Beyond cycle paths: A bottom-up approach to promoting cycling culture

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Abstract

This thesis examines a community-based approach to promoting cycling, suggesting that a top-down approach of infrastructure and facilities should be complemented by a bottom-up approach by the community to help address complex behavioural norms inherent in transport modal choice. The research hinges on the framing of cycling as culture – a holistic yet heterogeneous activity – and the idea that developing cycling culture will contribute to increased transport cycling. Using an action research process, a bottom-up approach was formed by creating a meeting point for actors in the cycling community of Växjö, a municipality in southern Sweden. This meeting point evolved into a collaborative space through the progression of social learning where actors realized the benefit of working together. The actors formed a partnership by starting a new organisation with the goal of supporting and developing cycling culture. The first project for the organisation was hosting a cycling festival – an opportunity to bring Växjö's cycling community together via a cultural event. The municipality, meanwhile, began to consider integrating cycling culture into its cycling strategy. The project serves to demonstrate an approach to promoting sustainable transportation and the effective merging of action research methods with sustainability science through the use of societal actors as local experts, coresearchers and agents of social change.

Keywords: Bottom-up, partnership, collaboration, action research, cycling, culture, sustainability science.

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1 Introduction

Cycling is an activity that contributes to society with benefits to health, equity and social cohesion (Torres, 2013; Bhopal, 1995; Pucher, 2010; Montes, 2012; Aertsens et al, 2010). It provides environmental benefits and contributes to a sustainable society as a transport mode with zero emissions (Fraser, 2011). With these benefits, promoting cycling should be easy – however the reality behind this is not always the case. Beyond the barriers to cycling, such as journey purpose, time, distance, and the physical environment, (Horton, 2011, Parkin, 2007, Christie, 2010), there are additional complexities related to the psychological factors involving the perception or meaning of cycling as it relates to status and lifestyle (Aldred, 2012a,b; Aldred, 2013; Horton 2006, Pooley, 2011). Additionally, many western cities, or specifically their constructed physical environments, have been built to favour the car (Lundin, 2004; Emanuel, 2012). Since the post-war era, the car has been viewed as the path to modernity and over seventy years of car-centric planning have shaped towns and cities in favour of motorized transport (Emanuel, 2012). As a result, there is little hospitable space left for walkers and cyclists in many cities (Jones, et al. 2012) and attempting to use the bicycle in spaces shared with either cars or pedestrians can result in conflict over entitlement and legitimacy (Brown, 2010; Aldred 2012b).

In response to concerns over pollution, global warming, congestion and declines in personal health, cities are increasingly promoting cycling as a form of transport. In recognition of road and space sharing conflicts and safety among users, many cities are building infrastructure such as separated lanes and allocating road space to cyclists in an attempt to create safe conditions for cycling. In addition to structural means, campaigns and communication programs help to inform and promote cycling as well as walking and public transit. Cycling strategies are drafted by city transport departments to establish plans for cycling routes and oftentimes present goals of increasing cycling modal share (compared to car use, public transit use and walking) and increased safety. Questions exist, however, over the effectiveness of these city-initiated top-down approaches, suggesting policies and interventions are developed without understanding their impacts and can lead to unintended effects and limited success (NICE, 2006; Pooley, et al. 2011 p.1601). Mandatory helmet laws, for example, may have a negative effect on travel behaviour by decreasing bicycle use (NICE, 2006).

Given the questioning of top-down approaches and the complexities that surround travel behaviour, new approaches to encouraging cycling are needed. As a complement to the top-down approach that cities take, I propose a bottom-up, community-based approach that encourages cycling as a heterogeneous activity. Bottom-up approaches have been applied to sustainable planning in several contexts. Examples include culture and participation in planning and land use in Botswana (Hammami, 2012); a bottom-up derived discourse in the Netherlands around a “balanced city” that integrates the domains of family life (Karsten, 2009); participation in and ownership of sustainable rehabilitation of the built environment in Lebanon (El Asmar, 2012); and youth strategies in urban policies in Croatia (Sakaja, 2011). A bottom-up approach can encourage participation and a
sense of ownership of urban planning strategies in addition to forming grassroots movements that improve society and urban life. In the context of cycling, the approach can take the form of a grassroots movement to support cycling within the community while influencing better integration of cycling culture in urban and transport planning.

I take inspiration from Horton’s insistence that cycling should be promoted for the reasons one wants to (freedom, social inclusion and passion for example), rather than those one ought to (environmental, health, financial for example), thereby referring to cycling as an enjoyable activity rather than a moral practice (Horton, 2006b). Borrowing UNESCO’s definition of culture (UNESCO, 2001), as a component of lifestyle, value systems, tradition and beliefs, and using a framework of social learning (Wals et al., 2009; Reed, 2010; Lotz-Sisitka, 2012), my approach frames cycling as culture to help unite the actors in a city’s cycling community. These actors – the cycling organisations, retail shops, sport clubs, community organisations and health professionals – are the local experts (Backstrand, 2003) who are most likely to understand the characteristics that make people want to cycle. Partnerships among actors can create a bottom-up approach to strengthen the cycling community and promote cycling culture via a holistic and inclusive process so that, “cycling simultaneously becomes, on the one hand, more interesting, attractive and appealing and, on the other hand, more ordinary and acceptable” (Horton, 2006b).

To test this approach, I use the case of Växjö, a city in southern Sweden that has invested in infrastructure with the intention of increasing commuter cycling and uses campaigns to promote safety and awareness among road users. According to its cycling infrastructure strategy (Växjö kommun, 2009), Växjö intends to become a “cycling city” and in 2010, the municipality declared its ambition to become fossil fuel free by 2030 (Växjö kommun, 2011). Commuter surveys show that at the municipality level, cycling modal share has increased from 16% in 2002 to 19% in 2012, just missing its target of 20% (Växjö kommun, 2013). Indications in the city centre, however, show a decrease in cycling journeys by 4% between 2004 and 2012 (P. Wallin, personal communication, 30 January 2013). The city ranked 11th among 33 Swedish cities in a report by Cykelfrämjandet, a Swedish cycling organisation, that examined the efforts of local governments to increase cycling and make cycling safer and more attractive (Gorjifar, 2012).

While Växjö is not considered among the top cities for transport cycling in Sweden, it does have a growing leisure cycling component. Gardner (1998), Heinen (2010) and Mullan (2012) show there exists some crossover between transport (commuter) and leisure cycling, inviting the idea of viewing cycling through a much broader and holistic lens. Through a culture lens, I use action research as a means to turn knowledge to action (Cash, 2003) via a process that encourages social learning and collaboration among the actors of Växjö’s cycling community.

The outcome of this research can help cycling actors to collectively support and develop cycling culture, while simultaneously encouraging the activity and practice they are engaged with through work, volunteer or recreational reasons. The public could gain new entry points to cycling, leading to potential instances of social learning and positive social interactions. The municipality, meanwhile, gains a
complementary approach to promoting cycling that can increase the likelihood of reaching its sustainability goals related to transport goals and fossil fuel use. The outcome can be useful for other cities that are also working to increase cycling, particularly those that also contain a community of organised or semi-organised cycle-related acting groups.

Within academic contexts, the research provides a Swedish perspective that contributes to the research of cycling cultures in the UK (Aldred, 2013; Aldred, 2012a,b) and puts into practice calls for increased diversity of cycle-related policy (Horton, 2006b; Jensen, 2009; Jones, 2005). This research contributes an example of community building via action research (Hall, 2009, Stoecker, 2008; Letiecq, 2012; Bordorkós, 2009) and practices sustainability science via the utilization of stakeholder and community knowledge in a transdisciplinary setting (Lang, 2012; Brundiers, 2011).

This paper begins by providing a background on Växjö – its current cycling-related strategies and the cycling community. Next, the methodology around using two cycles of action research and social learning is illustrated before the process; outcome and reflections are described in detail. Lastly, the paper concludes with implications for community, municipality (civil servants) and academia. I follow the recommended structure by McNiff (1996) for a thesis dissertation using action research.

2 Focus

My main research question asks: how can a process that encourages social learning among community actors lead to new partnerships in promoting cycling? I guide my process via two aims:

1. To initiate a meeting point among cycling community actors where social learning leads to new initiatives and collaboration.

2. To facilitate further collaboration, where participants develop partnerships and work together to support and develop cycling culture in Växjö.

I take several roles in this process including: initiator – by initiating the process at the start of each research cycle; facilitator – by scheduling meetings and promoting a process that is participatory, inclusive and relevant to the actors and context of Växjö; networker – by seeking additional actors in the community and providing an interface between the cycling community and civil servants; researcher – by bringing my experience and knowledge from academia that complements those of the local actors. Lastly, I am a participant – I use the opportunity and experience to broaden my own knowledge of cycling and cycling culture and I learn about the people and different communities and organisations of the city in which live. Ideally these partnerships will be long lasting and extend beyond the research period; to achieve this, it will be necessary to find a way that the process becomes self-sustaining regardless of my future involvement.
This research will focus on the early stages of the process and outcomes during a ten-month period – from June 2012 to April 2013. Activities will likely continue following the thesis period, however, these will be beyond the scope of the paper. I acknowledge the missed opportunity to learn from the outcomes of these later activities but defer them as opportunities for additional research.

The research is limited in its scope related to the context of Växjö and transport behaviour and modal choice. I will consider a comparison of cycling conditions and behaviours in Växjö to other cities to be beyond the scope of this research, other than to suggest there are no features that make the city very good or very bad for cycling. I will not go into a deep analysis of barriers to cycling, as they exist in Växjö and other cities (Parkin, 2007), aside from what I learn from actors during the research. I also avoid assessing the approaches used by the city to promote cycling, except that given the urgency of reducing fossil fuels by 2030, I suggest that additional approaches are necessary.

3 Content

As a researcher in sustainability science and environmental studies, I value transdisciplinary and participatory processes. It is important to me that my work focuses on socially relevant problems, enabling mutual learning (within and outside academia) and aims to create knowledge that is solution-oriented, socially robust and transferable to both scientific and societal practice (Lang, 2012). Using an action research approach follows the practice of sustainability science by providing a proactive method for addressing socially relevant problems. And as a new resident of Växjö, and a cycling enthusiast, I have a personal interest in being a part of developing cycling culture in the city.

During the Spring of 2012, I had a conversation with the project leader for sustainable transportation at Växjö’s traffic department. I spoke about my experiences with cycling culture in Vancouver, Canada and how it compared with that in Lund, Sweden. The project leader leads a committee that is responsible for the cycling strategy of the city and his interests are in encouraging more bicycle commuting in the city - primarily promoting the shift from car to bike for transport purposes. He was interested to learn more about cycling culture and I was hired to write a report on the topic for the municipality (Hale, 2012) during the summer of 2012. I later hosted a workshop with actors in the cycling community during the Fall of 2012; the combined events would be my introduction to working with the city and the cycling community of Växjö and provide the foundation for this research.
3.1 Växjö: Europe’s greenest city

Växjö is the capital of Kronoberg county of Sweden; it lies to the south of the country in the province of Småland. The layout of the city is largely dictated by several large lakes and surrounding forests, as shown in Figure 1b so it is a city that provides many opportunities for outdoor recreation.

![Figure 1a,b - Maps: location of Växjö, detail of city](source)

Växjö municipality encompasses Växjö city along with neighbouring small towns and villages; the municipality has a population of approximately 84,800 inhabitants and has been increasing with an average of 1000 inhabitants per year since 2002 (SCB, 2012a).

In 1996, the municipality declared its ambition to become fossil fuel free and in 2010, this ambition was refined to include the target year of 2030 (Växjö, 2011). Along with this ambition, it has established a number of energy- and transport-related goals, as seen in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 - Energy and Transport Goals, as percent change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fossil fuel sourced CO₂ (1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity consumption (1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle traffic (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public transit use (2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy consumption (2008)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Units: percentage change (’-‘ denotes reduction, ‘+’ denotes increase) from reference year, in brackets
No 2008 data available for public transit use and energy consumption in city’s environmental plan.
Data source: (Växjö kommun 2010)

The table shows the progress the city has taken in reaching these goals – fossil fuel sourced carbon dioxide and electricity consumption are following the desired
trends. In fact, the municipality had reached 86% and 71% renewable energy use for heating and electricity, respectively by 2011, as shown in Figure 2. The municipality’s achievements prompted a BBC journalist to label Växjö as *Europe’s greenest city*. The name has stuck since and is used in political, policy and marketing campaigns including everything from renewable energy use to promotion of buying local produce.

Source: (P. Wallin, personal communication, 26 March 2013)

**Figure 2 – Portion of renewable energy use in Växjö in 2011**

Among the municipality’s examples of renewable energy use is the less successful example of transport. In 2011, transport used only 6% for renewable energy, accounting for 70% of total fossil fuel use in the city and contributed approximately 80% of the city’s carbon dioxide emission (P. Wallin, personal communication, 2 May 2013).

The city’s transport modal share for Växjö municipality was measured as part of a travel survey that is conducted every 10 years (Växjö kommun, 2013). The results are shown in Figure 3 and compare data from 2012 with the 2002 survey. Car and public transit decreased 2% and 1%, respectively, while walking and cycling increased by 1% and 3%, respectively.
Comparing survey data from 2012 to 2002 as total, weekday (vardag) and weekend (helg). Modes include car (bil), public transit (kollektivt), bicycle (cykel), walking (till fots) and other (annat färdsätt). Source: (Växjö kommun, 2013)

**Figure 3 - Transportation modal share of Växjö municipality**

In contrast to the increase that the municipality has seen, Figure 4 shows data for the city over eight years from a counting system placed at 24 locations during two weeks every year - one week during Spring and one during Fall (P. Wallin, communication, 30 January 2013). The graph shows a decrease in the number of cycling journeys by 4% between 2004 and 2012. A number of factors might contribute to the declining tendency in the city measurements, compared with municipality survey data – it could depend on the weather during those weeks, the changing route preferences as new cycling routes have been created or it could simply be a representation of different dynamics between city and municipality habits. Civil servants consider the municipality survey data to be a more accurate representation of cycling in Växjö – that showing an increase over the last ten years (P. Wallin, personal communication, 2 May 2013).
The municipality has an average of 470 cars per 1000 people (SCB, 2012b), or a total of approximately 39,731 cars, with 90% of households having access to a car (Växjö kommun 2013). A population growth rate of 1,000 people per year suggests the number of cars is bound to grow significantly by 2030. This presents a challenge for the municipality to meet its goal of becoming fossil fuel free when it currently has nearly 40,000 cars, in addition to trucks, tractors, snowploughs, taxis and other vehicles running on fossil fuel. One method the city is using to address this is through the use of biogas production, as an alternative fuel for public and private vehicles (Växjö kommun, 2011). They have also started mandating the use of renewable fuels in vehicles used for service contracts such as garbage collection and promoting the purchase of highly fuel efficient cars (miljöbil) and electric cars.

In its transport strategy from 2005, the city declared its intention to become a “Cykelstad” (cycling city) with the goal of becoming Sweden’s city with the best conditions for cycling and the highest cycling rate (Växjö kommun, 2005). The strategy does admit, however that based on statistical data, the city's current situation does not yet reflect this ambition. A cycling city is defined in the strategy as one that “promotes cycling in its physical operations, organisational assets, and service campaigns. Cycling should be included in land use planning and transport plus other sectors in society. Many use the bike in a cycling city and the city or urban area is characterised by its cycling culture.” (ibid, p.10) Within the transport strategy, the city outlines is four methods of achieving the status of cycling city:

1. Prioritise cycle traffic: change mindset of planners and politicians, bike traffic becomes a higher priority over car traffic in daily planning, highlight problem areas.
2. Better infrastructure: develop a good network in urban areas and connect neighbouring villages, maintain high quality in detailed design. Goals include continuous cycle network, improved parking and safer conditions for cyclists.

3. Operation and Maintenance: maintain quality of cycle track and paths, considering that single vehicle accidents can be a problem with bicycle use.

4. Improve organisation: creating a reference group from the user side as well as people in environment and health departments to contribute to the planning process.

Similar discourse is found in the city's bicycle route plan, in which it desires to become a “cykelkommun,” taking its ambition beyond the city, to the municipality (Växjö, 2009, p.8). The plan includes the cycling routes that have been constructed, including both dedicated on-road lanes and separated tracks, as well as the 42km Växjö Runt, an on and off road cycling path around the city. In addition to cycling infrastructure, the municipality is part of EU-funded projects that form collaborations among different municipalities in Europe to create methods to promote more cycling. Växjö also uses various campaigns to promote cycling and traffic safety such as Ögonkontakt, a campaign to encourage eye contact among road users Växjö kommun (n.d.,a).

3.2 Cycling as Culture

Cycling culture can be a basis for mutual understanding by a group of actors who come with different backgrounds, values, interests and perspectives on cycling, and blur the identity frames that can make it difficult to find mutual beneficial outcome (Bouwen, 2004). I define culture in a way that goes beyond the traditional view of culture through art and literature, by using the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) definition that:

“Culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs” (UNESCO, 2001, p.11)

Cycling culture can be a form of commuting, an active lifestyle, a component of one's identity and fashion or a means to engage in competition and more. Cycling culture engages people for many different reasons, highlighting it as a heterogeneous activity that formulates the lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs of people, their communities and social networks.

Promoting cycling culture encourages cycling in a way that could help mitigate the fundamentalist tendencies that cycling advocacy can sometimes take (Cuppies et

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1 One project example is the ELMOS project that promotes electric bicycles (www.vaxjo.se/elmos)

2 Frames include motivations behind particular types of cyclist, such as sport cyclist or environmental activist.
In other words, cities and non-governmental advocates oftentimes focus on promoting the activity on moral grounds such as environment, sustainability, health and financial benefits (Horton, 2006b; Cupples et al., 2008). This approach could limit the effectiveness of campaigns and promotion, particularly if people have little interest in using the bicycle for these reasons. Some people engage in cycling because of their passion for sport and competition or the freedoms it provides over using a car. These perspectives should be considered in promotional activities, following the suggestion to embrace the affect of cycling, and its creative potential (Cupples et al., 2008; Jones, 2005). Jones, for example, recalls his experiences while bicycle commuting through Birmingham and how the city is remade through his experiences as cyclist. These experiences help to create new associations of emotions and desires with our transport journeys and serve to influence our behaviour and modal choice.

Within cycling culture there is a variety of subcultures – or different types of cycling, such as touring, mountain biking, bicycle couriering, fashion related to bicycles, cycling technology, and cyclosportives3, for example. There is no common definition or categorization of these, possibly because of the tremendous diversity of the different forms of cycling and the even greater diversity in the meaning of the practice (Rosen et al., 2007, p.2). It is not the purpose of this thesis to try to define these forms, so for the sake of clarity and to help describe the interests of the actors with respect to cycling culture, I will refer to three cycling subcultures throughout this paper. These include transport: when people cycle for commuting purpose to and from work or school or use the bicycle for errands and transport purposes in general; leisure: cycling during leisure time for physical and mental health or personal interest; sport: cycling in a more serious manner, including competition. It is possible to break these down further in other subculture groups such as messenger (Fincham, 2006) and tourism (Ritchie, 1998, Lamont, 2009), however for this thesis, I assume these fall under one or more of commuter, leisure and/or sport.

### 3.3 Växjö’s Cycling Community

There are several actors in Växjö’s cycling community, from retail shops to commuter organisations and sports clubs. Table 2 shows a list of the actors that participated early in the research process, by attending the initial workshop in September 2012. I use this as a working group of actors to begin the process.

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3 A mass participation cycling event.
## Table 2 – Participating actors from Växjö’s cycling community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group/Individual</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sport cycling club</td>
<td>Promote sport and competitive cycling – both road and trail riding - through weekly training rides and organising sportive they aim to attract a diversity of people to their activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trail riding club</td>
<td>Build forest trails and create a meeting point for trail and mountain bike riders. They would like to continue their collaboration with the municipality to build these trails with the long-term goal to develop the Växjö area into a destination for trail riding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commuter organisation</td>
<td>Work with the municipality to improve cycling safety through infrastructure and policy. They want to encourage safe riding conditions for cyclists and are interested in education on traffic rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health professionals</td>
<td>Promote health through active lifestyle and have an interest in safe cycling conditions, primarily for commuters. Despite the fact that their work does not directly relate to cycling, they still have an interest in participating in the cycling strategy and planning of the city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil servants</td>
<td>Their priority is to reduce car use and promote commuters to other forms including walking, cycling and public transit. They desire increased bicycle use for commuting, according to targets set by the transportation strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail shop owner 1</td>
<td>Runs a small side business from home and is interested in providing unique bicycles not found in retail shops such as folding and cargo bicycles. His long-term goal is to expand his offering of unique bicycles to include more types and models.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retailer shop owner 2</td>
<td>Focuses on mid to higher end bicycles for sport, leisure and commuting and bases his business around good service. He encourages cycling sport by organising local mountain bike races and is interested in promoting cycling at the local level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land owner</td>
<td>Has proposed plans to the municipality for building a bicycle parking house near his property, transforming a car parking lot to do so.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-hand shop owners</td>
<td>Sell used bicycles, among many other things, at the university campus. They repair old bikes for sale and offer services to students such as basic repairs and a buy-back service to exchange students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community organisation</td>
<td>Provides skills and language training to immigrants, organises community events and programs related to recycling and design. They operate a second hand shop and bicycle workshop that repairs and sells used bicycles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I acknowledge that while this list provides a diverse group of actors, it is not a complete representation of the cycling community actors in the city and there are additional actors including:

- Retailers
- Individuals and organisations that host cycling events
- Unorganised individuals that share an interest in a particular form of cycling (BMX for example)
- Clubs that participate in charity or other cycling events
- Other examples I am not aware of
As the research develops I intend to include more actors in the process, however during the early part of the research, I focus on the working group defined above.

4 Methodology

The methods used in this research were adopted inductively, in that as the research progressed, I chose the methods and framings as they became relevant and useful. I adopted the use of action research following the workshop because I was interested in taking a participatory approach to working with the community actors. The framing of cycling as culture was inherent in the work from the beginning but its significance as a means to promote collaboration became more obvious through the first cycle. Pursuing partnerships among cycling actors was an idea that came up following the workshops, as a means of creating long-lasting collaboration, and this eventually became an aim for the research. The use of social learning to frame the outcome and transition to partnerships was introduced during the planning stage of the second cycle.

4.1 Action Research

Action research is an inquiry that is done by insiders of an organisation or community to address a particular problematic situation through action, or cycles of action (Herr et al., 2005, p3). It shares similarities with qualitative research but differs in that participants are involved with the design of the research and methodology (ibid, p2) and relies on a process of reflection to contribute to knowledge production.

I have chosen to use action research for two main reasons: first because participatory research practices are important components of sustainability science (Kates, 2001) and that “participatory procedures involving scientists, stakeholders, advocates, active citizens and users of knowledge are critically needed” (ibid, p.641). As a researcher in the field of sustainability science, it is important to me that my work uses a transdisciplinary approach that focuses on socially relevant problems, enabling mutual learning (within and outside academia) and aims to create knowledge that is solution-oriented, socially robust and transferable to both scientific and societal practice (Lang, 2012). Second, I saw the opportunity to bring techniques and knowledge from academia including participatory processes and inspiration from World Café techniques (Brown 2005) that could help facilitate communication among cycling actors.

I take inspiration from the ideas of Lewin (1946), the experience and approaches of McNiff (2002), Zuber-Skerritt (1992a,b) and Hall (2009) and guidance of Herr and Anderson (2005) and Huang (2010). Hall wrote of her process of using participatory action research to empower community actors to create an environmental bill that would stimulate climate policy in Australia. She used the
action research cycle process of Plan-Act-Observe-Reflect by Zuber-Skerritt, shown in Figure 5, to guide her work and I will adopt the same for my research, using an iterative approach with two action cycles.

![Figure 5 - Action Research Process](source: Zuber-Skerritt (2001, p.15))

### 4.1.1 Challenges with action research

Beyond the influences on the conduct of social science research, outlined by Bryman (2008 p.24) as values, theory, epistemology, practical considerations and ontology, I acknowledge there are unique challenges associated with action research. I address three such challenges including criticisms of action research, my own bias as a researcher, and depth of involvement.

Levin (2012) points to criticisms that action research is limited in its contribution to science, that projects exist merely as endless stories of change process with little contribution to the scientific debate. Huang (2010) discusses a number of misconceptions of action research including how it is referred to as “sloppy conventional research” (ibid, p. 104) because of its basis on different ontological and epistemological perspectives (Levin, 2012). However, Levin defends action research, suggesting it stirs debate due to it challenging “the disciplinary structure of social science because seeking practical solutions in a holistic situation does ask for more than a singular discipline can offer” (ibid, p.135). I will add that action research is a tool to apply the suggestions and knowledge of other research to practice and in a transdisciplinary setting, it can develop practical solutions in the community through collaborative knowledge generation.

With regards to bias, this is an influence in any form of research (Bryman, 2008 p. 25), however, the roles of the researcher as participant and facilitator in action research necessitate a higher degree of reflexivity during the process. The aims, expectations, hopes and attitudes brought by the researcher to the field affect not only the interpretation of data and outcomes, but they influence the direction the
process takes. For example my personal interests in sport cycling and my interactions with civil servants during the early stages the research may influence my decisions and the way I interpret and prioritise data. To ensure the quality of the research, Huang refers to seven criteria points, one of which is the importance of self-reflexivity by the researcher so he or she is aware and reflects upon the biases and influences these make on the outcome of the project (Huang, 2010 p.102).

Levin (2012) points out an interesting but potential pitfall of the action researcher – when the researcher becomes so absorbed in local culture and politics that the role of researcher “disappears from the consciousness” (ibid, p. 8). In this case, the researcher lacks the understanding of how being in charge of the research process sets them apart from the participants in the process and in essence, the researcher becomes an activist. It is important to continuously reflect on the priorities throughout the process, particularly with help of critical friends and/or colleagues to evaluate the researcher’s progress and research claims (McNiff, 1996, p.84).

4.2 Social Learning

Social learning is a participatory process that brings together people from different backgrounds – with different perspectives, knowledge and experiences – “to come to a creative quest of answers to questions for which no ready-made solutions are available” (ibid, p.5). It is a process in “which people are stimulated to reflect upon implicit assumptions and frames of reference, in order to create room for new perspectives and actions” (ibid, p.5). Social learning is described as a manner in which to actively commit people to far-reaching processes of change (Wals et al., 2009). Success depends on the people concerned and on the manner in which they become involved (Lotz, 2012), in this case in realisation that the actors – from different backgrounds – share a common goal of developing cycling culture. Social learning has been used in coping with the complexities and resultant uncertainties in natural resource management (Reed 2006) and plays a role in realising ways to develop a society that is more sustainable than today (Wals et al., 2009, p.5).

According to Wals, the important characteristics of social learning include learning from each other together in heterogeneous groups. These groups create trust and social cohesion in order to become more accepting of the viewpoints of others. Lastly, it is about ownership of the process and the outcomes (ibid., p.11). I consider these characteristics to be well matched to the principles of action research and provide a foundation for promoting learning and encouraging collaboration and partnerships among actors.

I use social learning as a means of tracking the progress of my research and to frame the outcome of each cycle. Reed suggests three features required for a process to be considered social learning (Reed, 2006) and I used these to guide my

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4 Huang’s criteria points include: articulation of objectives; partnership and participation; contribution to action research theory/practice; methods and process; actionability; reflexivity and significance.
observations and reflections. The features and the strategy and indicators I use for guiding my research through each feature are shown in Table 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate that a change in understanding has taken place in the individuals involved.</td>
<td>Compare discourse and project ideas that are developed throughout the project.</td>
<td>Change of opinion, development of discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate that this change goes beyond individual and becomes situated within wider social units or communities of practice.</td>
<td>Use evidence to see how the workshop, communication and collaboration have led to new initiatives and projects by the actors to become change agents and broaden the scope of the project.</td>
<td>New events, activities, and participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change occurs through social interactions and processes between actors within a social network.</td>
<td>Describe the social interactions that occur between actors during workshops, meetings and other situations.</td>
<td>Description of meeting place through images and verbal descriptions from attendees; social media interactions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Connections between social learning and collaboration exist in examples such as Bouwen’s framework for multi-party collaboration in natural resource management (Bouwen, 2004), and a study by Brummel (2010) on Community Wildfire Protection Planning, a policy-mandated collaboration that used a bottom-up approach to address limitations of top-down policy in fostering successful local collaboration.

4.3 Partnerships

While considering the aim of this paper, I considered several outcomes. The situation in Växjö, for example, could present an opportunity for collective action, whereby actors take action to improve the conditions of their group (Wright et al., 1990) – in this case cyclists. However the situation does not present a condition of injustice for the cycling community, a condition that van Zomeren (2008) suggests is necessary for collective action to occur.

The context of cycling in Växjö contains the mechanisms of community empowerment - the process of enabling communities to mobilise towards change, including agency, capacity building, resource provision, opportunity structure and sustainability according to Hennink (2012, p. 206). However I view the goal of new partnerships as a more appropriate scope for this thesis; achieving longer-term community or organisational empowerment (ibid p. 206, 207) could be a long-term outcome or goal of the process and is left as potential further research.

There are several examples of collaboration and partnerships that promote sustainability (Livesey, 2009; Yarime, 2011; Graci, 2013). Working from the
connections of social learning to collaboration, an appropriate research aim is to prolong these collaborations through the establishment of partnerships, or associations between multiple actors.

4.4 Theoretical perspective

I share the theoretical perspective of many action researchers who challenge the positivist view that knowledge should remain objective and value-free if it is to be credible (Brydon-Miller, 2003, p. 11). Instead I take a constructivist perspective, in assuming that “social phenomena are continuously being accomplished by social actors” (Bryman, 2008, p.19). In addition, I suggest knowledge is socially constructed and carries with it the values and objectives of those that create and share it.

I believe that, in accordance with George Kelly, and the Personal Construct Theory (PCT), that everyone is a ‘personal scientist’ and that it is not the privilege of experts and professional scientists to create knowledge (Zuber-Skerritt, 2001, p.10; Kelly, 1995). Zuber-Skerritt explains Kelly’s assertion that “we are not passive receivers of knowledge, but active constructors (or self-instructors) and interpreters of our experiences. Thus knowledge and theory become personalized, relevant to, and fully integrated into our practice (Zuber-Skerritt, 2001 p.10).” Brydon Miller notes the suggestion that the task of action researchers should be to:

“Provide people with the support and resources to do things in ways that will fit their own cultural context and their own lifestyles. The people, we knew, not the experts, should be the ones to determine the nature and operation of the things that affected their lives” (Brydon Miller, 2008, p.14).

In the context of action research, the actors within the cycling community create their own social interactions, and these interactions have the capacity to change and develop through the actors’ own intentions, interests and their own knowledge creation that is supported by the project. In accordance with PCT, as a personal scientist, the researcher must be self-reflexive and critical of his or her work - the extent to which one locates oneself as a change agent and be aware of the significance and effects that interpretations, observations and actions have on certain situations. As Zuber-Skerritt suggests, development and conceptual change depends on “openness to change and willingness to search for disconfirming as well as confirming evidence in research” (Zuber-Skerritt, 2001, p10).

4.5 Data Collection

I will rely on several methods to collect information about the project; anything that is not located in the text or appendix is available on request.
1. Weekly notes and journal entries with personal observations and reflections.
2. Notes and transcripts from interviews with agents and during the second workshop (Appendix B).
3. Pictures taken during the workshops and meetings, to help describe the setting in which we worked together.
4. Presentation slides from the workshops to help describe the communication processes.
5. Records of brainstorming and other workshop and meeting material.
6. Evidence of projects and collaborative efforts and new initiatives.

5 The Project

This section provides an account of the progress of the project and the stages I have taken through two action research cycles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Act</th>
<th>Observe</th>
<th>Reflect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 1</td>
<td>To foster communication and new initiatives among actors in the cycling community</td>
<td>Workshop 1</td>
<td>Interviews, conversations</td>
<td>Lead into next cycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 2</td>
<td>To form new partnerships among actors that promote lasting collaboration</td>
<td>Create new organisation</td>
<td>Bi-weekly meetings</td>
<td>Lead into future research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I address the four components of each cycle: plan, act, observe and reflect, and integrate the social learning features into the section that combines observe and reflect. I include a timeline in Figure 6 to show the sequence of events that are related to the thesis project. It begins with my summer contract work (June 2012) with the city and the report I began researching for and writing at that time. The timeline ends a year later with the cycling festival on 15 June 2013. The project focuses on the activities including workshops, meetings and interviews within the two cycles but will only reference those relevant events that fall outside the cycles, including the cycling culture report and the cycling festival.
Figure 6 - Thesis timeline

19 September: Workshop #1 - first meeting point to discuss ideas shared among cycling actors on how to promote cycling culture in Växjö.

29, 30 January: Interviews with cycling actors. Semi-structured interviews that aim to follow-up the workshop, and converse about how to carry on a communicative and collaborative process.

8 March: Workshop #2 - second meeting point to discuss the idea of hosting a cycling festival in Växjö.

25 March: Festival Meeting #1 - discuss ideas for activities, groups selected the activities they would be responsible for and what resources we would need.

8 April: Festival Meeting #2 - served to establish Cykelkultur Kronoberg by creating interim board and reviewing a draft of statues

22 April: Festival Meeting #3 - an update for the groups, to talk about their activities, planning and resources.

20 January: Växjö Cyclocross race

5 April: Presentation on cycling culture given to the city’s cycling strategy panel.

10 February: Växjö Cyclocross race

12 October: Final report on cycling culture - examples and ideas for Växjö (Hale 2012)

16 May: Thesis submission

15 June: Växjö Cycling Festival

1 March: Permanent move to Växjö; enabled better integration and participation in the city’s cycling culture.

22 September: Klimat Mässa; a Kommun sponsored event to promote sustainable transportation

25 November: Växjö Cyclocross race

19 June: Summer work: research and writing of report on cycling culture – examples from the world and ideas for Växjö
5.1 First Cycle: Cycling Culture Workshop

5.1.1 Plan

The idea behind the first workshop was to help inspire new ideas among the cycling community actors on promoting cycling in the city. The workshop complemented my report on cycling culture and ideas for Växjö (Hale, 2012) and functioned as a collaborative effort with civil servants. Civil servants invited actors and hosted the event and I was responsible for guiding the process, providing presentations on cycling and then facilitating brainstorm sessions and group discussion using ideas from World Café methods (Brown, 2005).

The invitation (Appendix A, in Swedish) described the workshop as:

“…a workshop on "Bicycle Culture" that would inspire people to grow and develop interest in cycling in Växjö vicinity. The workshop is aimed at anyone with an interest in more bikes in Växjö, cycle shops, sports shops, clubs, cafes, shops and other cycling interest.”

“…we jointly develop ideas for Växjö’s bike culture and also present inspiring examples from around the world.”

The invitation was sent out to a variety of actors, directly and indirectly related to cycling, including:

- Sports clubs
- Bicycle retail shops
- Health professionals
- Community organisations
- Second hand shop
- Commuter organisation
- Recreational organisation
- Selected civil servants from Växjö and neighbouring cities
- Property owner
- Individuals with a high interest in cycling

The list of invitees was based on the knowledge of the civil servants; people they considered active in the cycling community as far as they were aware. It was not a complete list of all cycling actors in the city but a variety of perspectives were included nonetheless. We considered inviting politicians to the workshop but decided against this, preferring to keep the workshop community-based.5

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5 Inviting politicians could have been a good opportunity to include them in a community-oriented discussion, plus they have the authority to apply funding and resources to projects that interest them. However city staff and I were concerned that power relations may undermine other participants may occur or that the workshop would take on a political or policy-related bias. We decided that it was better to involve politicians when we need them for something unique such as funding or promotion. The workshop, we felt, should take on a non-hierarchal setting that allows participants to share their ideas freely.
The event would be hosted at a local coffee shop – a location that was familiar to many people and one we considered more inviting than a meeting room at a municipal building. The space was limited to about 20 persons – a condition that limited the size of the invitation list but the small space, we assumed, would help to keep the workshop informal and inviting for people to participate in discussion.

Our goals with the workshop were to: (1) meet and share ideas to promote cycling culture in Växjö and (2) inspire organisations and/or individuals to initiate new projects that promote cycling in Växjö.

The workshop took place on 19 September 2012, the same week as a climate exhibition in Växjö (Klimat Mässa; 22 September), an event organised by the municipality to promote sustainable and climate friendly modes of transportation. The workshop would act as a first meeting point while the exhibition, we thought, could serve as a second meeting point where people could reflect on the process and develop their ideas further with each other.

5.1.2 Act

Out of the invitees, we had 19, myself included, attended the workshop, with a variety of people that I distribute under eight categories as follows:

- Retail: 3 (3 different shops)
- Community organisation: 1
- Health professional: 2
- Commuter organisation: 3 (all from same organisation)
- Sport club: 3 (2 from same club)
- Civil servants: 3 (1 from a neighbouring city)
- Property owner: 1
- Cycling enthusiast: 2
- Research: 1 (me)

The workshop started with an introduction of the attendees and the purpose of the workshop, followed by a short presentation on cycling culture in the world, including urban fixed gear and associated fashion trends, Belgian cyclocross culture, and youth engagement of freestyle BMX. I showed examples of programs such as Cykelbiblioteket in Copenhagen, a program to help people experience different bicycles, including cargo bikes for transporting goods or children. Participants were seated at tables of approximately four to five people and we used these groups to facilitate brainstorming of ideas and reflections on those cultural examples. The groups were encouraged to write their thoughts and ideas on large brainstorming sheets – two examples of such sheets are shown in Figure 7 below.
I then presented my ideas for Växjö, including a lending system of unique bicycles, hosting a cyclocross race and designating streets where cars are required to drive at bicycle speed. We followed this with another brainstorm session, with questions that guided the group through reflecting on my ideas and creating ideas of their own that would be suitable for Växjö. The small groups then shared their ideas with the larger group and posted their brainstorming sheets on the walls for all to see, as in the photos in Figure 8. After the discussion, participants were given coloured post-it notes and invited to indicate the ideas they were interested in and ideas they would like to be a part of. At the end of the seminar, participants were given a draft copy of my report and we announced a follow-up email would be sent out with a summary of the project ideas presented and which of those participants were interested in.
Following the workshop, one of the civil servants (a co-host of the workshop) assembled the groups’ brainstorming sheets and summarized the themes and ideas that were most popular, indicated by the post-its and his impressions of the workshop. The list was sent out to the participants by email with the hopes that by seeing the popular themes, the groups would take some initiative in pursuing some of them. The themes and examples are as follows:

1. Parking and security (better, more secure parking, indoor garage)
2. Lending bike program (city and unique bikes)
3. Safer cycling (designing streets with a youth perspective in mind)
4. Education and influencing attitudes (campaigns that target youth and companies)
5. Retail/repair (maintenance decal, mandatory winter tires)
6. Activities (bicycle of the year, cycling festival, BMX track)

I agree with the theme structure created by the civil servants after reviewing the brainstorming papers myself. In addition, I value his interpretation of the popular themes based on his comprehension of the discussion during the workshop, something I lacked because of language differences.

5.1.3 Observations and Reflection

In this section I provide an overview of the observations and reflections that I made throughout the first cycle – and ranging from the planning stage to the interviews and conversations that followed the workshop. Following a general reflection of the workshop, I use the features of social learning, presented in section 4.2, to show evidence of learning and a changing of perspectives among the actors. I conclude the section with a reflection of the challenges in the process and consider the path forward.

5.1.3.1 Workshop

The workshop provided a good meeting point for a variety of actors – from sport clubs to property owners – and there were many different perspectives from which to share opinions and ideas. We had perspectives from groups dedicated to cycling, such as sport and trail riding groups, as well as those that don’t concern themselves with cycling directly such as the health professionals and the property owner – this characteristic shows how diverse the stakeholder group can be.

Despite the variety of people, I found there was a tendency for the conversation to go towards transport cycling and related issues (safety, security) among the popular themes in the workshop. I assume this could be because interests favour transport cycling (see Figure 9 in the following section) and because civil servants were hosting the workshop so the issues and projects proposed by participants may have leaned towards the capabilities and interests of the municipality. I didn’t
perceive this as a bad thing because these were common topics of interest, but it may have narrowed the scope and creativity that could have come from the participants.

5.1.3.2 Interviews

I was not able to participate in all of the discussions during the workshop, because of the language difference, however I was able to use nine semi-structured interviews6 to speak directly with several of the participants to gain their views on the workshop, their ability to work together and how to go forward in a process that promotes communication and collaboration. What started as semi-structured interviews, however, turned into a semi-directed conversations after I understood the realities of speaking with people who have limited available time.7 I realized that I would have to keep my interviews brief because of people's limited time commitment. The questions that I used to guide these interviews are included in Appendix B).

I was concerned the length of time of four months that had passed between the workshop and the interviews might sacrifice the quality of the workshop reflections however there was the benefit in seeing if there were any long-term outcomes as a result.

Using a thematic approach (Bryman, 2008), I found several common themes that came up during the interviews, some similar to those that came up in the workshop. These include:

- **Parking**: Secure parking, especially for expensive bikes; complaints about parking at the central train station.
- **Participation**: Involvement in municipality transport and cycling strategies; several groups wanted increased transparency while others were interested in some form of participation.
- **Education**: Some groups were interested in education and teaching traffic rules, especially to youth and new residents unfamiliar with these rules.
- **Small organisation**: Several times the issue of organisations being small, with few active members came up as a challenge.
- **Municipality facilitation**: When discussing how to go forward with the process, nearly all groups agreed the municipality was necessary to facilitate the process.

I constructed Figure 9 to illustrate the subculture interests for each actor within the working group, based on my interpretation from interviews and conversations with the actors. Most of the actors focused on one form with some deviation into a neighbouring form, while others, such as one retailer, crossed all boundaries. This

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6 Some of these interviews included combined participants from the same organisation.

7 For example, during one interview, the distractions of a two-year old daughter and limited interview time meant I had to focus my questions down from my original intention. In other cases, people were at work and had very limited time to talk.
comparison shows that interest among the actors favours transport more than leisure and sport, such that despite the diversity of backgrounds for the group, their interests are not as diverse. This suggests that there could be a benefit in engaging with more actors who have interests in leisure and sport cycling that could broaden the scope of social learning that takes place as it pertains to cycling culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transport</th>
<th>Leisure</th>
<th>Sport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commuter NGO</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sport club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health professionals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kommun, transport department</td>
<td>Trail riding club</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retailer 1</td>
<td>Property owner</td>
<td>Retailer 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property owner</td>
<td>Second-hand shop</td>
<td>Community organisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9 - Cycling community actors and their sub-cultural interests

5.1.3.3 Social Learning

This section relates my observations during the first cycle to the three features of social learning that were introduced in section 4.2. I use evidence from the collected data for each section, as outlined in section 4.5.

Change in individuals’ understanding

The workshop helped to provide an opportunity to learn about different cultures that exist in other cities throughout the world. For some it was an introduction to cycling cultures they were previously unfamiliar with, and as one participant said, “it was good when you presented culture from around the world and Europe” (Health professional).

Some of the cultural examples are found more typically in large cities such as New York (messenger culture) or Copenhagen (cargo bike culture) and are not often found in smaller cities. While these cultural examples may exist in Växjö, they may not be highly visible on the street or in local bicycle retail stores.

For some, the workshop served as exposure to some of the cultures that exist in the city that might extend beyond their personal interests:

“The workshop was interesting. Some people were shocked by the way we talked about sport cycling, and had no idea about cycling beyond commuting” (Sport cycling club member).
During the Klimat Mässa (22 Sept 2012), I spoke with a few of the participants of the workshop to gain some early feedback. The member of the sport cycling club was excited by the increased recognition that transport civil servants were giving their club and involving them in planning activities. One member from the commuter organisation appreciated the growth and popularity of the sport clubs and considered the idea of their organisation combining with the sports clubs, “we are only 100 members but combined we are over 300” (Commuter organisation member). At least one actor was visualising the idea of working together; while the purpose of the first workshop was originally to create new initiatives, this was the first time the idea of collaboration among the cycling groups was proposed.

While the workshop was focused on issues around transport cycling, there was interesting evidence of how one individual from the commuter organisation was reflecting on how he promoted cycling during the interview:

“One Colin is pointing to something very important when we look at culture. Why is it important to drive? But when I show up in my BMW, I show to my colleagues what a successful guy I am. There is vanity in driving. If you bike somewhere it is the sign of someone in financial trouble. It needs to become prestigious for you to ride bikes” (Commuter organisation member).

“I used to promote cycling as a way to save time and money but now I think of it differently” (Commuter organisation member).

His perspective had evolved as he realised that the way he has been promoting cycling is not a way that engages all people. He continued later, discussing the benefit of the recreational and sport clubs and how they attract a broader group of people. He even refers to a revolution of sorts – the changing ways in which cycling culture is developed.

“People our age will be gone by the time that this revolution happens. We should focus on the young people. There are some good things about [the trail riders] – they attract young, healthy people, and those are a key focus. They will not be attracted by old guys like me and riding” (Commuter organisation member).

A benefit of sport and leisure riders is they ride because they want to, not because they are forced to for financial reasons or necessarily feel obligated to for health or environmental reasons, as some transport cyclists do. Horton refers to the latter reasons as why one ought to ride (2006b). In this case, cycling can become a moral practice that urges the reflection: is this the way we should view and promote cycling? A lot of the work done by the municipality and non-governmental organisations is done to promote cycling for the reasons one ought to ride while placing less emphasis on the reasons one would want to ride. In fact, their efforts might have the exact opposite affect, as Horton suggests the problem of cycling activism – despite their use of cycling as a distinction-seeking and distinguishing practice - “campaigning for more people to ride bikes and thus seek to undermine the distinctiveness of their own privileged practice (Horton 2006a).” In other words, excessive promotion of cycling can tarnish its appeal, and as the commuter organisation member points out, we need to be aware of the behavioural drivers that influence cycling rates.
Change goes to wider communities

One new initiative that followed the first workshop came from an example of cycling culture that inspired a retail shop owner who organises mountain bike races in the city. He was inspired by my talk about cyclocross racing and the example of racing in the United States that has grown significantly due to its approach to promoting the sport at the amateur level. This approach was in line with the shop owner’s interest in developing the local cycling scene in Växjö and he organised a series of cyclocross races in Växjö during the winter months that followed the workshop. While he was discouraged by poor weather and low turnout at the races, it was a good example of how the social learning process worked to introduce new cycling culture to Växjö. The process was sufficient for this knowledge to be transferred via one actor to the wider community.

During my interview with the two civil servants from the workshop, we talked about the potential for including cycling culture into their cycling strategy. Previously, the strategy was centred on transport cycling with little regard for other forms of cycling (Växjö kommun, 2005), and the staff were interested in broadening their approach of their strategy but uncertain on how to go about it:

“We are responsible for infrastructure and we provide the citizens with that, but above that, there is a lot of possibility” (civil servant).

“It [the workshop] was a good outcome... there could be a component of cycling culture in the strategy” (civil servant).

Because the framing of cycling as culture is a new concept for the cycling strategy, the civil servants struggled to determine exactly how to use it. We talked about the potential for involving other municipal departments into the process, such as Culture and Leisure (Kultur–och Fritidförvaltningen). The leisure section supports recreation and sports clubs in addition to building facilities such as the skate park in the Araby neighbourhood (Växjö kommun, n.d.,b). The culture section of the department is dedicated to the traditional arts, such as theatre, fine art and dance, and hosts festivals such as Kulturnatten and National Day. Since cycling spans across culture, leisure and transport, there is an opportunity to see how the departments can function together to promote cycling collectively.

Social interactions and processes

The workshop served as a starting point of communication for the cycling community actors – participants met several other actors in the community and learned about cycling culture and activities in their city as well as other cities.

Prior to the workshop there was little to no communication between many of the groups and participants appreciated the opportunity to meet for the first time (for many). During our interviews, some actors commented on the workshop setting:

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8 See: www.nationaldagen.se and www.vaxjo.se/kulturnatten
“The brainstorming and workshop part was good. Compact. They liked the small groups and small group discussion... it was a meeting point” (Health professional1)

“Meeting was good, because a lot of us are interested in biking – in different ways. But we never meet” (Health professional2).

“It was easy and informal, everyone could participate” (Health professional2).

It was interesting to hear that these groups rarely communicate, regardless of the fact that they are all interested in cycling in one form or another. A comment from a sport cycling club member might give some indication as to why:

“I don't understand the rift that was so evident during the workshop, where those who see themselves as purely commuter cyclists could never picture themselves "going fast" and also frown upon those who do” (Sport cycling club member).

It was apparent that the meaning of cycling was varied among the participants, forming some tension among the groups. Additionally, there was the perceived age gap between the transport-focused groups and the sport-focused groups. There was discourse around the “old” versus “new” actors, as the sport groups were often referred to as “you young guys...” by the older transport cyclists. I don't believe there was any intent to be disrespectful, however the discourse was sufficient to show how there was a separation between the groups: they lacked an understanding of each other. Despite the common device (the bicycle) that many groups have in common and the overlapping themes, they perceived their interests to be quite different. The social interaction that occurred during the workshop helped to reveal this division among actors. Wals et al. (2007) suggest that a certain level of dissonance or conflict is required for social learning to occur, so this division is a part of the process and it would be interesting to see how perspectives might change through the second cycle.

One theme that was popular among nearly all the groups was better transparency and participation with the municipality's transport planning. The idea of a steering or reference group came up several times during the interviews; it could be a group dedicated to help guide the municipality and their strategies for cycling in the city. One participant gave his idea of what such a group could be:

“Steering group, one rep from each organisation. Gather four times per year. But there needs to be some kommun guy running the show” (Retail shop owner).

I asked why the kommun would be running the show, as opposed to a self-contained group led by individuals in the community:

“It depends on what we want to achieve. The kommun is often at the centre of resources, access and helping capabilities” (Retail shop owner).

According to several actors, including the civil servants, there has been little consultation with these cycling groups in the past. A reference group could remedy
this by better integrating a variety of cycling sub-cultures into city planning. A reference group could be an opportunity to integrate cycling culture into the cycling strategy; a way to think beyond the commuter to other cyclists and consider the sometimes unique and different needs of road users, including recreational and sport cycling groups.

The importance of inclusion in participatory process and social interactions came up during a conversation about the cycling community actors, a civil servant said:

“It’s important to have all these groups involved in one way or the other. Especially people not a part of any group - independent people without any special interests, or hidden agenda...” (Civil servant).

This raised an interesting point in my efforts to establish a transdisciplinary group – while I have been working with several different organisations that represent cycling sub-cultures, I had not considered the importance of engaging people outside of these organisations. These people may not identify themselves as a particular type of rider or have the desire to be associated with a particular organisation.

Participation on the part of the actors during the workshop and interviews may have been compromised for several reasons. Language played a role, as my lacking Swedish meant I presented in English during the workshop and this may have caused difficulties in others understanding and communicating. During the workshop, both small and large group discussions were conducted in Swedish, so I had difficulties following the conversations and there may have been important discussions that I had missed and that were not reiterated during the interviews. During the interviews, which were conducted in English, I recognized some participants had difficulties in communicating their thoughts and ideas as effectively as they would in Swedish. This created some power relations among interviewees with different confidence levels of using English. There were times when one interviewee would interrupt another if he or she was struggling to find words or slow to explain ideas in English.

I learned that one participant believed he lacked the ideas and creativity needed to contribute during the workshop. During our one-on-one interview, he outlined a number of his ideas with me, but I expect that in the workshop group, he may have been more introverted. Even small group interactions and what we perceived to be an inviting setting may still not be sufficient for a participatory process that evokes creativity and ideas for some people.

5.1.3.4 Going Forward

At the conclusion of the first cycle, there were examples of changed perspectives among the actors, while others simply appreciated the chance to meet and talk with other actors. There was interest in continuing a similar process however the path forward was not exactly clear. In planning how to proceed, I reflected on a few observations:
• Several cycling organisations perceive themselves as small and lacking resources and there was perceived high dependence on the city for support.
• It is important to better engage unorganised groups and individuals into the process.
• There was a division that existed between the transport-focused groups and the sport-focused groups.
• Some larger groups may struggle to organise active members, sometimes the smaller groups collaborate more effectively among themselves.
• All participants had an interest in the future cycling strategy.
• Civil servants were interested in integrating a broader culture of cycling into their new cycling strategy.
• The formation of partnerships among actors was an interesting insight.

It is important to reflect further on the first theme because several organisations struggled with personnel resources and suggested they needed to rely on the municipality to initiate activities:

“We are just a handful of people. Members, we have 97 but active members there are maybe 10” (Commuter organisation member).

Several participants suggested city support was necessary to facilitate activities such as the ideas that came from the workshop:

“They [the municipality] can’t expect other groups to be the driving force. They need to be the driving force. If they want something to happen, they have to drive it” (Sport club member).

“To make a difference over the years, you need to do it structurally [via the municipality]. We are small organisations, especially considering those who are active members” (Health professional).

When I discussed the need for a facilitator with civil servants, they had a different perspective:

“We need someone. The kommun [municipality] could play that role. But do we want that role? We would rather not play too active a role, otherwise the discussion would be central around demanding more infrastructure.”

I reviewed the themes and ideas that came from the workshop in an attempt to look for the most relevant path based on these observations. Many themes were related to responsibilities of the city (parking, security, safe cycling), while others were already addressed by other organisations and companies (education, training, retail and repair) or required some form of high or long-term investment (lending program). I considered the idea of a steering group, since this was a popular topic during the interviews, however civil servants had already indicated plans for establishing such a group for their new cycling strategy.

The example of a cycling festival came from the workshop participants as one of the activities themes. It was an idea that stood out for me because it posed several benefits, particularly as being an activity that would be initiated by the actors, rather than necessitating facilitation by the municipality. Benefits of a festival could include:
• Engagement with people outside the organisations.
• The actors work together on a project that meets their individual interests as well as a wider interest.
• An event such as this would require planning and recurring meetings, enhancing the social learning opportunities.
• The collaborations among actors would create a new partnership process that could help to strengthen and unite the cycling community.
• The festival could be very inclusive in nature, celebrating and showcasing the many cycling cultures in Växjö and other cities.
• The festival could bridge gaps between culture, leisure, sport, recreation – in the community and among city departments and civil servants.

Undertaking a festival presented several challenges however – significant time and other resource commitments, mine as well as others’. A festival would require participants to take more of an active role and become organisers instead of simply participants, and many were reluctant to take on this responsibility. I had mentioned the idea of a festival during the interviews and the feedback was positive - all groups considered it a good idea and were willing to participate, however most were unwilling to take on an organisational role. I considered applying an approach to organising the cycling festival that used an “umbrella” group or organisation that could provide the location, time, and resources and manage the finances of the festival. Sub-groups, consisting of single organisations, individuals or collaboration, would create the activities that would make up the festival. With acceptance from the participants, a festival, the formation of an umbrella group and sub-group collaborations would act as the path forward in the project. The process is detailed in the second cycle.

5.2 Second Cycle: Cykelkultur Kronoberg

The second part of this research involves establishing a new organisation that would combine people from different cycling backgrounds to work together on projects, activities, and events that support and develop cycling culture in Växjö. The first ambition of the organisation would be to host the cycling festival. I originally considered the festival to be an appropriate act for the second cycle, however the date for the event would fall beyond the thesis period and I assumed the thesis would be more fruitful if it contained two complete action research cycles, rather than one complete and one unfinished cycle.

5.2.1 Plan

The second workshop served as a way for me to communicate my results following the first workshop and interviews and the ideas on how to proceed. I explained how I narrowed their ideas to two options: a reference group for the city’s new cycling strategy and a cycling festival. The reference group would help to broaden
the scope of feedback from a diverse cycling crowd while the cycling festival would act as a community approach to promote cycling. I explained that civil servants would proceed with establishing a reference group – as a top-down approach to promoting cycling, and we could proceed with organising a cycling festival – as a bottom-up approach.

I presented the “umbrella” idea of organising the festival, with groups combining and taking responsibility for individual activities. I was originally concerned about the short length of time prior to organising a festival – the group agreed with my suggestion of June as the most appropriate given the weather and the tendency in Sweden for people to take vacation time during the months of July and August. I suggested the option of organising a festival the following year, however one participant responded, “if we leave it till next year, nothing will happen.” The group agreed with this, and we decided to host the event on 15 June 2013 and participants suggested that we commence bi-weekly meetings to plan the festival.

My “umbrella” scheme was considered a good idea and we discussed three options for this organisation: using existing cycling organisation, using an existing non-cycling organisation or creating a new club. Using an existing organisation was the easiest solution because it would avoid the paperwork and bureaucracy involved with creating a new club. None of the cycling organisations were willing to take this on, and it was a similar story when I contacted a community organisation and an educational institution (Studieförbund in Sweden, which supports cultural events): both were happy to be involved but not to organise the event.

The last option was to start a new non-profit organisation (Ideell förening in Sweden) that would consist of representatives from different cycling clubs and organisations. This idea came up as a suggestion from members of the trail-riding club – people who had recent experience with setting up a small organisation and could assist with starting another. Despite the additional work to start a club, it carried several benefits:

- Promotes ownership on behalf the organisations and individuals that are part of it.
- An inclusive club could reduce bias that might come from a sport or commuter organisation running the event – it could deter people that do not identify themselves with that particular organisation.
- Symbolizes collaboration and partnerships among the cycling organisations.

Without an existing organisation to act as an umbrella for the festival, we decided to start a new organisation to fill this role. This would become the act portion of the second cycle, and it would contribute towards forming new partnerships among the actors.

During the first festival planning meeting (25 March 2013), we established a date, basic schedule, location and a preliminary list of events and activities for the festival based on the input from attendees (Appendix C). We decided that the next meeting would involve setting up the new organisation and we would establish a temporary board of directors.
5.2.2 Act

During the second meeting (8 April 2013), we decided on a name, Cykelkultur Kronoberg, set up a temporary board of directors and reviewed a draft list of statutes, with the primary purpose to support and develop cycling culture in Kronoberg. As is often the case in processes of social learning, scenarios can change, especially when dealing with a diverse group (Wals et al., 2009). The purpose of the club changed from one that was responsible for hosting a cycling festival to one that would work to promote cycling culture, so that the group was free to host events and activities outside of the festival. The area in which we would work was expanded to Kronoberg, rather than Växjö, to include neighbouring small cities and villages.

Our temporary board and auditor consist of a variety of actors, and help to broaden the scope of the activities performed by the club:

Chairman: researcher (me)
Secretary: trail riding club member
Cashier: commuter organisation member
Auditor: health professional

5.2.3 Observations and Reflections

This section provides an overview of the observations and reflections that I made throughout the second cycle – ranging from the planning stage through recurring meetings every two weeks that followed during the months of March and April. Following a general reflection of the workshop, I use the features of social learning to structure the progression of learning among the actors, and conclude with additional reflections of the cycle and a look beyond.

Each meeting attracted between eight to twelve attendees. I used a scheduling website, doodle.com, to allow participants to show their availability and then I would select the date and location of the meeting. Several people could not make the meetings but indicated their interest in participating, placing high importance on communication outside the meetings. We began using social media platforms (Facebook, blog) for Cykelkultur Kronoberg to help aid communication, and to reach additional people who might be interested in the club's activities.

During our meeting on 8 April, the process of appointing members of the board didn’t come quickly or easily. Several members had other commitments with family, work or other organisations and were reluctant to take on more responsibilities. Some peer encouragement from other participants helped to loosen up those who were on the fence with their decision. The process prompted my reflection on board members and the difference between attracting members already on the boards of other cycling organisations – those with good networks and access to resources but lacking personal time commitment. Another option would be to attract members who aren’t affiliated with other organisations, who may have smaller networks but can provide more time to dedicate to the
organisation’s ambitions. My initial preference was to have a mixture, but this depends on the unique circumstances for each individual.

I view the change in purpose of the organisation from festival organiser to one supporting and developing cycling culture as a positive change that opens the flexibility for the club to engage in different activities and events. Most interestingly, it was an indication from the actors that they were eager to carry the organisation beyond the festival, potentially broadening the scope of their ambitions and involvement.

5.2.3.1 Social Learning

The following sections relate my observations during the second cycle to the three features of social learning using quotations from the second workshop.

Change in individuals’ understanding

The first festival meeting acted as a turning point where the process turned from a meeting point to collaboration where the groups began working together. Not only were groups interested in the cycling festival, but the discourse was different this time. Instead of groups seeing each other as having different interests, the discourse was around “ownership,” “collaboration,” and “partnerships.” The participants were communicating the benefits of working together, participating more significantly in the research processes and becoming co-researchers by enhancing and encouraging the learning process and promoting this within the group. 9

A member from the commuter organisation who originally didn't see that there was a connection between the different actors, had changed his opinion since the first workshop:

“I think we have a lot in common. Since you started working with us, I realise we have more in common than I realised before. People who get into bicycling for sport reasons can discover things like commute time and how fast it is for transportation. They might become transportation bikers which is my prime interest. We have more in common I think.” (Commuter organisation member)

A member from the trail riding club builds on the idea that there is cross-over between the groups:

“I represent a sporting view, and work mostly with that side of it but I’m a commuter as well. I’m not blind to that side.” (Trail riding club member)

To which the commuter organisation member responded:

9 This contributes to Huang’s second criteria point for action research, of partnership and participation (Huang 2010, p.13).
“We all benefit from all aspects. I don’t think there are any conflicts that need to be sorted out.” (Commuter organisation member)

Perhaps this was in response to the “rift” that occurred during the workshop – to establish the peace and show that the groups were capable of working together. And looking back through the two cycles, there has been an interesting development in the perspective and relation between the acting groups. While the groups may come from different perspectives and have different interests in cycling, they now view cycling as a common theme through culture. And as a result, the groups are willing and interested in working together on creating a cycling festival.

Change goes to wider community

There was interesting conversation around promoting the event and the club during the second workshop – particularly around the importance of building the project from the bottom up:

“Build it from the cultural perspective, then you need to build it from the grassroots up, I think that’s important” (Trail riding club member).

Supporting grassroots development could be an important role for the club. It could also act as a lobby group to help other cycling groups that aren’t organised to promote their activities to the community and the municipality. An example is the BMX riders in the city who are not allowed to ride at the skate park because of safety concerns. There was a request put in at the municipality (Växjö kommun, 2012) to consider building a park dedicated to BMX. The club could help similar unorganised groups to lobby with a stronger voice for new cycling-related facilities.10 11

Framing cycling as culture has helped to attract new participants and supporters of the festival. I met with the manager of the Culture and Leisure Department (Kultur- och fritidförvaltningen) in Växjö and talked to her about framing cycling as culture and creating a festival in the city. She was interested in the project and offered suggestions for funding through her department. She was familiar with and has experiences using UNESCO’s definition for culture and appreciated the link of culture with sustainability. I also met with an educational institution (Studieförbund in Sweden) and while they were unable to assist with organisational responsibilities of the festival, they joined in a supporting role of the festival, providing funding and resources.

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10 One actor explained the development of skateboarding culture in Växjö. In the 1970s, youth lacked a dedicated facility to ride in the city and relied on public and private structures (stairs, railings, curbs, forest paths). When the youth grew up and encouraged their own children to ride, there still was still a lack of facilities for skaters. A number of people formed an ideell förening to Växjöskate and built an indoor skating facility. The group was also instrumental in city plans to build a new skate park at Spetsemosen.

11 In response to the request for a BMX facility, the city has since considered combining an off-road BMX course with a new off-road trail building project with the help of the trail-riding club.
Through organising the festival, I have observed how the event has the potential to cross socio-cultural boundaries. The event has drawn interest from people that are not affiliated with a cycling organisation but enjoy the activity as leisure and transport. A phone call to enquire about film projection equipment turned into an exchange of stories about leisure cycling. The class from a new cycling educational program for people with little to no riding experience – new immigrants in particular - will use the festival to celebrate their graduation. A small group of sustainable food enthusiasts and authors are interested in preparing food for the event. These examples show how such a festival can have such an inclusive nature and create interactions across different cultural groups – beyond the cycling community.

The changes of perspective that have become apparent through the first research cycle can resonate with additional members of their respective groups. For example, I was invited by civil servants to give a talk on cycling culture (5 April, 2012) to the committee of planners and designers in charge of creating the new cycling strategy for Växjö. For a group that is normally fixated on commuter cycling, it was an opportunity to talk about cycling in a different way – by framing cycling qualitatively as culture rather than exclusively through logistics, structures, regulations and quantitative measurements and milestones. During my presentation, I reflected on the features that make cycling attractive and the influences of culture and trends on habits and behavioural norms. I presented the significance of culture, referencing Horton’s comparison (2006b, p.37) of reasons people want to ride a bike, rather than ought to ride. The feedback from the group was positive – it was an interesting perspective that hadn’t been applied to their work in the past. There was not an instantaneous enlightenment, however, as one attendee suggested, “maybe we should look beyond the rules and regulations…” It will be interesting to see how the strategy progresses prior to its release in 2014 and how culture is integrated into it.

*Social interactions and processes*

By establishing the club and through planning the cycling festival, we have been able to continue the communicative process that we started with the first workshop. And as we broaden our reach through personal networks and social media, the social interactions among the participants became richer, diffusing to wider communities and encouraging new forms of learning.

The group was interested in using social media and referred to the strength of each organisation, club and individual’s network to promote the festival.

“We can use the existing channels we have today - every organisation links up with social media through their own networks” (Trail riding club member).

“Social media carries its own momentum – it can go viral” (Trail riding club member).
This had been the case as the inception social media platforms helped us to reach people in neighbouring cities and connect people with specific cycling-related resources in Växjö.12

The symbol of participation and collaboration among these different groups along different social interaction platforms can set an example for cross-cultural collaboration and help avoid the stigmas attached to some cycling forms. The opinion that commuters have nothing in common with spandex-clad road cyclists – inherent in the first workshop – has been sidelined among the cycling actors and over time the partnerships could expand from our small group to the wider community through interactive events like the festival and through different forms of social media.

5.2.3.2 Additional reflections

Participation in organising the festival and drawing in new actors has been a challenge at times; for some, it is a conflict with work and home responsibilities while for others it conflicts with their involvement with their own organisation. For example, we lost participation with the sport cycling club after a change in their board of directors and concern over lack of time outside of organising their own events. As Spring approached, one bicycle retail shop owner was too busy with his store and organising his own events to participate in our meetings. He was interested in participating in the festival but couldn’t commit more fully. Meeting attendance varied from week to week, especially as the project timing neared Spring – people had other activities to fill their evenings and had difficulties committing time for festival planning. While there were indications of interest in the festival and the potential for Cykelkultur Kronoberg, the group was facing a similar challenge as the individual organisations: several interested people but few active members willing to take a more active role in organising the event.

Referring to section 4.1.1 and Levin’s pitfall of action research, my additional roles as project facilitator, festival organiser, and chair of Cykelkultur Kronoberg often created conflicts over time and priority between action activities and the research activities. The conflict of time made it difficult to incorporate feedback mechanisms to the group that would help to better guide the research. I would have preferred offering several options on how to proceed with the project (festival, additional workshops, reference group, and new ideas) and have a vote among the actors. Instead, I made the decision to host the festival, and while we have had a number of actors on board and helping, I was not able to completely follow the process that is recommended for good action research (Huang, 2010).

Documenting the learning process of some actors was obvious, including the cycling organisation member who took a critical reflection of how he promoted

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12 People from neighbouring city of Karlskrona have linked to our festival’s Facebook page, suggesting it is a good idea for their city as well. Through the page, we were able to connect one person with the cycling education program in Växjö.
cycling. For others, who were less vocal about their reflections in the meetings, the change in perspective and the learning that took place was not as obvious. Follow-up interviews towards the end of the second cycle would have helped show evidence of whether there was a similar learning process for other actors. Since we were already meeting bi-weekly, I decided it was best to use these opportunities to gather observation data rather than conduct interviews at the conclusion of the second cycle. I acknowledge I may have missed useful observational data but concluded that it was difficult to justify the additional time taken from participants. Alternatively, short questionnaires may have provided additional feedback from actors – especially from those who rarely attended the meetings. This additional feedback could have contributed to documenting the learning process for other participants – not only those who vocalize their perspectives (and changes thereof) more readily than others – thereby strengthening the foundation for reflection.

5.2.3.3 Going forward

The action research process helped to provide the facilitation that was necessary to initiate and encourage communication and collaboration among several cycling community actors.

The first aim of the project was to initiate a meeting point among cycling community actors where social learning leads to new initiatives and collaboration. We initiated this through the first cycle, with examples of changed perspectives during social interactions of the workshop and the second cycle helped to maintain and broaden these interactions. The cycling community found a common basis through cycling culture and the connection between the different forms, for example, the likelihood of sport and leisure cyclists to take up transport cycling. Civil servants began to consider a new framing of cycling – as culture – and are considering including elements of this in their new cycling strategy.

The second aim to facilitate further collaboration, where participants develop partnerships and work together to support and develop cycling culture in Växjö, was achieved through the decision to host a cycling festival and the formation of a new organisation, Cykelkultur Kronoberg. These outcomes provide partnerships among cycling actors - as well as individuals and organisations not normally affiliated with cycling.

The formation of Cykelkultur Kronoberg was an appropriate concluding point for the thesis; however, extending the research beyond the cycling festival would have provided some interesting long-term results with how effective the process was to engage more people in the organisation’s activities as well as engaging the public with different forms of cycling culture during the festival.
6 Significance

6.1 Community and Municipality

For the cycling community actors, this project has been an opportunity to learn of alternative ways of promoting and encouraging cycling - supplementing their own interests by working towards a common goal of increased cycling culture. In effect, these actors become agents of social change in their community encouraging social capital (Burnett 2006) and a more sustainable Växjö.

Building on ethnographic studies of cycling cultures in the UK (Aldred, 2012a,b), the project contributes action-based research that works directly with the community to develop cycling cultures. The formation of Cykelkultur Kronoberg could present an example for cycling actors in other cities to follow, particularly cities that contain informal and unorganised cycling groups, and cities where cycling is still a marginalised activity (Aldred, 2012a, Pooley, 2011). Partnerships among the different actors could better promote and lobby for their activities and common interests. The research has shown that while cyclists in Växjö are not marginalized as they might be in other cities, community actors are still capable of promoting their interests without dependence on municipality facilitation. It puts to practice the calls of Horton (2006a,b), Jones (2012) and Jensen (2009) to modify the perspective, scope and meaning of cycling and the promotion thereof, from a homogeneous activity to a heterogeneous activity with positive affect.13

For the civil servants, the research has offered a new perspective on promoting cycling by prompting the consideration for cycling culture in their new cycling strategy, aligning with Horton’s suggestion:

“We believe cultural approaches to cycling ought neither to be neglected nor treated as optional extras to the ‘real business’ of infrastructural provision and cycle training; they should instead constitute a central plank in the raft of pro-cycling strategies. (Horton, 2006b, p.38)”

The research strengthens the connections between different forms of cycling, complementing the quantitative research (Gardner, 1998) suggesting crossover of different forms of cycling. This creates additional pathways to increasing transport cycling via leisure and sport cycling – pathways that planners should take seriously in hopes in achieving their sustainability goals. The potential for intertwining of governmental departments – including Transport and Culture and Leisure, discussed in the first cycle (section 5.1.3.3), shows that the scope of the project can grow to accommodate the context of the municipality’s top-down approach. Collaboration among government departments could connect culture with sustainability and create cohesion between the top-down and bottom-up

13 Or negative affect since it does occasionally rain.
approaches. An example of this cohesion is found in the fact that both departments are providing funding for the cycling festival.\footnote{The Transport Department is paying to use the festival to host a participatory review of its cycling strategy while the Culture and Leisure Department are providing some funding as they frequently do for cultural events in the municipality.}

### 6.2 Action Research and sustainability science

I combine action research and sustainability science because there are linkages between the two – action research as a methodology that creates knowledge from a context of practice and requires researchers to work with practitioners (Huang 2010), and sustainability science, a practice committed to moving knowledge into social action (Kates, 2011). This research shows how action research is a method of turning knowledge to action in a process that reiterates into new knowledge production, ensuring legitimacy through high levels of stakeholder involvement. The actors involved in the process, as local experts, take on roles of co-researchers who help the progress and expansion of the social learning, as agents of social change. And much like Hall’s work (2009), agents are taking the initiatives needed to make up for lacking government policy and planning. In Hall’s case it was a lack of consideration for environmental conservation, while in Växjö, agents were overcoming the lack of consideration for culture in the city’s transport strategy.

In accordance with sustainability science and the formation of knowledge that is both academically and socially relevant (Lang, 2012), it is my desire that the process and outcome of this project are useful to society: the organisations, individuals, city planners and transport strategists that relate to cycling. To make the research accessible to more people, I plan to write a summary of the project in both English and Swedish and provide access online through the Cykelkultur Kronoberg website (still to be created), through media, events such as the festival and presentations to different municipalities.

### 6.3 Future research

This research project prompted a number of questions that could garner future research.

What is the progression and future role of Cykelkultur Kronoberg? Answering this could provide insight into the effectiveness of a diverse group of actors to promote an activity such as cycling. It could show the effectiveness of the research process in creating lasting, positive change in the community.

How can culture, or qualitative goals, be incorporated into urban planning? In the context of cycling, this could explore the approach of improving the quality and
positive cycling experiences in the city, rather than simply looking at numbers and regulations. The municipality’s transport strategy suggests changing the mindset of planners and politicians and this research could contribute to this effort. Going beyond cycling, further research could find practical ways of integrating other forms of culture into other sustainable development strategies related to consumption and production and nature conservation.  

For new residents, how can the bicycle provide empowerment through freedom of transportation as well as a means of social interactions and integration? The involvement of the cycling skills training group in the festival prompts the consideration of the bicycle as an integration tool that helps new residents move more freely through the city and become better acquainted with other residents of their new city through sport and leisure activities.

7 Conclusion

This project serves to demonstrate an approach to promote sustainable transportation through the contribution of societal actors as local experts, co-researchers and agents of social change. This was accomplished by an effective merging of action research methods with sustainability science. The research initiated a bottom-up approach that could help to address the complexities with societal norms and behaviours that influence transport modal share, by focusing on the positive features of cycling – those that encourage people to want to cycle, rather than those insisting that people ought to. The bottom-up approach is an indirect way of achieving increased cycle modal share based on the cross-over of different forms of cycling – such that increased recreation cycling can contribute to increased transport cycling. The research provided an example of fostering new partnerships among actors of the cycling community in the municipality of Växjö. The actors realized the benefit of working together to promote cycling in their municipality. The framing of cycling as culture and features of social learning transformed a group with conflicting perspectives into a collaborative group with the common goal of supporting and developing cycling culture. The group formed Cykelkultur Kronoberg, an organisation intended to unify the actors into long-lasting collaboration and to act as a lead organiser of a cycling festival. The partnership can complement the top-down approach of the municipality to increase cycling modal share as a part of achieving its sustainability goals.

15 Such as those indicated in Växjö’s environmental programme (Växjö kommun, 2010).
8 References


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P. Wallin. Project Leader of Sustainable Transportation. Växjö kommun.


9 Appendices

Appendix A: Invitation to first workshop

En workshop om cykelkultur
i Världen och i Växjö

Välkommen till en workshop om ”Cykelkultur” som vill inspirera till att öka och utveckla intresset för cykling i Växjö med omnejd. Workshopen vänder sig till alla med intresse av att fler cyklar i Växjö, cykelhandlare, sportbutiker, föreningar, caféer och andra med cykelintresse.

Onsdagen den 19 september kl. 18:30-20:30
Plats: Gusto, Västergatan 6

Colin Hale, cykelentusiast från Vancouver, Kanada, entreprenör och student på Masters utbildning om hållbar utveckling på Lunds universitet har på uppdrag av Växjö kommun undersökt olika intressanta och spännande exempel på cykelkultur runt om i Världen. Colin kommer att hålla i en workshop (på engelska och svenska) där vi tillsammans utvecklar idéer för Växjös cykelkultur samt också presentera inspirerande exempel från hela världen.

Exempel från Colins rapport: Cykelbibliotek i Köpenhamn, cykelparkering i Amsterdam med cykelaffär och dusch, Tweedrun i London, godstransporter med cykel från Portland i USA, Cyclocross med 60 000 besökare i Belgien o s v

Anmäl dig till, par.wallin@vaxjo.se el 070-257 42 18 om du vill medverka på workshopen senast den 16 september så vi har fika till alla.
Appendix B: Interview guiding questions

Note: due to limited time during interviews, I focused on a few key questions in each section to guide conversations. I highlight these questions in bold.

1. Defining goals
- As an organisation, business or individual, how do you relate to cycling in Växjö?
- Do you have goals or ambitions related to cycling?
  - What methods do you use to achieve these goals? What impedes your progress if anything?
  - Do you see your goals as overlapping with other organisations, companies or the municipality. (Including the other participants from the first workshop.)

2. Workshop 1 follow-up
- What were your motivations for attending the first workshop? What were your expectations?
- Did the workshop meet these hopes or expectations?
- Did you find the theme and discussion relevant to your work or interests?
  - Was the setting (Gusto coffee shop) appropriate and comfortable - in such a way that you felt you could participate?
  - Prior to the workshop, have you had experience working with the other cycling groups?
  - Since the first workshop, have you started any new collaboration with other participants?
  - In your opinion, how else was the workshop useful and/or effective? Have you noticed any changes or positive or negative influences?

3. Workshop improvements
From here, we can continue with a refined version of the workshop that includes more input from the participants. We can highlight the ideas that came from the first workshop and/or present new ideas from the participants. Or we can try something completely new that could replace or complement the workshop.
- What do you think the goals or purpose could be for this process?
- Going forward, should we: i) build on the workshop idea ii) do something completely different iii) create a complementary process – workshop plus something different?

- **Do you have any suggestions on how to proceed with the process, either with a similar workshop or ideas of your own?**

- What new hopes or expectations would you have if the workshop were to be redesigned in this way?

- Who should be involved? What is a good group size?

- Do you think the workshop (or other) process should continue on an on-going basis? If so, do you have any suggestions on how to do this?

- **What role do you think the municipality should play in this process? As a facilitator, or as an actor like the others?**

- For the process to continue do we need a consistent facilitator or could this role be passed around to different participants?

4. Cycling in Växjö

- **How would you describe cycling in the city? With regards to commuting, recreation or other cycling forms?**

- What does cycling culture mean to you? (how do you define it?)

- How has the cycling scene or culture in Växjö changed since you have been apart of it or lived in the city?

- Is this perceived as a positive change or a negative change?

- What would you say are the drivers of this change? (factors that influence)
Appendix C: Festival map

1. City Tour
2. Children's cyclocross
3. Bike polo
4. Bicycle testing
5. Bicycle repair
6. Bicycle-ergo, and technical course
7. Uuse-downtown bus: short film, photo exhibit, cycling strategy workshop
8. Picnic food, music
9. Bicycle-dowored feature film