

THESIS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

# Communicative Interfaces for Planning

Social learning in participatory local networks in a Swedish context

LISA BOMBLE

## **Communicative Interfaces for Planning**

- Social learning in participatory local networks in a Swedish context

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Cover:

[Participation takes place between and among all stakeholders.

I visualize it as a plane on which communication takes place.

See fig. 2 page 14]

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### ABSTRACT

*Swedish municipalities connect participation strategies to objectives concerning sustainable development, as we all need to be part of the solution when it comes to climate change and resource scarcity. The mandatory participatory meetings in municipal planning are criticized for being slow and inefficient and alternative, parallel methods of participation are called for.*

*After having followed two municipalities' efforts in trying their hand at such alternative methods, conclusions have been drawn about participation in municipal planning in general. The first case study in the municipality of Uddevalla (2009-2011) dealt with specific participatory methods in practice, while the second case study in the municipality of Lerum (2011-2014) focused on organizational changes.*

*A vast empirical material has been collected in interviews, workshops and meetings, most of which have been audio-recorded.*

*A communicative gap between the inhabitants of the municipality and its organization was found, as the inhabitants saw communication with the municipality as one on-going dialogue. The complex organization of the municipality however, communicates from different offices, sectors, aims and objectives in many voices. Another discovery was that regardless of participatory method, the inhabitants participate in stories or narratives. Some of the context and coherence of the narratives is easily lost in interpretation.*

*The result is a new perspective on planning as part of a process of social learning and on participation as an on-going process in which planning projects can take their stance. The mosaic is used as a metaphorical visualization to describe this non-hierarchical perspective on participation and power.*

*The Co-Production Group of Gråbo in Lerum, has been studied as an example of such a participatory local network, where local stakeholders sit at the same table as municipal politicians and administrators, creating a common narrative about their local community. The studies have focused on the communicative interfaces within and between a delimited geographical area and the municipal organization, looked at from the perspective of a planner.*

*Local networks of stakeholders, delimited geographically, are suitable arenas for a continuous participatory dialogue to start. The study in Gråbo, Lerum, showed that even a network that is not fully representative nor always successful in its efforts, can make a difference and is better than having no network to collaborate with. Power is shared between municipality and local community, as decisions become dependant on the shared knowledge in a local network.*

Keywords: societal planning, participation, communication, narrative, network, co-production

## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

This thesis is based on the work contained in the following papers, referred to by Roman numerals in the text:

- I      *Case 1 Uddevalla - summary of licentiate*,  
summary of licentiate Åhlström 2011
  
- II     *The Participatory Mosaic*,  
submitted to Planning Practice and Research (PPR)
  
- III    *Lost in Interpretation*,  
Conference Paper, Changing Cities, Skiathos Greece, June 2012
  
- IV    *Rather Network*,  
submitted to Planning Practice and Research (PPR)



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Why Am I Writing This? What Is My Problem?

Participation in planning is a diverse topic and can be looked at from perspectives of democracy and influence from the participants' point of view. Or it can be looked at from a planner's point of view, making sure that all aspects of a planning project are considered by including local knowledge from stakeholders in design solutions.

All aspects means that many voices want to and/or should be heard and participation in planning is therefore a communicative task. And communication about place happens everywhere and among everyone as we all live in geographical contexts which we all understand, use and feel for differently.

Current challenges of sustainable development also call for participation. Because strategies towards a sustainable future is not only a question of policy making. It is the challenge of getting everyone involved in making the right sustainable lifestyle choices, thus making participation in societal planning necessary.

The Delegation for Sustainable Cities was appointed by the Swedish government in 2008 to investigate and promote sustainable development in Swedish cities. They state in their final report from 2012 that

*“The most important actors in cities are, not surprisingly, the people who live there. Sustainable urban development is dependent on people’s capacity to understand problems, change their values and adopt new ways of thinking. The climate issue is also about behaviours and ultimately about people’s survival.”*

(Take Action Now - Delegationen för Hållbara Städer 2012, p3)

In a Swedish context planning is part of the municipal area of responsibility, thus placing participation in planning on a municipal scale and its organization in this rather specific scale and context.

Both the municipalities, where I have conducted my case studies, have formulated aims and objectives to do with participation for sustainability's sake (Uddevalla Kommun 2008 and 2011, Lerums Kommun 2009). However, successful participation is in itself a challenge yet to take on. While successful participation may be needed to meet the challenges of climate change and resource depletion for example, we need to define successful participation in order to set up possibilities for it.

Policies that apply to the wicked problems (Rittel and Webber 1973) of sustainable development as well as to societal planning are being set up on different levels of power in a global hierarchy. In Sweden, the municipal visionary policies can set up ambitious sustainability aims responding to a need for change, where local measures try to answer to global challenges. The comprehensive plan is another document, where the process behind it opens many possibilities for more participation and grounding of issues to do with an area's development.

With the Plan and Building act (*Plan- och Bygglagen*, PBL) from 1987, participation in planning was actually made mandatory through *samrådsprocessen*; a mandatory set of participatory meetings and exhibition of progress throughout the process of developing new plans (comprehensive and detail plans) at given intervals. However, practitioners and inhabitants from both my cases agree that this system seldom works as intended. My case interviewees pointed to a discrepancy in timing, as the issue at hand for the municipality was not always the issue prioritized by local inhabitants. This led to meetings where neither planning authority nor participants felt heard or got constructive input. Another comment made by several planning professionals was that the processes tended to be hijacked and stalled through appeals by inhabitants that seemed to resist all change. So-called NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) attitudes were often referred to in this context.

Other functions behind the problems of the current system are how land ownership or economical interests tend to be prioritized, and it is not regulated how, only that, the planning authority has to consider disputing

interests. (Stenberg 2013) Or, as PBL focuses on singular sakägare (stakeholder or interested party), it makes people act individually based on vested interests and not as part of the community or for its sake (Listerborn, 2015a). Agenda 21 (1992) actually stresses that previously excluded groups should be prioritized in participatory efforts, but Swedish practice cannot be said to meet that demand (Stenberg 2013). Or, as exemplified by Listerborn in discussions about safety in planning discourse, efforts aimed at “everyone” tend to exclude certain groups all the same (Listerborn 2015b).

Also, the pressing need of housing in Sweden is the objective of changes to PBL suggested in an official governmental report from 2013 titled A more efficient planning- and building permit process. Some changes were made and accepted in January 2015. The participatory process is still mandatory, but the municipality can, to a greater extent than before, decide who they confer with. The recommendation about the participation meetings in the report reads:

*“Instead of general rules about how the participatory process is organized, we suggest that the municipality must confer with affected stakeholders. Furthermore, a new demand for the municipality to report how the need for joint influence has been met, is introduced.”*

(SOU: 2013:34 p 234)

The interest for parallel, complementary formats and methods for more qualitative participatory influence has accordingly been the focus of several studies in Swedish academia these past decades (See for example Danielsson and Berg ed. 2013, Lindholm et al. ed. 2015). With the changes to PBL suggesting the need for even more diverse interpretations of participation and citizen dialogue(s), the interest in new ways of collaborating with the inhabitants or stakeholders of a place is of pressing importance to both practitioners and researchers in the field of planning.

But input from inhabitants, citizens or constituents has not only been in focus in societal planning. Indeed, a governmental official report from 2001 called for a more “participatory democracy with deliberative qualities” (SOU 2001 - own translation). The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) started the project Medborgardialog (Citizen Dialogue - own translation) in 2006, and initially the term was to signify only dialogue between political realms and their constituents. The project came to broaden its scope to other forms of citizen dialogue though, as they discovered overlaps and parallels with the administrative realms of the municipal and regional organizations (Langlet 2013).

The studies behind this text have focused on two Swedish municipalities trying new participatory approaches for sustainability’s sake. The experiences have resulted in theory about a more inclusive and lateral view on participation in relation to power and a suggestion for an approach to participation in such a setting.

## 1.2 Why Am I Writing This?

*“Talking about houses is also architecture.  
Because we are talking about how you can talk about houses  
and we are doing something with architecture, right?”*

(own translation/ slightly paraphrasing the words of a child 13-15 years old, participating in a workshop about their school, Buråsskolan in Göteborg, in 2008)

I see planning as something happening in the discourse, the communication about a place. I believe decisions are formed a long time before they are made and that communication leads to empathy. Empathy in turn leads to including more people in the decisions that are eventually made. Science is not about believing. But these beliefs set my startingpoint for investigating participation in planning.

I am an architect according to my master’s degree, but I have specialized in the words. The words about how architecture and planning are conveyed between people, not only architects. And having focused more on the processes leading up to buildings being built, I ended up in planning. My research has then taken me

further in that direction and I am now looking at how planning is being planned. By any layman's terms I am a theorist.

Planning theory is a specific field of academic theory though, and my focus on the words about architecture and planning put me in the direction of the theory behind my PhD studies before they began. I left architecture school to work with architecture and communication, managing participatory projects primarily with children and youth and primarily learning by doing...

A few years communicating about architecture and planning outside the profession, and between children and professionals, deepened my interest for the words about architecture and planning. To then find a position as a PhD student in a research environment where communicative and collaborative planning theory is common vocabulary, was to find a home for my interest in words.

I have had a from-the-side-lines kind of perspective on my profession and field (architecture and planning) since the day I was accepted to architecture school. I came from the humanities as I started my academic career with language studies and the idea of becoming an interpreter. Being the link of understanding between two people, who otherwise would not understand each other, appealed to me. And I still identify myself as some kind of interpreter, but now between different professional languages or between different kinds of knowledge about our common built environments. My field of interest is communication, maybe even more so than architecture or planning. I have come to study what I call "communicative interfaces for (municipal) planning", combining my main interests of facilitating communication and physical, societal planning.

I have been searching for participation for sustainability's sake, parallel and different to the legally defined participatory processes in planning (samrådsprocesser) in two Swedish municipalities. I have done so by following and reflecting on on-going practice in two specific contexts, rather than conducting my cases according to my research questions.

I was invited to follow the discussions about a new comprehensive plan in Lerum, but found how those discussions tried to find planning problems to solve in a vision put together by politicians. I found myself looking for an exchange that wasn't there. Instead I found a new communication gap, where different actors from the municipality discussed local contexts from different perspectives and time-lines. Misunderstandings occurred as the inhabitants and local actors participated in different meetings and workshops with their same knowledge, context and stories regardless of municipal opponent in the different meetings. The participants were asked to communicate in contexts they did not understand about a context they knew well. I saw the need for the participatory dialogue to start in a common, mutual understanding. I have been looking for the place and opportunity where such communication can take place.

My studies have focused on the function, scope and timing of participation, rather than on the sustainability objectives behind the need for participation. I ended up in contexts beyond my planning profession, but with a planner's perspective.

### 1.3 Why Am I Writing **This**? Scope And Content

As will be described below, my research has been conducted following two case studies in two Swedish municipalities - Uddevalla and Lerum (See chapter *The Cases*). My topic is and has always been *participation* and planning in a Swedish municipal context. Within that topic the first case resulted in questions and concepts presented in my licentiate thesis (Åhlström 2011, see also *Paper I*), to be further explored in the second case. The main key to my topic has always been *communication* and I wanted to further investigate the communicative gap I had found between the municipality and its inhabitants. From there I would investigate what kind of *knowledge* the planning authority wanted and what kind of knowledge the participants were able to share. This would in turn connect to the concept of *power* and what that meant in the case context of decision-making in municipal planning.

I kept within that framework of key concepts and phrased my research questions in and from it. But the case experience in Lerum tightened the study from the key concepts to strategies within them. Papers II, III and IV presented in this thesis are still something of a reflection of the process through these concepts (See *Summary Papers*). I have seen my studies in the shape of fig.1 below: A framework set up by the previous case and then a journey within that framework, but narrowing in on my perspective and conclusion through strategies found in the key concepts. First I described a perspective on participation as a *communicative process* and social learning (see *Paper II*). *Narratives* is a strategy through which knowledge is shared in that process, and I came to study how it is and can be used (see *Paper III*). And on the concept of power; to organize the local *network* is a strategy to share knowledge in order to have influence (see *Paper IV*).

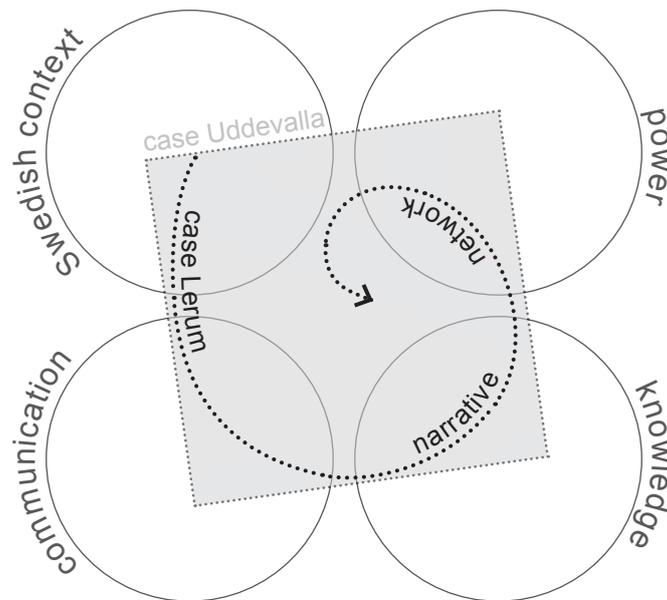
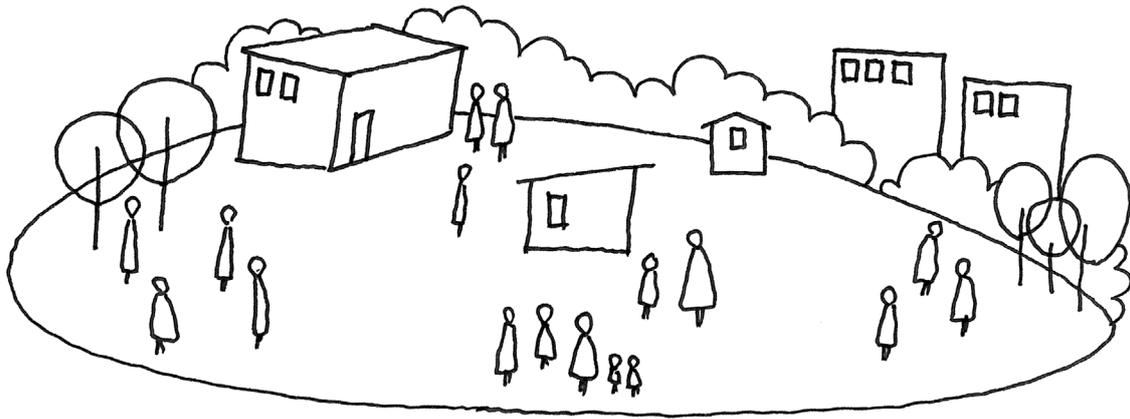


Fig. 1: Research framework for my studies on participation in planning as presented at a seminar June 5 2013, but with the case Lerum added as a process within that framework narrowing it down through strategies found within the key concepts.

The planning theory I lean most heavily against, describes the communicative interface between planners and other actors, but I look at these communicative interfaces as one and the same (See fig. 2). While my perspective has been that of a planner focusing on planning issues, I also draw conclusions from communication between others (no planners involved). Many realisations about participation are from events that had nothing to do with planning, but will or could be of use in planning projects to come. Seeing all communication to do with knowledge, interests and ideas about a geographical area as valid input to a participatory communication process, planning is what follows participation, not the other way around (See also chapter *Other Key Concepts – Project/Process*).



*Fig. 2: Participation takes place between and among all stakeholders. The communicative interface(s) between inhabitants or local stakeholders, municipal politicians and administrators (among which we find the municipal planners), relates to a certain geographical area and context. I visualize it as a plane on which communication about that area takes place. All actors' different sets of knowledge is of interest for planning projects influencing their area.*

My study of two cases in two Swedish municipalities has given me the reason to phrase my results based on a stance in communicative and collaborative planning theory, but considering communication about planning to be embedded in communication at large between municipal and civil actors tied to a specific geographically delimited context.

I choose to address a geographical *context* rather than *place*, as I want to address communication to do with many aspects of said context, not just the physicality or morphology of the actual place. (See also *Paper III*)

I have interviewed people and I have listened in on meetings. I have read texts by predecessors that made more and more sense as I could compare them to my own experiences over time. Eventually I have tried to write it down; For my case municipalities' sake on the one hand, in reports and presentations for them. In this format on the other hand, for the sake of contributing to the body of knowledge about participation for planning. It can never cover all aspects or narrate complete sequences of events, but it can hopefully summarize my experiences, reflections and conclusions. I hope to have pointed out some things we can do better, together, and continuously.

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Through experiences from two case studies a new perspective on participation evolved. The first case left me with questions and concepts to be studied further in the second case (Åhlström 2011, see also *Paper I*). This is what has been investigated:

- *Can communication between local civil society and municipality work as one continuous dialogue?*
- *How is local knowledge of value for a planning project communicated between civil society and municipality?*
- *Can participation be set up to be given the problem formulation prerogative?*
- *Can participatory efforts without formal and executive mandate from the municipality have power or influence over municipal decision-making?*

### 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

#### 3.1 Research Contexts

Both case municipalities have been collaborating with Chalmers Architecture in a master studio, to which the research behind this thesis has been connected. Furthermore, the case in Uddevalla was connected to a European Union funded Interreg project together with the municipality of Fredrikstad in Norway. And the center for transdisciplinary knowledge production about sustainable urban development, Mistra Urban Futures, was connected to the second case in Lerum. All these connections and contexts are described below, as background and frameworks for the research then made on the empirical material gathered in the cases.

##### 3.1.1 Design and Planning for Sustainable Development in a Local Context – a master studio

Chalmers Architecture has two master programs, one of which is the *Master Program Design for Sustainable Development* (MPDSD). Within the program, one studio is called *Design and Planning for Sustainable Development in a Local Context* (Local Context for short) and both Uddevalla and Lerum have been case studies, not only for this thesis, but for this master program. I have followed this studio as an assistant teacher and advisor in both my case municipalities, as well as in other municipalities between the years 2009 and 2013 (In order: Uddevalla, Alingsås, Lerum, Mariestad, Tidaholm).

Since I have followed the master students in their introduction to and analyses of the local context of the two cases behind this thesis, and since that has also been my own introduction to these municipalities, the construction of this studio and its aims is of interest to understand my cases.

The studio has developed since 2003 in collaboration with different local actors, first along the west coast of Bohuslän and eventually with inland municipalities of the Västra Götaland region. It started as one of the results of a project about collaborations between academia and practice called *Den Praktiska Tolkningen* (*The Practical Interpretation*, own translation), conducted at Chalmers Architecture between 1997 and 2003 (Falkheden and Malbert 2004).

In the flyer introducing the studio to future students it says that the studio's overall aims are:

*“... to increase knowledge and understanding of the planning and development problems as well as possibilities of small and medium sized municipalities / communities / towns in the perspective of sustainable development.*

*... to train the ability to describe, analyse and interpret the local situation in a broad perspective, including spatial and architectural characteristics as well as environmental, social and economic aspects.*

*... to, with a point of departure in an understanding of the conditions of place in a local as well as in a broader context, work out and try visionary principles of planning and design of spatial structures and the built environment, in support of a positive and sustainable development.”*

(Studio Flyer: Design and Planning for Sustainable Development in a Local Context 2015)

Much focus is thus on the understanding and analysis of a local context and its prerequisites and possibilities to meet sustainable development objectives. The course is laid out in three parts over 13 weeks.

*“Part A focuses on understanding and analyzing a local situation, also in a larger geographical and functional context, identifying local development objectives and work on comprehensive planning and design strategies in support of a sustainable development. Part B contains work on planning and design projects that can support the objectives and strategies developed in part A. (...) Part C is about communicating the outcomes of the studio and contains work on an exhibition and presentation on site for local stakeholders and inhabitants.”*

(From information flyer about the studio, 2013)

My role has been that of an assistant teacher throughout the studio as well as advisor to some of the in-depth projects carried out in part B and to the communication and presentation of the projects in part C. As an

assistant teacher I have come along on the introductory first week on site with the students, where the municipality introduces itself as well as provides opportunities for interviews and visits with both inhabitants and key actors in the community. As part of that introduction, my first visits to my case study municipalities have been very organized, full of information, meetings and people, in a way I could hardly have achieved coming alone.

Having followed part A and a few of the in-depth projects closely in the other municipalities that the studio visited in 2010, 2012 and 2013 has also given valuable comparative material and contacts to have, when making assumptions or observations in my cases. In 2014 and 2015 my contributions to the studio have been limited to a few lectures, and I have not had any opportunity for comparative studies on my own in these years.

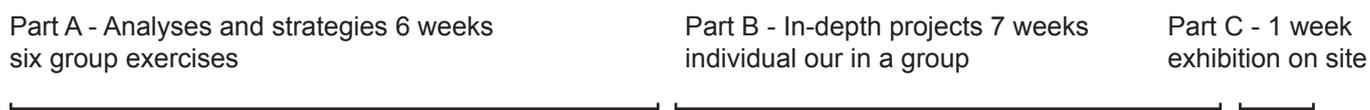


Fig. 3: Studio lay-out.

I have also had the opportunity to follow up on the studio in my two case municipalities. I have for example seen how they use the material left by the students and how the projects have affected local discourse or on-going planning projects and/or detail-plan processes and also other reactions to this somehow neutral voice suggesting changes or developments.

### 3.1.2 Mötesplats Medborgare – an EU interreg project

Uddevalla municipality collaborated with Chalmers Architecture in both the master studio Local Context (see above) and in co-funding a PhD position with research focused on participatory methods in planning. Both of these collaborations became part of Mötesplats Medborgare (MSM), which translates to Meeting Venue Citizen(s) – a three year EU funded interreg project between Uddevalla in Sweden and Fredrikstad in Norway, from 2008 to 2011 (Uddevalla Kommun, 2008 and 2011).

The PhD position was advertised by Chalmers and I applied. This is how I came in contact with the project and how I started my PhD.

The municipality of Uddevalla, discovered in an SCB survey in 2008 that its inhabitants had low trust in their municipal authorities<sup>1</sup>. These survey results became the starting point of the project MSM, which had aims in terms of “development of local democracy” and “strengthening local initiative and sense of involvement” (MSM project description 2008). The project set out to test a chosen variety of methods for dialogue with the citizens of Uddevalla. During the project period methods like safety walks, participatory budgeting, matchmaking conferences and a roleplaying game about visionary sustainable development were used. All these methods were collaborations between officials and inhabitants. What method to use was decided on a political level, but after suggestions by the project management team. One may generalise and say that politicians participated, but the methods used were chosen, tested and assessed at an executive level in the municipal organisation. The assessments of the project also show that methods deemed successful are to be implemented in everyday practice of different departments within the municipality. (Uddevalla Kommun 2011)

In Uddevalla the planning office was involved in all the methods tried. Participatory meetings in different set-ups were described as complementary to everyday practice and the mandatory participatory process in planning which is demanded by law in Sweden. The attempts at new methods were meant to improve municipal planning practice and direct influence by the inhabitants was described as “successful” in the evaluation and documentation of the project (Uddevalla Kommun, 2011).

1 Statistics Sweden (Statistiska Centralbyrån SCB) does regular surveys called *Medborgarundersökningen* compiling statistics on attitudes and facts of and about the Swedish population

The aim was to “*improve local democracy*”, a phrase that could be, and was, interpreted differently by different actors. One politician said that “*Successful participation leads to better and more relevant decisions*” (Esam el Naggat, municipal politician, meeting with the municipal board’s support commission, 2009, own translation) while the initial project description phrased the aim of the project to be “*giving the inhabitants a sense of being involved*” (MSM project description, 2008, own translation). A phrasing that was later changed to “*giving inhabitants a possibility to influence local decisions*” (own translation). The evaluation of the project listed successful aspects of the different methods tried. The “quicker” methods were generally preferred to the slow building of new practice within the overall process of municipal planning (Metodboken 2011). Possibly due to the trials being made within the framework of a time restricted project.

### 3.1.2.1 task: method development

The contract between Chalmers and Uddevalla stated that the collaboration would result in “site analyses” carried out by the PhD student (me). I later changed the term to *Area Analyses* due to the character and size of the geographically delimited areas analysed. The idea of making site analyses in the first place came from Fredrikstad, where an architectural firm had made analysis documents characterizing different parts of the municipality, in essence according to the Norwegian method of Stedsanalyse (Miljøverndepartementet, 1993) mostly focusing on physical environment and character. The task in Uddevalla combined the purpose of these area specific documents with ideas for new methods of participation. Thus my task was to develop a method for site analyses based on participation.

The areas were chosen for me, parallel to one of the other methods tested in the project, where existing local associations were asked to take on a new role as dialogue partners to the municipality in “*Local Democracy Areas*” (named so by the project, from here on referred to as LDAs)

The research part of my PhD was to view this method development task as my empirical studies, while questions and reflections emerging came to have a larger scope. The method development is described in a report presented as my licentiate thesis in Swedish in 2011. Its title translates to *Area Analysis as a Tool for Participation – Interpreting Narratives to Planning Documents* (Åhlström 2011). It is summarized and reflected upon in this thesis in Paper I. It resulted in five area analyses of different parts of Uddevalla (Ljungskile, Bokenäset, Lane Ryr, Dalaberg/Hovhult and Tureborg), based on interview and workshop studies, further explained in Paper I. These analyses are in Swedish and can be obtained from me, Chalmers library or Uddevalla municipality on request.

### 3.1.3 Mistra Urban Futures

As the project MSM in Uddevalla was concluded and my method development described in a licentiate thesis in August 2011, there was a brief discussion on how to continue. A second case however presented itself, as the master studio of Local Context (see above) was to collaborate with Lerum municipality that semester. Lerum in turn was interested to combine the studio with a more long-term collaboration with Chalmers, through my continued research on participation.

At the same time, the centre Mistra Urban Futures had been started in Gothenburg. My supervisor Björn Malbert was involved, as professor and course examiner, for the master studio in the negotiations between Chalmers and Lerum. But he had also played a major part in developing Mistra Urban Futures, a centre for sustainable urban development financed by Mistra (the Swedish Foundation for Strategic Environmental Research) and a consortium of partners. Thus the fortunate connection to these two contexts created a possibility to continue my research in a second case, co-funded by Lerum and Mistra Urban Futures.

Being part of the Mistra Urban Futures network also allowed me to take part in seminars and meetings with researchers from other fields, concerned with sustainable urban development seen from other perspectives. The centre’s build and organization in the interface between theory and practice, funded on a consortium constituted by several organisations in the Gothenburg region, combined with key international partners, let

me be part of an organizational context that gave my way of conducting research both a framework, a vocabulary and *raison d'être* – transdisciplinarity (see further in chapter *Method*).

The centre's idea is to co-create knowledge, through practice and research simultaneously and together. Thus the consortium partners participating in network meetings and seminars have given yet another arena in which to test and discuss my findings with practitioners from similar contexts as my case studies.

Thus the Göteborg Region Association of Local Authorities (Göteborgregionens Kommunalförbund, GR), being part of the Mistra Urban Futures consortium, has a network of municipal representatives that convenes regularly to discuss sustainable urban development. This network has given me reoccurring opportunities, not only to present my results, but to take part in what is happening on the topic of participation in planning in other close-by municipalities.

Furthermore, the centre Mistra Urban Futures hosts events, seminars, lectures and meetings and can offer its network of partners, researchers and practitioners when inviting to a seminar or topical discussion of my own. Both being able to invite such a vast network and being invited to such widely reaching events, has been rewarding.

While the centre is international, with four platform offices spread over the world (Gothenburg, Manchester, Kisumu and Cape Town), my research has stayed on Swedish soil. The centre has however had guests from its international platforms giving me opportunities to meet and exchange experiences with researchers and students of sustainable urban development from both the UK and Kenya.

### 3.1.4 in the context of sustainability

First, the term sustainability was described in chapter *Other Key Concepts*, but it is not *my* understanding and use of this concept that matters for this research. But the context of sustainable development has rather, as objective and vision in the municipalities in which the studies have taken place, been a prerequisite for these studies to come about.

The concept of sustainable development is worthy of, and complex enough to earn itself, a lifetime of study. As my main focus is another, I refer to others having analysed or scrutinized the concept more thoroughly (See *ex Thematic Paper A* in Castell 2010). And while my research is connected to formulations, activity and discourse about sustainability both at the Chalmers school of Architecture and at Mistra Urban Futures, the municipalities' understanding and use of this concept sets some of the framework for the case studies. Both my case municipalities have initiated participatory efforts with objectives of sustainable development (Uddevalla kommun 2008, Lerums kommun 2009, see also *Introduction*). I will therefore just clarify how the case municipalities use the word.

To sustain derives from the latin prefix sub- (from below) and tenere (hold). In extension, the literal sense of sustainability is thus the ability to uphold something (over time). The classic definition of sustainable development from Our Common Future (WCED, 1987) could be said to extend the underlying meaning of "over time" to "indefinitely" by referring to "the needs of future generations" in plural. But to develop and to be sustained can hardly be synonyms and the inherent paradox of the expression was aptly illustrated by Castell (see fig. 4) and is somehow stumbled over in the Oxford Dictionary definition.

The definition of the adjective sustainable is actually divided in two in the Oxford Dictionary, hinting at a difference in meaning between sustainable economy (assuming aiming for growth) and ecology (assuming aiming for balance).

**sustainable:** adjective

1 Able to be maintained at a certain rate or level: 'sustainable economic growth'

1.1 Conserving an ecological balance by avoiding depletion of natural resources

(Oxford Dictionary 2015)

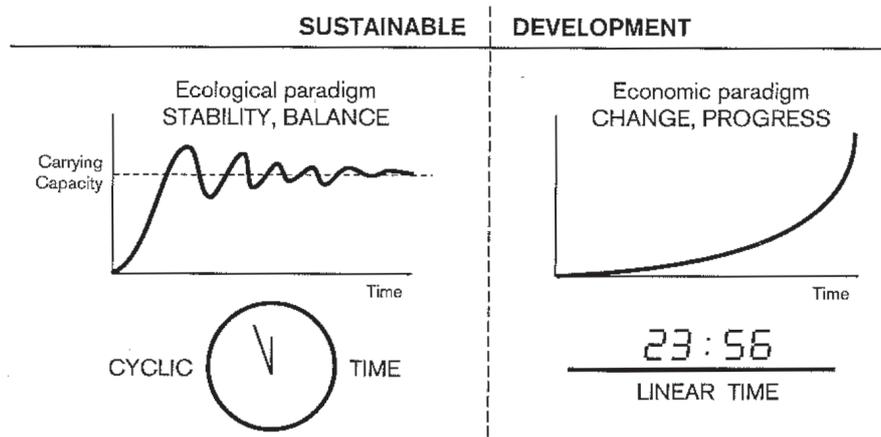


Fig. 4: The paradox of sustainable development as illustrated by Castell 2010. The word sustainable referring to stability and balance and a cyclic view on time, while development suggests linear time and indefinite growth or progress.

It somehow suggests that the word has been given contextual meaning by its use; on the one hand with the example of maintaining (economic) growth and on the other conserving (ecological) balance. Sustainability is often explained with three interlocking circles in a Venn diagram, showing sustainability as the result of social, economical and ecological/environmental concerns coming together. In the examples of the dictionary definition above, the social dimension is the one missing, and the one most often referred to when discussing participation and sustainability. Lerum’s approach to this is to place the inhabitants or participants in the driver’s seat, being the necessary driving force of sustainable development as a whole (Lerum Kommun 2009).

Sustainable development in the municipality’s discourse has a tradition of being first and foremost about (green) environment and ecology. Indeed “sustainability issues” (hållbarhetsfrågor) and “environmental issues” (miljöfrågor) have been used as synonyms in municipal meetings I have attended. When discussing sustainable development, the municipality of Lerum have referred to the classic Venn diagram mentioned above, sometimes adding a fourth, cultural, dimension. However, the three different dimensions are sometimes referred to as different kinds of sustainability, which may run the risk of missing the point of the middle overlap.



Fig. 5 the municipal logotype for the Vision 2025 (2009)

The political vision of Lerum municipality is phrased in Swedish as “Sveriges ledande miljökommun 2025” (Lerums kommun 2009). The word “miljö” is directly translated into “environment” and the whole phrase says literally “Sweden’s leading environmental municipality by 2025”. However, I would rather like to say that Lerum means to be a leading municipality “in terms of sustainability”. But the vision is narrowed down in specifying chapters and strategies under three keywords: *Hållbarhet*, *Kreativitet*, *Inflytande*. A literal translation of these is: *Sustainability*, *Creativity*, *Influence*.

While this made the concepts and the vision somewhat confusing to translate or explain for this text, the simplification of the Vision seems to help the municipality to specify what it means. Under the specification of Hållbarhet (Literal translation: Sustainability) they paraphrase the classical formulation of Our Common Future (1987) while linking human needs to the dimensions of the Venn diagram:

*“A sustainable community means a development of that community ensuring the basic needs of each individual, culturally, socially and environmentally, without risking future generations’ possibility to have the same. But the development also need to be economically sustainable. Urban settlements must co-exist with surrounding countryside and a cyclic system is a prerequisite.”* (Lerums kommun 2009 – own translation)

Comparing this formulation to the first paragraphs under the other two keywords in the Vision document, Sustainability seems to summarize the vision, while Creativity (*“Need for meeting places and welcoming innovation and new technology”* - own translation) and Influence (*“Every individual’s right and need to shape their life as well as participation and responsibility towards the community”* - own translation) seem phrased more as strategies.

In working towards this vision, the urban settlement of Gråbo has been selected as a pilot area for efforts towards sustainable development. Its project name is Pilot Gråbo. Lerum has phrased in its objectives that the pilot cannot be considered successful unless *“the inhabitants of Gråbo are the driving force behind the sustainable development of their community”* (paraphrased from Lerums kommun, Pilot Gråbo, 2009, own translation). Referring to this particular phrase, issues as diverse as waste management, local demand and supply of sustainable goods and services and accessibility by bike or foot within Gråbo, have been discussed.

*“What if we could create consumer demand for sustainable solutions, rather than for bathroom renovations, wooden verandas or kitchen islands?”*  
(Christian Mattsson, process leader Pilot Gråbo, Lerum November 2015, own translation)

This quote by the process leader of Pilot Gråbo well illustrates the aims within Pilot Gråbo to discuss sustainability, not as a new addition to the complexity of a community, but as (becoming) part of what is already there. Becoming part of the inhabitant’s everyday lifestyle and consumer choices for example. *“Making the sustainable choice the easy choice”*, as the same Christian Mattsson phrased it, when presenting Pilot Gråbo to a seminar at SALAR in 2013.

The way Lerum phrases participation as a driving force in sustainable development, and sustainability being related to lifestyle choices made by each and everyone, correlates well with why participation in planning is such a current topic. It is about how global issues, such as climate change or resource distribution, need to be addressed also on a local level (see also Falkheden 1999).

While acknowledging the overuse and “greenwash” as well as the inherent paradox of the expression sustainable development, I choose to refer to it in accordance with the phrasing offered by Lerum’s vision document as quoted above.

## 3.2 Method

### 3.2.1 Case studies

The empirical material has been collected in two case studies. Looking at others' definitions of case studies (i. e. Yin 1994, Giddens 1982 and 1984 and Flyvbjerg 1998 and 2006) I quickly formulated my case studies as something different to Yin's rather restrictive definition, where the case study is determined by only the 'how' and 'why' research questions (Yin. 1994). I was looking for a 'what' question – searching for participation and communication about a local context, parallel and different to the legally defined participatory processes in planning (*samrådsprocesser*) in two Swedish municipalities. I have done so by following on-going practice (see *The Cases* and *Paper I*) rather than conducting my cases according to my research questions.

Giddens and I had more in common, but I would have no possibility to be as immersed in my case contexts as Giddens claims is necessary to draw any conclusions (Giddens, 1982). Giddens claims that the study must happen in a context of “mutual knowledge”, shared by observer and participants” (Giddens, 1982). As my cases are in a Swedish context, mainly concerning issues of planning, I find myself suitable to draw conclusions from my experiences. The case context is, in all relevant aspects, my context as well, in for example jargon, social codes and understanding of discourse. However, issues of objectivity and bias must still be addressed. I do so by describing my roles, tasks and how I have conducted my studies, as clearly as I can, to enable the reader to assess the relevance or accuracy of my findings.

My definition of the cases is thus simply the life-world reality in the municipalities of Uddevalla and Lerum, its contexts and events, regardless of and dependent on my presence. Thus, the case study is my method of reflecting on and comparing experiences in that life-world, to theory and cases phrased by others. I have been a temporary observer and participant in my two cases, and I don't see a problem with sharing my observations, reflections and conclusions from them, as long as I am clear about how the study has been conducted. Thus giving the reader the possibility to weigh the validity of my claims.

I found that while Flyvbjerg might criticize the premises of my theoretical framework (see chapter *Anyone Against?*), I agree with many of his views on case study. When he lists five misunderstandings about the method (Flyvbjerg, 2006 p. 221), he sums up and concretizes some of the things I did not agree with, in texts by Yin and Giddens.

My cases have been very specific, and rather than taking general knowledge from them, I have compared general theoretic knowledge from elsewhere to them. Thus I have been able to verify whether existing theory on the subject is applicable to this particular context – i.e. Swedish municipal planning. I therefore claim that context-specific knowledge is valuable as it is. It can verify or contradict theoretical knowledge, not only in the specific context, but in the application of theoretical knowledge in practice. The specific case study is simply the laboratory of sciences to do with life-world practices, such as planning and architecture.

The generalization of one individual case might run the risk of becoming what Flyvbjerg (2006) discusses as a black swan, and it can be argued that only several case studies in comparable contexts can emerge generalizable knowledge. As I compare two cases in similar contexts, and have a further 288 other Swedish municipalities to compare with, I can specify rather well what is case specific and what can be confirmed in other municipalities as well. But, as Flyvbjerg also points out, if one case falsifies established general theory, that one individual case study has by default contributed generalizable knowledge. Thus, I argue that singular case studies can be of value to science in general, both when falsifying and verifying existing theory.

Yin (1994) claims a case study needs to address contemporary situations, not situations in the past. This might be true for my two cases, but comparing them to previous case studies and pilots conducted by others is to me part of the case study methodology. Wang and Groat (2013) suggest the word “contemporary” in Yin's definition should be replaced by the word “setting” to be more applicable to architectural (and planning - my comment) research. As such the definition would read:

*“A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a setting phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”*  
(Yin 2009 combined with Wang and Groat 2013)

The combined definition works well with how I see my studies as totally dependent on the case context(s), but where the phenomenon (participation in planning in a Swedish municipality for sustainability’s sake) and context are interdependent and overlapping. It is this overlap or “unclear boundary” between case context and case phenomenon which makes cases of similar contexts comparable.

I came to my case studies with a view on the world. The cases both challenged and confirmed that view. But more than anything I compared life-world occurrences in the cases to literature on participation in planning. It was described in other cases as well as in theoretical descriptions in the literature. I have used my case study to test my own and others’ pre-understanding of participation and planning. Conclusions drawn from my two case studies are answers and results to how hypotheses I came to my cases with, developed and fell out when applied to the life-world context. Thus, the third misunderstanding according to Flyvbjerg (2006) about how case studies are mostly to form hypotheses, is a misunderstanding vis-à-vis my case studies as well. Or, as phrased by Wang and Groat (2013), my case study has been both exploratory and explanatory. Exploratory - to understand the phenomenon and case and how they correlate (see above). I see this as having challenged and tested my pre-understanding and pre-existing views, in order to deepen my understanding and broaden my views. But as I have also come to some conclusions or results, my study has become explanatory as I have tried to make sense of my understanding and find ways to convey it – both to the real-life context of my case and in this book. I think that is to build or contribute to theory in my field of study.

### 3.2.2 Embedded researcher and (trans)formative assessment

The case in Lerum has been in collaboration with Mistra Urban Futures ([mistraurbanfutures.org](http://mistraurbanfutures.org), see also chapter *Case Contexts – Mistra Urban Futures* and *Theoretic Framework – Transdisciplinarity*) and there I learned to call myself an embedded researcher. That is to say, a researcher embedded in a life-world (a concept after Habermas 1987, used here as described by Malbert 1998, p 35-37) context, following, rather than conducting, his or her case study. In hindsight I was much of an embedded researcher in the Uddevalla case too. But my task of method development within their practice made me think of that as a sort of action research, being a part of and clearly influencing the case. But using the experiences in Uddevalla as my empirical material to reflect upon, much in the same way as in Lerum, makes me describe my studies as being in a transdisciplinary setting (see chapter *Transdisciplinarity*), where researcher and case have been allowed to influence each other.

In this second case of Lerum, my practical task on site was described as *formative assessment* – A term usually used in the world of education and refers to an adaptive process where the student’s learning ability affects the teaching method (Black and William, 1998). But the term does not have one affirmed definition and is used in a variety of ways, mostly in the field of education. My version of the method should perhaps more aptly have been called *transformative assessment*, as Mistra Urban Futures refers to transformative knowledge (Polk et. al 2009). I will, from now on, use transformative assessment to describe my method.

Transformative knowledge is contextual, or the knowledge that comes out of applying theoretical knowledge to a specific context. In my case, theories of participation and communication applied to the context of Gråbo. Thus, in our project, transformative assessment has meant this: Assessments based on participatory observations have been reported back in planned feedback sessions to the project or process owners (the municipality). I have been a silent observer at meetings and events to do with Pilot Gråbo (see chapter *Case Lerum/Gråbo*), but all those present have known or been told about my role and task. The participants of my case have on occasion asked me questions about things to do with expertise on for example planning practice. But the silent observer role has meant that I have kept silent even on occasions where my input could have helped. But, as an example, participants of one meeting speculated about what was being said at another meeting which I had also attended. I could not contradict the speculations with the facts then and

there. Instead, I explained at a later occasion that these two groups needed information about each others' activities to avoid speculation.

It was a balancing act where I chose where to interfere by asking myself if they had access to the information without my presence or not. If they did not, I could not be its source if my observations of how the organization worked should avoid being tainted by my manipulation. Thus I could refer to my own presentations and reports, if asked, as they were already available and meant to influence change.

I have recorded and taken notes of events and discussions. At given times and when asked, I have reported my findings and reflections along the way to different groups connected to the case (See chapter *Case Lerum/Gråbo*), and Lerum municipality have thus had the chance to change their practice according to my results and recommendations along the way.

### 3.2.3 Adaptive/ accretive studies

One could argue that my studies are both deductive (general conclusions are being drawn from specific observations after comparison with other described cases) and inductive (specific knowledge contributing to the general, thus improving or explaining an already established claim or probability), but since I can claim both I choose to call my studies accretive (Tahvilzadeh, 2012). While I compare empirical findings to theory, my preconceived knowledge of the field of planning guides me. Even though my training has been towards a practice rather than having a theoretical background to an academic field, I find Layders description of adaptive theory as quoted by Tahvilzadeh describes my perspective on my empirical studies best:

*“Adaptive theory is accretive, it is an organic entity that constantly reformulates itself both in relation to the dictates of theoretical reasoning and the ‘factual’ character of the empirical world. Prior theoretical concepts and models suggest patterns and ‘order’ in the emerging data while being continuously responsive to the order suggested or unearthed by the data themselves”*

(Layder 1998:27 as quoted by Tahvilzadeh 2012:73)

Since my empirical studies and my reading of different theories have been parallel it is natural to assume that I have chosen theories based on my empirical evidence and vice versa, thus letting theory adapt to my findings and findings adapt to the theory most recently learned. While I initially found this to be a problem, I might now think of it as a very honest way of learning and validating my findings. Thus my empirical data are described very free from theory and compared to or described through set orders or logics afterwards.

### 3.2.4 Empirical material and researcher bias

Working with people, there are of course many ethical considerations made almost automatically. Privacy is respected, interviewees are chosen to represent different groups or categories, and the EU project in itself has aims concerning integration issues, youth interests and rural development problems. Blatant ethical issues like racism, segregation and discrimination are also dealt with explicitly and directly in the meetings with the public, and in the municipality offices. But there are also more subtle ethical issues that concern me and more specifically my research.

Two difficulties of case study as method, is addressed by both Flyvbjerg (1998 and 2006) and myself in discussions about the vast amount of empirical material the method accrues and about the objectivity of the researcher. Flyvbjerg, is most known for his case study in Aalborg, Denmark. Not only for his results about rationality and power (Flyvbjerg 1998), but for the way he conducted his case study and how he communicated it:

*“(...) the Aalborg case is depicted not in terms of codes but in terms of events, simply recording what happened on such a day, in such a place, in such a context. Events are then structured into a narrative by the conventional means of time, place, actors and context. The narrative is developed with two plots, the immediate plot of actors and actions, and the conceptual plot of the relationship between rationality and power...”*

(Flyvbjerg 1998, p. 8)

I recognized much of my own method in this description as it also resonates the accretive nature of the study as described above. Yes, it is “*difficult to summarize and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies*” as Flyvbjerg’s (2006) last misunderstanding reads. That is not a misunderstanding, but it is a misunderstanding that these difficulties would in anyway dismiss case study as a valid research method. The case study context of a life-world’s chaotic character, not at all with predictable causalities of a laboratory experiment, makes the accrued empirical material of a case study sprawling and dependant on a researcher’s methodological discipline.

The continuous narrative phrasing the immediate plot of actors and actions in my case studies has been accrued in the form of a research diary as well as in meeting notes and sound recordings (Meeting notes comparable and linked to their sound recordings with the help of the application Evernote). It quickly becomes a vast amount of documentation as the the case context does not wait.

The second plot, of how conclusions and results have built on top of each other, is accrued in this text. My style of writing has always been narrative and prosaic. I have wrestled with the academic format, making sure I show and refer my findings correctly as I build my results and conclusions on others’ work combined with my case experiences. But I have also let my language stay narrative and perhaps more prosaic than the dissertation format calls for, as my findings also show the narrative as a communicatively effective means of conveying knowledge (see *Paper III*).

In relation to my topic and method of study, I have made the following ethical considerations:

- Participants and actors of the cases are anonymous, unless an individual’s title, age, gender or other attribute is considered of importance to the understanding of a context or quote.
- Audio recordings of meetings, interviews and workshops are for my ears only, as agreed upon with those present when a recording device has been used. The audio files are however archived by date, and events quoted are thus possible to find in my recordings on demand, should a conclusion of events or meaning of a quote be questioned or in need of further explanation.
- My empirical material has been stored and ordered in such a way, that, upon request, I can produce quotes, data or information in its original context.

My own bias is more complicated to address or circumvent as directly or openly. Case study bias, in my experience, comes from our human nature. When we understand someone’s good intentions, we tend to excuse more of their failures. Becoming embedded in a case, forming relations to actors within the case, you tend to like those and that which reflect your own views. But when looking at de-personified functions and activities, even in social settings such as groups of well meaning participants in my cases, liking something or someone does not overshadow an ill-performed task or misplaced functionality.

Giddens claims that you have to be part of a context to understand it (Giddens 1982) and that the bias you develop to your case is part of the method. I find however, that the researcher’s role gives you a responsibility to reflect on your objectivity or bias towards the case and include those reflections in the presentation of your findings. The research might not be bad because of a biased researcher, but it might need to be weighed against other results depending on what that bias entails.

It might be interesting for example, to have my results tested or challenged by someone who believes in economic growth and a free market as systems to build a sustainable society on, as I do not. And I do think my personal views on fair distribution of resources, gender equality, a no-growth economy as described by Jackson (2009) and other value building opinions, do influence my research. Basic personal values have influenced my choice of career, topic and method and undoubtedly therefore my results. Being open about that however, lets my readers weigh my findings against those of my opposition.

## 4. REVISITING KEY CONCEPTS OF PLANNING THEORY

### **planning** –

1. The process of making plans for something

1.1 The control of urban development by a local government authority, from which a licence must be obtained to build a new property or change an existing one

(Oxford Dictionary 2015)

The word planning is ambiguous. It gives the idea of thinking ahead, projecting a desired future, but is at the same time an on-going process, constantly changing direction and “*making, formalizing and expanding connections between events, functions and institutions*” (Madanipour, 2010, p 351).

But linked to societal planning and changes in our physical environment, planning becomes a communicative process of concretizing ideas into physical form. And while most figures of speech surrounding ideas tend to focus on an instantaneous and sudden insight (epiphany, divine intervention, strike of genius, a thought hit me...), ideas are often conclusions or results of collaborative efforts. Indeed ideas need to be cultivated in environments where they can grow. They grow over time and by building on each other, sometimes by two very diverse sets of knowledge complementing each other in a new way (Johnson, 2010). The environments Johnson describes as “cultivating innovation” seem to have a lot in common with collaborative planning (Healey, 1997). It is about connecting ideas and different expertise or realms of knowledge to each other and putting the right knowledge in touch with the right context in order for innovation to happen.

Thus, all stakeholders’ knowledge is of value when formulating a problem to solve through physical planning, when choosing and designing that solution and eventually when implementing and using the built result. Combined, the notion of collaborative planning and the cultivation of good ideas gives me a platform for my thoughts on participation being a collaborative, communicative process, not only connected to planning but of which planning is part.

My pre-understanding of the concept of *communication* in itself has shaped how I address the topic of *participation* and vice versa. From a planner’s point of view, these two concepts are the glasses through which I see my research. Therefore, some reflection on how I use and understand these two concepts are of interest here.

### 4.1 Communication

#### **Communication** –

The imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium

(Oxford Dictionary 2015)

Almost everything can be about communication. Not everything is about good communication. For communicative planning to be conceivable, “two-way communication is key” (Sager 1994), but not even two-way communication is always good communication. I would like to give a few clarifying paragraphs about prerequisites I see as required for well-functioning communication. As such, I see communication as the key to almost everything.

People will come to a participatory meeting about their place with their own set of ideas, knowledge and agenda. In fact, that is a prerequisite for interplace (Stenberg 2004, Forsén and Fryk 1999, see also chapter *Research Environment - Interplace*) to form – different perspectives on the same thing. In order for these sets of understanding and these different agendas to come together and make new knowledge emerge (as described by Stenberg 2004), communication is the glue, excavating tool, crowbar or key to that process, depending on what metaphor you choose.

I take the notion of how we influence each other while communicating from Forester (2009) who says that all communication is either dialogue, debate or negotiation. This categorization has helped me identify what kind of conversation I am in or listening to, but also to distinguish when it is not communication I hear, but two opposite sets of monologue.

|          | DIALOGUE          | DEBATE                                     | NEGOTIATION                                       |
|----------|-------------------|--|---|
| GOAL     | Understanding     | Who's right?                               | Agree on action                                   |
| QUESTION | What do you mean? | Why are you right?                         | What can we do?                                   |
| RISK     | Talk, talk, talk  | Winners and losers<br>(Weakened relations) | Bad compromises<br>(Lose-lose instead of win-win) |
| HELP     | Facilitate        | Moderate                                   | Mediate   |

Fig. 6. Forester discusses the usefulness and risks of the three different kinds of communication in the concluding chapter of *Dealing with Differences* (2009) p 175-187.

Here depicted in a matrix as noted at a seminar with Forester at SLU, Uppsala, 2009-01-12

My own description of communication starts in common definitions of communication as an exchange, such as the one from Oxford dictionary above. It distinguishes the difference between information and communication, where information is one-way messages from one to another and communication is a two-way exchange between the two.

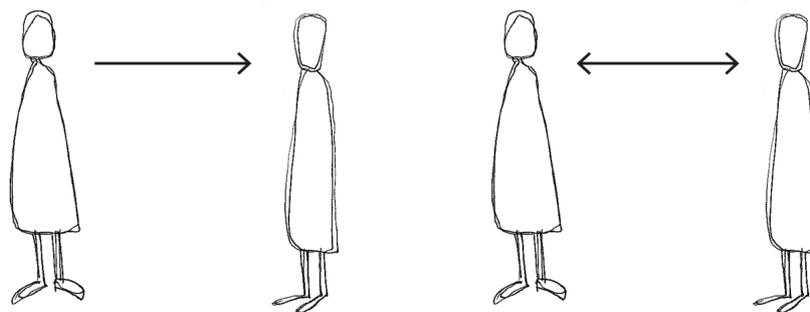


Fig. 7a: One-way information and two-way communication

But I have had to develop that image to explain functioning and mal-functioning communication. It has to do with empathy and the ability to actually let each others' input influence the response(s). Thus to have an actual exchange aiming towards a mutual understanding, decision or compromise. The anti-thesis to this actual exchange would be two monologues aimed at each other, with neither party listening.

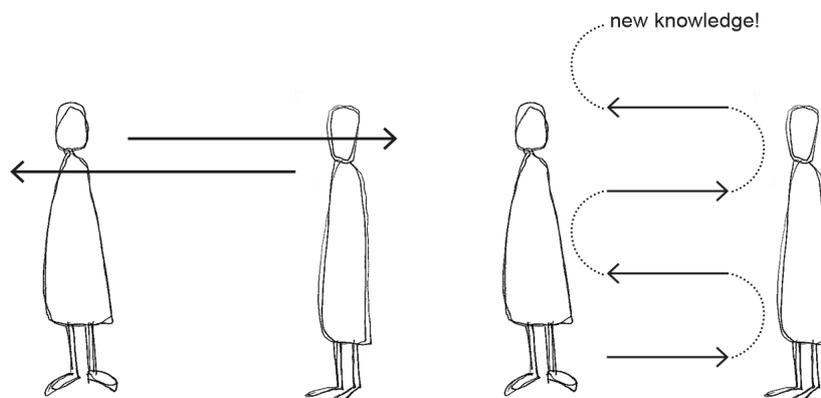


Fig. 7b: Two sets of monologues aimed at each other can not be considered two-way communication. Instead, each response needs to be influenced by and build on previous input, so that communication builds understanding and knowledge between the communicating parties. This is what I call true communication.

It is the same difference Forester points to when he says that “*calling a process collaborative or participatory doesn't make it so*” (Forester 2009, p 12). He clarifies that inviting people to a meeting is not automatically to invite them to participate. The possibility to influence, learn and interact is the participation part of the meeting. Not the invitation. The same prerequisite for participation has been pointed out by several predecessors (Forester 1998, Malbert 1998, Svennberg and Teimouri 2010): That it is the openness to change, being prepared to change one's view depending on the other's input or the possibility for social learning (see also *Paper II*) that constitutes the prerequisites for successful communication in a participatory setting. Or successful participation in a communicative setting depending on your perspective on the process.

Understanding or having an opinion on how communication works or does not work is important in order to achieve anything in communicative (Sager 1994) or collaborative (Healey 1997) planning. Forester calls it having an underlying perspective of “*collaborative and critical pragmatism*” (2009, p 15), where we can anticipate and facilitate for example conflicting interests and biases. Having acted as a facilitator or moderator of communicative processes I see my understanding of Forester's matrix as a useful tool in such efforts. Recognizing the type of communication and weighing it against the objectives of the exchange, one can steer the direction of the communication to another category in the matrix; From dialogue to negotiation when a decision needs to be made. From debate to dialogue if the opponents show lack of understanding for one another etcetera.

#### 4.1.1 Communication and conflict management

It is as a process facilitator, a moderator or a conflict mediator I have come to my views on communication as something that can be used as key and tool for mutual understanding. Communication can fail and need help to come further. So while I maintain that communication is key, I see the need of facilitation / a facilitator in lines with Malbert (1998) as sometimes crucial for that unlocking mechanism to work. Therefore, communication skills, both in terms of understanding all sides of Malbert's interspace (see fig. 12 p. 39) and the ability to phrase planning strategies to straddle that gap, could be called participatory planning skills dependant on an understanding of communication and conflict mediation. Forester puts it in terms of: “*Assessing, facilitating, moderating and mediating efforts are needed to shepherd along participatory or collaborative processes*” (Forester 2009, p 13).

With that in mind, I took the opportunity to familiarize myself with the method Deep Democracy, as established by Greg and Myrna Lewis ([deep-democracy.net](http://deep-democracy.net)), over a three-day course in October 2012. While a three day-course does not give me diplomat status, the course reinforced my belief that the understanding of communication and conflict is crucial in order to understand participation and civic engagement in local development.

The mediator method(s) taught focuses on an empathic, neutral understanding of the opponents in order to phrase the misunderstanding, difference of interest or reason for dispute between them. One exercise stayed with me and has influenced my way of listening to other people communicating. The exercise was on majority decisions and how this is not only a method for counting votes in order to follow the majority's wish, but a method to point out the opposition to the solution chosen. The closer the vote, the more opposition identified. By just recognizing and “listening to the no” as the method taught us, one could reach a deeper understanding for the decision taken. “Why are you against?” is asked after the vote, and the answers given may then influence or adjust the solution chosen. Or, the answer is so much contrary to the majority that another question is needed: “What would it take to have you accept the majority's choice?”. This gave the opposition the opportunity to influence or to accept the majority decision, in a way that made the whole group work towards a common goal without the naysayers even looking disgruntled over not getting their way.

I realise that this is just one of many methods phrased on conflict management and that is a whole field in itself. I also know that the method, like most methods, is not applicable to all groups or contexts, but this was my entry to conflict management as part of planning project facilitation. Up until this course, facilitation had been about process design and management as described by my head advisor Malbert (1998). But

my experiences in Uddevalla, had shown me that conflict management was sometimes necessary in order to even approach facilitation of participation in planning issues (Åhlström 2011, see also *Paper I*).

I was frustrated over being thrown into a mediator role, when all I wanted to do was to find the interviewees' common issues, in for example the area of Lane-Ryr. But my frustration was explained and even understood as something natural depending on the local context, in Forester's *Dealing with Differences* (2009). This comforting explanation combined with the course on Deep Democracy has formed my way of looking at communication in participatory processes. It has helped me to hear different agendas, to listen for misunderstandings and to respect resistance. I have found that facilitating is to mediate understanding between parties rather than to propose solutions.

#### 4.1.2 Beyond consensus

The criticism of communicative or collaborative planning that I have come across, often addresses the flaws of consensus building as a strategy for development (See for example Flyvbjerg 1998 and Purcell 2009). As I see conflicting agendas and different perspectives as essential prerequisites for the social learning process I refer to as participation (see *Paper II* and chapter *Participation* below) that criticism becomes moot.

However, it raises the expectations on the facilitation or mediation described above as necessary and essential. Communicative planning requires, not only communicating but focus and efforts towards qualitative or rational communication, of which conflict is part. Consensus can be very useful when it is the agreement on a common narrative, context or description of a current state. The consensus aimed for can also be to agree on what conflicts are of interest within an issue, or on what conflicting issues to mediate and how. But to go from consensus to decision-making is a communicative process in itself (see for example Forester 2009, Margerum 2011, Susskind 1999).

This is where I personally think planning, architecture and design solutions become interesting; Beyond consensus. Because in choosing a solution as concrete as built environment, that solution needs to mediate and respond to all interests in the participatory process behind it. The planner's task could therefore be seen as communicating what parts of a solution came from what party and what compromises or deals that have been made between conflicting interests along the way. Thus, drawing on Malbert (1998) and his description of different tasks within the planning profession; In a transparent enough process, the technical task of a planner can easily be made subject to an interpretation and facilitation task of his or her colleague. And the planning itself can be mediating and visualizing considerations in a conflict ridden process.

Thus, communicative, intrinsic planning (Sager 1994), and the facilitating, mediating (Malbert 1998, Forester 2009) role of a planner, can actually be summed up in these comprehensions of communication as described above. And my definition or description of the communication needed is therefore: Two-way, open to adaptation and part of social learning, not aiming at consensus as a goal, but rather as a starting point for planning solutions to be designed as a reply to, in an on-going dialogue.

## 4.2 Participation

### Participation -

The action of taking part in something

(Oxford Dictionary 2015)

Architecture is sometimes referred to as our third skin (See for example Hundertwasser's five skins fig. 8, Restany 1998) (Clothes being the second skin) and my interpretation of that is that we are part of the built environment around us and it is part of us. We all take part (see definition above) in the built environment around us regardless of land ownership or what policy it is ruled under.

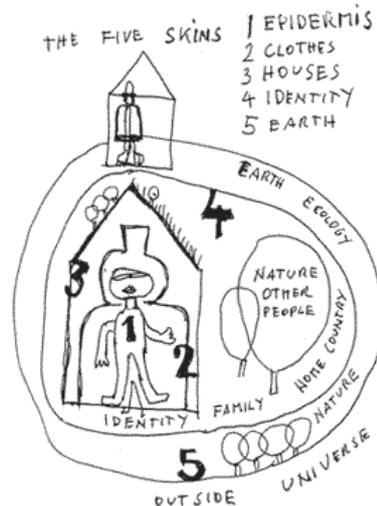


Fig. 8: The five skins according to Hundertwasser, in Restany 1998.

I have more than once used the simile of planners and architects being to their clients, what doctors are to their patients. The doctor may be the expert on the body and its functions, but the patient sure feels entitled to have some say in what is to be done to his or hers. Likewise, we as planners or architects come with our expertise to people's environments and worlds, and regardless of our expertise on built environment in general, we affect their world specifically. They already take part in it. We are at best just visiting.

Participatory planning is therefore in many ways adding planning to participation, rather than the other way around. Or, in the words of Patsy Healey when describing the "interpretive, communicative turn in planning theory":

*"Public policy, and hence planning, are thus social processes through which ways of thinking, ways of valuing and ways of acting are actively constructed by participants"*

(Healey, 1997, p29)

Therefore, I don't see a way around participation in planning, without landing in a tyrannical technocracy disregarding the context in which development schemes are to be implemented.

When telling colleague planners and architects that I study participation, I have more than once got a frustrated and negative response. While understanding the "good intentions" of participation, one colleague said, it is sure to "complicate, prolong and mess up the process" (own paraphrasing and translation from memory).

### 4.2.1 Swedish context - Mandatory participation and necessary parallel methods

In Sweden, planning is the only sector outside politics where the authority (municipality) is required by law to offer participatory influence by stakeholders. There is a system in place for exhibitions of plans and participatory meetings (samråd) to be held along the process of developing detail plans (detaljplaner). However, both politicians, planners and inhabitants in my cases have referred to this system as flawed in

many ways. The processes are prolonged mainly because of neighbours appealing the plan and “hijacking the process” as expressed by a planner in Lerum. At the same time, these meetings are an opportunity for inhabitants to meet the planning authority and the meetings on a specific site are sometimes hijacked by other issues that are more pressing to the local inhabitants.

While referring to a slightly different American context, I found this formulation poignant to the Swedish view on the *samråd* context:

*“We have created a regime that almost requires public-spirited citizens to mobilize as narrow-minded, single-issue reactionaries, and to engage in endless small battles just to ensure that whatever it is doesn’t happen in their back yard.”*

(Brain 2006)

In that perspective, the view on participation as being both excessively time-consuming and unnecessarily complicated, is understandable. At the same time, one of my first interviewees in Uddevalla said that *“Planners are people who make up problems they already know they will be able to solve”* (Own translation) The combination of these perspectives suggests that the Swedish system, while well intended, does not work as well as it needs to.

When discussing participatory methods in planning in a Swedish context, we usually refer to other methods, parallel and complementary to this process of *samråd*. Such was the objective with all of the methods tried in MSM, Uddevalla (Uddevalla Kommun, 2011) and such are the aims of the participatory efforts in Lerum.

#### 4.2.2 Success factors

My own experience as well as studies by others show how participation in planning is often conducted in pilot projects or singular examples. Assessments of such examples often show immediate change in trust or executive power of planning decisions (See for example Svennberg and Teimouri 2010, Peterman 2001, Forester 1999, Uddevalla Kommun 2011). General conclusions are drawn, but often illustrated with specific and local prerequisites or conditions, because local context matters that much and makes examples differ from each other. Nevertheless, the assessments show similar conclusions on why or how the project was successful or not. I have taken to heart a couple of things often pointed out as essential in these assessments: early stages, transparency and feedback.

Peter Fröst, has focused on participation by users in the design of healthcare facilities, but talks about the Description of needs, the Prestudy and Programming (Fröst 2004) as the crucial early stages in any design process. It can be debated whether these early stages are to be seen as part of the planning project or if they occur before the planning project has begun. Mona Seuranen, previously urban planner with the City of Gothenburg, phrased this phase as *“giving participants the problem formulation prerogative”* (Seuranen, 2010) and manages to describe why the early stages are important in that expression. It is not about being invited to a planning project. It is about instigating it, or whatever process is needed for the problems at hand.

Placing participation before or overlapping the actual planning project may also circumvent many critical voices about the risks of participation. Cooke and Kothari refer to a “mildly humorous cynicism” expressed by practitioners as well as participants discussing failed participatory processes, where the participatory intents have been “undertaken ritualistically (and) turned out to be manipulative” (Cooke and Kothari 2001 p 1). While I acknowledge the risks they stress, successful participation within a planning project is possible, if connected to a trusting relationship between local community and authorities in the broader context of that project.

Participating in formulating the problem opens the possibility to understand the following design or planning project better. Thus the feedback between planners and other participants throughout a transparent design process can provide fruitful insights. To the non-planner participant, this feedback is crucial to understand

how his or her input is treated and considered. This is often overlooked, and feedback is considered something to be dealt with at the end of the process, assessing the result. In a planning project one might even see the built result as that kind of feedback. But if that building comes up after a design process behind closed doors, chances are the participants do not recognize their early input at all. In such a closed process, that important participatory input from the early stages is partly wasted. Even if that input has been considered and has influenced the design proposal, the trust, mutual respect and social learning that could have come from a transparent process is lost. In Putnam's words it is a loss in social capital (Putnam 2000). And the next participatory effort has to start all over, trying to earn that social capital back. Instead, continuous feedback can be compared to the communication exchange as described in fig. 7 p. 27.

My experience from working with children and youth in participatory projects between 2004 and 2009, is that continuous feedback is necessary. The time restraints were not tiring voluntary participants in long processes. Nor were they related to project budgets with an expiration date. Child participants simply outgrow the solutions they help design quite quickly. Feedback only in hindsight was seldom a good idea, as they talked about an age ago, when we adults still saw it as the present. Having to use continuous feedback throughout relatively short projects like this also showed that kind of communication to be beneficial to more inclusive, more likely used and liked design solutions towards which the participants felt ownership and responsibility (See also Svennberg and Teimouri 2010).

#### 4.2.3 Ladder or mosaic

Participation is often discussed in relation to a ladder or a set of steps, the first of which was described by Sherry Arnstein (1969 – see fig. 9). Her ladder was however an assessment tool to answer “How participatory did we get?”. She did not, as far as I can read from her, intend her ladder to be used as a tool when organizing a participatory setting. Indeed, I believe Sherry Arnstein and myself agree more on the concept of participation than the use of her visualization by others would suggest. Arnstein herself showed for example how top-down initiatives risked getting stuck on the lowermost rungs of the ladder (manipulation and tokenism), while bottom-up initiatives had more possibilities to “climb higher” (Arnstein 1969, see also Tahvilzadeh 2015). She clearly relates the quality of participation to hierarchical relationships in a power structure, as two opposing ways of “climbing a ladder”.

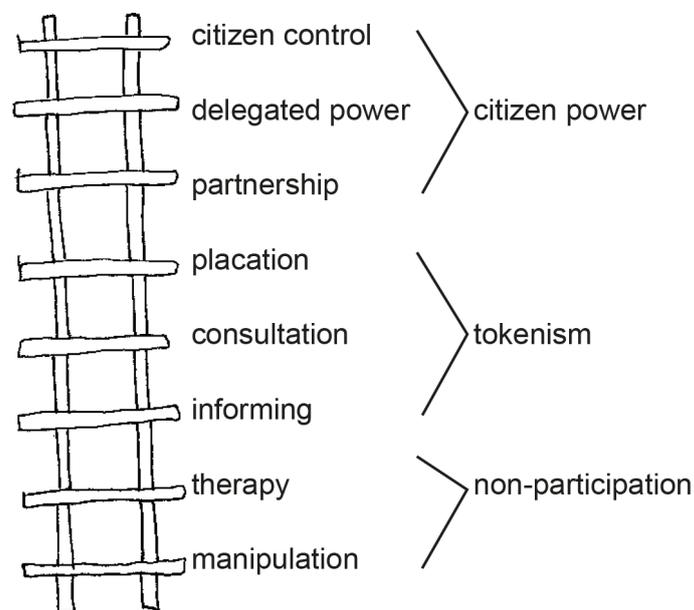


Fig. 9: Arnstein's ladder from 1969, redrawn verbatim.

Arnstein's ladder has inspired images of participatory ladders or steps in many settings (see for example Hart 1997, SALAR 2006), but I agree with the criticism of the steps or ladders in this context (See for example, Castell 2013a and b, Collins and Ison 2009, Tritter and McCallum 2006). In short: As a visualization of participation in general, it presumes a hierarchical system of authority above participants and of power as something given or taken, by an authority, to or from those “below”. As this is not my view on participation, the ladder or steps lead me astray when trying to phrase my understanding of the concept.

I found my view on participation fit in nicely with the image of the mosaic, as described by Tritter and McCallum (2006) (see also *Paper II*). That is to say, that the “whole picture” includes everyone with any kind of stake in the issue, be it a planning proposal or other developmental discussions in a geographically delimited area. Even the background pieces that are not even part of the motif in focus, (who are perhaps not actively participating in the issue at hand), can be said to participate. Just not actively in this or that particular issue.



*Fig. 10: Mosaic from Pompeii. One can easily claim the pieces that make the eye of the dog are more important to the full image than one of the white background pieces. They are all however pieces of the full image.*

Politicians, business owners, civil society as well as the planners tasked with designing a development proposal are pieces of the same participatory mosaic. The planners' proposals and sketches are made as input to the on-going communication in the mosaic or network of actors (see also *Paper IV*). When planning becomes part of a transparent, communicative process, the planner's expertise is mediating conflicting interests in a design proposal. This, for instance, can be a most effective and even efficient (see chapter *Efficient/Effective*) role of planning and design in a participatory setting.

Each planning proposal is devised to meet, explain, highlight or respond to the latest input from the other stakeholders (as well as taking other criteria such as policy and agreed conventions into consideration), the planner is seen to respect others' interests. Respect for and trust in the planning profession follows enhanced understanding of the many conflicting interests a planner tries to mediate in the design. The way I see it, planning participating in the on-going communication about a place, can only be of benefit to our profession, our expertise and our role in planning as a whole.

It is therefore also of interest to consider planning as just one of the realms of interest in which people's engagement in their local context focuses. By combining methods and meetings with other realms such as education, maintenance, safety, accessibility and other municipal issues of consideration, planning solutions are applied to the appropriate issues. Meanwhile some planning issues may turn out to be more information issues or reasons for collaborative efforts on site (See for ex. the story about dirt piles in chapter *Case - Lerum/Gråbo*). I therefore see participation in several scales; planning activity takes its stance in participation and participants take part in (for instance) planning.

## 4.3 Other Key Concepts

It is both practical and common to provide something of a dictionary to an academic text, clarifying how this text in particular refers to a word or a concept. A few key concepts have followed me throughout my work and they have come to mean so much or have become so specific, that I simply needed to expand on some of them.

### 4.3.1 Co-production/Co-creation

The concepts of co-production and/or co-creation are developing and being used rapidly and broadly. They have become something of buzzwords and are sometimes used synonymously, sometimes describing different kinds of processes. For the sake of my work and text I follow and concur with the definitions and reasonings on co-production by Polk (2015), not least because her work is part of the discussions and processes behind the establishment of Mistra Urban Futures in Gothenburg (Polk et al. 2009). That is to say, co-production of knowledge for solutions to complex or wicked problems (Rittel and Webber 1973). I see co-production as production of new knowledge in the merge of different sets and applications of knowledge in theory and practice. On the other hand, I see co-creation as being more about producing something at least almost tangible, as in a joint organization (such as the development process of the *Co-production Group of Gråbo*) or an actual physical object (such as the art wall in Gråbo described in *Paper IV*).

However, since my case has come to call their participatory efforts in Gråbo *the Co-Production Group* in English (*Medskapandegruppen* in Swedish), even though they (we?) could have used either term, I need a further distinction. I will distinguish the difference in meaning between the group and the concept by referring to the group in Gråbo as a name, as above. Therefore I also stick to the term co-production throughout and avoid the word co-creation, even though it may be apt to describe part projects or outcomes in my work.

### 4.3.2 Efficient / Effective

#### **efficient** –

1(Of a system or machine) achieving maximum productivity with minimum wasted effort or expense

2(Of a person) working in a well-organized and competent way.

#### **effective** –

Successful in producing a desired or intended result.

(Oxford Dictionary 2015)

A common critique of participation in planning in general is that it takes too long (See also chapter *Participation*). Or in other words, that participation delays the planning project and you start building later. “Too long” implies that it could be done faster, but also that faster is better, which might not be the case. Participation in planning might not be the most efficient way to get things built (at least not in the first attempts), but it may be more effective. The difference in meaning between these deceptively similar concepts is in fact crucial to interpreting my research.

I do not argue with the dictionary distinction (see above) between the two, where efficient refers to and assesses the process activity and effective refers to the quality of the result.

Efficient in my research's context would then mean to walk through the necessary steps of a planning project quickly, with a minimum of wasted time and money. Effective would in contrast mean that the planning project ensures the quality of the resulting building and its use. To me, anchoring it to a local context and thus ensuring its future as a well understood, used, appreciated and needed addition, is to work effectively, if not always necessarily efficiently.

The pairing and comparing of the words efficient and effective is a good way to argue for participation in planning. Stefan Larsson argues in his dissertation from 2014 in the context of wind power instalments in Sweden, how the word efficient, while valid for the turbines, misses much of the democratization and social

aims of the cases he has studied. He then shows how effectiveness could be a more accurate way of arguing for more long-term positive effects. (Larsson, 2014) Similarly, I argue that while time-consuming and sometimes more expensive in the beginning, working effectively with participation towards objectives set in a more long-term perspective, will eventually render the shorter processes more efficient as they relate to each other and to their local context more intimately.

Tahvilzadeh (2015) shows efficiency as one of the reasons for participatory governance and links it to authorities coming closer to and understanding a local context. He draws from Fung and Wright (2001) and their idea of Empowered Deliberative Democracy (EDD), which in many ways comes close to my perspective on participation in planning specifically. Fung, Wright and Tahvilzadeh alike do however use the efficient/efficiency throughout, while in many ways referring more to what I would call effective/effectiveness. However, a combination of efficient and effective measures would be ideal, when it comes to participation and to planning. Neither efficient nor effective planning necessarily equals good planning, if not put in correlation with an aim or objective.

In my two case studies, the aims and objectives have been phrased in relation to sustainable development. Thus, in a long-term perspective the effectiveness of participation seems most important; i.e. that the participatory process builds mutual trust and understanding that can be beneficial to both the project as such and to future planning and building projects as well as the participatory process in general. However, it has been shown how achieving quick and tangible results can give trust, optimism and momentum to a slower, larger process. For example, the Co-Production Group had a flying start, as the municipality was able to show they meant business, by quickly providing some money for an event in Gråbo after the first meeting in May 2012 (See also chapter *Case Lerum/Gråbo* and *Paper II and IV*). This quick response to a local initiative is still referred to by group members, when arguing for trusting the process or the intentions behind it.

My experience and view is that by letting the participatory effort occasionally be extra efficient, even on a small scale, it becomes more effective. Aiming for long-term effectiveness of participatory efforts, will eventually also lead to more consistently efficient singular projects.

#### 4.3.3 Project/Process

Throughout this text I will use the word *project* about issues of change that are restricted to one problem to solve and has time restraints and/or a deadline. The word *process* on the other hand will be used to describe change over time in a deliberate but also iterative way, without the restraints of a project. In doing so I join and agree with the arguments phrased by de Bruijn et al. (2010) in *Process Management*; that narrowed down project formulations can only follow a process formulation where everyone involved agree either on the way the process is organized or managed and thus agree on how the problem formulation is made. This coincides with Mona Seuranen's way of phrasing *the problem formulation prerogative*, as she showed through example when she worked as a planner in Gothenburg. She explained to me how a planning project became more efficient (and effective!) following a participatory effort where inhabitants phrased their area's qualities and potentials. Through that effort they also understood the complexity that the planners faced in designing new developments (interview with Seuranen as referred to in Åhlström 2011). Therefore, on the scale of planning projects, they can take their stance in, be part of, challenge or affirm the process of local context behind it.

With my case example I would argue that the sustainable development of Gråbo is a *process*, in which I have studied a way of organizing dialogue and communication among and between local and municipal actors and stakeholders. From and within this process part *projects* emerge, merge, counter-act and happen.

#### 4.4 Necessary perspectives

All concepts above are presented from the notion that they need to be understood in a certain way in order for my research to be valid. Some of the challenges of such a demand for pre-understanding has already been explored and summarized by a fellow research project at the center Mistra Urban Futures ([www.mistraurbanfutures.org](http://www.mistraurbanfutures.org), see also chapter *Research Contexts - Mistra Urban Futures*) called KAIROS (Knowledge about and Approaches to Fair and Socially Sustainable Cities). This project has defined social sustainability as a stable relationship between Security, Justice and Development, and has shown how a few mental shifts (Swedish word: *synväändor*) within these concepts are necessary in order for them to encompass social sustainability:

- 1. From negative to positive security – about the need for a more inclusive and co-created city development that handles unequal power structures and conflicting goals, a city development that focus not only on negative security but also promotes social capital and trust (i.e. positive security).*
- 2. From a purely market-oriented growth mindset to a more healthy development – about the connection between public health and societal development.*
- 3. From control to more of co-creating in the system of education – from a school for order of society to a school by and with children and youths, from learning about democracy to living democracy, from social control to social interaction*
- 4. From looking upon citizens as objects to seeing them as subjects – to open up for a civil society not only consisting of associations but also of social movements, networks and engaged citizens and about the need to look upon civil society not as counter-parts but as co-creators in developing a sustainable society.*
- 5. From invitation to dialogue to a co-creative democracy – about the need for a new local social contract.*
- 6. From focus only on customer benefit to focus on a broader public value – about the need for a new mode of governance and a more co-creative leadership in the public sector*
- 7. From formal rights to real rights – about the need to focus on justice not only in possibilities but also in outcome, and about structural discrimination and the need of supporting structures for real change in outcome.*

(KAIROS, 2015)

These mental shifts are also applicable to my results on local participatory networks for continuous communication, in which participatory projects and solutions are co-initiated and co-produced. But several of these shifts also tend to happen back and forth in local discussions when different sets of interests and knowledge about a common issue meet and develop ideas. Participation in continuous communication gives the possibilities for a local network to find different perspectives on their common issues among themselves (See anecdotal examples in Paper II and IV).

## 4.5 Theoretic Framework

### 4.5.1 Communicative/ Collaborative Planning

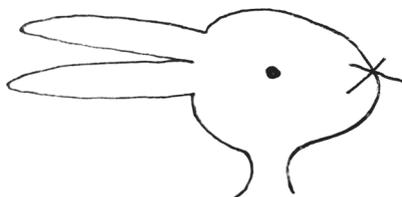
My outlook on my topic led me to a warm embrace of a family of theorists talking about communicative (Sager 1994) and collaborative (Healey 1997) planning theory. I take my theoretical stance in the descriptions of incremental planning (as opposed to synoptic) (Sager 1994) and the pragmatic view taken by Healey, relating argumentative, communicative and interpretive planning theory (Healey 1997, p29-30) to changes in planning practice due to societal, political, regional or urban changes.

As planning has its technical, executive side linked to technical precision and expertise as well as its political side linked to community and stakeholder involvement, Sager (1994) explains how this calls for different sets of planning theory. Therefore, he says, the incremental view is necessary to contrast synoptic theories of planning against, as the latter tends to lean on a utopian or imagined reality (Sager 1994). Simply put, not all things can be foreseen and thus planning projects cannot be fully designed in advance. Things will always come up and things will be dealt with incrementally along the way.

*“Local planning is a close companion to local politics, and it is faced with constantly recurring claims for democracy. This does not only imply majority decisions on planning matters. The interested parties demand to be kept informed and to have the opportunity to argue their case throughout the planning process. Two-way communication is the key word. (...) The plans are not only to function well as technical solutions but even as political ones.”*

(Sager 1994)

Two-way communication is indeed the key, but not a solution in itself. It is not just about listening to each other, but hearing and to be open to changing each other. (see also chapter *Communication*)



*Fig. 11: True two-way communication makes it necessary for each party to take in and understand the other's point of view. (See also chapter *Communication*, fig. 7 p. 27) Understanding is more important than convincing. Many issues of difference could, like Wittgenstein's duck-hare (first seen in 1892. This is my own version.), be seen from two perspectives, both of which are true.*

True two-way communication creates a new understanding, or new knowledge, between the parties communicating. This kind of knowledge production can be explained as co-created knowledge (see for ex. Polk ed. 2015).

Sager's incremental view on planning also relates it, not only to other versions of itself, but to continuous processes that planning is part of. For example, planning can play a crucial role linked to challenges of climate change and pollution, civil society and how we all face these challenges and how local policy must link the global to the local (Falkheden 1999). I look at communicative/ collaborative planning as the way to for example tie global issues to local contexts and to concretize some parts of sustainable development (see also chapter *In the Context of Sustainability*).

Or in a simpler context, planning is one of three municipal areas of responsibility in Sweden (the others being healthcare and education) and following any planning project, one will quickly see how it relates to and involves the other municipal sectors, simply because it is set in the same geographical context. At the same time, the analysis phase of a planning project will take national and regional interests of for example

preservation and nature reserves into account. And it will refer some considerations to international conventions and global issues. But if turned around the different contexts of different scales are not affecting the planning project, but the planning project is part of all of the continuous context(s) of a place, thus of a larger process (See also chapter *Other Key Concepts – Project/Process*).

Hoch distinguishes planning theory, up until communicative planning theory, as describing the three interfaces between three spatial planning domains: The field, the movement and the discipline of planning (Hoch 2011): The field refers to purposeful actions by planning professionals. The discipline is the theoretic field and body of knowledge to do with planning, and the movement is “*collective efforts to develop and promote the practice of spatial planning as a legitimate and useful organised practice and profession. Various social, political and civic associations and their members contribute to the movement.*” (Hoch 2011 p 8).

He then continues to say that efforts to describe a communicative planning theory, referring to Healey and Friedmann, being an attempt to bridge all three domains as “*They hope to inspire the planning movement and the field using disciplinary ideas*” (Hoch 2011 p 10). I concur.

We need the planning discipline to influence both planning practice and all stakeholders or actors to do with planning projects, simply because we are talking about our common environments. While “the movement” might not be planning professionals, they are experts on different perspectives on planning. From a geographer’s expertise on the different meanings and contexts of a place to the politician’s expertise on public opinion in his or her electoral areas. Or from a child’s knowledge of short-cuts through a village to the historical perspective of a place described by an elderly inhabitant. Because if planning does not consider the local context from many different perspectives, it misses its purpose of meeting the future correctly equipped. Planning must for example meet sustainability challenges such as setting the stage for lifestyle changes in homes as well as in urban spaces. And it must try not to repeat past mistakes.

Based on a planning practice that deals with stakeholder involvement and participation, John Forester describes a planning theory that takes its stance in a planner’s professional role as a deliberative practitioner.

I lean my studies against this body of planning theory known as community planning, but see them as describing the planning profession on something of a sliding scale between practice and theory. Adding Hoch’s planning movement to this scale, it also adds the influence of the outside world to my map of theoretical framework.

#### 4.5.2 Research Environment

This focus on the transdisciplinary interface (interspace/ interplace - see below) between theory and practice (see also chapters *Research Contexts – Mistra Urban Futures* and *Method – Embedded Researcher and (trans)formative assessment*) also comes from my predecessors and colleagues’ foci (Malbert 1998, Stenberg 2004, Castell 2010 ), which in many ways were my starting points for this thesis. I stepped into a succession of research on the topic of participation in planning, going back three generations of PhD projects. A brief walk-through gives more understanding for the shape of my PhD project.

##### 4.5.2.1 Interspace

My head advisor has been professor Björn Malbert who addressed facilitation of participation processes and the gap between theory and practice in his dissertation from 1998. In it he describes *interspace* as the gap between theory and practice in two directions (see fig. 12). He describes a communicative gap between experts and users (public planning systems and communities of the life-world) on the one hand. On the other hand the same gap between theory and practice (research based knowledge and practice based knowledge). (Malbert 1998)

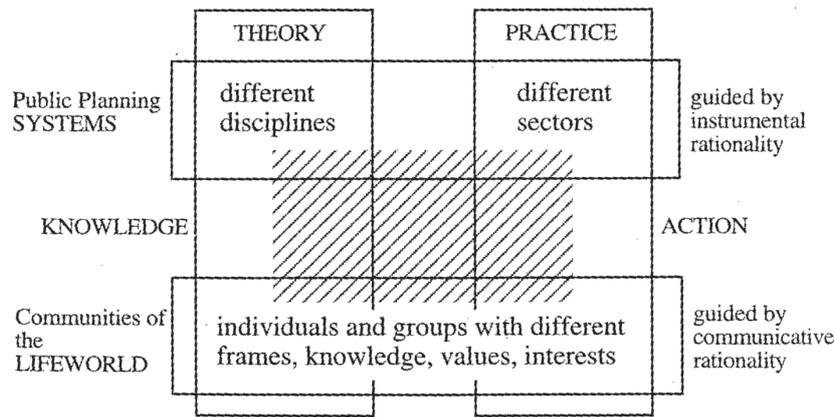


Fig. 12: Interspace as depicted by Malbert 1998 p 40  
The hatched area representing Interspace.

Malbert came to be a researcher after several years of planning practice and his understanding of all realms in this model gives a broad but deliberative brush with which to draw up solutions to bridge the gap. One of these solutions is the professional role of process facilitator, to complement the planners' existing roles as experts and coordinators within the planning project. The facilitator would work close to the life-world community bridging interspace in a planning project. Malbert's view on facilitation as a task for someone with planning expertise, gave me a footing and the confidence to attempt being the interpreter of qualitative interview and workshop material during my method development in Uddevalla (see paper I). There, the understanding that planning expertise is of use when issues interlink and depend upon each other became empirically proven and experienced. Again, I found myself becoming more comfortable in the words, the mediation of different sets of knowledges around problem formulation, rather than in solution design.

#### 4.5.2.2 Interplace

Jenny Stenberg's research in suburban areas of Gothenburg in large scale housing areas studied how authorities and inhabitants meet or interact in different development plans. She talks of *interplace*, a concept she takes from Forsberg and Fryk (1999), but adapts to include the perspective of planning. (Stenberg 2004) In my interpretation Stenberg's interplace describes the transdisciplinary space between the different actors involved in or affected by development plans in a certain place. She describes how knowledge meeting knowledge creates new knowledge in this interplace, but she includes politicians and representatives of local authorities other than planners in this gap between actors of a process. All relating to the same geographical context. Stenberg's description of Interplace has given me a lot of understanding in my cases, for what happens in a group of different actors with different agendas meeting around a common issue. I see Interplace as a combined concept describing the imagined, lateral space between actors and stakeholders connected to a specific geographical context. In Stenberg's description, also tied to development plans or planned changes of some sort. It is very much applicable to the Co-Production Group of Gråbo in my cases (see f ex *Paper II* and *IV*), with the one exception of the connection to on-going development plans, which is necessary in Stenberg's description of an ever changing interplace. Therefore I do use Stenberg's description or interpretation of Interplace, when describing "the meeting table" (can be used metaphorically) in a non-hierarchical participatory group of actors connected to a specific location. Its participants are a mixed group of actors present because of interest, responsibility, profession or political mandate tied to the geographical place.

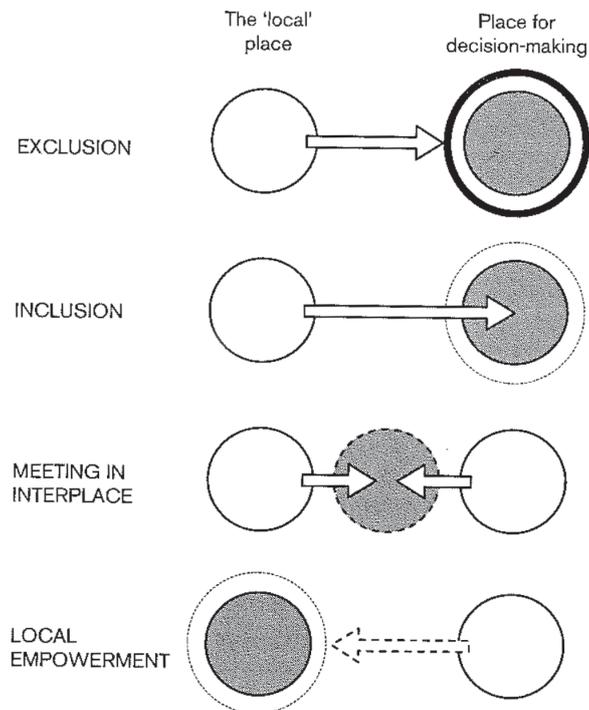


Fig. 13 Castell (2010, Thematic Paper C, p 10) illustrates exclusion, inclusion, meeting in interplace and local empowerment in the above schematic diagrams.

Own comment: The diagrams shown laterally emphasise how it is not about power hierarchy but about power relations.

#### 4.5.2.3 Local contexts and global challenges

Pål Castell continued research within the institution and in this tradition. He focused on a very tangible and concrete scale, studying tenant involvement in open spaces such as common inner courtyards of housing complexes. He describes how his research looks at three themes of key relations in society – social relations within the local community, participation in urban design and planning projects and the role of the space itself (the courtyard in question for example) (Castell 2010). As Castell phrased the delimitation of his study, in three different relations, I could phrase what I do and do not do for the first time (see fig. 14). While the scale of Gråbo is larger than “open green spaces”, it was this image that let me phrase “communicative interfaces for planning” in a combination of A, B and C (see fig. 2 p 14). If related to Castell’s figure: Communication of value to co-produced knowledge for the (sustainable) development of a geographically delimited area is found in all communication within and between A and B in relation to C.

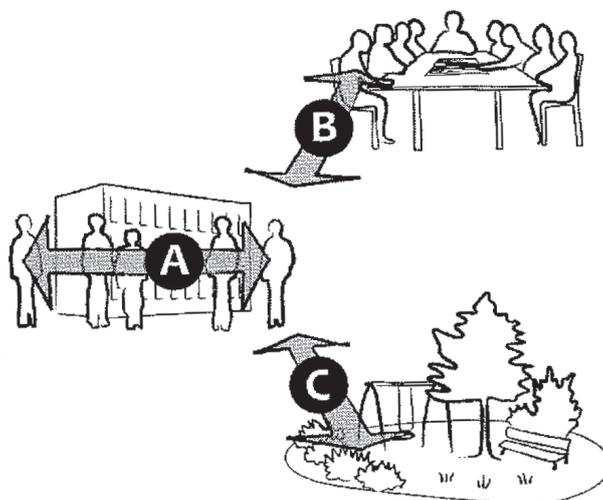


Fig. 14: The framework for Castell’s studies on togetherness in tenant management of courtyards published 2010, p 11. He studies the relations between A. Social relations in the local community, B. Citizen participation in urban design and planning and C. The role of urban open green spaces. Compare to fig. 2 p. 14

As Castell's studies have such a tangible scale, his descriptions and cases become sharp and to the point even in large or abstract theoretical contexts. This is described most clearly tying tenant involvement in common courtyards to different perspectives on sustainable development. Castell's discussions about sustainable development, landing in the concept of robustness, has had a profound impact on how I understand, listen to and consider issues that are said to aim at objectives of sustainability, even when restricted to the municipalities' own objectives and definitions within that concept (See chapter *in the Context of Sustainability*).

Castell refers the connections between local and global issues to another colleague, Lena Falkheden. She founded and runs the master studio Design and Planning for Sustainable Development in a Local Context together with Björn Malbert at Chalmers Architecture school. Falkheden's research is on how the global challenges find their solutions in very local and contextual situations (Falkheden 1999). The master studio combines her perspective on sustainable development with Malbert's view on planning in participatory settings. This studio has in turn had a great impact on the practical framework of my research project (see chapter *Research Contexts – Design and Planning for Sustainable Development in a Local Context - a master studio*).

Thus my research project has been set in a rich tradition and environment linking non-hierarchical participation to planning in a very communal sense of the word. And sustainable development has been referred to as something done together in the way suitable or possible to this or that local context.

#### 4.5.2.4 Transdisciplinarity

The close relationship between practice and theory in my research is a direct result of the research environment and the timing of research in the two cases combined with education in a master studio (see chapter *Research Contexts*).

I did not know to call it a transdisciplinary approach to begin with, but the second case being organized in collaboration with Mistra Urban Futures ([mistraurbanfutures.org](http://mistraurbanfutures.org), 2015) gave me the vocabulary to describe my research settings. Mistra Urban Futures is a knowledge-building platform and a transdisciplinary centre for sustainable urban development, opened in 2011, joining practice to theory and research through initiatives towards a sustainable urban development.

Societal planning and policy making was indeed the original *wicked problem* (Rittel and Webber 1973):

*"...in a pluralistic society there is nothing like the indisputable public good; there is no objective definition of equity; policies that respond to social problems cannot be meaningfully correct or false; and it makes no sense to talk about 'optimal solutions' to these problems...Even worse, there are no solutions in the sense of definitive answers"*

(Rittel and Webber 1973)

This way of describing a wicked problem as something, where neither problem nor solution can be definitively or even satisfactorily defined, can also be used for challenges of climate change and sustainability. It calls for pluralistic solutions and problem formulation dependant on their application in a local context. Thus, the problem formulation behind participation in planning (for sustainability's sake) calls for transdisciplinary approaches.

Research in planning as such is interdisciplinary, that is to say dependant on input from several disciplines. *Transdisciplinary* research is defined by its closeness to practice-based/situated expertise and real-life problem contexts, co-producing knowledge between theory and practice (See also Westberg et al 2013, Polk 2014, Polk ed. 2015).

Thus, my research can not in itself be said to be transdisciplinary, but is conducted in a transdisciplinary context; academic research influencing practice and vice versa. See fig. 15 a, b and c.

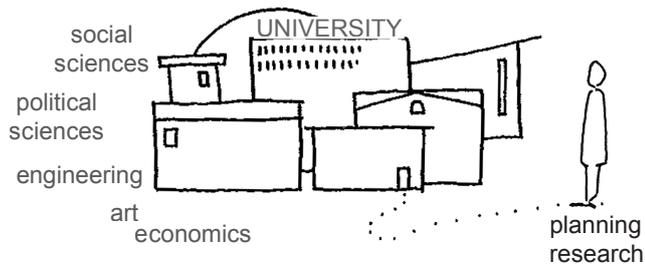


Fig. 15a: Academic context: Doing a PhD is learning and becoming part of a research environment. Research in planning is intrinsically interdisciplinary, as it is dependant of input from many different disciplines.

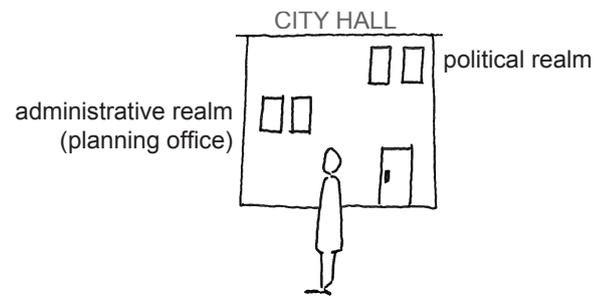


Fig. 15b: Practice context: The municipality's political realm decides what its administrative realm does. Among its offices is the municipal planning authority, which is where I find my professional colleagues and background.

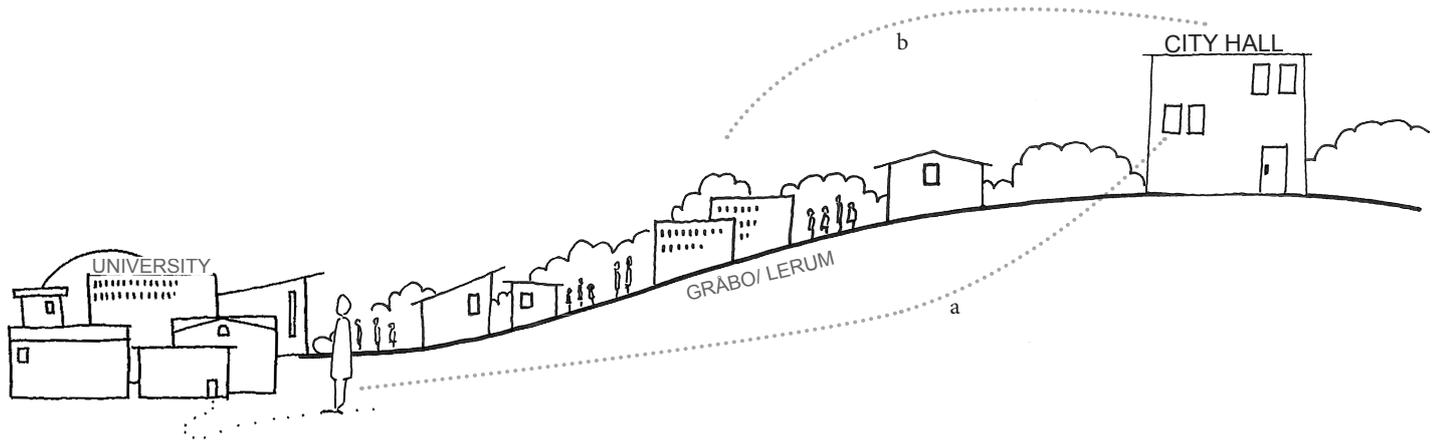


Fig. 15c: Transdisciplinary research would, according to Polk's definition (2015), be if knowledge was co-produced between practice and academia – between my planner colleagues at the municipality and me as a researcher (a), but that is not what is done here. Instead, I study a co-production of knowledge and activity between the municipality and a geographically delimited context in Gräbo (b). Knowledge is co-produced both about and within my case study, but my research is not transdisciplinary in itself. Instead it is set in a transdisciplinary context. I understand the life-world context from my position on my way into academia from a professional background in architecture and planning.

The first time I understood the term transdisciplinary was in an example made by professor emeritus Sven Eric Liedman in a lecture at the Department of Conservation, Gothenburg University on March 22, 2011. Liedman described how the discipline of medicine as we see it today, was two separate things for a long time. On the one hand there was the medicine academia where scientists charted and discussed the functions and build of human and other biological bodies. They discussed and argued their findings in texts and illustrations and the science had to do with understanding and describing – no more. On the other hand, there were the practitioners coping best they could with mending people's bodies and curing them from illnesses. These craftsmen were the surgeons. The application of the theoretical knowledge of the academics to the work of the practitioner came much later. And adding the practitioners' experience based expertise to inform the academic body of knowledge was yet another step away. My understanding of transdisciplinarity is this interface between theory and practice, informing each other with different kinds of knowledge and application, connecting theory to practice by co-creating new knowledge.

The distinction between theory and practice as described in the example above can be directly applied to the discipline and field (drawing on Hoch 2011) of architecture and planning, and thus transdisciplinarity can be understood as knowledge-building in the interface between academic planning theory and the practice of planning in different contexts. My study has looked at planning practice in the context of Swedish municipalities, through the expertise of an architect/planner, leaning on academic planning theory that has been phrased far from the context of my case studies. The cases have informed my understanding of the theory, and my understanding of the theory has been allowed to inform and influence practitioners in my cases. Or phrased otherwise: knowledge has been co-produced (ed. Polk 2015) and understood between practitioners and me in my cases. Therefore – my work is conducted in a transdisciplinary context.

It needs to be noted that the practitioners in my case have not all been planning professionals, but people dealing with planning issues in a municipal context; be it as an inhabitant, a politician or a municipal employee focused on any of the municipal sectors of responsibility. The focus on planning and planning theory comes from my expertise and subject of study, but the context of the case being wider than that, has placed my studies closer to ideas of governance and participation of different kinds rather than just participatory influence on planning. This is where my focus on larger time-lines and overlapping contexts comes from. From a planner's point of view, I see it as the continuity to which planning projects latch on (see also chapter *Other Key Concepts – Project/Process*)

The knowledge behind this text is sifted through the expertise and perspective of a planner, as described by John Forester (1999). I refer my transdisciplinary method of study to the interplay between Donald Schön's idea of the Reflective Researcher (1983/1995) and John Forester's play on Schön's concept rephrasing it the Deliberative Practitioner (1999). My background being that of an architect/ planner influences how I associate thoughts as well as my approach and focus in the tasks at hand as a researcher (see Engberg 2010). Furthermore, the practical tasks being asked of me because of my perspective as a planner (Compiling material for and writing area analyses in one case and assess knowledge production in a network in another) constitute the empirical work behind my reflections and conclusions.

As this research project is conducted as part of Mistra Urban Futures ([mistraurbanfutures.org](http://mistraurbanfutures.org) 2015), it relies on definitions of co-production and transdisciplinarity used by this center (See also Polk ed. 2015).

#### 4.5.3 Anyone against?

There are obviously critics of the perspective I have described, and understanding their criticism is crucial, also for understanding what it is I stand for. The criticism I feel compelled to meet is about power relations, and while I will describe this in short here, I refer my view on decision-making in a shared-power world (Bryson and Crosby, 2005) to the article *Rather Network (Paper IV)* and the chapter *Results* of this thesis.

Bent Flyvbjerg is close to my field of research primarily when it comes to methodological approach (See chapter *Method*). He is however critical of communicative rationality according to Habermas (Flyvbjerg 1997). It makes the world described by both Sager, Healey, Forester and Hoch, and thus mine, vulnerable to the same critique, as they rely on this rationality. Very simply put: Flyvbjerg writes that Habermas's discourse ethics doesn't deal with human evil, but assumes that the good in human beings will dominate (Flyvbjerg 1997, p 274). He continues that this makes the whole rationality questionable, as it becomes philosophy and dogma rather than a description of practical reality, with examples from his extensive study in Aalborg. In other, or my, words; to trust each other in the ways a participatory process requires, is to make the process vulnerable to malfeasance or manipulations of ill intent, since we don't know people's hidden agendas. Flyvbjerg (1997) also addresses problems of consensus building in relation to power. He shows through his case study, that power relations were more instrumental to practical outcomes than majority decisions, since these decisions were made between choices determined beforehand. Thus, the ones deciding on what to decide, could still be said to be in power of the decision made. In this way, consensus building as a strategy could, in reality, strengthen or uphold unbalanced power relations.

Purcell (2009) argues from the standpoint that communicative or collaborative approaches will not counteract neoliberalization enough and argues for transformed rather than neutralized power relations to that end. This text will describe transformed rather than neutralized power relations as I acknowledge that hierarchies still exist in the network (see *Paper IV*), but that interdependencies of knowledge and trust secures decisions being made on the right, commonly agreed upon, basis. As for market interests and/or deviations from this decision making process in a network, that is still a risk, but mostly at a much later procurement or implementation stage of a planning projects. I refer that discussion to other studies with other scopes (See for ex Brorström 2015a and 2015b).

But as both Purcell and Flyvbjerg also agree, the alternative to communicative or collaborative planning is technocratic rule of different kinds. A mixed approach where expertise informs communal decisions is to be

preferred, but we may differ on how that is obtained. I believe, as Malbert (1998), that the communicative part of planning is just one of its tasks – instrumental planning still needs its professionals. Communicative, participatory or inclusive can never be mistaken for anarchy or that everyone does everything. On the contrary, two-way communication is key, as Sager (1994) says. What I mean by that is that while planners get understanding of the local context of the participants, the participants also get understanding of the planners' tasks, responsibilities and professional expertise. Thus, communicative planning is not about consensus building, but about transparency and mutual understanding of different and contradictory opinions, interests and roles. Transparency may also mean different things at different intervals. It does not mean that everyone has access to everything at all times. Sometimes knowing that a meeting is taking place behind a closed door is enough, as discussed by Torfing et al 2012:

*“(...)as long as voters, clients, and stakeholders accept the existence of those moments of secrecy, and have the opportunity to assess the final outcomes and means to sanction those who are responsible for those outcomes.”*

(Torfing et al 2012, p 225)

Also, consensus can sometimes mean that the group agrees on what the conflicts of an issue are, without necessarily already having resolved them. Conflict and how to handle conflict must be intrinsic to this view of participation. I share my view on conflict being a natural part of communication in chapter *Communication* and in both my cases, conflict resolution has been natural occurrences to do with the process of communicating (see also *Paper I*)

#### 4.5.4 Planning in governance

Healey (1997) describes different kinds of governance and how collaborative planning relates to the different types of rule, such as representative democracy and corporatism. Governance is by definition, way to rule, to govern, and signifies type of relationship between civil society and its governing institutions (see for example Fung and Wright 2003). Thus, when describing participatory efforts in governance, planning issues become part of a larger context. In this text, I will not delve deep in to different forms of governance and different repercussions they might have on my idea of continuous participation. Instead, since my cases both relate to Swedish municipalities, that scale and context becomes my governance framework within which my results are viable. The word governance is thus used to signify the relationship between the system of rule and the local civil society, in which I claim participation starts and continuously takes place.

Over the years of the study I have realized that my studies could easily have been related to political science rather than planning, finding more and more descriptions of different kinds of governance that seem to fit my reflections on my cases. The difference being governance as the relationship between civic society and government/authority/municipality continuously, as opposed to participation in planning usually focused on one development/planning project at a time.

Landing in civil society outside of any on-going planning project forces me to describe my perspective on planning from a governance point of view. That is to say the continuous relationship between civic engagement and authority – in my cases, the municipality. In many ways, I think my thesis could be described as planning's particularity within known governance systematics, by someone writing about the same thing from a political science standpoint. But being me, I need instead to scratch the surface of that realm of knowledge, from a planner's standpoint.

My findings show how planning projects must start and depend on a local context, and how this local context can be addressed with participatory aims and measures, before any planning projects start. With this relation to the planning profession I place myself a step aside of the framework of planning theory. But I will claim that my stance is the necessary outcome of seeing planning as incremental (Sager 1994), collaborative (Healey 1997) or spanning over planning field, discipline and movement according to Hoch's description (2011).

Healey describes how the systemic institutional design needs to be set up for collaborative planning to work (Healey 1997, p 284-314), doing what I describe above – addressing the continuous context surrounding planning practice, from the planning perspective. I. e. the context needs to work thus, in order for planning practice(s) to work like this. Setting up both planning theory and the context it needs to work in, she can then describe governance within that system. For example, she describes how because having resources equals powers (as described by Giddens 1984), any political community which seeks to promote collaborative planning needs “resource pots” of various kinds to distribute in particular circumstances (Healey 1997, p 301).

It is impossible to apply Healey’s “particular instances” and examples of fair resource distribution on the cases in Swedish municipalities, without taking political sides. Examples end up in particular issues in the two municipalities with clear opposing political standpoints to their solutions or handling. Healey however stays clear of ideological or political discussion, by simply referring to the workings of collaborative planning practice(s).

Davoudi and Madanipour (2015) describe different rationalities and technologies of government to explain the background and reasons for the emerging theme of “localism” in a British context. While not exactly mirrored in Swedish political history there are parallels to be found. And the practical example in Lerum/Gråbo could be seen as a top-down initiated shift of responsibility or power from authority to local actors. But trying to hypothetically place the Gråbo example against other types of governmental rationality described (liberalism, welfarism, neoliberalism), I find the organization of the Gråbo example possible in them all, possibly with different political objectives behind it.

Guided by Healey’s formulation of institutional needs, I have stayed clear of politically charged issues in my examples, and phrased the organization of local networks (based on the Gråbo example) in order for it to be possible regardless of political rule and within the framework of the organization(s) of Swedish municipalities (see *Paper IV*).

## 5. THE CASES

This thesis is based on experiences and observations from two cases in two Swedish municipalities. In order to understand and have an opinion on the results or standpoints of this thesis, the setups, backgrounds and contexts of these two cases need to be explained. Some of the methods used depend on the contexts of the cases.

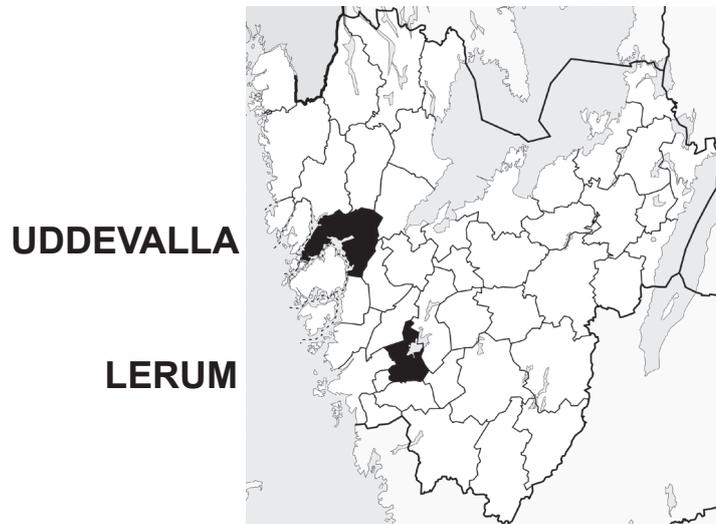


Fig. 16: The Västra Götaland Region. Uddevalla and Lerum municipalities in black.

Both cases are in municipalities in the county of Västra Götaland (Västragötalandsregionen) in the south west of Sweden (see map). Both municipalities can be described to be “outside Gothenburg” with commuters going back and forth to the bigger city, though Lerum is more in the direct vicinity than Uddevalla.

### 5.1 Case Uddevalla

The initiative and context to how the study in Uddevalla municipality came about can be found in *Research Contexts* as well as in *Paper I*. Therefore, I consider the event plot of this first case mainly told elsewhere. However, some of the efforts during the Uddevalla case study need to be noted as it required me to work half-time on this consultant task of method development for the project MSM.

The area analyses conducted was the laboratory in which I tried my new method for participation through trial and error. I conducted the first four by myself (Ljungskile, Bokenäset, Lane Ryr, Dalaberg/ Hovhult) while Emma Persson, a newly graduated architect at the time, tried my method and conducted the last one (Tureborg) as somewhat of an assessment of the method developed.

Each analysis is based on between nine and fourteen in-depth interviews at least two workshop and several spontaneous interviews on site (see *Paper I* for method description). All of which were audio recorded and transcribed if and when used for direct quotations.

The analyses were then compiled in relation to a table of content that I had put together based on the site analysis assignment given to students in the master studio Local Context (see above), the current comprehensive plan of Uddevalla municipality, the report on site analysis *Get To Know Your Community! (Lär Känna Din Ort!)* by the Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (Boverket 2006) and the Norwegian manual for site analysis, *Stedsanalyse* (Miljøverndepartementet 1993). However, the content of the interview and workshop material decided whether a headline from that checklist was valid or not for the area in question.

The analyses documents (in Swedish) can be acquired from me in pdf format on request.

The licentiate report on the method (also in Swedish) can be downloaded via Chalmers Library or acquired from me in pdf format on request.

## 5.2 Case Lerum / Gråbo

Lerum municipality is working towards a political vision of sustainability (Lerum municipality 2009) and has pointed out the urban settlement of Gråbo as the pilot in their efforts. With the title Pilot Gråbo, efforts towards sustainable development are applied to the context of Gråbo first, with the aim of eventually implementing successful methods and organizational models to the rest of the municipality.

The case study in Lerum/ Gråbo and its results are presented in Papers II, III and IV in this book, but during the case study I reported back to the municipality in reports and presentations in a process of transformative assesment (see chapter *Method*). Below is an attempt to summarize what I reported back to the municipality between September 2011 and January 2014. All reports can be aquired from me or from Lerum municipality on request. I also attach a meeting calendar in an attempt to show the scope of the case study.

### 5.2.1 Pre-study

The study in Lerum started, as in Uddevalla, with me following and assisting the masterstudio *Local Context*. The students arrived in Lerum/ Gråbo in September 2011 and their analysis and introduction of and to the municipality became my startingpoint as well. At the same time I was invited to participate in meetings, both political and administrative, to study how political citizen dialogue and participation in planning was connected. I joined the political commission assigned to Pilot Gråbo. Their task was to establish how Gråbo was to become sustainable through participation of its inhabitants. These first months were called a pre-study where I was free to phrase what I observed and wanted to focus on within studies of participation for sustainability's sake. I reported this pre-study period in a report and in an oral presentation to the municipal board (Kommunstyrelsen) in April of 2012.

The pre-study report (which is in Swedish) has a few main themes: First it summarizes the area of study and how I will look at communication about planning specifically in municipal planning activity, but also in the political realm of the municipality. In this, it draws from the results of the previous case study in Uddevalla (See above and *Paper I*). I also summarize my understanding of how the municipality of Lerum is already working on these issues, through their political vision and organization and in the efforts towards a new detail plan for central Gråbo.

The pre-study report also summarizes my understanding of the political organization of Lerum municipality, where the commissions dedicated to contemporary issues are appointed from the municipal council (Kommunfullmäktige) and in charge of citizen dialogue within their thematic issue. I was to follow the thematic commission dedicated to Pilot Gråbo. I also briefly mention the municipality administrative sectors divided between the three main areas of municipal responsibility: Societal Planning, Education/Learning and Healthcare. The societal planning sector takes care of comprehensive and detail planning, building permits and maintenance as well as development of physical environment.

I summarize the *Local Context* studio, its analysis and projects and how I have found issues from the projects being discussed in different realms of the municipal organization. From that I present the idea of planning issues as “trans-sectorial issues” to be used as communication catalysts between administrative sectors and between political and administrative realm of the municipality. I also argue how planning issues are a good starting point for discussions on more abstract themes such as sustainable development. As architecture and planning concretize and makes tangible what is more abstract in phrasings of global challenges, a project on bike and pedestrian accessibility can be used to discuss the issue of peak oil and fossil fuel dependency for example.

The report also compares with experiences from two other municipalities (Malmö and Upplands-Väsby) which I visited for specific input on municipal communication strategies.

### 5.2.2 report February 2013

The next written report was presented in February 2013. In the year that had passed, the Co-Production Group of Gråbo had been initiated (See *Paper II* and *Paper IV*) and I had followed the meetings of this new

group as well as the meetings of the political commission dedicated to Pilot Gråbo and a few meetings with an intersectoral group of administrators working with Pilot Gråbo.

During this period I had written the first draft of what was to become *Paper II*, and the report starts with a summary of my findings as presented in that text. I had pointed out *time*, *trust* and *transparency* as success factors in participation. The problem to be solved is how the inhabitants' input into a participatory process is not recognizable to the participant after a design process behind closed doors. Thus, successful participation requires that participation in the important early stages is followed by understandable feedback and exchange throughout the process. Or in short: Timing and transparency as basis for deepened trust.

I continue by showing that Pilot Gråbo is conducted in simultaneous and parallel processes with risk of misunderstandings and overlaps happening despite efforts to merge or collaborate between them. The Co-Production Group of Gråbo was, and still is, an answer and solution to many of these concerns. But the intersectoral group of administrators still had trouble opening up to the Co-Production process at this point, even though they shared my concerns. They were simply trying to sort out their own overlaps and collaborations first, but could meet with the Co-Production Group in specific issues.

I continue to summarize the early development of the Co-Production Group and how it works as a response to many of the issues raised in the pre-study report, such as tying issues to geographical contexts and discuss (planning) issues locally and intersectorially. I end the report by tying a quote from a lecture with William Peterman to a quote by the newly appointed chairperson of the Co-Production Group, trying to show how local planning issues could help the group find its form and purpose:

*“People need to understand what they’re fighting for. Their own neighbourhood they understand.  
Sustainable development... not as much.”*

- William Peterman April 17 2012

*“There are many people here willing to participate. But they need to understand what they become a part of.  
We need to clarify what we are.”*

- chairperson of the Co-Production Group of Gråbo September 3 2012 - own translation

### 5.2.3 report January 2014

The last written report was presented to the municipal board in early 2014. It lists some major events in Gråbo and the activities of the Co-Production Group (see also *Paper II and IV*), but also comments the final report by the Pilot Gråbo political commission. The commission had a two year task to phrase what sustainable development meant in Gråbo particularly. They started in the material handed over by the Chalmers master studio and followed that with several meetings and workshops with the inhabitants of Gråbo. They also took it upon themselves to look at discourse about sustainable development in a broader context in order to find the local factors specific to the Gråbo context. The collected material was broad and vast and the group discussed how it was to be reported. They had already summarized the practicalities to do with specific planning issues or maintenance in a “half-time report” in 2012 and this final report needed to be *“the politics of it all”* as one commissioner put it (own translation). However, their task was phrased so that you could interpret it in two ways: They were either to summarize what the Gråbo inhabitants were aware of and willing to do in terms of sustainable life changes - or they were to suggest political measures that could be met by the awareness and/ or expectations of the inhabitants of Gråbo. Unfortunately, they ended up in the summary, without the political debate that immediately flared when trying to suggest political objectives in the forefront of sustainable development.

The report also touches upon the process to develop a new comprehensive plan for the municipality that had started. I chose not to follow that process as it had already completed a vast dialogue process in order to phrase a political visionary description of a future Lerum. While the method approach was interesting to me, I found the process of less interest to my studies at that point as it was handed over to the Societal Planning sector to be considered as political assignment. The point I decided to make in the report however, was on this visionary description. It was similar to the point regarding the Pilot Gråbo Commission Report - If the

politicians fail to phrase “*the politics of it all*”, it falls on the administration to choose debateable solutions under generic terms such as “renewable energy sources” or “strategic locations”.

Furthermore the report discusses the concept of *narratives* as conveyer of knowledge and how knowledge is *Lost in Interpretation* (see *Paper III*) when summarized into quantitative material. I also show how a story is built through the relationships and connections between data, so that a combination of narratives about a place can tell a more complete story. I use the simile of a dot-to-dot puzzle (see fig. 17)



Fig. 17: Combined narratives in the simile of a dot-to-dot puzzle. By knowing or just being aware of more parts of the story, more perspectives, we can understand more of the bigger picture.

An anecdotal example from the first meeting of Gråbo has been used to illustrate this, where I showed how a missing or added set of information can “kill or save the rabbit in the figure”: One participant raised a complaint during the meeting saying that he did not believe in this effort in Gråbo as the municipal authorities clearly did not care about Gråbo, referring to a few dirt piles right at the entrance to Gråbo that he considered ugly and affecting the image of the whole community. The municipal representatives at the meeting took notes to investigate whose responsibility these mysterious dirt piles were, when a representative from Lekstorps IF, the local sports club, raised his hand. The sports club had let one of their sponsors use that spot to deposit some material (the dirt piles) as part of their sponsor agreement. They were not the responsibility of the municipality at all and knowing the circumstance, time limit and context of the dirt piles worked almost as well as a shovel to get rid of the dirt pile annoyance.

One paragraph in the report also addresses how the sustainability vision of the municipality makes it necessary for all municipal actors to share a definition of what the municipality means by sustainable development, for that concept not to become meaningless if it is used to describe all municipal development. (See also chapter *In the Context of Sustainability*)

As a conclusion of my written reports to Lerum municipality, the last chapters in this report addresses trust for municipal processes through continuous true communication. And I address the Co-Production Group as a possibility for true successful participation if the municipality takes the concept of co-producing seriously. I phrase it as *co-production must be co-produced* giving examples on how the municipality needs to respond to local initiatives as well as the local network responds to municipal proposals. But also that the municipality acknowledges that some co-production projects are initiated and conducted locally, between local participants of the Co-Production Group without municipal involvement. With a few examples of such projects, I show that the municipality participates there simply by being informed about them and either supporting, allowing, informing or just inform about them.

#### 5.2.4 Transformative impact on the case

The presentations I have done to the municipal board are all noted in protocols, sometimes with measures to follow my recommendations (Lerum Kommun 2014) and I have also presented my findings, my method and my recommendations in other settings. To the municipal council, the Co-Production Group and in seminars at SALAR and the Swedish Energy Agency to mention some of them (see *Empirical Material* and fig. 18 p. 52). But I choose to show how my research has been transformative by quoting (and translating) a passage from correspondence between Lerum Municipality and my home institution at Chalmers about my research. The process leader of Pilot Gråbo writes in October 2014:

*“Lisa has been a fantastic asset to us and both her person and work have been highly appreciated.*

*This spring we closed the research project vis-à-vis the municipal board, as I chose to call her report from January a ‘final report’ to the municipality in that session (I noted that there is an academic final report to come later). At that occasion the board made a few decisions directly deriving from Lisa’s ‘final report’:*

- to investigate whether the political secretaries of the municipality should be involved in citizen dialogue also in planning matters. The political secretariat has training in this and Lisa’s work showed that their dialogues were more fruitful than the conversations that were had around the PBL (Plan and Housing Law) matters.*

- to strengthen the process management of Pilot Gråbo.*

- to raise a discussion in the municipal council on Lisa’s observation that our commissions have been given unclear tasks, risking weak political guidance from the council.*

- to investigate how to strengthen representativity in the Co-Production Group of Gråbo.*

*Three of these decisions are already being executed(...)”*

Process Leader Pilot Gråbo, Lerum Christian Mattsson in an email to Chalmers, Björn Malbert October 6 2014, own translation

These decisions, my report and the administrative official letter to go with it to the municipal board can be found via Lerum Kommunstyrelse (2014) and Lerum Kommun (2014). Protocols from the presentations of the other reports to the municipal board simply say that they have received the report and refer recommendations to be considered by the administration (Lerum Kommun 2012, 2013, Lerum Kommunstyrelse 2012, 2013). But the administration has changed their practice, maybe not from specifically reading my reports, but from my wording and presentation of my findings. As an example, they avoid what I call “first meetings” in Pilot Gråbo, but rather try to put each meeting in its contexts and time-lines. This lets everyone see how the process is moving forward and it also avoids unnecessary overlaps or parallel processes/projects.

In the intentions formulated by the municipality when deciding to invite an embedded researcher to follow their processes, Lerum municipal board hoped the research would give them the opportunity to have the efforts in Gråbo noticed and compared to other participatory innovation elsewhere, nationally and internationally (Lerum Kommun 2011, Lerum Kommunstyrelse 2011). I have been given the opportunity to accompany the municipality to national seminars and conferences in the public sector (Tällberg, Sigtuna 2012, SALAR (SKL) 2012, Swedish Energy Agency (Energimyndigheten) 2014). I have also taken and/or been given to share my research and be inspired by others at a few seminars and conferences (IFHP 2012, Changing Cities 2013) as well as in seminars with a network of municipalities at the Göteborg Region Association of Local Authorities (GR 2012-2016) and events hosted or in the context of Mistra Urban Futures (Urban Lunchtime 2013, , Urban Research 2014, Almedalen 2016). Combined, the efforts in Pilot Gråbo has been presented, discussed and influenced by several other contexts of participation for sustainability’s sake and is clearly a part of and is referred to in the national discourse on the topic.

### 5.2.5 Empirical material

The flowchart in fig. 18 is an attempt to show the extent of the material gathered and the main processes followed in Case Study Lerum/ Gråbo with meetings and special events added. I have chosen to restrict the representation to meetings with case actors that I have attended or at which I have presented my research to a third party. Administrative, tutoring or project group meetings are thus omitted from this chart. As are teaching occasions such as lectures or workshops I have conducted, even if connected to my research topic. All meetings represented here are recorded in notes, protocols and/or audio recordings. Over 60 hours of meeting recordings has been saved connected to the Gråbo case.

The last arrow of other meetings and events is an attempt to gather all occasions I have had to present and/or discuss my research outside of academic or case context. Added here are also a couple of public events in Gråbo (two municipal information meetings and a harvest festival), not hosted by neither Co-Production Group nor political commission.

The dates are spread evenly over the year in the figure, but a closer look at the dates show this to be a false representation. It is a choice made for legibility's sake as meetings tend to group in the beginnings and ends of each term, with a long gap over vacations. I have chosen to not just show a calendar of dates, but rather process arrows, as it is the processes of the case (The three middle arrows) that have been in focus. Because there have been meetings related to these processes that I have not attended, but from which I have received protocols and/or been part of the planning for. For example, I have not attended all, but a few, of the board meetings that precede the Co-Production Group meetings, but I have been given notes from them. They are therefore part of the process I have studied, as are other meetings related to these processes that I have been absent from due to choice and priority, sickness or leave of absence. Material saved also contains email conversations, drafts of meeting agendas and similar. Some email conversations could possibly be called "follow-up interviews" as I have sometimes asked for complementary explanations or elaborations of things discussed in meetings. The void left in 2015 represents my parental leave of absence.

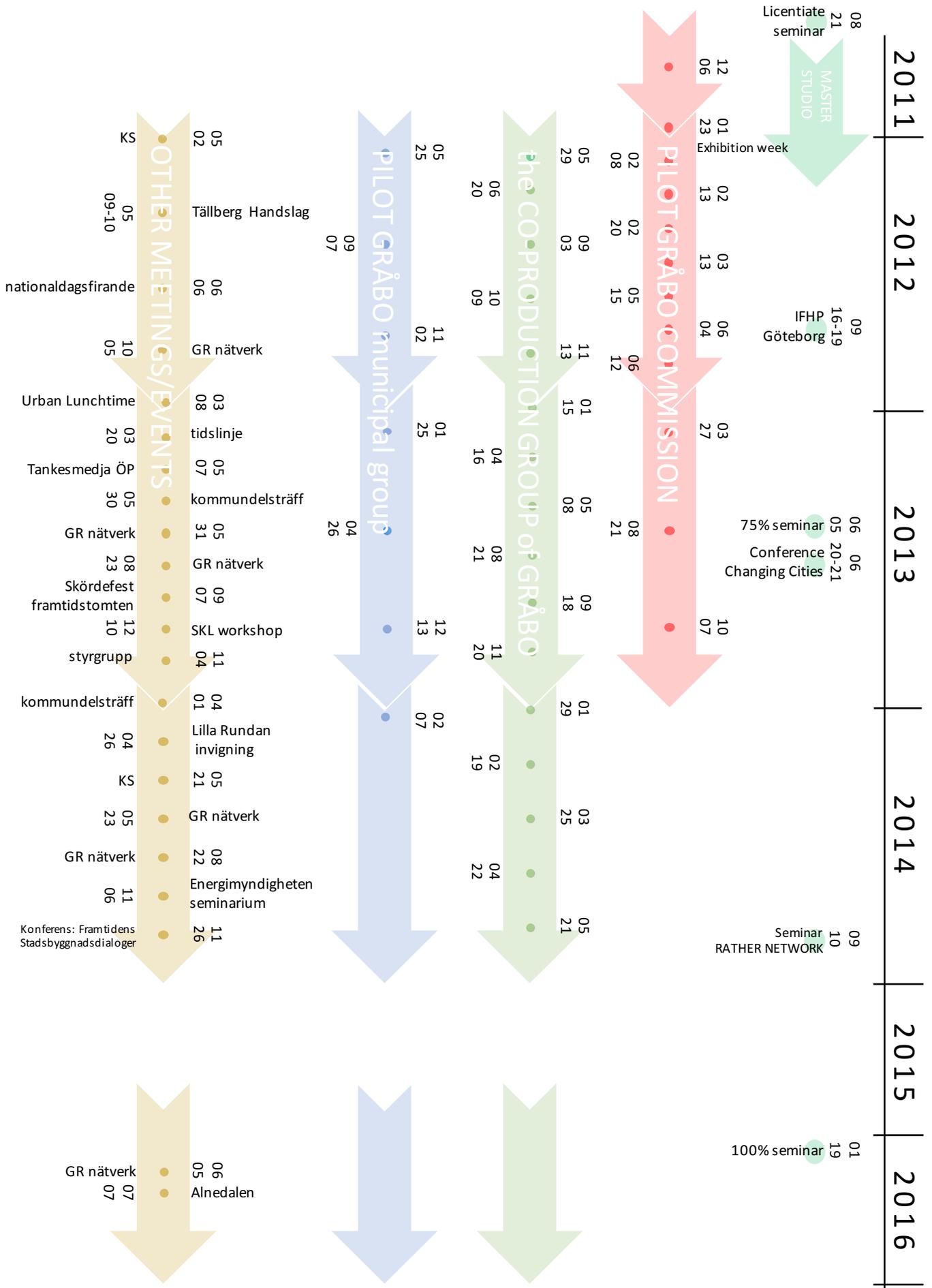


Fig. 18: The processes I have followed in case two, plus other occasions for presentation/discussion of my work. In green at the top, teaching in the master studio connected to the case, a conference and seminars about my academic texts are appropriate to show as it also gave input to what and how conclusions in the case could be drawn.

## 6. SUMMARY PAPERS

Before addressing each paper, a few words about the process behind them are needed. As my research project has been set up parallel to my case studies, much of the writing has been done after the tasks in the cases. Part of the challenge of the transdisciplinary format (see chapters *Method* and *Research Contexts*) is to mediate tasks on different time-lines. As academia can wait to some extent, while the life-world context cannot, my initial reading and writing these papers ended up with all the experiences of the cases in between. It made for more initiated insights in the cases, but left me with unusable reading notes for writing my conclusions. These papers are the results of long writing processes with parts written before, during and after case studies conducted between 2009 and 2014.

### 6.1 Summary Paper I

– *Case Uddevalla and Area Analysis as a Participatory Method*

This paper is in itself a summary of my licentiate report, presented and defended in 2011. Its Swedish title is *Områdesanalys som deltagandemetod - att tolka och förmedla berättelser till planeringsunderlag*. The English translation is *Area Analysis As A Participatory Method - Interpreting and Communicating Narratives Into Material For Societal Planning*.

The paper summarizes the context of Uddevalla municipality and the task of method development within the project MötesplatS Medborgare (MSM – Meeting Venue Citizen own translation). The method is about interpreting and summarizing interview and workshop input from inhabitants into an analysis document. The analyses are to be seen as input in the dialogue between inhabitants and the municipality parallel to the comprehensive planning undertaken by the municipal planning office. Focusing on current state of affairs rather than on specific planning issues or problems, gives the participants problem formulation prerogative, thus participation starts before the actual planning project(s) or before what is normally referred to as “the early stages”.

The paper presents the method based on interviews and workshops in short, but refers to the licentiate report for details. However the licentiate resulted in questions, reflections and conclusions that gave me my focus areas for my second case study. This summarizing paper can thus be seen as a background chapter to understand papers II, III and IV better.

The actual area analysis documents can be obtained from me or from Uddevalla municipality on request.

### 6.2 Summary Paper II

- *The Participatory Mosaic - An example of participation, co-production and social learning*

I left the case in Uddevalla with questions as well as answers about successful participation (See *Paper I*). But I also arrived to Uddevalla and my PhD position with own experiences as well as a network of practitioners involved in participatory methods and projects of different kinds. Very early I wanted to sum up some of the success factors that other pilots, projects as well as colleagues agreed with me were crucial for participation to be fruitful or even advisable as approach in architectural or planning projects. Thus, the embryo or start of this text was very much different and it has been with me for a long time. The initial scope was too wide, its objectives too far reaching and the text too superficially touching upon too much within the topic. It simply came out as a summary of experiences being confirmed by literature, rather than the concise description of prerequisites for successful participation that I wanted it to be.

Eventually, I submitted a text then called *Time Trust Transparency*, which was refused but with reviewers appreciating parts of it. I was encouraged to choose the success factor most closely related to what I found most intriguing and successful in the Gråbo pilot study: Continuity. Indeed, it is the key behind all three statements in the former title. This paper is the result of that initial text being re-arranged, re-focused and re-written even if there are still a few full sentences left of the original text.

The three concepts time, trust and transparency still sum up the success factors behind a participatory arena set up for social learning, which can be described using the simile or visualization model of a mosaic.

The paper summarizes the context of the Lerum Case study in order to arrive at Pilot Gråbo and the efforts of establishing the Co-Production Group of Gråbo.

The theoretic background described in the paper, delimits it to the communicative gap between theory and practice described from different perspectives by several scholars within the field of planning; The gap between planning practitioners and stakeholders (see f ex Malbert 1998, Stenberg 2004) but also participatory efforts as addressing this communicative gap (see f ex Forester 1999 and 2009, Healey 2006, Peterman 2001). One may study jargon and language creating a discrepancy in understanding (see f ex Porter 2000) or one may look at the architectural visualizations and its potency as communicative tool (See f ex Stahre 2009, Mistra Urban Futures Annual Report 2011). What I found is a common denominator is that communication of different kinds can bridge that gap.

But communication needs to work transformatively and create new knowledge in the exchange Thus two concepts are introduced to describe a framework and outcome of successful participation: Social learning and the participatory mosaic. Neither is my own invention, but the combination of the two works well when describing the success factors of participation in the Gråbo model or case.

The Co-Production Group of Gråbo can be seen as an example of a participatory mosaic and arena for social learning. The paper lists some of the prerequisites for successful participation related to the group and how they are fulfilled. I compare my findings to Collins and Ison's design heuristic for social learning (Collins and Ison 2009, p 366). I argue that the Co-Production Group of Gråbo has the institutional design and set-up to be or become the arena for continuous participatory communication, co-production of local knowledge of value for several municipal processes and from which planning projects can find their problem formulation(s). This view on participation also lets me conclude that inviting stakeholders to participatory processes is already to share power, as information and knowledge lets stakeholders understand and influence the context of municipal decisions.

### 6.3 Summary Paper III

– *Lost in Interpretation*

The paper was presented at the conference Changing Cities at Skiathos, Greece in June 2013. While slightly edited for language and readability since then, it is presented here as at the conference. However the concept of narrative has been further studied and discussed for and with the municipality of Lerum since this paper.

The paper presents a comparison between a few chosen quote examples of responses given by participants in my two case studies. The quotes are then shown to be fragments of larger narratives, and by applying different narrative analysis methods, the paper shows how more information might be found if considering the narrative behind the answers, rather than interpreting the story into quantifiable categories of data.

The definition of narrative for this paper is: a set of data linked together by temporality, causality, context or coherence.

The intention was to study and compare the difference between narrative answers from the case in Uddevalla, and more quantifiable survey responses from citizen dialogue meetings conducted by politicians in Lerum. But the main finding was rather how the short answers on notes and in a survey in Lerum showed narrative indicators.

The paper tries to show in four short examples how information is lost in the interpretation of material given in participatory interviews and surveys. This is because the purpose(s) and addressee of the interpretation make municipal employees sift away information that could be of value to other parts of the municipal organization. In fact the study shows how participants share the same story of their local context in all mu-

nicipal encounters, be it a political meeting or a planning workshop. Depending on the question or topic of a meeting, they may however start their story from different perspectives or give chosen fragments of their stories.

The version of the paper presented here is the same as that presented at the conference. However, if this theme was revisited and edited for a future submission for publication elsewhere, I would make a point of keeping all the comparisons within and selecting all examples from the Lerum case. The longer narrative example in the paper is from one of the longer interviews in Uddevalla. There are several recordings from Co-Production Group meetings in Lerum/Gråbo that summarize or address several issues at once, exemplifying my point; local issues are interdependent of one another. Understanding their broader scale causalities, contexts or coherences might let us find synergies, problem formulations or solutions that overlap or bridge sectors in the municipal organisation or even political visions with issues of hands-on maintenance.

The paper shows that if different municipal actors hear and read the same responses given by participants, they respond to more complex issues and see synergies with other sectors or realms within municipal activity. For example by having politicians present at participatory meetings about planning and planners present at political dialogue meetings\*.

\*A note outside the paper is that Lerum municipality refers to this idea when delimiting their Co-Production Group efforts in Gråbo to a geographical area, rather than having participatory groups working in thematic areas.

## 6.4 Summary Paper IV

- *Rather Network*

Early in my studies I imagined my last paper to be about the relationship between participatory processes and the concept of *power*. About definitions of power that might explain where executive decisions are actually formed and/or made. This paper is not exactly what I imagined as the case in Gråbo made me focus on responsibility rather than power. I had already formulated my view on relational power in *The Participatory Mosaic* (See *Paper I*).

My notes on how knowledge was shared and co-produced in the Co-Production Group of Gråbo showed me how a network grew and evolved by tying new actors to the group depending on issues discussed.

This paper summarizes the development of a local network, delimited by geographical area rather than by municipal task or sector. It develops through common experiences, and I show with examples how even negative experiences can be valuable to the Group's learning and development. From common learning experiences and shared knowledge with municipal actors comes possibilities to influence the municipal agenda.

The paper clarifies how the initial set-up needs to be, with representativity of the different realms of the municipality as well as the civil society. The experiences from the Co-Production Group of Gråbo also shows two ways of being a key actor in a local network – through formal responsibility or through connectivity.

While overlapping the results of Paper I somewhat, this paper concludes that the network's organic development, by letting the issues at hand decide who participates (through invitation or voluntarily), slowly builds a group able to take on continuous participatory communication between inhabitants/stakeholders/local actors and the municipality.

The title of the paper is intentionally double-faced and oddly chopped. It derives from the conclusion that rather a rather good local network for participation than no network at all.

## 8. RESULTS

I have observed the same communicative gap between inhabitants/ stakeholders/ public and authority/ planners/ municipality (choose expression depending on author and context) as several predecessors have done (See f ex Malbert 1998, Healey 1997, Forester 1999, Stenberg 2004, Castell 2010) and concluded that we misunderstand each other due to lack of knowledge or understanding about each other's context(s). That is the problem, and communication is the key to bridging that gap.

My main finding from the case in Uddevalla was how the inhabitants conceived the Municipality as One opponent in an on-going dialogue. They commonly referred to “the Municipality said...” or “The Municipality did...”. As the Municipality is a rather complex organization, not least by consisting of both a political and an administrative realm, several old conflicts and misunderstandings could actually be solved simply by explaining fields of responsibility within the municipal organization and figuring out who had said what in what context.

Secondly, the participatory efforts studied both in Uddevalla and in Lerum showed how time and timing are crucial factors for successful participation. In Uddevalla, the practical participatory methods used by the municipal planning office sometimes referred to comments from stakeholders being “too late” or in the “wrong context”. In Lerum in the meantime, the politicians of the Gråbo commission found their perspective too visionary and long term to meet and respond to the inhabitants' practical wishes and maintenance issues such as broken lighting fixtures or the lack of bike racks. Planning issues span over these parallel time-lines, thus connecting political vision to practical reality, or, in the perspective of sustainability issues, global to local context. In response to the issue of timing, my interview studies in Uddevalla showed the value of hearing the inhabitants' stories before any planning project was even started. The conclusion being that successful participation starts already in the finding and formulation of the problems that are to be solved through planning and/or changes in the physical environment. Early stages as described in other participatory methods in planning seemed too late, if the participants were not already on board with what problem the design was to solve. As an example, an interviewee in Uddevalla referred to a participatory meeting held by the municipal planning office about schools in the area. The participants started the meeting with “When are you going to fix the road here?” – in essence a meeting lost, as neither party got what they came for. I therefore claim that successful participation must begin before the early stages, in having the problem formulation prerogative.

Adding my interview studies from Uddevalla, to the many different kinds of meetings I attended in Lerum, another conclusion was drawn: People participate in planning with their stories or narratives. The methods used when interviewing, making a survey or hosting a workshop are simply tools for the organizers to sort through the narrative material the participants bring. To the inhabitants or business owners of a place, their knowledge about that place is already packaged in contexts, time-lines, causalities, relationships and spatial understanding. Thus the answer to any question related to spatial planning or changes in their surrounding will be given as an outtake from or in a complete narrative. We run the risk of losing vital information given by the participants, when we pick and choose different parts of the narrative to sort into quantifiable or otherwise simplified formats. However, simplification or summarization of vast, diverse and lengthy material from for example a participatory workshop is necessary. Experiences in Lerum show that when several municipal actors with different fields of responsibility were present at a participatory meeting, more of the “full story” as told by the participants was heard and understood.

Eventually I came to follow the development of the co-production group of Gråbo and their failures and successes seemed to correlate with my previous results. Communication and mutual understanding was the key to resolve old misunderstandings and the area and issues of Gråbo were understood from the contexts of its inhabitants as the story of Gråbo was told in full; first by each one around the table, and eventually in a common version of what Gråbo was, is and needs. The concept of social learning was found to describe this process; participation as a collaborative effort and as mutual understanding of a place and its contexts. The image of the mosaic can visualize this idea of participation, where everyone is needed to see the full image, but where some pieces do carry more importance than others depending on the issue in focus. This hierarchy

between the mosaic pieces was described as power relations within a network, where certain actors in the network carry key roles through connectivity in the network or through formal responsibility such as professional role or political mandate.

This made me think of planning projects as something that can latch on to an on-going dialogue, and how that can be more efficient and/or effective than planning projects that try and start from scratch again and again. Participants in both cases have told stories about past participatory processes that “lead nowhere” or where “nothing came out of it”. Hence they feel they are just starting all over again when invited to a new opportunity to participate. Continuity can thus sometimes simply refer to a communicative task; sometimes just giving feedback on how the participatory effort influences the planning project, or showing what has happened until now and how this meeting/ workshop/ intervention connects to that on-going process.

A forum or group of local actors that meet regularly around issues to do with their local area, regardless of whether there are on-going development plans or not, lets me phrase this setting for participation as a way of stabilizing interplace, over time. From this forum, planning projects, can start or latch on, whether the idea comes from the stakeholders themselves or from elsewhere.

Transparency of the process and access to relevant information gives a local network understanding for the planning project and its considerations, but also a possibility for input as to what problem to solve. This can hold true for other kinds of issues that the network deals with too. The municipal authorities cannot make decisions contradicting the logic known to the co-production group or network without losing trust, momentum and possibilities for future participatory initiatives. In other words information gives influence. And influence over decision-making is power. I argue, that just inviting to participation, making something more transparent, is to share power.

At the same time, the transparent process also entails that the network becomes informed about interests and considerations outside their own realm. The participatory process is therefore also an opportunity for enhanced understanding of the planner’s profession and task.

I found that participation in planning can be part of a bigger process of participation and communication. It was the connections between planning and other topics of communication, tied to geography, place-making and policy that intrigued me when I tried to put my finger on what participation in planning is. I came to call them the communicative interfaces for planning. From there, I argue that participation in planning, and the early stages of any planning project begin much earlier than the planning project itself – in continuous dialogue with and among local stakeholders. Planning professionals need to participate in this on-going dialogue letting future planning projects take their stance in a common story about a place. The planning project then needs to stay transparent and stay present in that on-going participatory dialogue. Municipal societal planning can become both more efficient and effective, connected to a continuous feedback system through true communication with actors and stakeholders on site.

The Co-Production Group in Gråbo cannot (yet) be said to be representative or reach all parts and groups of the community they aim to represent. Their open format and idea is however an example of participation of the kind described in this text. Considering Gråbo through different sets of knowledge, from civil society as well as the municipality’s political and administrative realm, the Co-Production Group becomes an arena for social learning as described by Collins and Ison (2005). Or maybe as an environment suitable for the cultivation of ideas as phrased by Johnson (2010). An environment from which common problems and common solutions can be formulated.

## 9. DISCUSSION / CONCLUSION - CONTINUATIONS

My hope is that the results of this research can contribute to a discussion about participation that transcends “one project at a time”. While there are several well established methods, assessments and success factors for participation in planning (f ex Peterman 2001, Fröst 2004, Svennberg and Teimouri 2010, Eriksson 2013), those can only benefit from problem formulations made and/or understood in an already participatory setting. Accumulated knowledge about successful participation for planning should encompass all stages from problem formulation prerogative, to assessments after the built result and the planning/design stages there between.

I have reflected on two cases where new methods and organization for participation in municipal planning and/or decision-making have been tried. I compared these cases to other studies and examples exploring participatory methods and collaborative/communicative planning and found key concepts understood differently and similarly in assessments as well as problem formulations: Communication, participation, knowledge, power, time, trust, transparency, continuity... and I have phrased what they mean and entail in correlation to my cases and my perspectives on them.

The case setup in Lerum has ensured that experiences and conclusions from the study dissipated into and influenced practice. It was an exchange where results from the research were tested and not always proven true. For example, I argued that if they could open their municipal meetings on Pilot Gråbo to my scrutiny, they could open those meetings to the Co-Production Group of Gråbo (Lerums Kommun 2013 and 2014). In my view that would have increased trust and transparency, but the process leader of Pilot Gråbo argued it would do the opposite. We agreed it was something to work towards, but his argument was that the municipal actors needed a forum to process their learning and adjusting to a new way of working. Our discussions on the topic mirrored well the discussion on transparency and governance in Torfing et al (2012), which comes to the conclusion that even a transparent process has closed meetings. The transparency is then limited to that the people not attending still know these meetings are taking place and why.

One thing that did change and keeps changing is the view on process/project that several actors within Pilot Gråbo found useful. Organizers of meetings to do with Pilot Gråbo now consciously try to avoid the “starting from scratch” feeling, by starting each meeting with a summary on where that fits into a larger timeline.

*“Every meeting with our inhabitants has a reason and we need to tell them that reason, not to start from scratch every time. Through telling them these reasons it will also become clear how previous participation has had influence and that is something we can take responsibility for together as the dialogue continues.”*

Elin Elebring, secretary to the Municipal Board, Lerum, own translation.

Both cases behind these studies have given a manageable sub-municipal scale, when discussing changes in the organization of societal planning in a Swedish context. The areas in Uddevalla municipality and Gråbo in Lerum are all areas with clear own identities, which separate them from surrounding areas. Issue by issue a neighbouring village or adjoining area may be included, just to be excluded in the next issue focusing on the center, without too much conflict. These studies, in this format, would present other issues and questions on a larger city scale. The on-going development plans of central Gothenburg for example, would be interesting to discuss from this study’s point of view, raising new questions and putting new parts of the problem in focus: Where, and with whom, would you for example establish the on-going communication about a place, which does not (yet) have any actors or stakeholders but will have several once development plans are in place? Maybe co-production initiatives for municipal planning, like the Gråbo example, can find useful know-how in discussions about *joint building ventures* (Alm and Åwall 2015, see also byggemenskap.se) or *Designdialog* methods (Fröst 2004, Eriksson 2013). I. e. could the urban planning scale learn from building scale when it comes to early stage participation in areas where no one is yet a stakeholder?

Other studies and methods also suggest that there are prerequisites for participation and influence to be determined in the scale and complexity of the local context. For example, Sara Brorström’s studies on public

sector innovation and implementation in Gothenburg (Brorström 2015a and 2015b) show initiate participatory objectives and efforts on several scales that were lost later in the process. The large scale development process involved actors with contradictory aims and objectives and the inhabitants' input was difficult to both receive and address by the right actor at the right time. Brorström concludes among other things that "*the users of public sector innovations, here the inhabitants, might demand other things that expected, which highlights the need of an ongoing dialogue between city managers and inhabitants.*" (Brorström 2015b). Therein Brorström echoes my findings on continuity being key.

The Gråbo Co-Production Group was initiated as a response to several things happening at once within the Pilot Gråbo efforts (see *Paper II* and *IV*). But it was in all essence one municipal employee inviting a local elite to a meeting table together with municipal actors. This research project just followed and studied and in hindsight, the initiation of the group seemed like something that could or should have been done differently. The criticism of the representativity of the group and the constant discussions on who are *not* at the table, raises questions about mapping the local network better before initiating the group. Compared with the experiences from Uddevalla, the collaborations with different area associations there worked better or worse depending on how that association already interacted with their area and stakeholders (Åhlström 2011, *Paper I*). I realise there are yet things to be learnt about who, how and when in the start of interaction between a municipality and a local network. While I am convinced that co-production is a good idea and method for participation and knowledge production, co-initiation of such processes is something that needs to be studied further.

Already in my licentiate thesis on area analysis as participatory method (Åhlström 2011), I concluded that it would be interesting to compare other methods of area analysis and how they would meet the objectives of my method. I now see synergies between my way of getting to know the Uddevalla case areas and the mapping and initiation of co-production groups like the Gråbo example. There should be similar synergies to be found in methods like for example Cultural Planning (Lundberg and Hjort 2011) and Life Mode Analysis (Højrup 1996, Arén 1994), which could both be used to find and involve local stakeholder networks.

I aim to find out more, as I have been granted a Communication Project by FORMAS to spread, implement and test my results in the municipality of Vänersborg 2016-2017. The project will also contain a conference with municipalities from the Västra Götaland Region to share experiences and methods around local governance and participation. My focus is now the (co-)initiation of a co-production network, aiming eventually for a similar organization as the Gråbo example, but adapted to local context and particularities.

Lerum municipality has also showed continued interest in my perspective, as they have asked me to be part of a so-called advisory board. Experts from different fields are invited there to discuss and give input to a new set-up and organisation behind their comprehensive planning process.

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Municipal political protocols other than those referred directly to in the text, can be found sorted by date at:  
<http://www.lerum.se/Kommun-och-politik/Kallelser-handlingar-och-protokoll1/>

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SALAR seminar: *Hur kan vi skapa lokalt engagemang för hållbar utveckling?*, Stockholm 2012-12-10

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Swedish Energy Agency seminar: *Seminarium om strategisk kommunikation och medborgardialog*, Uthållig Kommun, Stockholm 2014-11-06

Urban Research conference: *Framtidens stadsbyggnadsdialoger: rättvisa, legitimitet och effektivitet*, Gothenburg 2014-11-26

Göteborg Region Association of Local Authorities (GR) Network for citizen dialogue and participation seminars/meetings between 2012-2016 (see fig. 18 p. 52)

Almedalen seminar: *Medskapande för att möta komplexa samhällsproblem – hur då?*, Visby, 2016-07-07

**PAPERS I-IV**

## CASE 1. UDDEVALLA – A SUMMARY

### AREA ANALYSIS AS A PARTICIPATORY METHOD

The first case, Uddevalla, was described in full in a report presented for a licentiate degree in August of 2011. This report focused on the development of a method for area analyses based on interviews and workshops with inhabitants. The report was in Swedish with the title *Områdesanalys som deltagandemetod - att tolka och förmedla berättelser till planeringsunderlag*. The English translation is *Area Analysis As A Participatory Method - Interpreting and Communicating Narratives Into Material For Societal Planning*. This is an attempt to summarize the method developed, the results and ending reflections that were used as a basis to the second case study.

#### 1 Local Democracy Areas

The method *Area Analysis As A Participatory Method* as developed in Uddevalla was dependant on another part of the project *Mötesplats Medborgare* (MSM, English title – *Meeting Venue Citizens* – own translation), that this method development project is a part of. Mimicking an idea from the partnering Norwegian town of Fredrikstad, Uddevalla let a few associations connected to certain geographical areas become what they called Local Democracy Areas (Närdemokratiområden in Swedish, henceforth shortened to LDA). These associations were already existing ones, in some areas with its roots in a historical society of some sort, in another a network of business owners in the area to mention examples. The areas analysed were: Ljungskile, Bokenäset, Lane-Ryr, Dalaberg/Hovhult och Tureborg.

The areas, of which the analyses were made, were the same as the chosen LDAs with the associations representing them as my first contacts. The geographical delimitations of each area was pretty well established, but it should be noted that areas and representatives were chosen for the study and not by me, the researcher. In a few of the areas the participants spoke of the analysed area as something sometimes bigger or smaller than what the analysis was to encompass. These definitions of place then became a topic of study in itself for those particular analyses.

In Ljungskile for example, the inhabitants living more rurally found a closer connection to the neighbouring area of Forshälla than to the village of Ljungskile and wanted Ljungskile and Forshälla to be considered as one geographical area of study together. But the municipality had discussions association in Forshälla trying to establish it as yet another LDA for MSM. In Lane-Ryr on the other hand, the experiences from the analysis has me thinking that it would have benefitted from being considered as two separate areas.

Having an established group to meet with initially was helpful and practical, but also made it necessary to find strategies to find the right interviewees and workshop participants outside of that group (See below). Representativity and ownership were key issues when choosing methods.

The the model for the LDAs came from Fredrikstad as well as the idea of writing area analyses about said areas, a lot was just about mimicking their example. The difference in Uddevalla was the participatory approach and how these analyses were to be based on interviews and workshops. Then they were to be used as background material for planners, rather than the characterizations of the physical environment written by an architectural firm, as was the case in Fredrikstad. Instead the analyses in Uddevalla were supposed to be a supplement to the comprehensive plan .

#### 2 Interview and analysis method

Simply put, the method *Area Analysis as Participatory Method* is about summarizing a vast narrative material into a document describing the current situation in a local area, focused on issues regarding sustainable societal planning and development.

Planners conducting interviews when analysing a place is not new and neither is supplementing those narratives with material gathered in for example workshops. The relation to the planning process and the analysis documents' intended use is what is new.

The interviews behind the area analyses are of two kinds: The in-depth narrative interviews and the spontaneous interviews on site.

### 2.1 The in-depth interview / narratives

The in-depth interviews are all longer than one hour and start in short open-ended questions such as "Can you tell me about this area?". The focus is on the chosen narrative of the interviewee, be it their historical knowledge of the place, wishes for the future or descriptions of strengths and weaknesses of the place as is. All in-depth interviews were recorded and for the most-part transcribed. In each area I conducted between nine and fourteen in-depth interviews.

By choosing narratives and storytelling be the format of my collected material, I let the interviewees themselves organize their knowledge in contexts and causalities in the way Barabara Czarniawska explains in *Narrative as mode of knowing* (Czarniawska 2004, s 6-10). This way the interpretation of this local knowledge comes closer to the interviewee, as the interpreter needs to understand a sets of information together, rather than just singular statements on delimited topics.

The interviewees were chosen through "strategic snowballing". I came to call the method so as an afterthought, but at the time it was a rather organic way of finding my way further into the networks and groups of each area. This is easiest to explain with an anecdotal example:

I first met with the LDA at one of their meetings. One of them became my first in-depth interviewee. He or she would often tell me that I "should talk to that one" or that I "should not talk to that one". Generally speaking, I then made sure to talk to the second suggestion as he or she probably would tell me a contradictory story.

These in-depth interviews gave me the main themes for the analysis documents and what followed was process of triangulating data, challenging and affirming the narratives in the in-depth interviews. Only after such a process could I write a text claiming to be based on what the inhabitants had said. But even then, how small the group of interviewees was and how many workshops had been conducted was clearly stated in the analyses. The analyses were still presented as document to "spark discussions". I.e. I could only hope I had made the right choices in my interviews, to ensure that the text reflected the view of the many. I reflected a lot on representativity and scope of my interview study. I came to the conclusion that as I could not interview everyone, being open about my selection method and also opening up for discussion on the analyses even after they were presented, let the analysis documents be part of the dialogue, rather than just the result of it.

By triangulation, I mean choosing topics to include in the analyses, only after having three sets of input. Sometimes, three different people talked about the same theme and that was enough to make sure that theme would be in the analysis. I did make sure to verify data given in interviews when needed at all times though. At other times I needed to search for additional input. For example I could verify what was said in an interview by talking to the appropriate municipal representative on the subject, or I could turn to my other interview method:

### 2.2 The spontaneous interview

The spontaneous interview is what I called stopping people in the street or catching them in their gardens, asking a few questions. Sometimes revealing my purposes and asking them to have an opinion on this or that from my in-depth interviews. Sometimes the spontaneous interviews were part getting to know the area, asking for directions or just striking up a conversation about how this or that place was used. For example: "Nice soccer field! Is it always this empty or am I just here at the wrong time?", "Do you walk your dog here often? Then maybe you know where the nearest trash can might be?" Answers from the spontaneous

interviews could not be recorded, but I took notes immediately after. Sometimes the questions in these were quite specific (see examples above) to spark a conversation on a specific theme taken from the in-depth interviews.

### 2.3 Workshops

My third method of gathering material for my analyses was to organize workshops on different themes in the different areas. In the first analyses I had used these workshops mainly to get to know the place myself. For example, I asked participants to write activity maps where they sat in groups around printed maps, writing and discussing what they did where, what they lacked and what they treasured in the area. I also conducted photo workshops, where participants were to associate photos to statements like “This is typical to this area” or “This is the future here” or “This is a problem here”.



Fig A: Example from an activity map in one of the workshops.

I later realized however, that while these workshops helped me understand the area, the discussions around the tables were so much richer than the collected maps and photos with attached words and sentences on post-its. I began audio recording all workshops and treat the material like I did my in-depth interviews. Also, from the third analysis, the workshops became triangulation tools and were held later in the process on themes I had gathered from in-depth interviews, to verify or dismiss statements for the analyses. Sometimes the workshops then gave me additional issues to write about and I had another turn with either new interviews or a complementary workshop to gather as diverse, but still local, perspectives as I could, on each issue.

## 3 Discussions on the method

### 3.1 Necessary Actors

The organization within the project MSM and the LDAs being invited, existing associations, gave the method a set of actors and an organization not necessarily available outside of the project context. During the project MSM, the municipality had a project coordinator employed and he became the natural link between the LDA associations and the municipal organizations. Former insecurities on who to contact within the municipality and how, were easily avoided, as the project coordinator took it upon himself to be the intermediary. As the project came to an end, discussions on this intermediary role between participants and the municipality became necessary, but never resolved. The only thing agreed on was that it was a much needed role for someone to have, for the LDAs to work as intended.

Also, the different associations worked more or less well in their new capacity as LDAs. In some areas, the association was already a collaboration between several groups. Thus, representing a larger network was a relatively easy transition for the groups in Bokenäset and Dalaberg/Hovhult. Here the existing associations already worked for the development of the area, collaborating with the civil society in different ways. The conclusion was that for such a small group to be representing a large geographical area, one has to build

that representativity and trust first, becoming a “network of networks” (own translation of what I discuss as samverkansgrupp in the report from 2011).

In other areas, the LDA was based on an association with existing tasks, other aims and on-going conflicts of interest. The most obvious example is the local heritage association in Lane-Ryr that had developed into one group interested in local history and tradition and a smaller faction of that group interested in local development, events and community activities. On top of that the area was clearly divided between two villages and the group referred to “us and them”-relationships both within the association and between the two villages as well as to a generation gap where “old” and “young” were words used to describe opinions rather than age. The work here resulted in a written analysis, but conducted more as a diplomatic mission, clearing up old misunderstandings and finding commonalities to work on, together. The conclusion drawn was that the method could work well in Lane-Ryr, but not yet. The LDA had to be reformed and find a way to work together on issues that let them represent the area at large, building trust first, in order to become the starting point for a common story about Lane-Ryr.

### 3.2 Objectivity / reliability

The question of my own role in interpreting the interviews and phrasing the analyses was never easy. But I defended it as part of the method having objectives to do with planning. I concluded that a person with planning expertise could be trusted to interpret the narratives into material for societal planning. But one could argue that the method could be used for other aims, such as accessibility or healthcare, if the interpreter of the same narrative material had other expertise.

Mats Alvesson said that “(...) it is reasonable to assume that some interpretive ability is ‘lost’ when several different theories are to be merged into one frame of reference” (Alvesson 1997 p 18 – own translation). I interpreted this phrasing as being opened to the possibility that there is more knowledge to be found in a narrative, if understood from another perspective. For example, a planner and a school teacher hear different information of value, in the same narrative about school routes and means of transportation.

Also, depending on who is conducting and interpreting the interview, the interviewee is likely to give his or her narrative a different focus. In my case, the question “Can you tell me about your area?”, being posed by a planner, inclined the interviewees to answer with stories about physical environment, traffic issues, history of place or nature values. All issues of interest to a planner. This is to be expected, and is part of an interview method based on narrative answers. (See also Forester 2001, Czarniawska 2004)

Defending this method as a method for planning, my own role and expertise thus became crucial. But also, the format of the analysis document mattered. Being comparable to the comprehensive plan and summarizing issues to do with planning was enough to call it a method of planning. But also, letting the document be part of a dialogue, which continued also after the analysis was done, let it be a comprehensive contribution to that dialogue. Something to start a discussion on the current situation from.

Participants and interviewees also voiced that it was important that I was a neutral observer, not employed by (or “running errands for” as one interviewee put it) the municipality. It was therefore stated that the analysis needed to be compiled by someone the community or inhabitants of the area could trust. It is obviously not possible to always find a researcher willing to compile area analyses, so if the method is to be used elsewhere, finding a neutral voice with the right expertise is essential. I suggested a merge of the Fredrikstad and Uddevalla means of execution; The municipality employs architectural firms to do the analyses, but according to my participatory method of collecting the material in narrative interviews.

The interpreter of the interviews however, must be able to produce the original narratives, be it in audio recordings or notes. Having the original interview accessible on request is a measure taken to ensure that the interpreter’s prerogative does not entail that the planner can draw any conclusions based on the interviews. This process also needs transparency to place that interpreter prerogative with the reader of the analyses, rather than with the analyst/ interpreter. This is an issue of trust and credibility.

### 3.3.2 Time-lines within time-lines

The method development being part of a time restricted project like MSM, made it necessary to reflect upon short-term and long-term effects and needs of the methods tried within the project time and budget restrictions. It is clear that the commitment and trust gained from forming the LDAs needs a longer timeline than a three-year project. One cannot ask a group of people to take on such a responsibility vis-à-vis their community and then just pack up and leave once the project is over. Also, the analyses documents, while being a one-time contribution, is part of an on-going dialogue that continues even if the project MSM is finished. We need to address the different time-lines to which the project relates.

Current practice can be seen as a continuous timeline of process, to which shorter project time-lines relate and are part of. I suggested the simile of the wheel to explain this relationship between process and project. If on-going practice is seen as a rolling wheel, a project could push it along in the same direction (For example measures taken to increase participation in public meetings). But a time and budget restricted project can also be used to challenge current practice, changing the direction of or slowing it down while considering other possibilities. The different methods used in MSM can be seen as projects within the project, each affecting current practice differently. Or MSM in its entirety can be seen as a project designed to challenge Uddevalla's "business as usual". A project in relation to an on-going process.

It is in the relation between project and process I think the assessment of a project should be. In the case of MSM, a method within the project was deemed successful or not in relation implementation possibilities in common practice/ the overall process. But as the assessment was done within the project's timeframe, some methods will not be assessed fairly as their relation to the process should be considered in a more long-term perspective.

In the assessments of the three-year project (Uddevalla Kommun, Metodboken, 2011), methods that could be tried and assessed within the project period were thus easier to handle by the municipality and more likely to be considered successful. Some of the methods considered successful became part of another project where they were implemented some of MSMs methods into common practice. The area analyses, while considered valuable documents, were too expensive and time consuming. The assessment says:

*"It is rare that inhabitants are involved in the problem formulation stage of planning projects. The analyses may therefore be seen as valuable additions to the mandatory participatory comprehensive planning process [sic: samrådsförfarande]"*

(Uddevalla Kommun, 2011, own translation).

No new LDAs were to be formed and no more area analyses according to my method were to be made. Seeing as the analyses were both time-consuming and in need of employing someone neutral to the municipality, with planning expertise, it was an understandable assessment. However, the analysis documents are still used and referred to in the different areas and proven useful in different communications both within the areas or with the municipality. Despite the MSM assessment of the method, I see merits to it as is but also that it is worth developing further.

## 4 Results

The method developed is an attempt to show how material for societal planning can be broadened and more grounded in a local context at a very early stage – before any actual planning process starts. This gives the local inhabitants the problem formulation prerogative (as phrased by urban planner Mona Seuranen in an interview). That is to say the possibility to describe current state of affairs and issues, strengths and weaknesses to do with it, in order to find problems and solutions based on the local context. Thus any planning dialogue between authority and local stakeholders starts in their descriptions of their place and of any conflict, history or dream they may have there. When the method is used as a basis for planning, this would in effect make the inhabitants the recipients of solutions to problems they have defined themselves. If successful, the process would entail more communication and understanding between inhabitants, planners and maybe even local politicians.

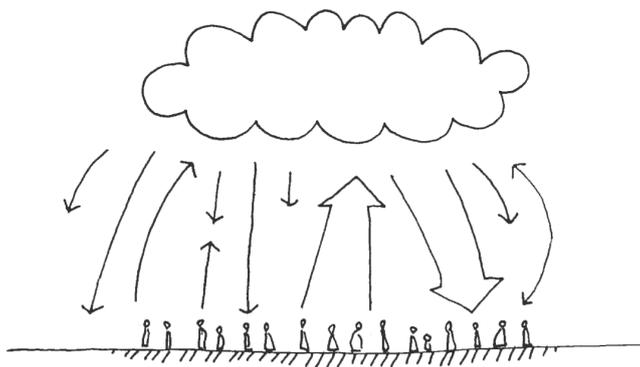
Comparing the material gathered in interviews and workshops during this study, to input given by inhabitants at the regular participatory meetings in the planning practice of the municipality, it can be shown that the new method gathered stories, causalities and contexts that otherwise was overlooked, only hinted at or never considered in their entirety. The common practice has, simply put, focused on one problem at a time, often disregarding the possibility or likelihood that issues overlap and are interlinked. Or that a planning issue can be dependant on solving a local conflict, on respecting local history or can be obsolete by understanding how it relates to other issues.

The area analyses compiled in this study show how this is a timing flaw and that the different planning issues would benefit from gathering a broader material in their initial stages to solve the right problem, change its scope or if they are to be started at all. They also show how participants' interview answers are stories and how a narrated story connects pieces of knowledge into contexts that need to be understood in their entirety.

The common practice at present invites inhabitants to protest or approve already delimited and/ or designed solutions. In the area analyses inhabitants have instead been asked to describe a current state of affairs or just to "Tell me about this place?" They have in other terms been asked to contribute in the problem defining stages. Thus phrasing what problems or opportunities there might be to be handled through societal planning – A prerogative usually given to the municipal planning authority or even the financier of a future development.

A couple of examples described in the interviews suggest that this not so transparent way of choosing problems to solve, has caused distrust and conflict in the past. Local inhabitants question the motifs behind new development. They have for example asked about hidden agendas or corruption within the municipality when it is unclear why a development is on the way or is denied.

The interviewees happened to mention distrusting the municipality quite often and it was concluded that the communication between municipality and inhabitants was flawed. The inhabitants simply understood the municipality as one powerful actor in an on-going dialogue (see fig B). But the municipality's many offices and sectors responded in many, sometimes contradictory, voices in meetings and medias as disparate as the different issues at hand. The inhabitants were not even always sure if the answers they got were political visions or executive orders.



*Fig B: The municipality perceived as one actor with many contradictory voices in an on-going dialogue.*

Thus, communication between authority and inhabitant became a focus for my studies at large. It was more than just the development of a method for area analyses, but a study of what the dialogue(s) between authority and stakeholder need(s), to be understood, including and constructive for all parties. As it was, questions asked and answers given were sometimes not clearly connected, as the output or feedback to participatory input came very late or from somewhere else in the municipal organization. As participants in planning processes did not recognize their input, once it was manipulated in a design process behind closed doors, they had influence but still did not feel listened to or trusted.

If we (the planners/ the municipal planning authority) do not start by asking for approval or dismissal, but by figuring out what problems the inhabitants would like to solve, we will have the chance to begin the planning dialogue at an earlier stage – In problem identification. From there we can discuss the priorities of the municipality and build a two-way dialogue that is more direct and transparent throughout the process, thus leading to deepened trust. Having a problem description phrased by the future users of a new built environment can be seen as the clients ordering a solution from the professionals. If this is done in a way that deepens the trust and understanding between planning authorities and inhabitants, one could also draw the conclusion that it may lead to a professionalization and improvement of the planning profession in Sweden. In relation to the participation ladder as established by Arnstein 1969, I found that the method tried to establish some kind of participatory relationship between authority and stakeholder on the “partnership” or the “delegated responsibility” step. But the ladder visualization restricts the setting, in which participation takes place, to a hierarchical power relation between authority and participant. However, in describing or assessing participatory methods in hindsight, when they were clearly set up in such a power relation, it serves its purpose.

In the report from 2011, I used these three figures to explain the power relations connected to planning, described by the interviewees.

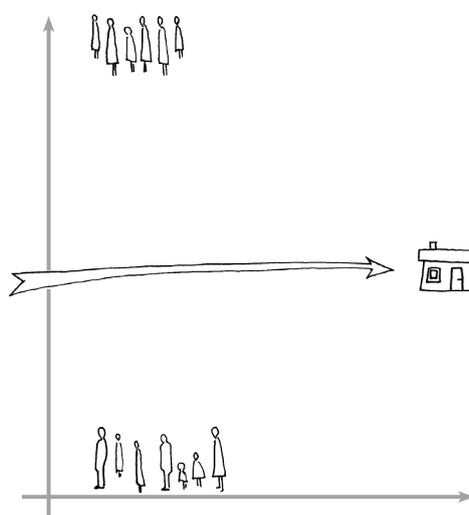


Fig.C.1 The planning process and perceived power relations. The inhabitant below, the politicians above the planning process (arrow) conducted by professionals, based on how the interviewees referred to the municipality as being “above” and to the municipal official as sometimes being “between” politicians and inhabitants in an on-going dialogue.

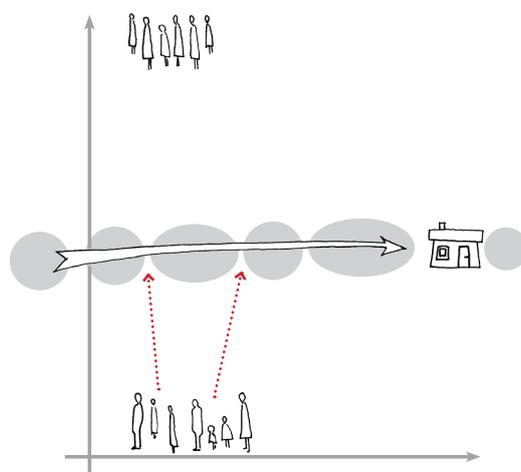


Fig C.2 The stages of the planning process. Starting in a predefined problem (1), then choosing a solution (2), designing said solution (3), building phase (4) and after the build, some kind of assessment or evaluation (5). The method “Area Analysis as Participatory Method” happens before this process even begins (6) and participants are thus influencing the definition or formulation of the problem to be solved through planning.

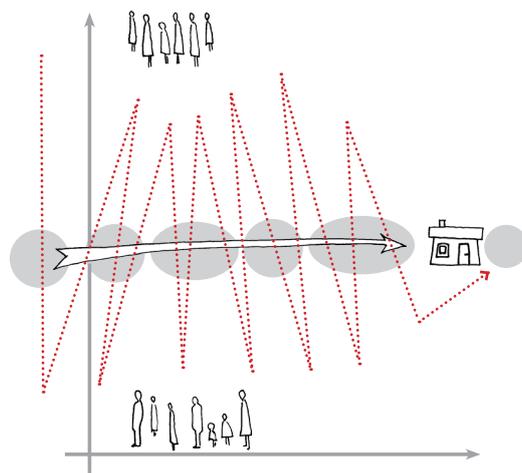


Fig C.3 Adding the participatory area analyses and the wished for transparent and continuous communication to be had, throughout the planning process. The planners being part of the middle, professional “arrow” in the model, being something of an interpreter between policy, practice and inhabitant.

## 5 Conclusion and continuations after case 1

I left the case in Uddevalla with more questions than answers about a broader context to participation in planning. It had to do with time-lines and timing, trust and transparency and I asked myself what I meant by words like knowledge and power. In the concluding chapter of the report from 2011 I list concepts and areas within my topic I would like to study further. In hindsight, I have yet to answer some of my questions and I have yet to study some of the areas I mentioned there. But in large, my second case and the questions I came there with, derive from my experiences in Uddevalla.

### 5.1 Still to be done

In relation to my own method development in Uddevalla, I also looked at other methods where analysis of current situation and characterization was in focus, rather than methods for participation in planning processes. In the method Lifeform Analysis (Arén 1994, Højrup 1996) I found many similarities in thoughts of why a local community needs to be understood in several ways, in order eventually to be changed and/or developed. The Lifeform Analysis method would still be interesting to use and assess in relation to my research. In establishing a local network for participation for example. Cultural planning (see for example Bianchini and Ghilardi 2007, SALAR 2011) was not considered in the report from 2011, but was mentioned at the defence of said report as another method to be compared to, or weighed into my method. Primarily in the use of area analyses as a tool for dialogue in planning.

The concept of knowledge still intrigues me, but instead of looking into different kinds of knowledge as such, as was my plan in 2011, I chose another route. I stayed with the idea of narrative as a carrier of knowledge, such as I had found in the in-depth interviews and described by Czarniawska (2004). And I came to phrase how participants share their stories regardless of participatory method. But different kinds of knowledge is still a crucial topic, when studying groups for participation, such as I have in the LDAs and in the Co-Production Group of Gråbo.

### 5.2 Communication and Power

The two concepts I truly have continued looking at are Communication and Power. All things considered, it is what my research is about, within the subject of participation in planning.

My realisations about communication in Uddevalla were that the dialogue between municipality and inhabitant was flawed and the source of misunderstandings. Another realisation was that this meant that the participants shared the same story of their local context, regardless of what municipal representative they were talking to, or in response to what participatory method. They just started the narrative from different perspectives depending on the workshop method, or on the context of a question or meeting.

So, instead of devising communication strategies for the municipality, I came to look at how the municipality could understand and interpret the narratives given to them.

The concept of power needed to be studied further as both my case municipalities have phrased aims of participation in terms of “sharing power” with their inhabitants. I found this phrasing curious as I had experienced influence through participation, but not power in the sense the municipalities meant. I came to phrase it as the difference between formal responsibility and shared power.

I had to find other definitions of power, as the description of power as an entity to be had, shared, split, taken or given did not fit my experiences. I saw a connection between knowledge and power.

Two-way communication (sometimes through me) between the LDAs of Uddevalla and the municipality meant that the participants did not only divulge their knowledge in narratives to me, but learned about municipal practice, intentions and contexts. It was clear to me that the participants also used that knowledge to learn more and to ask for more influence. In my research diary from the period I spent at Bokenäset, I found this thought:

*“Those who know the most about the municipality can influence the most.  
Is that enough to claim that knowledge is power?”*

(Own translation)

In the following case in Lerum, I worked under the assumption that their inhabitants saw the municipality as one opponent in an on-going dialogue. I assumed they participated with narratives. And I was looking for ways to describe how their growing understanding of different perspectives on their local context gave them power. I phrased it in terms of transparency leading to trust.

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# THE PARTICIPATORY MOSAIC

## participation through social learning

### Abstract

*Public participation or governance can be studied from many perspectives. When studied from urban development or a planning perspective, focus is often on gathering local knowledge to inform a design or planning project. This text wants to broaden the scope for participation in planning, presenting a more inclusive perspective of participation in which planning is one of many overlapping areas of interest.*

*Experiences from participatory efforts in the municipality of Lerum, Sweden, lead to understanding about continuous communication between stakeholders and municipality as the key to successful participation. Rather than looking at participatory methods one project at a time, this study focuses on continuous communication between stakeholders co-producing knowledge about their local context.*

*The case in Lerum municipality and the Co-Production Group of Gråbo (an urban settlement in Lerum) is explained as a participatory arena, through the concept of social learning. The image of the mosaic can be used as an explanatory model or visualization of this participatory arena, where power is built in mutual knowledge and action upon action. Can this inclusive perspective on participation as a process of social learning help find more specific solutions to parts of so called wicked problems (for example planning solutions)?*

### 1. Introduction

Participation in planning is not a new topic, but it has been more and more connected to the issues of sustainability. Patsy Healey wrote in 1998 that:

*“Urban planning [in Europe today] is not about ‘building cities’ or about [controlling city processes]... It is about fostering the capacity to shape ongoing ‘place-making’ activities in ways which can promote long-term and sustainable improvements to material quality of life and to the sense of identity and well-being of people in places”*

(Healey, 1998, p 1544)

The Delegation for Sustainable Cities – appointed by the Swedish Government to investigate the concept of urban sustainability between 2008 and 2012 states in its English summary:

*“The most important actors in cities are, not surprisingly, the people who live there. Sustainable urban development is dependent on people’s capacity to understand problems, change their values and adopt new ways of thinking. The climate issue is also about behaviors and ultimately about people’s survival.”*

(Delegationen för Hållbara Städer, 2012)

These examples are just two chosen among many that connects the issue of sustainability to the knowledge, incentive and participation of the public and urban planning to sustainability as well as lifestyles, identity and place. In other words, the wicked problems (Rittel and Webber, 1973) of urban, societal and sustainable development are closely interlinked and interdependent of each other in both definitions and solutions. This makes inevitable the merge between existing knowledge and results from studies in participatory planning, societal organization and aims of sustainability measures. This text is looking at participation as part of this inclusive perspective on the wicked problem of urban, societal, sustainable development. It describes an inclusive perspective on participation as a process of social learning and tries to establish whether it helps find more specific solutions to parts of the wicked problem (for example planning solutions)?

This text is based on experiences and conclusions from a Swedish context where municipalities have found reason to use complementary, parallel or other methods for participation in both planning and other municipal issues. Aims and objectives around such measures are phrased around participation for sustainability’s sake. The starting-point being that building a sustainable future is something that needs to be done together. The study focuses on a case study in Lerum municipality. The efforts studied are at an organizational level.

Lerum reformulated their political organization in 2006 focusing on having closer interactions with the inhabitants (Lerum Kommun 2009a). In 2009 the municipality adopted a political vision of becoming a “*leading environmental municipality by 2025*” (own translation of “*Ledande Miljökommun 2025*” Lerum Kommun 2009b) The studies in Lerum focus on one urban settlement within the municipality called Gråbo. In 2011 inhabitants of Gråbo were invited to a new initiative, and the study behind this text has focused on the initiation and activity of this Co-Production Group of Gråbo. The purpose behind Lerum’s focus on governance and participation is stated as being co-dependent concepts to sustainability and inter-sectorial learning in the municipality political vision document (Lerum Kommun 2009b).

## 2. Methods

The possibilities for this case study are formulated in collaboration between Chalmers University, the department of Architecture, Mistra Urban Futures ([mistraurbanfutures.org](http://mistraurbanfutures.org)) and Lerum municipality. Given the task of assessing efforts in Lerum to improve their communication with their inhabitants (referred to by the municipality as both participation, influence and citizen dialogue) on an organizational level, the task in the municipality can be divided in two: On the one hand to take part and assist in their practice, assessing their efforts (see transformative assessment below) and on the other use the documentation of that process as the empirical material to be reflected upon from another perspective; In relation to research questions about participation and planning in a municipal context.

### 2.1 Transformative assessment

Referred to as an *embedded researcher*, the case study has entailed sitting in and observing meetings in all parts of the municipal organization concerning the efforts in *Pilot Gråbo* (see below) trying to find organizational overlaps, grounds for misunderstandings or strategies for more effective communication and participation in line with objectives defined by the political vision document (Lerums kommun 2009b). At predetermined times findings were presented to the municipal political board, as well as to the whole municipal organization, in written reports and at meetings. This feedback to the municipality influenced their practice and this was referred to as transformative assessment, a term meaning the possibility to influence the case at set intervals, sharing results with those affected by them (Municipal employees and politicians in Lerum as well as inhabitants of Gråbo). Between January 2012 and April 2014, three reports were presented and handled in different parts of the municipal organization (Lerum Kommun 2012, 2013, 2014).

### 2.2 The deliberative researcher

While I was given a task in my case study, with an objective to help their practice, I have collected data about that process for my own research purposes. I have collected protocols from meetings, which I have also audio recorded. I have interviewed stakeholders in these processes and carefully systematized the material into themes based on my interest of participation and communication for and in planning particularly. In other words, I have collected and sorted my empirical material in order to reflect on it after the fact.

I therefore also refer my method of study to the interplay between Donald Schön’s idea of the Reflective Researcher (1983/1995) and John Forester’s play on Schön’s concept rephrasing it the Deliberative Practitioner (1999). While taking part in the case through transformative assessment, I collect to reflect. My background being that of an architect/ planner also influences my associations, understanding and choices as well as my approach and focus in the tasks I have as a researcher. In other words, I find that I tend to choose examples from my empirical material to do with problems one might solve or design a solution for in physical form – through planning and design.

## 3. Theoretic background

The word planning is ambiguous. It gives the idea of thinking ahead, projecting a desired future, but is at the same time an on-going process, constantly changing direction and “*making, formalizing and expanding connections between events, functions and institutions*” (Madanipour 2010, p 351). For the purposes of this text, the word planning is primarily used in the context of urban or societal planning and the profession of physical planning. Planning projects mean the design processes leading to changes or developments in the physical environment.

Planning theory stems from planning practice and most planning theory is about improving or perfecting a singular, sometimes utopian practice. This article joins those who argue that the diversity in planning practice is both unavoidable, necessary and also desired (f. ex. Forester 1999, Hoch 2011, Watson 2002, Hillier & Healey 2010). Also drawing on Healey (1997, 2006) planning practice is seen as a collaborative effort requiring participation and communication. This article could thus be seen as part of the practice movement in the academic research of planning (Liggett 1996). It claims to improve a general planning practice by studying specific practice cases. However, the local context(s) of each case will influence the interpretations of the general deductions, creating many different sets of practices.

This collaborative or communicative perspective on planning does however connect the field of architecture and planning to several academic disciplines in policy and social studies. The issue of participation is therefore by necessity a multidisciplinary issue, but is most often addressed from the perspective of a field narrower than the actual topic. This text is another example of that, being written by someone from the planning profession and perspective. But it is trying to establish whether a more inclusive perspective on participation in municipal affairs can be of use in planning as well as other participatory contexts.

### 3.1 Transdisciplinarity and co-production

The close relationship between practice and research in the two cases is a direct result of the transdisciplinary approach of Mistra Urban Futures ([mistraurbanfutures.org](http://mistraurbanfutures.org), 2015), a knowledge-building platform and a transdisciplinary centre for sustainable urban development in Göteborg, Sweden, joining practice to theory and research through initiatives towards a sustainable urban development. The context of the research behind this article is thus transdisciplinary. In that context I have been what the centre refers to as an embedded researcher doing transformative assessment (see Method above) of the efforts in the Lerum case. Part of the study is of a Co-Production Group. These are concepts used in different ways in different academic disciplines, but as this research project is conducted with a stance in planning theory and set in the organization of Mistra Urban Futures, it also relies on definitions of transdisciplinarity and co-production used by this center (see Polk ed. 2015). That is to say different actors from both research and practice work together to co-produce knowledge ([mistraurbanfutures.org](http://mistraurbanfutures.org), 2015, Polk 2015, Polk ed. 2015).

The name of the participatory network in Gråbo (see Case Study below) refer to themselves as The Co-Production Group (Medskapandegruppen). The name was chosen by officials in Lerum and decided upon by the group after they discussed the term as including both initiatives for practical things one might do together and the joint knowledge production as described in the definition above, within the group. Since the use of the concept of co-production can be confusing, this text will distinguish between concept and group by referring to the Co-Production Group in Gråbo as a name.

### 3.2 The Communicative Gap

An earlier case study found that the inhabitants saw the municipality as one actor, while in fact it is organized in several sectors and offices and in both a political and administrative realm. Inhabitants did not distinguish between these different municipal actors and several misunderstandings could be cleared up by tracking who said what and when (Åhlström 2011).

Several predecessors and colleagues have described and studied the gap or relationship between authorities and stakeholders in participatory processes (F ex Malbert 1998, Stenberg 2004, Castell 2010). They have all described more complex, more lateral and more diverse relationships than that of rulers and subjects. Participation in planning has similarly been thoroughly explored by architectural and planning scholars (F ex Forester 1999 and 2009, Healey 2006, Peterman 2001). Also communication about architecture from professional jargon (F ex Porter 2000) to visualizations (F ex Stahre 2009, Mistra Urban Futures Annual Report 2011) has been studied within the field to a wide extent. In all studies the link to policy, politics, underlying decision-making and power structures is either addressed directly or hinted at as a prerequisite for planning, participation or good communication within the design process.

The communicative gap is also connected to the wider issue of lacking trust between inhabitants and municipality. The trust in authorities in Sweden is still high compared to many other countries, and our measurable corruption figures are comparatively very low (Bauhr et al. 2010). But in interviews conducted for this and earlier case studies (Åhlström 2011), interviewees have repeatedly referred to the municipality not keeping promises, having hidden agendas or contradicting themselves. Also, the municipality is perceived to react and respond slowly or not at all to inhabitants requests or questions. This trust deficit however seems to stem partly from how input and outcome seem disconnected in many participatory processes.

From a planner's perspective, planning issues were easy to track like this and often showed how input and outcome were not connected in the feedback to the participants. Swedish planning processes are often long and subject to several rounds of appeals. Although this text is not written to explain Swedish planning regulations, it needs to be said that there is a system in place for mandatory participatory meetings (*samråd*) at the municipality, in every planning project. The municipalities in Sweden hold a planning monopoly, that is to say the approval or denial of building and planning permits. However this mandatory system of participation has been criticized for not being enough, for not being transparent enough in the initial stages and for being hijacked by naysayers, slowing planning processes to sometimes a full stop through repeated appeals.<sup>1</sup>

In the words of an inhabitant of Gråbo participating in a public meeting in Lerum in 2012: *"They ask us the same thing over and over, and then they do as they please anyway."* (Own translation) Inhabitants are asked to give input time and time again, but they don't recognize the results of their input after politicians, planners and other officials have processed it behind closed doors, for sometimes years at a time. Hence, they do not feel listened to.

A common way of expressing successful participation is that it leads to a deepened trust between the actors involved (See for example Forester 2009, Peterman 2001, Malbert 1998 and Svennberg, Teimouri 2010). Sometimes expressed in social capital – a term explained by Putnam as *"[...] the collective value of all 'social networks' [who people know] and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other ['norms of reciprocity']"* (Putnam 2000). Several also describe success not only in successful architectural development of different kinds, but also in new relationships between stakeholders and authorities. Both assessments in an earlier case study in Uddevalla (MSM Metodboken 2011, Åhlström 2011), assessments of trust issues in Lerum (Bomble, Lerum Kommun 2013, 2014) and assessments or reflection chapters in other studies of participation, see time and time management as determining factors to the success or failure of a process (Healey 1997, Malbert 1998, Peterman 2001, Stenberg 2004, Fröst 2004, Svennberg, Teimouri 2010).

In searching for a theoretical framework with which the experiences from Lerum could be understood, the concepts of interspace (Malbert, 1998) helped confirm and explain the different perspectives of the municipality and the inhabitants, described by Malbert as the gaps between theory and practice as well as between planning systems and lifeworld. Later, the related concept of interplace (Stenberg 2004, Forsén and Fryk 1999) led me to look at what happened in the Co-Production Group of Gråbo as a knowledge exchange creating new knowledge disregarding any power hierarchies or authoritative perspectives.

In Stenberg's Interplace (2004), the setup for participatory knowledge production, which in turn can inform planning decisions for example, needs to be inclusive and non-hierarchical. The participants' roles and tasks need to be defined and understood, not in a hierarchical relationship to each other but as complementary sets of knowledge. Involving the right actors in order to collect a wide scope of local knowledge, be it practical experience or professional expertise, is crucial to the process.

<sup>1</sup> Instead of referring the criticism of the Swedish planning systems to specific examples, I suggest the comprehensive review and explanation by Charlotta Fredriksson in her dissertation: *Planning in the 'New Reality' – Strategic Elements and Approaches in Swedish Municipalities* (2011)

### 3.3 Social Learning

The gap between theory and practice or the common platform a process needs made sense. However, an explanation and description of the process of knowledge production in such a platform was needed, rather than descriptions of the problem at hand or of the platform for solving it. When stumbling upon the notion of social learning as described by Collins and Ison (2009), the mutual trust being developed between the inhabitants and the municipal actors in Gråbo could be explained and understood as observed. Collins and Ison compares the process to that of an orchestra where each participant draws his or her instrument and expertise to the common performance or concert, but also specifies social learning to one or more of the following (part) processes:

- “- The convergence of goals (more usefully expressed as agreement about purpose), criteria and knowledge leading to awareness of mutual expectations and the building of relational capital*
  - The process of co-creation of knowledge, which provides insight into the causes of, and the means required to transform, a situation.*
  - The change of behaviours and actions resulting from understanding something*
- Arising from these, social learning is thus an emergent property of the process to transform a situation.”*  
(Collins and Ison 2009, p 364 -365)

John Forester describes a process of learning together quite poetically:

*“(...)But what they will learn in the conversation cannot be foreseen with much confidence in advance. Into the ritual occasion of sharing stories and concerns, for example, or sharing lists of strengths and weaknesses, threats and opportunities, come concerns and relationships. With the concerns come particulars and facts that matter, details suggesting issues to be explored. With the relationships come evolving possibilities of understanding, of mutual agreement and contingent promising, of collaborative opportunities, of going on together in unforeseen ways. Participatory and deliberative processes, then are not simply sites of bargaining and trading; they are occasions on which participants can deliberately, if gingerly, transform their senses of self and opportunity and their practical relationships too.”*

(Forester 1999, p 151)

Knowledge meeting knowledge and turning out new knowledge in the exchange can only be described as a process of learning, and learning from each other in a group can be seen as a social activity. Thus social learning is an apt name for the concept. But social learning entails not only, as the expression suggests, knowledge being built from common experiences and individual contributions to the group. It actually presupposes a relational view on power and knowledge, not as constants or as commodities, but built in relationships as described by Foucault (1970). And if power is seen as relational and part of social learning, this may also mean that this kind of social learning in itself is a process of sharing power in local development. A process of social learning also leads to, or presupposes, transparent processes as the communication and learning process is continuous.

### 3.4 the Mosaic

The model for, or visualization of, participation as a process of social learning needs to be seen as systematic relationships as suggested by Tritter and McCallum (2006). Collins and Ison (2009b) refer to a jigsaw while Tritter and McCallum use the image of a mosaic where every bit (even the blanks) adds to the complete picture:

*“Rather than a ladder-based model, we propose a different analogy to aid understanding of how user involvement systems should be created; the mosaic. A completed mosaic creates a picture that is the product of the complex and dynamic relationship between individual and groups of tiles. Tiles of different colours and shapes are essential to creating a complete picture, which without systematic integration reveals only chaos. This analogy captures interactions between individual users, their communities, voluntary organisations and the healthcare system on which successful user involvement depends.”*

(Tritter and McCallum 2006, p 165)

While Tritter and McCallum work on participation in healthcare systems and not sustainable societal planning, their phrasing works well on other complex issues. One can easily see the mosaic analogy applied to the networks and relationships necessary to change behaviours and life patterns in for example Gråbo, to reach the visionary goal of a sustainable urban development by 2025 (Lerum Kommun 2009). Put simply: Everyone needs to be regarded as participant, whether or not they actively choose to participate. This also calls for understandable, communicable or transparent information in decision making processes, such as planning projects.

It also puts the mosaic analogy in contrast to the hierarchical and linear ladder, originally drawn and explained by Arnstein (1969), which is often referred to when discussing participation. The original ladder depicts eight steps grouped in three levels, from non-participation to citizen power. One can assess a participatory process by placing it on the ladder, concluding how much power and influence the participants were actually given (Arnstein, 1969). However, this visualization in itself confirms and cements a notion of power being something given and taken away by someone in an authoritative position, thus creating the relationship of us-and-them (authority over inhabitant or stakeholder) inherent to the visualization model. By understanding power as relational rather than authoritative, the ladder analogy becomes problematic.

Gallagher (2008) uses Foucault's ideas about power "*...as something that is exercised, not possessed. Power is not a disposition or a capacity, nor is it a resource or a commodity*" (Gallagher 2008, p 397) Gallagher addresses how a relational view on power drawing from Foucault, can give new perspectives on children's participation, that are opposed to out-dated authoritative relationships of adults "ruling over" children. But Gallagher's interpretation of power relations between the parent/adult and child is easily applicable to the relationship of municipal authorities and inhabitants:

*"Seeing power as circulating through networks has particular implications for the understanding of scale. Foucault stresses that power cannot be viewed as something which flows from the top of a social hierarchy downwards [...] Understood in this way, power is not something which operates only occasionally, through the lofty decisions of governments or the financial transactions of large corporations. As 'actions upon actions', power also animates many more mundane, everyday practices. Indeed, beneath the monolithic appearance of corporate and governmental decision making, one finds that such decisions are 'powerful' only because they are implemented by vast networks of people (service managers, administrators, politicians, civil servants, teachers, social workers, classroom assistants, children, parents, community workers, and so on) through their everyday actions upon one another."*

(Gallagher 2008, p 399-400)

Gallagher thus gives another example of more lateral relationships in which power is a result of shared experiences (action upon action), rather than authoritative action only. Seeing these shared experiences as a process of shared knowledge production, the concept of social learning is again apt.

#### 4. Case Study Lerum / Gråbo

The study in Lerum started in September 2011 focuses on their efforts on participation joint to their political vision about sustainability (Lerum Kommun 2009b), and took its stance in a few issues from a previous case study in Uddevalla municipality. The focus was on the communication patterns, obstacles and misunderstandings in planning identified in the previous case (Åhlström 2011).

First, the inhabitants could not distinguish between different municipal actors but referred to a continuous communication with The Municipality, as being one abstract and self-contradicting actor. The municipality on the other hand spoke in many voices from different offices and from both political and administrative realms. The second issue relates to this misunderstanding as inhabitants felt they repeated the same story over and over again without being heard. Their contexts and stories remain the same, while the municipality conducts meetings and workshops around different themes and issues (Åhlström 2011, Bomble, Lerum kommun 2012). This mismatch in communication was found to exist also in Lerum after interviews and meetings with politicians, municipal employees and inhabitants.

Lerum is a small municipality outside the city of Gothenburg, and they work with high ambitions towards their political vision of being a “*leading environmental municipality 2025*” (Lerum Kommun 2009b – own translation) Each part of the municipal administration (political and technical) has thus defined what sustainability might mean to their area of responsibility, and strategies are then adapted to this common future vision of a sustainable Lerum. A common conclusion at the municipality says that the inhabitants need to be the driving force towards this envisioned future and thus that participation and education is the first priority in the strategies (Lerum Kommun 2009b).

Gråbo – an urban settlement in western Lerum – was chosen as a pilot, where new measures are to be tested in order to plan “the sustainable municipality” (Lerum Kommun 2009b).

#### 4.1 Political *and* technical issues

During 2012, the study focused on the political organization of the municipality, where political commissions dedicated to specific issues and appointed by and from the municipal council, are to conduct the political part of citizen dialogue. Following one commission dedicated to the Pilot Gråbo efforts; the material collected by the commission was clearly frustrating to the group of politicians. They were given answers, stories and opinions that did not restrain themselves to visions of the future, but were mixed with wishes for new bike racks, mended street lights, new playgrounds and stories of worry about the traffic situation... In short, the politicians were overwhelmed by issues meant for the maintenance and planning offices at the municipality, without a clear organizational path to hand this material over. This resulted in a new series of meetings where commissions regularly meet the municipal board, with the purpose of technical tasks being sorted from the political material.

Somewhere in the discussion between technical and political tasks when it comes to participation, the municipality was approached by a couple of local enterprises in Gråbo. Did the municipality have the possibility to be part of a network of enterprises with sustainability as a common focus? Joining discussions and initiatives within Pilot Gråbo, the process leader of pilot Gråbo (a municipal employee) suggested yet another forum or grouping for continuous communication between inhabitants and the municipality – the Co-Production Group of Gråbo.

#### 4.2 The Co-Production Group

The Co-Production Group started already in May 2012. It started as a group of representatives chosen by the process leader from different interest groups in Gråbo. The local enterprises association, the three churches, the local sports association, the local history association and other similar already organized groups were invited to the first meeting. They were asked to develop the group together with municipal politicians from executive board and council, as well as municipal employees invited according to what issues are to appear on the agenda. This group thus forms a structure or organization for participation close to what Patsy Healey describes as inclusionary argumentation as a type of governance (Healey, 1997).

Whether this is a group initiated top- down or bottom-up can be debated, but it is not a democratically elected setup by any means. It is rather the choices and local knowledge of one municipal employee, the process leader of Pilot Gråbo, who started the group. How it develops however is a much more complex and diversified issue. Such a group needs a certain setup to be representative and/or to reach wider networks in the community (see f. ex. Åhlström 2011, SALAR 2011, Uddevalla Kommun 2011, Stenberg 2004, Castell 2010), and the Co-Production Group in Gråbo has so far only been comprised by already strong forces in the community (Chairpersons of associations, reverends of local churches, local business owners et cetera) and can clearly be said, at least initially, to be constituted by so-called local elites (Edling et al 2014). There is an on-going discussion within the group about male dominance, the need for more youth representatives and also about socio-economic gaps in the community and within the group itself. They end up in an us-and-them discourse similar to the divides already manifested in the community – Those who participate and those being talked about rather than with. How that sensitive issue is openly discussed with the so-called elites themselves is at least a step in the right direction. And as one chairperson of a local association put it:

*“The more perspectives on current events we become aware of, the more valid our version of events becomes. We simply need to hear other voices than our own in order to represent other inhabitants than ourselves in discussions about Gråbo’s future”*

(Quote noted after Co-Production Group meeting, May 2013 – own translation. When asked to repeat to be recorded verbatim, the conversation turned to a specific example on how the municipality’s agenda vis-à-vis Pilot Gråbo was still being told differently and more trusting by the Co-Production Group compared to sceptical voices in the community of Gråbo at large.)

The Co-Production Group can still be described as a local elite (Edling et al 2014) but with outspoken attempts and objectives towards lateral relations between the community of Gråbo and the municipality, through the group. Another perspective on represented interests is how local enterprises take part in the group through their local collaborative association. This is to avoid individual enterprises participating for their own profit interests, but to give them the possibility to participate for the benefit of the community.

*“We sit around this same table because we have different perspectives and input to the same issues”*

(Process leader Pilot Gråbo, in a Co-Production Meeting in September 2012, own translation).

Below, a few examples will show how the group, while flawed in its current set-up in terms of representativity, works with the issue of representing the local community issue by issue. Trust in and by the municipality as well as in and by its local community, puts the Co-Production Group of Gråbo as a forum in interplace (Stenberg 2004) for continuous communication in and about Gråbo, rather than as a body of power placed hierarchically “below” the municipal authorities, and “over” the individual inhabitants.

### **- the dirt piles**

At the very first Co-Production Group meeting in 2012, some of the invited local actors were clearly sceptical of the municipality’s agenda when starting such a group. One association chairperson voiced that the municipality did not care about Gråbo the way they cared about the centre of Lerum. One example of this, he said, was the field covered in dirt piles, just at the roundabout as you enter Gråbo. They would never be left like that at the entrances to Lerum. It was a blemish and a poor first impression of the place, so would the municipality be so kind to remove them? At this, the chairperson of the local sports association raised his hand and said apologetically that both the site was theirs, and a deal with one of their sponsors (a contractor in ground installation) let them use this site to store material. The sponsor deal was time limited and the dirt piles would be removed when it expired. This undramatic turn of events became symbolic and explanatory of what the group developed into. An issue perceived as municipal responsibility was not and information shared among themselves resolved it. The Co-Production Group was about sharing and building knowledge, not primarily between municipality and local actors, but among and between all actors involved in the development of Gråbo; municipal actors, politicians and civil servants as well as local inhabitants, entrepreneurs and civil society all contributing.

### **- the demolition site projects**

The issues or tasks for the Co-Production Group come from different needs, occasions or purposes. For instance, on the demolition site of the old high school in Gråbo, neighbours had appealed plans for new dwellings. These appeal processes take time and had postponed the build. While the process and timeline might be known and understood by the actors and stakeholders involved, the situation was a cause of frustration and concern with the rest of Gråbo. The demolition site was seen as a blemish to an already mismanaged central area of their community. Thus, the Co-Production Group of Gråbo was given the responsibility to let inhabitants realize ideas of an art wall, some plantations and a car-boot sale on the demolition site during the autumn of 2013. The projects were neither large nor complicated, but were concrete and solid evidence that the Co-Production Group could get things done, in cooperation with the municipality. But more than that, the realization of the little projects themselves, as well as the meetings leading up to their realization, the information and understanding for the processes concerning the demolition site and the housing project were discussed, spread and understood by many more than otherwise would have been involved. The humble little projects have clearly been the catalysts of new relationships between municipality officials and local forces and a clear example of participation being an opportunity for social learning.

## - long term organization

In May 2015, the regulations of the Co-Production Economical Association were accepted (Medskapandegruppen 2015). Thus a formal organisation of the group was finally set in writing. This setup and the phrasing of these regulations can be found developing in the protocols of the group's meetings since its beginning. They have taken time to develop as the open meetings, the gradual and organic growth of the group and its network was something that the group agreed was valuable and needed to be ascertained. The result is an association with member associations in an effort to maintain the format of the Co-Production Group while strengthening other civic engagement in the area. Also, the meetings can still be open to all, but if a vote is needed majority decisions cannot be "hijacked" by a many-headed interest group showing up as, each association gets one vote each. The formal organisation into an association also allows the group to handle a budget and receive and distribute money, a necessity that became apparent in the first meeting as any cost needed to be hosted by a member association until this new regulation was in place. However, not having had its own bank account has led to fruitful discussions about other resources such as voluntary labour, donated building material and sponsorship by local enterprises. The discussion on market demands and influence in governance is a big and important issue, also in Gråbo. Local enterprises in the Co-Production Group however, participate through the local enterprise association, through which they pledge to work for the best of the community they're in, not only in interests of own profit. Thus the organization of the Co-Production Group has, at least so-far, limited enterprise profit to good-will and collaboration opportunities with other local enterprises or actors.

Leaning on a long-term vision policy document, long-term efforts can be started and seen through. This gives the Co-Production Group a possibility for continuity and learning processes spanning several projects, experiences and events in a more comprehensive time scope than time restricted projects. Time and feedback are issues and obstacles in assessments of other participatory efforts (See for example Forester 1999, Svennberg and Teimouri 2010, Åhlström 2011, Kraff and Jernsand 2015), but the setup in Gråbo seems to overcome many such problems. While the initial set-up cannot be described as co-initiated (co-produced initiation), the continuous development of the Co-Production Group of Gråbo is co-produced through common experiences and discussions.

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Participation as Social Learning

The study of the development of the Co-Production Group of Gråbo can be seen as an example of participation as a process of *social learning*. Crucial to the group's success was how it owned the discussions in the group and the knowledge it produced together. That is to say that the same knowledge was shared between local stakeholders, local business owners and other stakeholders together with actors from the municipality's political and technical realms.

The observations made and the conclusions drawn may serve as examples of what Collins and Ison (2009) describe as a process of social learning in complex situations. Their case focuses on processes of participation within the context of meeting the challenges of climate change. The complex context of the case in Gråbo – the sustainable development of this urban settlement through participation – is directly comparable to the complexity of the cases Collins and Ison refer to. The case of Gråbo can therefore be sorted into the design heuristic for social learning explained in their article (Collins and Ison 2009, p 366) as shown in figure 1 below. The figure contains what they describe as key elements of a design heuristic through social learning with special attention to the relationships and constraints between these. These key elements are found to influence, enhance or hinder each other in a process of participatory transformation according to findings by Steyaert and Jiggins (2007) and have been defined more particularly by Collins and Ison (2009b).

Success factors for the Co-Production Group of Gråbo have been phrased from the point of view of the municipality and from the group themselves as they formed an economical association in 2015. They point to the organic development of the group through issues attracting the right stakeholders. The group is thus growing as it is "*building stakeholding through joint responsibility*" (Collins and Ison 2009, fig 3, p 366).

Simply by delimiting the issues to concern sustainable development in the geographical area of Gråbo, issues that come to the group's attention are automatically sorted into things to do, things to learn more about, things to respond to or things that does not affect this particular group. The presence of municipal politicians and administrators in the group is also a way of linking the stakeholding to both *responsibility* and *response-ability* as addressed in Collins and Ison's text and also links stakeholding to the policies and institutions (the municipality) in a mutual relationship of both enhancements and constraints.

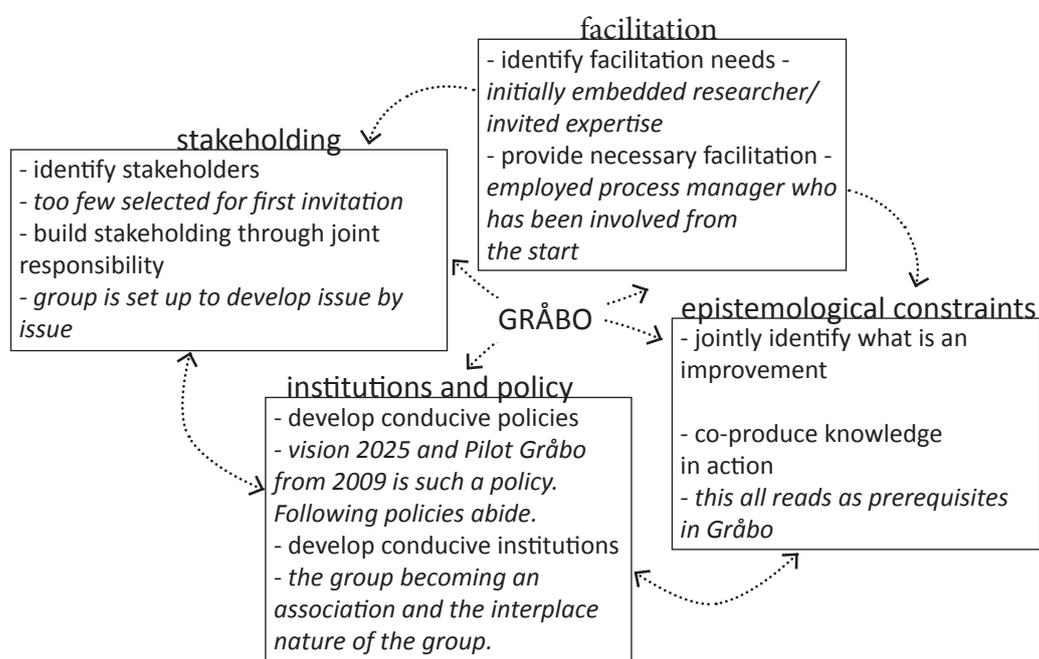


Figure 1: Drawing on the figure 'Design heuristic for social learning' in Collins and Ison 2009 p. 366, the Co-Production Group of Gråbo could be seen as having followed this set up in all aspects. The initial setup of the group can be criticized for being a non-democratic and with a too narrow selection of invitees and future facilitation and management of the group is something that can be discussed further. Both these issues are however addressed in the planned continuation and organization of the Co-Production Group. (Text directly from Collins and Ison in fig non cursive, my comments to the design heuristic vis-à-vis case Gråbo in cursive script.)

The municipality of Lerum has a broad political vision of sustainability. Leaning on this document, the Co-Production Group has had a clear purpose and the development of it has been allowed to take time. Thus the current political consensus in Lerum concerning their sustainability objectives can be seen as conducive policy for the participatory efforts in Gråbo. The Co-Production Group in itself can be seen as a conducive institution, but as Collins and Ison (2009) point out: "...attempts at capability building (...) fail if the circumstances for both responsibility and response-ability are not concurrently created". The process leader of Pilot Gråbo has gathered technical staff responsible for Pilot Gråbo from all municipal sectors to meet regularly. These meetings and the Co-Production Group's meetings together, can be seen as means of developing what Collins and Ison describe as conducive institutions that can handle both the responsibility and the response-ability of what sustainable development in Gråbo might entail.

Not all of the participatory activity in the Co-Production Group is yet understood or controlled by the group members themselves, but rather developing through common experiences. By allowing the knowledge that is built jointly in the Co-Production Group to form the bases of executive decisions in municipal planning, the improvements towards sustainable development in Gråbo are jointly identified through participatory power in accordance to Gallagher's (2009) description of "action upon action". While not all members of the group understand, or even care, how the Co-Production Group works as a participatory forum without formal mandate to make executive decisions, as described above they can influence decisions or processes simply by giving their now very informed opinion on issues they were not included in before.

## 5.2 Facilitation

Comparing to the model by Collins and Ison, facilitation is the most difficult aspect to pin down in the Gråbo case as it has changed in need, objective and setup over the last few years.

While many of the successes and failures of the Co-Production Group would have happened without a researcher present to observe and assess, my mere presence has been beneficial according to both politicians, inhabitants and business owners in the group. According to them, primarily by having a wider perspective of their actions than “one issue at a time” and for example connecting different parts of the municipal administration to ideas, constraints or complaints within the group.

When I left the case study in the fall of 2014, the municipal board had phrased four tasks for the municipality to handle next based on my transformative assessment reports. One of these is to “*renew and strengthen leadership in Pilot Gråbo*” (own translation, Lerum Kommunstyrelse 2014-05-21:198, Lerum Kommun 2014-04-08 KS11.69). This was after it had been pointed out that the process leader was the only one with comprehensive knowledge from meetings about Pilot Gråbo, within the municipal politics and administration as well as from activities in Gråbo and the Co-Production Group. This process leader also referred to not having the objectivity of an observer, but that he was constantly involved in the practicalities of what was on the agenda of the day. The municipal board agreed, that the group would and should benefit from better and more purposeful facilitation of the participatory process as such.

In Gråbo, each issue on the agenda of the Co-Production Group might need some kind of specific facilitation. But it is continuous and comprehensive facilitation and understanding of the context, mandate and format of the Co-Production Group that remained a challenge and a need for the continuation of this group’s activities. But as the group built “a sense of self and opportunity” through social learning as described by Forester (1999), quoted above, to some degree, social learning becomes a built-in facilitating function in the development of a participatory network.

In January of 2016 however, one of the initial members of the Co-Production Group – a reverend in one of the churches – was employed, part-time, by the municipality as process leader/ manager of the Co-Production Group of Gråbo. Thus the municipality answered to the demand for further facilitation by simultaneously giving validity to the joint knowledge produced in the group and they recognized the key actor role this particular member of the group has had. While the appointment could have been given to an outsider with specific professional expertise, such as a planning process facilitator as described by Malbert (1998) for example, the Co-Production Group is now aided “from within”. Technical and professional expertise is to be used as earlier, by inviting outside professionals as well as municipal employees from involved sectors depending on current issues.

## 5.3 Shared Power

Continuous participation through social learning as described in the Gråbo case is a way of making municipal decision-making about a local area more transparent. Since all information regarding Pilot Gråbo is discussed in the Co-Production Group, its members have insight in municipal issues they otherwise would be ignorant of. The examples of the Co-Production Group taking on issues or acting upon information as described above can be seen as them having an influence on municipal issues, despite having no formal mandate.

## 6. Conclusion

The case study in Lerum/Gråbo suggests that it is the platform or organisation behind the process(es) of participation that has been staged or designed, not the delimited planning project(s). Instead every planning project and the process around it can be seen as part of a larger scale process, in which continuous communication laterally between the municipal organisation and its inhabitants needs to work.

Organising a forum like the Co-Production Group and then continually facilitating its activities through for example updated information from different parts of the municipal organisation, understanding of

criss-crossing timelines of planning, policy and expectations et cetera, can clearly be described as setting up participation through social learning. Something Collins and Ison have shown to be beneficial in complex issues like sustainable development and climate change (Collins and Ison 2009). And as their logic is applied on complexity and social policy planning is the original “wicked problem” (Rittel and Webber, 1973), I will argue that: Setting up a platform for social learning between municipality and inhabitants is to share power locally by building trust in mutual knowledge and relations. Such a group or platform is a set up for successful participation for sustainability’s sake, as it creates influence and trust in, and continuity and context for, decision making processes in a Swedish municipal context. This organisation of participation is also in accordance with the municipality’s own definition of sustainable development being driven by lifestyle changes and demand for sustainable solutions among its inhabitants (Lerums kommun 2009b). As such continuous participation has shown to impact the participants’ possibilities to understand and thus influence municipal planning processes, it is suggested that it is also a way to share power with the local community. That is to say, like in the image of the mosaic, the different participants/actors or pieces influence the bigger picture, even when they cannot be said to actually decide the final motif by themselves.

Understood as “actions upon actions” (Gallagher 2008), power in a municipal context could be explained as executive decisions being dependant on knowledge emerging from interplace (Stenberg 2004) in a setting for social learning. Leaning on the definitions of power by Gallagher (2008) based on those of Foucault (1970) described above, the conclusion is thus that the municipality of Lerum shares power with the Co-Production Group of Lerum, simply by being more transparent or inviting to transparent processes.

Successful participation is thus defined, for the purposes of this text, as an inclusive, transparent process of social learning that can be visualized as a mosaic, a lateral network of very different stakeholders and actors all contributing in building local knowledge, which is then the basis for decision-making and prioritization between issues locally.

The examples from the Co-Production Group activities were chosen to show a new perspective on participation as a process of social learning. However, no conclusive example of a more specific solution to the wicked problem which can be derived from the group’s activities could be found yet. But - decisions made in issues that the group has discussed have been understood, accepted and spread by more Gråbo inhabitants than would have even known about the decision being made before. As more actors are involved and interested in co-producing problem formulation, solution, implementation and success, a sustainable, societal development can be driven by local stakeholders in collaboration with municipal actors tied to that same geographical context. The organization of such a platform needs to be based on local prerequisites and context, but discussion on local issues in such a platform can be described in terms of participation as a process of social learning.

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# LOST IN INTERPRETATION

– how narratives are interpreted into data in participatory planning processes in a Swedish context

*This paper is the continuation of two case studies of participation in municipal planning processes in a Swedish context, building on the idea that everyone needs to participate to achieve a sustainable future. A perceived communicative gap has been found; The inhabitant perceives meetings with municipal representatives, both politicians and officials, as part of one on-going dialogue, while municipal representatives act from different roles, aims and time perspectives.*

*This text shows how material collected by the municipality or given by the public, in participatory processes, are narratives. The intention behind the study was to compare narrative answers to quantitative survey answers, but the discovery was that the inhabitants want to tell their whole story, even when only given the opportunity to answer a limited survey question. The stories are the same, whether they are told to a politician or a municipal planner. This also indicates that the inhabitants perceive that their participation in future development in a certain area starts already in political dialogue, thus much earlier than what is usually referred to as the early stages in planning theory.*

*Further, different municipal actors, interpret these narratives, to be used in a political or planning decision-making process. This text aims to show what can be lost and/or gained in interpretation.*

*Keywords: Participation, physical planning, dialogue, narrative, communication,*

## 1. Introduction

In the field of planning theory different forms of participation and communicative planning can be found addressing the critical early stages of participation (for example Healey 2006, Peterman 2001, Fröst 2004). But depending on which scholar you read, or which process you mean, these early stages are defined differently. When talking about urban planning or a building project, the early stages have been defined as being the problem description phase in comparison to inviting to participation in the actual design stages. This paper will show that the early stages can be said to be even earlier, in describing a current state.

The material gathered in two case studies with very different aims, lead to discoveries and hypotheses about communication in general between public and municipal authority.

In the first case in the municipality of Uddevalla, the task was to develop a method for public participation in the early stages of municipal planning. Five area analyses were written, based on narrative interviews with inhabitants. The analyses were constructed by triangulating answers on certain topics, trying to capture the current discussion or state of each topic among the inhabitants. For each area between 9 and 14 deep interviews were made and recorded. Following these were shorter spontaneous interviews with people on site, now with follow-up questions chosen from the recorded interviews. And lastly groups were gathered in workshops around certain themes identified through the interviews. The combined material were interpreted into the analyses documents, using longer narrative quotes as illustrations to the text, trying to show the reader from which discussions on site the analysis drew its conclusions. In the deep interviews, the only question asked to all interviewees was “Tell me about your area” after a short introduction on how their answers were to be used in the analysis document. Some chose to tell the history of the area, some about their commuting habits, yet others about conflicts with the municipality about this or other.

The analyses showed in the end, that letting the inhabitants freely tell stories about an areas current state, gave a document highly relevant to possible development in that area. Comparing the participatory analyses to the municipality comprehensive plan, clearly showed in which areas the municipality would meet understanding and conflict respectively to their development plans. Thus the analyses could constitute a starting point of a participatory process, much earlier than what is generally referred to as the early stages (Åhlström, 2011).

The other case study in Lerum was less directly involved in municipal planning practice. Instead, the work of a commission of politicians from the municipal council has been studied through their meetings and dialogue sessions with the public. The commission has an overall task to map and investigate the public view on a sustainable future in a specific area, Gråbo, in Lerum municipality. The commission and its task are part of the municipality's Vision 2025, a policy document setting the objective to be Sweden's leading municipality in sustainable development by the year 2025. The vision document states that it is the inhabitants of the municipality that will drive this sustainable development, being given the opportunities to make "smarter sustainable life choices in their every day lives" (Vision 2025, own translation). The commission followed by this case study was given the task in 2011, to investigate what "a sustainable Gråbo" might entail, for the municipality and for its inhabitants, and to report their findings by the end of 2013. In the autumn semester of 2011, a group of 33 master students from the Department of Architecture at Chalmers used Gråbo as their project site in a master studio. The local context of Gråbo was analysed and a total of 14 in depth projects were presented in January of 2012, showing sustainable solutions for the future Gråbo. The projects were exhibited in Gråbo and the political commission acted as hosts in this exhibition. The second case study for the research project to which this paper belongs, started in that exhibition. The political commission had prepared questionnaires and a noticeboard in the exhibition to gather opinions and voices from the visitors. The narrative examples from Lerum in this paper are all taken from this noticeboard.

The idea was to compare the qualitative study in Uddevalla, to a more structured questionnaire and a more quantitative interpretation of participatory dialogue in Lerum. The discovery however, was that the participants wanted to tell stories, even when asked to answer a more structured or narrow question. The medium of written notes and questionnaires however, made the participants shorten their stories to the bare essentials or to fragments as will be shown below. When handing over their questionnaires or pinning their notes to the noticeboard, they tended to do so with explanatory comments to what they had written.

### 1.1. They tell us stories

In the two cases described above, two realisations were made: First – the inhabitants do not usually differentiate between the different municipal actors. The inhabitant is taking part in one on-going dialogue, with one complex opponent – the municipality. Meanwhile the municipality, being a diverse organisation, conducts several dialogues in different themes, on different timelines and from different actors with the inhabitants. This in itself creates a discord in the contact and interplay between inhabitant and municipality. In planning issues this becomes increasingly apparent.

Second – The inhabitants tell stories. They do not just hand over answers. They are the experts on the local context where the planning decisions ultimately land in physical form. But being an expert on context, also means connecting the whole picture of an area in one story. While they might focus more or less on the topic at hand for each meeting with representatives from the municipality, their respective stories are the same. Simply put, the data and its connections remain the same, but given the context of the meeting with the municipality, the inhabitant tends to hand over fragments of this story relevant to the respective agendas of meetings.

The difference between the stories collected in Uddevalla and the material from the study in Lerum, was in the beginning intended to be a comparison between different kinds of knowledge or data. The narratives were to be compared to answers given in questionnaires, surveys and structured interviews. However, the participants in Lerum insisted on telling stories, or fragments of stories, regardless of how the question was asked.

This text has pulled narrative examples from the body of empirical evidence in my two cases. The first is a collection of quotes collected in notes written by visitors to an exhibition in Lerum, the second a passage from a recorded narrative interview in Uddevalla. The exhibition in Lerum showed projects for sustainable planning solutions made by master students at the department of Architecture at Chalmers. A political commission of the municipality, who used the exhibition as the venue for dialogue with inhabitants during one week, hosted the exhibition. The politicians handed out questionnaires as well as offered a wall where

visitors could pin notes. But the visitors handed back the questionnaires and notes, often with more words spoken, explaining or telling their answers to the receiving politicians. They wanted to tell their stories.

Most meetings and workshops documented in this study in the case of Lerum have been themed towards physical planning solutions and the notion of “a sustainable future”. The stories told have therefore been set in hypothetical futures (“I would like it if...”, “It would be good having a...”). However the discussion around said “collected” answers have often compared the wishes to current state (“Because now, all we have is...”, “It would solve the problem of...”). The examples above would constitute more complete stories or narratives, had for example the conversation around the notice board been recorded more extensively. What was supposed to be a study about different kinds of knowledge became a study about collected stories and how the receiving municipal actors handle them. It seems narratives collected in participatory planning processes are often broken down in themes, to then be broken down into quantifiable categories of stakeholder interests. Participants, understanding this, give fragments of narratives, rather than the full story, to begin with. Can this constitute a risk that important data is being lost in interpretation?

## 1.2 Communication, translation, mediation

In an article about how research results are to permeate the realm of policy making, Cash et al come to the conclusion that three steps are always needed; communication, translation and mediation (Cash et al, 2003). The case studies described in this paper suggest that the same conclusion can be applied to participation and the decision-making and planning processes of a municipality. It has been shown that there is a discord between the perceived dialogue between inhabitants and the municipality (Bomble 2012 – in progress), showing the need for clear communication.

This paper in turn addresses the issue of translation, or interpretation, of the narratives inhabitants tell and how they can influence the different decision-making processes within the municipality. The discovery presented in this text is that it is not the method of communicating with the inhabitant that creates the communicative discord, but rather how the dialogue results are interpreted and simplified to be used in the municipal organisation that often leads to important coherences being lost in interpretation. Narratives are broken down into fragments and disjointed data to be shown in quantifiable statistics.

## 1.3 What is a narrative?

No common definition exists for a narrative or a story. This is an attempt at explaining the definition and use of the phenomenon for this text.

The earliest definition of a narrative is said to be that of Aristotle, when he describes poetry as having “a beginning, a middle and an end” (Johansson, 2005, p 124). A narrative is then to be seen as a sequence of events where one thing leads to another. And many definitions refer temporality, but also about the relationships between the different elements of the story and the narrator.

*“All narration, whether it is oral or written, whether it recounts real or mythical events, whether it tells a story or relates a simple sequence of actions in time, presupposes not only (at least) one narrator but also (at least) one narratee, the narratee being someone whom the narrator addresses.”*

(Prince, in Richter 1996, p 226)

The different explanations of narratives being descriptions of events placed related to each other in time, chronologically or at least in relation to a timeline also hints at causality and context as being the defining factors for a narrative.

Czarniawska describes an example where listed facts can have different meanings depending on the order and context they’re placed in, within different narratives.

*“‘The company suffered unprecedented losses’ and ‘the top managers were forced to resign’ are two mysterious events that call for interpretation. ‘With the company suffering unprecedented losses, the top managers were forced to resign’ is a narrative”*

(Czarniawska, 2004, p 7)

When it comes to interpreting narratives collected in participatory planning processes, events, facts and arguments are placed in relation to each other, and to the narrator. These relations can be of temporality, causality or context and can thus reflect and communicate much more than the singular data on their own. It is about yet another parameter of the narrative – coherence. It needs to be coherent or “make sense”. There are several levels at which coherence can tie a narrative together, as is shown by linguists Agar and Hobbs in three levels:

- *Local coherence ties each sequence in the narrative to the former or following sequence.*
  - *Global coherence ties all sequences to an overall theme or moral of a narrative.*
  - *Thematic coherence where parts of the narrative ties to general cultural themes, contexts or values.*
- (Johansson 2005 p 126, quoting Mishler 1986)

The narrative or the argumentation for an opinion often stays within a definition concerning temporality, causality and context. They are seldom told as for example mysteries, where causalities are deliberately hidden but presented at the end. Or even less often as poetic narratives or deliberately in several narratives at once to see them interlink at the end. Thus many recent discussions about looser definitions of the narrative can be ignored for this study’s purposes. Narratives could also be categorised as stories, plots, intrigues, discourse... but that is superfluous to the purposes of this study.

This study must however consider the full narrative behind a collected fragment of narrative. The participants in the case study have not always been given the opportunity to tell “the whole story”, but have given one or two sentences in a statement. These fragments however show narrative indicators as will be shown below.

The definition of a narrative chosen for this study is therefore: a set of data linked together by temporality, causality, context or coherence.

## 2. Examples 1

Narratives in its many variations, being told by participants in participatory planning as well as in politicians dialogue with their constituents, is interpreted and processed thematically, thus a lot of the defining factors of the narrative are ignored and lost. This full story is sometimes only conveyed orally on site, but should not be disregarded when interpreting the data. Given the context of the meeting or workshop, participants often only give a fragment of their narrative at each meeting. It gives less material to interpret, but the loss of context can be devastating here too. The examples from the meetings in Lerum are such fragments:

1) *“There must be a bank and a post office here.”*

– A quote from said exhibition, is for example a statement that is clearly related to a narrative that this inhabitant could tell us. It opens for many, and perhaps inaccurate, interpretations.

Other statements written on notes in said exhibition are more complete narratives:

2) *“It would be fun if there was a school for cultural activities here, and more shops. And maybe some restaurant, like McDonalds or Chinese food or something like that. I think this place is too boring.”*

This compared to the next example give different notions about the possible narrator:

3) *“It is important to have a holistic view of a society that should be for everyone, poor and rich alike. Raised awareness on how we build is crucial for the sense of community against segregation.”*

The above statements were all written on notes and hung on the wall in the exhibition. At first glance, most people will instinctively deduce that they come from rather different contributors. There is already something in the choice of words and references that hints at our preconceptions about categories of people. (All examples are author’s own translations from Swedish.)

The example from Uddevalla is a more complete narrative, told by a 45-year-old man, living with his family in a rural area:

4) *“I believe in accessibility. It has to be accessible to get here, and accessible to get out of here to someplace else. It doesn’t work if a car is the only option that works! Cars aren’t for everybody. You must have a good bicycle path too. It can’t be meant for only one type vehicle. You should be able to choose between bike, moped, car, buses... Those are the choices that should be available to you. But they aren’t today. Because if you choose the bike, well then you’ll go very carefully (laughs) or you’ll have to make many detours. So instead of 8 km to town, you will have to go 15, almost 20 km. If you’re on a moped you’re slightly more secure on the big road, but it is still very dangerous. And then you have the car... and the buses, well they go very seldom. And far away! (...) So this place it is not exactly suited for everyone in our family, but we make do... Me and the wife pick them up in the car!”*

So if we add analysing methods from different fields that deal with narratives, is there more knowledge to be found in these narratives and narrative fragments?

### 3. Interpreting The Examples

This text has pulled narrative examples from the body of empirical evidence in the two cases. They show different kinds of narratives and fragments of narratives that all fall under the above definition. When interpreting narratives, one can look to other academic disciplines to learn that it might not be the isolated data that are to be taken from a story, but the context and coherence of said story might be what is most important to the narrator, and maybe also to the interpreter.

The role of the interpreter is of great importance when collecting a participatory material. In the case of Uddevalla, hours of recorded interviews were interpreted into area analyses, using triangulation of issues at hand. Compiling a document that was to be compared to the analyses made in the municipal comprehensive plan, issues like public transport, physical character and sustainable development were specifically sought for in the interviews. Illustrating the analyses’ texts with quotes from which the analysis was drawn, the reader could see how the interpretation was drawn from putting one narrative description of context next to another within a certain topic. Thus using a narrative analysis method found in social studies to meet the demands of an architectural or physical planning related study (Åhlström 2011).

In the case of Lerum, the interpretation process wasn’t designed to take care of narratives. The political commission collecting questionnaires and opinions on a wall used quantitative methods, taking care of qualitative material, simplifying for the purpose of prioritizing between issues for the municipal politicians. However, so many statements gathered were at an executive level to do with concrete maintenance issues as well as planned developments in the area, the commission made a report to be handed directly to the municipal board, to help the executive part of the organisation with their priorities in the selected area. All the answers to “What do you miss in Gråbo?” in the questionnaire, as well as statements from the noticeboard expressing something an inhabitant missed were all grouped in a pie chart, with a shortened list of what the statements detailed in an appendix (Figure 1). Going back to original statements on notes, one can see that some statements were clearly divided into several answers to fit in the pie chart. (Figure 2)

The quote from Lerum saying there must be a post and a bank (1), is a statement clearly related to a more complete narrative that this inhabitant could undoubtedly tell us. This opens for many, and perhaps inaccurate, interpretations. It could for example be in coherence to accessibility, or a wish for more people in the centre contributing to a social safety factor, or both. The fact that it is a fragment of a story however, makes it impossible to interpret with certainty.

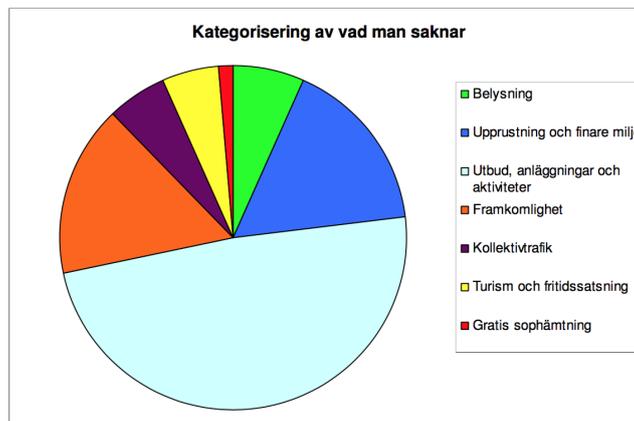


FIGURE 1: A pie chart over the 127 answers stating something one wants or misses in Gråbo. The biggest field represents “facilities and activities”. Examples 1 and 2 are counted here. (Gråboberedningens delrapport 2012)

|                                     |                          |   |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Utbud, anläggningar och aktiviteter | Bensinstation            | 1 |
| Utbud, anläggningar och aktiviteter | Post                     | 2 |
| Utbud, anläggningar och aktiviteter | Bank                     | 2 |
| Utbud, anläggningar och aktiviteter | Klätter- och parkourpark | 1 |
| Utbud, anläggningar och             |                          |   |

FIGURE 2: In the appendix of the report example 1 is found, divided into two posts. The word “must” is gone, but there are two wishes for a bank and two wishes for a post office among the collected statements. (Gråboberedningens delrapport 2012)

Used in a specific context, that context is part of the narrative, creating coherence in interplay between two communicating opponents, as described by Linde (1993); Coherence being dependent on both temporal and sociocultural context. These collected fragments do have both temporal and sociocultural context, but were ripped from it as no record was made of who put up the notes, or for that matter what they were discussing while in the exhibition. The statement is separated from its coherences, even if the word must suggests that they exist.

The next narrative (2) gives an instinctive image of a young narrator addressing people of higher authority. There is a wish and an assessment of current state. It has a local coherence between the current “boring” situation, and the wish for a livelier one, which “would be fun”. It has a global coherence in its references to the overall wish for a better more fun life, the reason for telling the story is the wish for a change. While the notion that the narrator is a young person, might be said to be based on preconceptions about the clientele of McDonalds, one might use quantitative linguistic analysis methods, measuring which words are used most often by different respondent groups. The results thereof could then be used to suppose the target groups reached in an anonymous survey such as this wall of pinned notes.

The next statement (3) would probably (author’s assumption) show another narrator group according to said linguistic analysis. This statement can instead be used as an example of how far, or short, the interpretation reaches when is sorted into the municipality’s records. While the whole statement is kept in the documentation of the exhibition, it is sorted under Attitudes and Social issues in a list of collected statements. This is a political statement to be included in the commission’s next report, at the end of 2013 – . Two years after the comment was pinned to the wall in January 2012. Referring to Czarniawskas concept of the interview as a narrative production site (Czarniawska 2004, p 49), this case was very limited (anonymous on a piece of paper), but the interviewee/ narrator still chose to tell about a “holistic view” and much larger contexts than just his or her own. If the aim was to gather a deeper understanding of the inhabitant’s contexts and opinions, this example could be said to be the wrong kind of information for the chosen communication medium – or vice versa. Even if the statement hints at valuable holistic understanding of the social context in this area (Gråbo), the lack of context for the actual narrative leads to poor possibilities for feedback and usage of this narrator’s capabilities.

A very basic literature review can be a structuralist view on a narrative. Saussure is considered to be the first structuralist in linguistic studies and is referred to also in literature review and narrative theory. He claimed words and their meanings only exist in relation to one another, and that the meaning of a word is completely dependant on its relationship to other words. As an example we wouldn't understand the word hut unless it is compared with for example other buildings of different sizes (hovel, shed, hut, house, mansion, palace) (Barry 2009, p 41). Thus a language or a story takes its meaning from the relationships between its elements. Thus the defining factors of the narrative described above – How the meaning appears only when temporality, causality or coherence can be observed between the different elements. A critic of Saussure – Ricks –describes the same thing, but from another perspective. He says that in language as in narratives, the relationships between the elements cannot be without the inherent quality of the element itself. Basically contradicting Saussure's logic by turning it inside out. (Barry 2009, p 44, referring to Ricks, 1981)

Furthermore Saussure claims that language doesn't describe the world, it constitutes the world for us, as we choose meanings to the elements around us. Barry chooses to illustrate this with the word pair terrorist/freedom fighter as a clear example of how choice of description also illustrates a point of view. In narrative examples from Uddevalla one group of inhabitants describes their rural dwellings as secluded while another more urban group of inhabitants calls the same place remote. The choice of adjective becomes indicative of the inhabitant's preference and worldview.

Either way you choose to use Saussure's logic when looking at the narratives collected in Lerum and Uddevalla, one has to look at the context between the different elements in each story. One also can look at the choice of words by pairing them with similar words, but with different values.

A last analysis example from the field of literature or narrative theory is the focalisation of the story. (Barry 2009, Johansson 2005, Holmberg 1999) In short – Who is talking about whom, and on whose behalf? Using the last narrative example above, from Uddevalla (4), observing pronouns and actors within the narrative, conclusions can be made about the narrators' perspective and perceived adherences. The narrator in this case exemplifies his argumentation with an anonymous "you" – "You must have...", "You should be able..." – addressing the issue as something applicable to everyone in the area, not just himself or his family. However in the end he exemplifies this general advice with his personal situation referring to his own family and how they address the issue of transport "...Me and the wife pick them up". Grouping narratives according to their focalisation could show if opinions or notions depend on whether you look to the collective's or to personal aims, if you argue for yourself or for a perceived greater good.

This interviewee had been asked to answer a survey a couple of years earlier about public transport in the rural parts of his municipality. He said he just answered "no" to the question "Do you use the public transport service?". This longer narrative answer clearly shows he has knowledge about transport issues in general (public transport included), not just about his own travel habits, of value. The inhabitants of an area generally showed understanding for each other's local situations within the same area, within families and among different groups of inhabitants.

#### 4. Result And Discussion

The intention was to compare qualitative and quantitative answers to questions on planning issues. The discovery was that people wanted to give qualitative answers in narrative form, even when asked to fill out a questionnaire. Also, since the every day life context described by participants is the same, whether they talk to politicians or planners, the crucial early stages of a participatory process occurs even earlier than the beginning of a specific urban planning process, in the political dialogue about an area and its inhabitants. Above are only examples of what more than data on a decided topic could be found in a narrative. The studies in Lerum have however not only shown how narratives are underused in their interpretation. It has also been observed how participants in different kinds of meetings between inhabitants and municipality representatives want to give their answers in the form of narratives. To them the context of the data is important. Based on that alone the interpretation methods and feedback systems should be looked at from a wider perspective than today. Instead we tend to analyse the narrative not based on its content, but based on which

part of the municipal organisation it is meant to be used in. Thus, the organisational silos are fortified using disconnected data from the narratives, rather than using the contextual coherences to find collaborations between adjacent organisational sectors in overlapping issues.

The inhabitant is an expert on the local context where the planning decisions ultimately land in physical form. But being an expert on context, also means connecting the whole picture of an area in one and the same story. While participants might focus more or less on the topic at hand for each meeting with representatives from the municipality, they tend to tell the same story over and over again. Simply put, the data and its connections remain the same, but the story focuses more on certain components depending on which municipal representative is conducting the meeting.

What happens in the municipalities after different types of dialogues or meetings is necessary simplification and interpretation of the data collected. In order for the data to be used in different decision-making processes, it needs this summarization or translation phase according to Cash et al (2003). However the purpose and addressee of the translation sometimes sifts away information that could be of value to other parts of the municipal organisation. Thus cementing the organisational silos, even when there is an outspoken ambition towards a more inter-sectorial way of working with overlapping issues, like in Lerum. One could possibly claim that some of what is lost in interpretation could contribute to the more holistic and sustainable view on local contexts.

For a physical planner the main input to take away from the participatory meetings should be the holistic view of the local context communicated through the stories told by participants – how issues and solutions overlap. The planner has many other interests to weigh in to the process, and must already choose and prioritize in the analysis materials. The overlaps and coherences of the narratives could be of help in this prioritization.

The role of the interpreter of participatory material can also be discussed in relation to power. The third step according to Cash et al (2003), mediation, could be considered as the correlation between participation and power and will be the focus of further studies based on the same case studies.

The categories of these interpretations on a political level are for example social safety, public transport, attitudes towards sustainable development and other main topics. A reflection based on the collected notes and surveys in Lerum is that the narrative fragments tend to contain suggestions and solutions, navigating towards physical planning. The politicians have difficulties taking care of “too detailed” issues and they are at risk of being caught in the political realm. Inviting civil servants from especially the municipal planning office to these political dialogue meetings, purely in an observatory capacity, could take care of these low scale suggestions in a more direct manner. The civil servant could easily weigh the public opinion and ideas against on-going planning processes. They could ask themselves whether the public opinion the politicians’ meet can respond to the solutions being developed in the planning office. Timelines and processes that today often run parallel to each other could be merged or at least related in a more efficient way. Several municipal actors could use the same narratives if the stories told by participants are told in their entirety and answered considering the narrative’s inherent qualities. Thus opening the dialogue and also finding contexts and connections that might suggest cooperation hitherto not considered by the different municipal actors.

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Interview with urban planner in Lerum Municipality 130213



# RATHER NETWORK

## Abstract:

*This text explores how the build-up and support of a local network can generate an arena for participatory decision-making. It shows how a continuous, shared communicative process becomes a prerequisite for well-based decision-making in a shared power world.*

*The network's build and prerequisites will depend on local contexts. According to the case example from Lerum Gråbo, a geographically defined network of inhabitants and other stake-holders can be initiated top-down and still build on and trust local initiatives. Allowing and supporting the network to take shape through its projects and tasks allows the network to develop according to its local context. The network learns to rationalize its communication patterns, and to identify the different potentials of different actors building the network further, through social learning and mutual story telling. There are two ways of being a key actor in a network – one's connectivity or the weight of one's formal responsibility.*

*Municipalities in Sweden have been pointed out as key actors when looking for solutions to complex issues like sustainable societal development and meeting challenges like climate change. Co-producing such solutions locally, lets specific issues be seen in a more comprehensive local context. Thus synergies and problem formulations can be found in a common understanding of local perspectives on global issues.*

*Comparing case experiences and descriptions of networking and decision-making in a shared power world, the text argues that power is shared the minute you invite to a participatory process, while responsibility may still lie with certain actors.*

## 1. Introduction

This paper focuses on the build, development and mandate of a local network in the municipality of Lerum, Sweden. The group is set up to achieve continuous communication with representatives from the municipality – both political and executive/administrative realms. Seeing this Co-Production Group (Medskapandegruppen), as it is referred to in Lerum (Lerum municipality, 2014), as part of the shift from government towards governance described over the past decades (f ex Healey 1997, Stoker 1998, Bryson and Crosby 2005, Torfing et al 2012 or in governmental investigations by f ex Amnå 2010, Johansson et al 2011, SOU 2000, SKL, 2013) lets this paper discuss governance more narrowly from a planner's point of view. Learning on Bryson-Crosby's descriptions of a shared power world (2005) this paper looks at how the network has developed and deepened its understanding of its own local context, through a few singular events and experiences. In the field of planning and architecture, the issue of participation often entails emphasis on the crucial early stages of a project or process (f ex Peterman 2001, Fröst 2004, Svennberg and Teimouri 2010). This paper investigates if the early stages can occur even earlier, in projects starting in a common, continuous process for communication.

Following the case in Lerum/Gråbo, the question was if this kind of co-produced local knowledge could be said to form a basis for more informed comments and have real influence on municipal decision-making? And does involving a local network in continuous dialogue result in better planning decisions being made?

Municipalities in Sweden have been pointed out as key actors when looking for solutions to complex issues like sustainable societal development and meeting challenges like climate change (Fenton et al, 2014, Rydin 2010). This is understandable as three important areas of responsibility rest with this most local authority in Sweden, i.e. societal planning, education and healthcare. To the inhabitant, the local context is understood as interlinked and correlating phenomena, while the municipalities tend to invite to participatory processes, one issue at a time. The network organization discussed in this text challenges this setup and finds synergies between and within issues by literally putting them all on the same meeting table.

Efforts in Lerum municipality on participation for sustainability's sake (Lerum municipality 2009) have been compared with research on participation in planning and on network development and shared power.

The case offers an example of a local participatory group where the municipality is part of an ongoing discussion about a local context. The continuity lets new ideas and issues latch on to an on-going narrative and common understanding in the group. The result is conclusions on why and how a local network, based on a delimited geographical area, can evolve and handle local issues.

The title of this text is intentionally ambiguous and somewhat grammatically limping. As the Co-Production Group studied is neither democratically elected nor working perfectly, it is a rather good network and not an ideal one. Secondly, the case study proved that the local actors were there to find if reached out to and that the issues the municipality wanted to discuss, already were discussed locally. Although sometimes partly relying on rumor and assumption rather than on facts, but combined with local knowledge and commitment. The local network(s) of stakeholders and local knowledge will exist in some way everywhere, and people talk and discuss their local context whether the municipality representatives are present or not. Being part of that communication lets municipal actors and local stakeholders learn from and teach each other in a continuous process of social learning (see also Bomble 2016). All in all: Rather network.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Case context

To understand the cases behind this paper, their context needs to be explained somewhat. The Swedish electoral levels are three: Municipality, region (county) and nation. Both these cases are situated in the Västra Götaland region (county) of Sweden, and both cases are on the municipal level. There are 290 municipalities and 21 regions in Sweden (Boverket 2012). The case behind this text is set in one municipality and in the geographical area of Gråbo – an urban settlement of a little more than 4000 inhabitants (4185 in the year 2010 according to Statistics Sweden – scb.se).

The political vision adopted in Lerum municipality in 2009 states that the municipality is to be “leading in issues of sustainable development by 2025” (Lerum municipality 2009 – own translation). In this vision and its following description it is stated that the urban settlement of Gråbo is to be the pilot case for the vision, and that new measures are to be tried here – first. And in the descriptions of Pilot Gråbo it says that the pilot cannot be considered a success until the “inhabitants of Gråbo themselves are able to and want to push the development of Gråbo as a sustainable community” (Lerum municipality 2011 – own translation).

To have participatory meetings (*samråd*) are legislatively mandatory in each planning project in Sweden. This makes planning the only municipal area of responsibility where this is regulated legislatively, but civil participation or dialogue is of course essential in healthcare and education as well. However, the setup of this mandatory participatory process has been criticized for being too difficult, slow, not representative enough and ill timed with what and how people want to participate (Åhlström, 2011, Fredriksson 2011).<sup>1</sup>

This text builds on the premise that discussions and knowledge about local development are already held in forums of different kinds both locally and within municipal organizations. The local network organized as described in this text is an attempt by Lerum municipality to invite several on-going discussions and sets of knowledge to the same meeting table and thus to create a common discourse on a geographically delimited area.

### 2.2 Earlier findings

A previous case study in Uddevalla municipality lead to conclusions about how common descriptions of current state was a prerequisite for constructive dialogue about future changes through building projects or planning prospects (Åhlström 2011). This in turn lead to future studies being more concerned about local civic engagement in general, rather than about participation in one planning project at a time. Drawing on Amnå (2012) one might phrase these studies as following how voluntary civic engagement can influence the political and administrative realm of municipal planning. Thus the function of civic engagement has been in

<sup>1</sup> The mandatory participatory meetings are discussed in both academia and in planning practice. For an overview of the discussions see f ex Fredriksson, 2012

focus more than the particular planning issues.<sup>2</sup>

The case is Uddevalla also found that interviewees referred to the municipality as one actor or opponent in an on-going dialogue. The municipalities are complex organizations of different offices and sectors divided into an administrative/executive and a political realm. Addressing this organization as “The Municipality...” was the origin of several misunderstandings and conflicts as this Municipality was perceived as one voice contradicting itself, when it was in reality several municipal actors speaking in different contexts. (Åhlström 2011)

The case study in Lerum/Gråbo thus relates to previous results, by studying how civil society and the municipality get to know each other in order to bridge the communication gap identified in Uddevalla. It also relied on the understanding that the local contexts as known by local actors are conveyed in narratives, but told from different angles depending on themes or objectives of participatory meetings. (Bomble 2013). Already, the Co-Production Group of Gråbo has been shown to be an example of participation through social learning (Bomble 2016) and this perspective on participation is needed to understand this texts conclusion as well.

### 2.3 Method

An embedded researcher has been attending and recording municipal meetings and workshops of consequence to Pilot Gråbo (see below). Experiences and reflections have then been reported back to the municipality at set intervals, orally at several occasions and in written reports (Lerum municipality, Åhlström/Bomble, 2012, 2013, 2014), in what the research project has chosen to call transformative assessment (Polk et al 2009, Lerum municipality 2014). Literature review and comparison to a previous case (see above) have then been compared to the extensive empirical material.

## 3. Case: the Co-Production Group of Gråbo

In the urban settlement of Gråbo in the eastern part of Lerum municipality in Sweden, the Co-Production Group (Medskapandegruppen in Swedish) was initiated by the municipality to create a local forum for local issues. The initiative is also part of the municipality’s Vision 2025 about becoming a sustainable municipality and Gråbo is to act as a pilot (project: Pilot Gråbo) in the attempts at finding new ways of being more sustainable. (Vision 2025, 2009) Thus the Co-Production Group is set in a context of participation for sustainability’s sake –that all must face the future challenges and all must take part in becoming more sustainable.

Tahvilzadeh (2014) lists four reasons for governance: Deepened democracy, responsabilization, efficiency and legitimacy. While not using those words specifically, the same reasons can be found in the initial reasons for establishing the Co-Production Group of Gråbo. The initial decree for the start of Pilot Gråbo says for example that:

*“The municipal vision and the climate strategy (...) demands new lifestyles, i.e. changes in the inhabitants everyday life. Such a development will be part of the work within Pilot Gråbo- and this cannot happen without close cooperation with those who live and work in Gråbo. The efforts in Pilot Gråbo cannot be pushed faster than the inhabitants are willing to come along.”*

(Lerum municipality, 2011 – own translation)

This short paragraph is one of the initiating formulations of what was to become the Co-Production Group of Gråbo. The group was eventually started when the process leader of Pilot Gråbo simply gathered mainly representatives of different associations, churches and other groups in Gråbo to a meeting in March 2012. This was in response to several conclusions being drawn simultaneously about more common arenas for discussion within the Pilot Gråbo discourse (Lerum municipality KS10.110 2011, pre-study report 2012, Gråboredningen delrapport 1, 2012). There was (and is) also a political presence in the group with representatives from the municipal board, as well as municipality employees who attend the group meetings depending on the issue at hand. The discussion about the group’s mandate, role, power and influence has been

<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive description of civic engagement as the basis of the wide field of studies in participation, Amnå 2012 draws conclusions about how civic engagement is developed over time, by explaining several perspectives on the will to participate as well as opportunities to be involved through many academic disciplines descriptions of civic engagement.

on the agenda every meeting. This is only natural, as the group has existed for two years with a very informal organization, having meetings open to anyone and discussing topics from sustainable produce and foods to school routes and art installations. The clearest proof of how the group has grown without the formal organization might be how this discussion has deepened over two years, as well as in how the group itself has developed and how its network takes shape. While the initial discussions in 2012 usually ended up in how to get money for projects and how to handle money without a formal organization, the latest discussions on the subject have been concerned with maintaining the welcoming and informal tone in the group while initiating a formal structure behind it. This formal structure is now in the form of an association which was founded in November 2014 (Medskapandegruppen, protocol, Nov 26 2014). The association format lets the group elect a board, handle a budget and create their own by-laws.

Among other things, these by-laws now state that the members of the association are local associations and organizations, while the Co-Production Group meetings are still open to everyone and anyone interested (Medskapandegruppen, by-laws, 2014). Thus avoiding a group of inhabitants making a coup in a specific issue by just showing up in larger numbers to a meeting, but also strengthening already existing associations in their respective fields and interests. The meetings are still as open and generally used as a forum for mutual information and discussion. Not until something needs to be formally voted on, the memberships of just associations matter (giving each association one vote). An association also gives the possibility to choose board members and the mandate to handle a budget. This organization builds on how important the informal and open meetings have been and are to the group. It clearly respects the gradual build-up of the group and its network. Which officials to invite from the municipality is to be based on the issues at hand while the political representation in the group is mandatory and phrased as being

*“...the link between the political realm and the group, reporting between these two about ongoing issues and suggested tasks for the group”.*

(Medskapande i Gråbo 2014-08-27, municipal document - Own translation)

Current members in the Co-Production Group of Gråbo are:

*The congregations of the Church of Sweden, the Missionary Church and the Penecostal Church, the business or enterprise association, the gymnastics association, the golf club, the local history association, the resident association, the scout corps, the garden association, the pensioners association, the horse club, the local sports club, a housing cooperative.*

(member list of the Co-Production Group of Gråbo, April 2016, translated not by name but by kind of organization into English)

While the Co-Production Group of Gråbo was started without a formalized organization, it has developed to the organization visualized in Fig A.

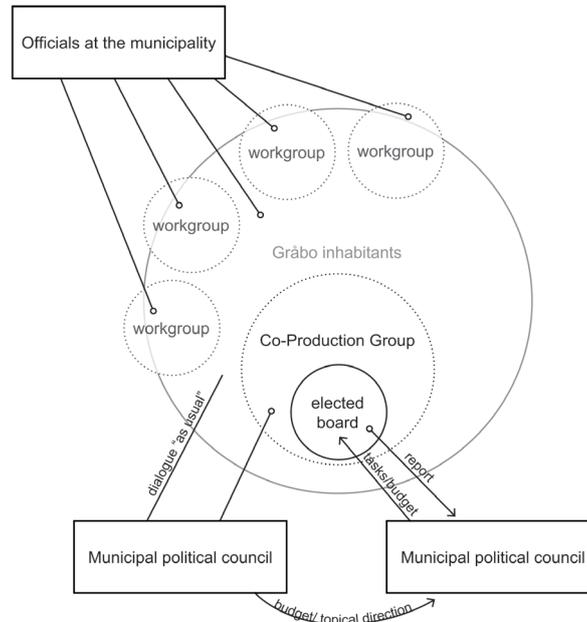


FIG A: The Co-Production Group is an open group inviting anyone from Gråbo to attend their meetings. The formal members are existing associations of Gråbo (Gardening ass., Historic ass., sports teams, churches etcetera). The board is chosen by the member associations. Issues raised that lead to action of some kind initiates a workgroup, which then reports back to the group about any progress. The municipal administration as well as its political realm are represented in the group, but with supporting, reporting roles. This figure is not to be seen as a finalized “how to organize a network”, but merely a visualization of how the example in Gråbo is arranged. Also, the figure does not show the group’s development over time, but shows how its different parts correlate to each other more or less flexibly. The temporary workgroups depend on issues and may exist for longer or shorter periods of time, while the association board is elected yearly. The dashed line of the Co-Production Group simply refers to its open meeting invitations and how inhabitants of Gråbo are welcome to be part of the group when an issue interests them.

The organizational schematic drawn up in January 2014 (almost a year before the group became a formal association) still holds true. It may help when trying to explain how the group fulfills Healey’s five issues of the institutional design needed to harbor governance effectively set up by Healey (1997):

- “- the division of governance tasks;
- their distribution between levels of governance;
- the boundary between formal government and the wider society;
- the use of administrative and technical expertise;
- the machinery for dispute resolution”

(Healey, 1997 p. 306)

They discuss which tasks are theirs and which responsibilities still lie with the municipal authorities. They discuss how different participants contribute by contributing working hours vis-à-vis contributing money or other kinds of sponsorship. In the discussions about budget and resources the boundary between formal government and civil society is constantly debated. The same is true in the discussions about responsibility and mandate. A very concrete way of managing how administrative and technical expertise can be used in the group, is that they invite municipal employees or outside expertise depending on what is on the agenda. And finally, many of the points made in the organization scheme of the group have their origin in discussions about representativity, fairness and formal decision-making; All measures to avoid, resolve or counteract conflicts that may arise (Medskapande i Gråbo 2014-08-27, Bomble, Lerum municipality 2014). As the issues decide the make-up of the group meeting by meeting, the organization of the group may stay as

described above, while the individual actors change over time and according to issues at hand.

In January 2016, the municipality employed a process manager (own translation of title *processledare*) to facilitate the group part-time. The chosen employee is a local reverend who has been part of the group since the start. In my mapping of the network, he was clearly an actor with high connectivity (see below). Choosing an already established actor in the network is to “consciously continue growing and learning from within” (paraphrase/ translated from informal conversation with the process leader of Pilot Gråbo, Lerum Municipality in January 2016).

### 3.1 Examples

The examples below are taken from a context where other issues, tasks and occurrences have been discussed and experienced simultaneously at monthly meetings since May 2012. Thus these events are chosen only to give an image of how it grows and learns with its tasks rather than through its formal organization. The lessons learned in each example could be found using other experiences or occurrences, but these examples lend themselves to somewhat short summarization. Note also that one of the examples is simply an event outside of the group’s control, which the group chose to act upon.

#### 3.1.1 Example 1

One of the projects within the Co-Production Group is the temporary use of a big demolition site in central Gråbo. Waiting for plans to be validated and building companies to invest, a field the size of six soccer fields was left empty. The Co-Production Group was presented with the possibility of managing several inhabitants’ ideas on temporary structures and activities to take place here. After an initial open workshop, three projects were chosen based on what the group considered possible within the time frame and within the capacities of the group itself and its networks. These were: An art wall, a labyrinth laid out in stone and some plantations and a car boot sale, which is now a reoccurring event on the site.

The temporary constellations on the demolition site gave many side effects to the group that are still referred to and used in other issues. Three deceptively simple ideas lead to meetings on many formerly unforeseen or unknown issues: How temporary/ low/ solid/ large can an art wall be without a building permit? How do we combine monetary aid from both municipality and private actors? How do we count sponsorship in material or working hours rather than money? Can this group even handle money without a formal setup as an association? How long is “temporarily”? Without answering their questions here, it is safe to say that everyone involved learned loads about municipal responsibilities, permits and laws as well as about their own capabilities and the strength of the local network. The responsibilities of different offices within the municipality became clearer, and the group learned who to call in which issues. These relationships with individual officials have also decreased the references to “the Municipality” as one big actor (Åhlström 2011, Bomble 2016). Now issues are rather addressed with “Who should we talk to about this?” or “Maybe [Name] can answer questions about this?” Also, the group needed and learned to understand the planning process and timelines for the housing project to be built on the field.

Building relationships with individual officials in the municipal organization was an expected outcome though, but less expected were the benefits of the mutual story, which the group and its network(s) now shared. The diverse common experiences from the project of the demolition site gave the group so many commonalities to refer to and understand, that one can clearly call it a case of social learning (Bomble 2016, Collins and Ison 2009). The common understanding about a series of events, about causes and effects or about chains of responsibilities, created possibilities for deeper understanding in the next issue or chapter of the same story. The demolition site project invited actors from the community, the municipal organization and from local businesses to a defined and graspable interplace (Stenberg 2004) for the exchange, growth and production of common knowledge.

Several members of the Co-Production Group now dared answer questions about the new detail plan from other inhabitants. At a meeting with the Co-Production Group “board” (by then not yet an official board) in August 2014 one comment was that “the people skeptical of the plan still seem to be the ones owning the

story about the plan. We need to communicate wider and tell that story from another perspective, showing how the new building projects characterize a new center for Gråbo” (Own translation from meeting notes). Not only does the quote show how the group has accepted a new vocabulary of storytelling and authority, but it also shows how they have become confident in having understood information and considering it theirs to communicate.

### 3.1.2 Example 2

A couple of months after the inauguration of the temporary projects on the demolition site, disappointing news hit Gråbo; The local gas station that also handled post packages was to close down. The first emails sent within the Co-Production Group emailing list were glum and disappointed, but by email number five someone already saw this as an issue to be handled in the co-production network. Without quoting that whole email, the suggestion in it reads:

*“(...) This must clearly be an issue for the Co-Production Group. This is completely crazy from an environmental perspective, to use our cars (the bus is hardly an alternative here) to go to Stenkullen and collect mail. Our politicians in the group [names of these] must immediately raise this issue to the municipal board and the municipal council. We must act together(...)”*

(Own translation)

This initiative started a now on-going project in the municipality, which is trying to involve the three biggest actors in mail delivery in Sweden in new sustainable solutions for package handling in the future. So far meetings have been held with representatives from Posten, Schenker and DHL, but no new solutions have been tried yet.

These “negative” news being received by the group and then turned into possibilities is an example of two things: First, the confidence in the group has grown to the belief that they already make a difference, without formal mandate, representative voting or even a budget. They already feel like a force or body of power in sharing experiences of accomplishments. Second, the email chains about these issues allowed for deepened understanding about how the network has grown and is growing. The emails with the news and their discussions were forwarded and distributed in a wider network than the original invite list and by the mapping the distribution of this particular email let me sketch a first idea on how the network grew and developed with an issue.

### 3.1.3 Example 3

In February of 2013, a Co-Production Group meeting was “hijacked” by 50 or so angry pensioners who wanted to protest how temporary building structures were to be put on their boule courts. The Co-Production Group did not really know what they could do about the issue raised, but municipal representatives present could channel the protest to city hall and the right municipal office handling the issue. The background to this hijacking was that the municipal political board had issued the task of finding land for a temporary housing project for immigrants, to the administration. Trying to avoid a long planning process, the administration looked for land already available for housing projects and owned by the municipality. The boule courts in Gråbo seemed a valid option under the circumstances. However, the fast track in this case, made the pensioner association who used the boule courts feel neglected and run over. As the municipality chose a Co-Production Group meeting to inform about this short process and the plans, the pensioner association found the same forum appropriate for their protest. However, the Co-Production Group had no role in neither the planning issue of finding land, the information that was given at their meeting by a municipal representative, nor did they have any say in the matter. The protest seemed understandable, impossible and futile all at once.

This meeting has been referred to abundantly when preparing the formal organization of the Co-Production Group into an economical association. The discussions and conclusions drawn from it state that, even while the Co-Production Group is not the owner of an issue, it can be the communicative channel for that issue, but with clear communication also about who the different stakeholders in that issue are. They also concluded that while the meetings need to stay open as they have been, a formal organization needs to address

the issue of voting mandate and avoid “hijacking” of an issue of interest. The Co-Production Association founded in November 2014 solved this by letting other local associations in as members. You can still come to meetings without being the member of any organization, to listen or to have your say. But to have formal influence within the Co-Production context, you need to be part of another local association. Thus the Co-Production Group Association is strengthening other parts of Gråbo’s civil society too.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Mapping the network

A first attempt was made to draw a complete, labeled network of all the actors and how new actors were added to the network in the selected examples. The figure quickly became illegible and complicated, so a second attempt tries to show one issue and its effect on the network (FIG B). The conclusion being that the structured support of a network described by Castell (2010) (see below) also happens organically in a network based on already established links and necessary new connections are formed based on the issue(s) at hand.

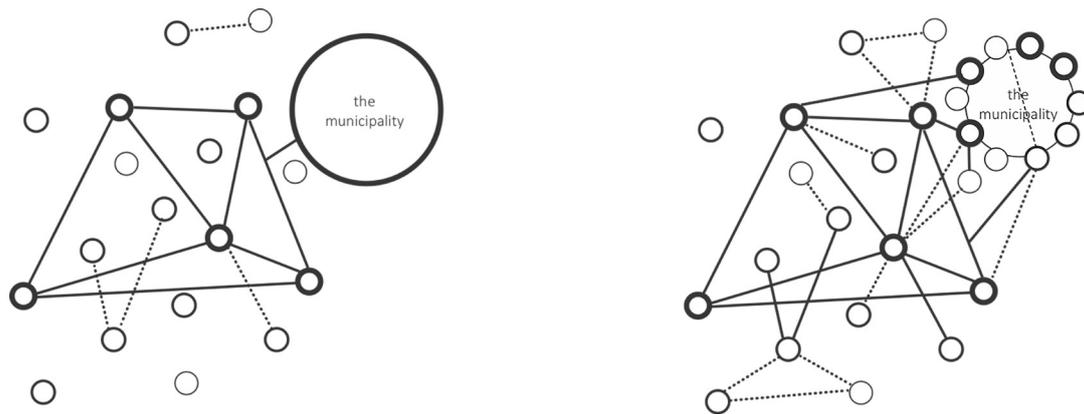


FIG B: A schematic figure of how the network gains new connections and understanding. Weak links are strengthened through mutual experiences and new weak links are established out of necessity when new actors are needed. The municipality went from being one actor to being understood as several actors. To the left – the first meeting. To the right – new connections to those participants after the art wall had been realized. The figure is schematic, and not definitive, as connections also rely on other experiences and their simultaneous processes.

Sketching these figure(s) however revealed conclusions about how the network works: As I wanted to look at the network as if it was flat like a mosaic, where different actors may be of different importance to the motif, but still all included (Bomble 2016, Tritter and McCallum XXX), I needed a way to mark these differences in the network. I tried color-coding and I tried something of a topographical map, acknowledging organizational hierarchies of responsibility rather than of power. However, in the geographical scale of Gråbo, too many actors needed several colors and “heights” or “weights” simultaneously in the visualization. Also, these qualities sometimes shifted from actor to actor depending on the issue at hand and what knowledge or responsibility was deemed of consequence. The realization was: There are two ways of being an extra important actor (key actor) in the network – through formal responsibility or through connectivity within the network. Sometimes, these qualities coincide (see fig C). Thus, there are hierarchies and power relations in the network, but the organization being delimited by issues regarding the sustainable development of and in Gråbo, made these hierarchies constantly interchanging and interdependent.

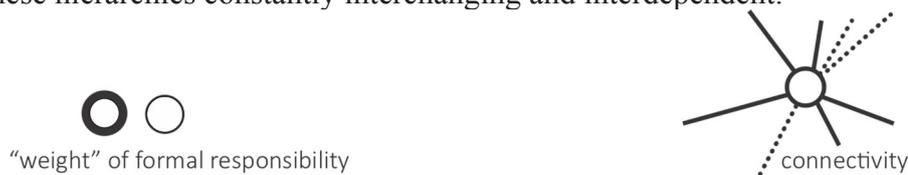


FIG C: Two ways of being a “key actor” in a network

The different ways of seeing actors in the network as more or less “important” has bearing on a discussion about power and responsibility respectively. Key actors of different kinds always play a role in participatory processes. Depending on local contexts these key actors can for example be civil, local actors, a particularly strong local politician or an association affiliated with most local issues. The different key actors can be

what makes local examples different enough to make conclusions or assessments difficult to compare, but just accepting that key actors in the process are key because of their formal responsibility (professional or political role for example) or their connectivity in the network could be a way of mapping or phrasing such comparisons. That is to say, hierarchies or power relations do exist in the network, but are intertwined and interdependent of each other when letting different sets of knowledge and experience enrich the relations and decisions. Torfing et. al. discuss the different varieties of governance in the network as being horizontal, vertical and diagonal relations (2010). What the Gråbo case showed is that if the same relations are maintained through several issues, discussions and experiences, the power relation between two actors can shift, depending on which set of knowledge or what connections are needed in correlation to the issue at hand.

A key actor without formal responsibility might thus be anyone in the local community with high connectivity within the network. Meaning that he or she or a whole association already shares knowledge and mutual stories with several other actors, or can be the one who ties new actors to the network most easily.

#### 4.2 How the Network Works

The lingering use of words like sending a decision “down” or “up” and the idea of the top-down hierarchical organization influences many discussions about power. And while organizational schematics of both political rule and the administration often might suggest the pyramid shape, the practical every day life in a municipal organization is much more complex than a top-down hierarchy and much more recognizable as the multi-node network schematic (Bryson and Crosby, 2005). While Bryson and Crosby study leadership in this so-called shared-power setting (Bryson and Crosby, 2005) their descriptions of these networks could instead be seen as maps of different kinds of governance and shared decision-making.

Contrasting the network to the more traditional hierarchical visualization of power where few rule over many, Bryson and Crosby describe the change thus:

*“An enduring ‘ideal’ organizational structure is the hierarchical pyramid, or bureaucratic model, which might be called the ‘in-charge organization’ [...] Increasingly however, this organizational structure is proving inadequate, both as a reflection of how organizations really operate and as a model of the forms most suited for today’s interconnected, interdependent world”*

(Bryson and Crosby, 2005 pp. 4-5)

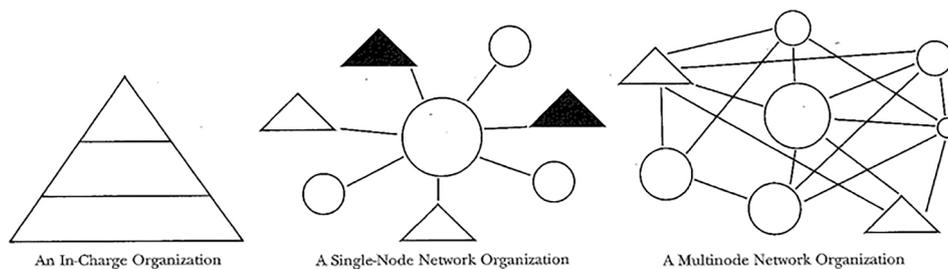


FIG D: Different organizational structures according to Bryson and Crosby 2005. While the figure first and foremost is showing the organizational structures, the different shapes within the networks could imply that the networks include smaller organizational structures that can be hierarchical (triangular) or lateral (round). This is my interpretation of the different shapes in this figure, as it applies to the case in Gråbo. An association in Gråbo can for example be seen as one actor in the network, while it is, in itself, a hierarchical organization.

The Co-Production Group of Gråbo, now organized in an “association of associations” (Protocol the Co-Production Group Nov 2014 – own translation) can thus be described as a Single-Node Network in its organization. The experiences from the Co-Production Group shows however that it works like a multi-node network where the network actors are related to each other in several ways.

The study by Bryson and Crosby then continues to investigate the “in-charge” part of the latter model – leadership in networks. But what if the network isn’t necessarily led by an authority, but rather exists based on a commonality as tangible as a geographical context? When decisions are to be made concerning a common geographical context, the network around that decision might be a both diverse, valuable and conflict ridden

group of stakeholders. From local inhabitants to associations and enterprises, they can and will all contribute with wisdom when it comes to changes in and to their neighborhood, town or landscape.

Instead of leadership, the Gråbo case tends to call for support (Lerum municipal board decision, May 2014) and facilitation (Bomble 2016). I find the example for supporting a network discussed and illustrated by Castell (Castell, 2010 p 97-98) helpful. Castell explains how existing strong or weak ties in a network need to be supported differently for the network at large to strengthen. (See fig 3) Weak links could be a connection to one particular issue, for example the person you call to use a certain space for an activity, or an expert only invited when discussions are on a certain topic. Strong links in the Gråbo example would be between the returning participants in the group, that relate and refer to each other as being parts of the Co-Production Group of Gråbo.

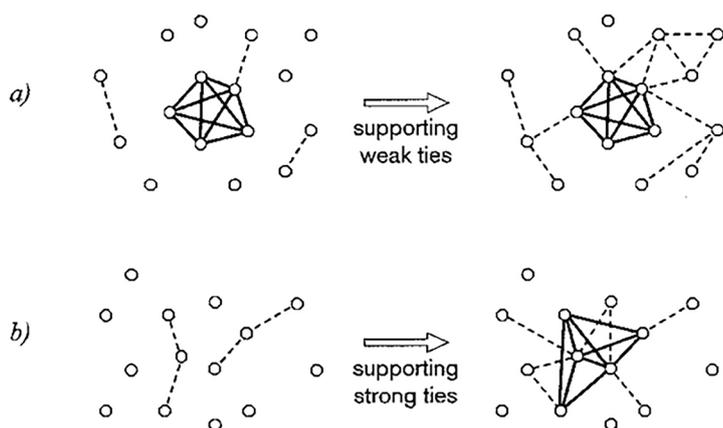


FIG E: Support of a network according to Castell 2010

Castell's figure can also be applied on other discussions on networks, when discussing power relations or organizational networks. Or in discussing whether participation is initiated top-down or bottom-up. By supporting existing local forces, rather than trying to form new ones, a top-down initiative can create a bottom-up empowerment and thus supporting self-governance and local initiatives. This can be said for Lerum, where the initiation the Co-Production Group supported existing weak links in Gråbo. The new group formed strong ties by sharing information and responsibilities in the new setting, placing old relationships in a new context and reinforcing local support between different local actors.

### 4.3 Meeting reasons for governance

Considering the four “reasons for governance” through different kinds of civic engagement and participation listed by Tahvilzadeh (2014), we see that the network in Gråbo can be said to live up to all of them. First, one can say that the participants consider *democracy being deepened* (1) in that they are trusted in local issues. This manifests in the issues where they not yet have formal mandate or say, but where they take charge and initiative based on their understanding of their co-productive role. Taking charge of issues in this manner can also be said to be a form of *responsabilization* (2) as they are now “our issues” or “our place”, rather than referring to the power and/or responsibilities of authorities. Introducing new topics in the Co-Production Group of Gråbo clearly shows how the group has made participatory dialogue *efficient or effective*<sup>3</sup> (3), depending on perspective. Discussions on any issue never starts from nothing, but is placed in the context and mutual story built by the group over the past years. Thus discussions quickly run further and deeper than they would, if they were started in a completely new group of people. And last but not least, the *legitimacy* (4) of any issue that has been discussed or handled in the group is stronger, not least within the municipal administration. The municipal representatives understand that contradicting the logic or understanding built in the group would have negative consequences in forms of lost trust, conflict and protest. Thus, the group in itself creates legitimacy for their issues by investigating them together. Not necessarily by reaching consensus, but at least mutual understanding. As the organization of the group “aspire(s) to deepen the ways in which ordinary people can effectively participate in and influence policies that directly affect their lives” (Fung and Wright 2001, p 7), the Co-Production Group of Gråbo can be referred to as another example in

3 For a full discussion on difference and meaning of efficiency and effectiveness respectively, see Larsson 2014, p68-75

the “reform family” described by Fung and Wright (2001 and 2003) as Empowered Deliberative Democracy (EDD).

#### 4.4 Transparency and shared power

What is referred to as formal responsibility in this text is often referred to as having power. But accepting that power is relational rather than an entity, drawing from the phrasings and definitions of Foucault (1970), makes it necessary to phrase the role of executive power in a network as something else. Formal responsibility is a way of explaining this. Discussing the planning authority as a key actor, with much formal responsibility, in a network of decision-making, rather than as an authority in a hierarchical system is yet another way of discussing interplace (Stenberg 2004). Imagining all actors involved in an arena for sharing knowledge supports the idea of discussing responsibilities rather than power.

*“In daily practice, information is power”* says Forester (Forester, 1999, p 202), and exemplifies with how planners can and do bend and shape the agenda for meetings about planning issues, including or excluding information from the process. Opening the process to being more transparent (Bomble, 2016) should therefore mean that not only information, but also power, is shared simply by inviting people to participate. In the case of Gråbo this is shown to be true, in how a participatory network simply is informed and thus part of decision-making processes formerly closed to them. Thus, influence can be said to be a sort of relational power.

Knowledge shared like this, with and within the network, makes it impossible for the municipal authorities to make decisions contradicting the logic known to the co-production network without losing trust, momentum and possibilities for future participatory initiatives.

The Co-Production Group of Gråbo is not always in agreement. They do not yet represent all of Gråbo’s inhabitants and probably never will. While the already strong forces and voices in a community can be said to form a local elite, the organization and build of the network in Gråbo at least gives the possibility for a wider representativity in the on-going communication and discourse about Gråbo’s future. The discussions were already on-going, but can now be merged into a larger discourse and build a more detailed image and story of Gråbo.

### 5. Results

The Co-Production Group of Gråbo is defined by its geographical limitations to Gråbo and its immediate surroundings. The group’s evolution issue by issue and experience by experience can be described in terms of network development, supporting weak and strong ties within the network by addressing actors that can be seen as stakeholders to the issue at hand. The claim is that the local network is already there, in discussions about local development between actors as well as in communication between authority and civil society. By inviting municipal actors (both political and administrative) to the same meeting table, to continuous communication in a group that changes slightly depending on issue, we find synergies between sets of knowledge that can spark solutions and collaborations that would otherwise not be found. These synergies and actors being tied to the network depending on their interest or knowledge about the issue at hand is what develops the network further, in strong as well as weak ties. The participatory network is a resulting idea, building on previous results on a communicative gap between municipalities and civil society and on participation being a process of social learning between and among participants and the authority. Letting a continuous communication with the network be the basis of all participatory efforts in a delimited area, creates a common understanding about relating pieces of knowledge and information about a place. The Gråbo example shows how discussions run deeper, quicker as new issues can latch on to this common understanding of the place.

Key actors in the network are identified by their formal responsibility or connectivity, being able to tie new actors or knowledge to the network depending on the issue at hand. While acknowledging that hierarchies of power are in play in the network, those hierarchies change depending on the issue at hand and on what knowledge is deemed of value to the group. Instead of a flat network, one might see it as an undulating topo-

graphical map.

Since no formal planning decision could be traced specifically from idea to decision(s) during the time of the study, the answer to if the network results in better planning decisions cannot be answered as such. What has been observed is a deeper understanding in the group of complexities within planning issues and responsibilities. Also, the discussions in the group have shifted from discussing the mandate and setup of the group as a whole, to an understanding of who and what is connected to different issues and how. This text will therefore claim, that a common understanding relating to a delimited geographical area, co-produced like in Gråbo, can serve as a prerequisite and co-initiated starting point for other, more specific participatory projects.

## 6. Conclusion

This text will claim, while not being able to present conclusive proof, that the Co-Production Group of Gråbo is an example of power being shared and inhabitants having true influence on municipal decisions, through the sharing of information and co-production of knowledge. Decisions being made by the municipal board reference the Co-Production Group of Gråbo as an important actor in implementation of decisions (such as the efforts on the demolition site and the continued information and relation to the housing project to take place there). No decision since its start has so far gone completely against the common logic or understanding of the local context of Gråbo, learned in the Co-Production Group. But should the municipality decide something completely contradictory, they cannot do so without being questioned or criticized for it, losing trust and momentum in the participatory efforts. This is because the decision-making process is more transparent the more inhabitants are invited to knowledge privy to it.

As to the perspective of planning issues specifically, the continuity of the meetings in the Co-Production Group have been a possibility for its members to understand the complexities of the long project timeline(s) that changes in the physical environment demand. The conclusion is that planning projects that can start in and latch on to such a continuous process of the communication as the Co-Production Group can offer, will be able to have a more initiated participation throughout as the problem formulation is co-produced and the planning project thus co-initiated.

A question not investigated in this text, but one that needs to be addressed if attempting participation in a local network of municipal and civil actors, is that of shared responsibility. While this text states that sharing knowledge already is to share power, the municipality's meaning when they say "to share power" with the network has been another. They mean sharing the responsibility of executing or developing certain local issues, which are municipal responsibilities today.

While this is an interesting notion in the development of more local democracy, one needs to make sure that such measures do not divide issues into too small morsels of the holistic perspective, thus complicating rather than facilitating possibilities for participation and social learning – and in an extension of that reasoning – hinders sustainable development. Some responsibilities are placed with the municipality for legal reasons or for reasons set up by our system of an elected, representative democracy. Sharing – or even transferring – those kinds of responsibilities to more local actors might need legislative changes in order not to break the law. That calls for another kind of study and a different perspective on power and participation than this text is based on.

Lastly, the start of the Co-Production Group of Gråbo was by no accounts democratic or ideal. Further studies to be conducted in the municipality of Vänersborg are to focus on the mapping and initiation of network participation such as the Gråbo example. The notion is that on-going discussions about a place are to be found in groupings in civil society such as local associations and other interest groups and that there may be a way for the municipal authority(-ies) to come and join in, rather than inviting participants to them.

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