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Felleshus and Paradiset in Vallastaden – care for social sustainability in a new neighbourhood

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Abstract. In recent years, the development of new neighbourhoods in Sweden has included social sustainability as an overarching aim. This research project focuses on Vallastaden (development of which began in 2017 and is still ongoing), host of Sweden’s largest built environment exhibition. The research explores how social sustainability was interpreted during the different phases of the project and how the built environment was constructed in relation to defining social sustainability. The results show that the planning process included a wide variety of stakeholders, and that social sustainability was defined broadly, with some versions being foregrounded and others backgrounded. Notably, some elements for residents, such as the so-called “felleshus” – large greenhouses with communal social spaces – and Paradiset – land designed for permaculture and urban gardening – were brought to the fore. Felleshus and Paradiset have been studied in greater detail: How have these communal spaces been developed over the last two years? Specific attention was paid to socio-material relationships. The empirical material shows various tensions between residents, activities, practices and the built environment. To deepen our understanding of the results, theoretical approaches relating to “matters of care” and ethico-political dimensions of care have guided our analyses. With these approaches, the work performed to achieve what was expected from felleshus is acknowledged, as are the effects of the work and relationship-building involved in felleshus and Paradiset. The conclusion is that social sustainability involves many processes, which might take time and evolve in unexpected directions. Openness to these processes must be taken into account when planning and constructing similar neighbourhoods.

1. Introduction
Social sustainability has been described as the pillar of sustainability that has attracted the least attention, while economy and ecology have been included in different policy fields, such as urban planning. [1] Even so, social sustainability can be included in several of the United Nations’ sustainability goals, such as Goal 3 (good health and wellbeing), Goal 5 (gender equality), Goal 11 (sustainable cities) and Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). [2] In Sweden, national authorities have expressed concern about current urban development not being sustainable in terms of any of the common dimensions. [3] For example, the Swedish environmental quality goals and the goal specifically targeting housing and other constructions – A good built environment – will not achieved through current development, policies, rules and regulations. Instead, with the current trend, there is a fear that environmental and cultural values will not be taken into consideration. Issues in relation to social sustainability have been identified by Swedish authorities as: abuse of substances and drugs, alcohol, tobacco, crime prevention, care of asylum seekers, violence in close relationships, trafficking, prostitution, honour violence and...
oppression, parenting support, minority groups, equality, public health, social inclusion and human rights. [4] The social dimensions of housing have also been debated, for example in terms of homelessness, segregation, overcrowded flats, gentrification, inequality, low income filtering and social polarisation. [5]

In this research, our focus is on a new city district – Vallastaden – which has an ambition of specifically targeting social sustainability, but the definition of social sustainability differs to some extent from Swedish authorities’ issues of concern. The key concepts for Vallastaden during the urban planning process, as expressed in the conceptual programme, were: “[…] democracy and health, economic and social security, identity and gender equality, multiplicity and integration, participation and influence, and cultural heritage […]” [6 p. 17]. While the authorities targeted the issues perceived to be present in many parts of Sweden, the conceptual programme for Vallastaden focused on phenomena presented as solutions to these issues. The conceptual programme was translated into a masterplan for Vallastaden, in which the core concepts were interpreted by the architectural firm Okidoki. [7] The masterplan described how the conceptual ideas would be transformed into concrete objects, such as buildings, streets, squares and green areas. The current paper presents our research on two of these concretisations: the felleshus community buildings and the Paradiset park. Our overarching research approach is a qualitative case study focusing on a clearly defined geographical area: the Vallastaden district. Relational materialism, and specifically “matters of care” [8] and “ethico-political dimensions of care” [9], have guided our analyses of the empirical material. The aim of this paper is to explore how social sustainability was interpreted in the different phases of the project and how the built environment was constructed in relation to how social sustainability was defined. We set out to answer the following question: How have the felleshus and Paradiset communal spaces been developed since the inauguration of Vallastaden in 2017 until the first year of our research project in 2019?

2. Theoretical approach
The theoretical approach of the research project is based primarily on relational materialism, as proposed by Mol [8], suggesting an analytical focus on how, what, when and why entities are enacted in different practices. Another layer of the analyses is “thinking with care” [9], which directs our focus to labour/work and ethics/politics, as well as associated tensions when some aspects are present and others are absent in the practices of living environments. The empirical elements of this research project are guided by approaches suggested by Haraway [11,12] (situated knowledge) and Puig de la Bellacasa [9,10] (thinking with care), with phenomena being viewed together with their relationships to humans, non-humans, their worlds, and the associated “doings”. Both approaches call for academic work that explores phenomena as thick, layering and relational, and acknowledges tensions and frictions. In practice, these approaches mean spending time in the field, exploring and talking to the people involved, and asking about their relationships and the challenges they have experienced.

3. Method and data collection
The empirical research approach for this paper has been inspired by the urban planner researcher Bent Flyvbjerg, who argues for single case studies in urban planning [13]. Flyvbjerg has focused on power dimensions in urban projects processes and shown that it is possible to learn about power from detailed descriptions and analyses of how decisions are made, and from how and by whom different parts of projects are carried out. This paper reports on the first year of our three-year project, and includes empirical material from studying documents such as the master plan, field observations from walks and activities in the neighbourhood, interviews with people who had a professional role in the planning process and group interviews with residents.

4. The conceptual and masterplan for social sustainability
The masterplan for Vallastaden shows clear references to historical Swedish land use practices and 20th century community building urban planning. The master plan “Tegar”, from the architectural firm Okidoki, can be translated as “Selions” and refers to European medieval agricultural ownership and
farming, known as the open-field system, where all farmers shared fields for crop growing and owned only a strip of land. This land-owning culture was eventually abandoned in favour of what was perceived to be more efficient methods of land ownership and farming. Okidoki argued for the economic and social benefits of selions in current times:

“Selions were originally a social insurance against the failure of crops and a way to share the best farmland. At the same time, they created opportunities for everyday meetings. The Valla Selion masterplan starts with the social capacity of selions, and recreates the spatial and social qualities of the villages of the open-field system.” [1]

The idea behind using strip properties in Vallastaden was to bring about a structural change in prevailing neighbourhood planning methods, creating variation and a sense of community by prescribing communal spaces at the centre of each block. The structural change implies a mix of developers, architects and ownerships in every block, creating a varied visual impression and persuading residents to buy into several shared activities and spaces, such as felleshus and the Paradiset community park.

4.1. Felleshus
Felleshus could be interpreted as an updated community space, which has previously been integrated into Swedish urban planning, for example in the 1970s and 1980s. While some of the 1970s community spaces were positioned in parts of the neighbourhood that were not attractive for other purposes, the felleshus in Vallastaden are placed at the centres of the blocks, with greenhouse-like designs featuring extensive glazing, thus making the activities inside highly visible to passers-by and from some residents’ windows, and connecting the outside environment and activities to the felleshus inside. At present, six felleshus have been constructed, with a similar conceptual idea of combining extensive glazing and greenhouse spaces with a “building within the building” which includes, for example, a kitchen, sleeping accommodation and a lounge area. The designs are, however, different for each felleshus and both the exteriors and the interiors differ slightly in terms of shape, height, colours, etc.

The residents of each block are co-owners of their block’s felleshus, and residents are also members of co-operatives who decide on and manage all the different tasks involved, such as energy supply, cleaning, waste management, maintenance and sub-letting the premises for different social activities. The co-operatives had to be up and running before any activities could be carried out in the felleshus. All the residents of Vallastaden are members of co-operatives, but the shares are different depending on whether they are owner-occupants living in detached houses or tenants renting flats in multifamily buildings. Owner-occupants have larger shares in the co-operatives, and also pay a larger share of the operating costs.

The opening dates for the different felleshus varied, and some are not yet operational. When the members of the co-operatives disagree about how to allocate costs or which activities should be allowed in the felleshus, the buildings are closed to everyone until further notice. In some cases, co-operatives decided to stop sub-letting their felleshus for parties following incidents. Being a resident of Vallastaden automatically implies a commitment to a felleshus, both economically and legally, as prescribed by the co-ownership agreement. None of the residents in our study described the felleshus as their most important place for social activities in Vallastaden, although some felleshus are frequently used for various meetings. Residents in one of the blocks which lacks a felleshus stated that they have not given this fact much consideration, but could see the potential of a felleshus for the largest group in their block: students.

4.2. Paradiset
Paradiset is an open combined community park and allotment area, and was part of the masterplan. The selion design in the masterplan would cater for a densely built neighbourhood, with few planned and organised green spaces, except for the river park cutting through the area in an east to west direction. The Paradiset park idea is presented in the masterplan as one of the main features of the masterplan, with a vision of creating a major city park as part of the green infrastructure of Linköping. The park would be a link in the chain of existing city parks, linking up with neighbouring green municipal reserves
such as Vallaskogen and Tinnerö. In addition to contributing to the green infrastructure, Paradiset would also connect with and add to the existing cultural history in this part of the city: Gamla Linköping open-air museum and outdoor recreation area in Valla. The historical use of the land would be acknowledged in Paradiset, with traditional regional crops being grown commercially on a small scale and sold at open-air marketplaces in the neighbourhood. [7] The park now features an audio installation “Väsen” (“Beings”) by sound artist and composer Stefan Klaverdal, with hidden speakers from which stories are told by Linköping comedian Anders “Ankan” Johansson about previous activities, events and beliefs in the area. [14]

Several of the ideas in the masterplan, such as the arboretum and commercial small-scale farming, have not yet been realised in Paradiset, but 79 allotments are now in use. In 2017, the non-profit organisation Paradisodlarna was established with the aim of encouraging urban gardening and community spirit, and creating an interesting destination in Linköping. Paradisodlarna is not a member of the Linköping allotments association, unlike the other four allotment areas in Linköping, but is organised differently in economic and spatial terms. Paradiset is not surrounded by barbed wire fences and closed gates, in contrast to the older allotment areas, but is open to everyone. The allotments are all open air, and no permanent structures such as sheds are allowed. According to the masterplan, Paradiset’s gardeners should live so close to their allotments that no storage or permanent shelter against bad weather would be necessary. Gardening tools should be carried from users’ homes in Vallastaden, and it should be possible to simply walk home in the event of an unexpected rain shower. In 2017, the intention was to dedicate half of the allotments to Vallastaden residents and half to residents of the whole of Linköping, but the Paradisodlarna association decided to rent to anyone who would be interested. By 2019, there were no vacancies and there was a waiting list to rent an allotment in Paradiset. During the two years since the inauguration of Paradiset, some of the spatial and material conditions have changed. Folkträdgården (the People’s Garden) – which was managed by a group of young enthusiasts who decided to start a new project in another part of the city – has disappeared. Small signs have been put up, designed by one of the members of Paradisodlarna, reading: “Private allotments – gardening all year round. Please look, but let us do the harvesting.” Another addition in Paradiset are sheds for garden tools, with one shed for each allotment.

5. Conclusions
The aim of social sustainability in Vallastaden is to create shared spaces and to engage citizens in the felleshus and Paradiset collective spaces. This engagement required residents to make the shared spaces a matter of care [9] and to engage with their fellow residents. The organisation was different for each felleshus, and sometimes the shared spaces became more of a problem than a place of care, such as when there were noise problems from parties at the felleshus or when the members of Paradisodlarna did not get to harvest their own vegetables. The planning of Vallastaden facilitated places for care by planning for shared space, but the way it was organised sometimes led not only to shared spaces, but also to spaces where private borders were drawn up. Borders were drawn between those people growing the vegetables and those passing through the shared spaces in Paradiset. Likewise, borders were drawn between the residents involved in managing the felleshus and those who wanted to arrange parties there. Thus, even though shared space can be a way to enable caring and sharing, there is also a need for privacy and the ability to draw borders within the shared space.

Planning for social sustainability bring many kinds of challenges, and in this paper we have shown some of the problems that can arise when shared spaces and community engagement are important in a city district. It is vital that the planning process takes the different forms of engagement that might arise seriously, and remains open to the need for private spaces and borders in relation to shared spaces.

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