

# Practical Approach Towards Degrowth Transition

A Case Study of an Emerging Ecovillage in Kalmar, Sweden

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## **Abstract**

Degrowth refers to an alternative human society which is simplistic, cooperative and opposite to current growth system which is based on overproduction and overconsumption. The current growth trend is indisputably unsustainable for the future being of the earth and its' population. Resource depletion, land degradation and climate change have become inevitable due to growth system, overproduction and overconsumption. The alternative culture is needed to break the unsustainable practices and to stop the irreversible effects on human and natural environment. Degrowth concept rejects the culture of overconsumption and overproduction as well as proposes sustained trajectory towards a simplistic, convivial society. Degrowth proposes a future human society which aims to conserve natural resources and maintain social integrity. On the other hand, ecovillage movement promotes living in sufficiently and sustainably rather than living in plenty and focuses on bringing long-term sustainable solutions in all aspects of human and ecological environment from grassroots level. Therefore, the purpose of the research is to explore the prospects of ecovillage movement as grassroots initiative towards degrowth transition of simplistic society that do not aim consumption and materialization. A case study combined with semi-structured interviews and direct observation at an emerging ecovillage in Kalmar County, Sweden was conducted. Collected data were structured and discussed based on four dimensions of sustainability: ecological, economic, social and spiritual. The findings of the research shows that the ecovillages' motivations are well reciprocated with degrowth vision to create a simplistic society and can contribute significantly in the well-being of human and natural environment in four critical aspects. Moreover, ecovillage's motivations in all four dimensions are needed to be integrated with the key features of grassroots initiative to fulfill degrowth transition. In an emerging ecovillage, numbers of interconnected and complex challenges arise during the process of establishment stage to fulfill ecovillage principles and degrowth transition simultaneously. An emerging ecovillage has to be concerned about their limitations and capabilities because over-expectation to bring instant social change can exploit unity and amenity among members and hinder the growth further. This study contributes to sustainability science by critically questioning un-sustainable practices of economic growth and focusing on grassroots initiative as a problem-solving approach.

**Keywords: Degrowth, Ecovillage, Grassroots initiative, Sustainability, Kalmar, Organic Farm.**

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## **List of Abbreviation**

WWOOF	World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms
GEN	Global Ecovillage Network



# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Problem Statement**

In present society, a typical scenario of any commercial represents a certain group of people as 'happy and satisfied' because of being a consumer of certain products (accentuated by author). What these commercials do not show are the consequences on the environment due to overproduction and distribution of those products all over the globe and the real effects of overconsumption in social and spiritual life of human (Pretty, 2013). Conventional economic growth is based on overproduction and overconsumption (Pretty, 2013) and in order to maintain the economic growth, the growth system encourages the culture of overconsumption among general society (Pretty, 2013). To meet the basic human need, economic growth is required (Pretty, 2013) but unlimited growth does not contribute to sustainable development (Tom et al., 2011) neither contribute to the well-being of natural environment (Pretty, 2013). It is fundamentally assumed that material consumption leads to improved living standard, but it is only true when consumption does not exploit earths' resources (Pretty, 2013).

The current trend is indisputably unsustainable for the future being of the earth and its' population and it is profoundly needed to bring out the alternative culture. Degrowth refers an alternative human society which will use 'fewer natural resources' (D'Alisa, Demaria, & Kallis, 2014, p. 3) and does not strive for consumption and materialization. Degrowth conceptualizes that grassroots initiative is one of the facilitators of transition towards convivial human societies (D'Alisa et al., 2014). In this thesis, I present ecovillage as one of the prominent examples of a grassroots initiative, which aims to lessen negative impacts on the natural and social environment (Siracusa, La Rosa, Palma, & La Mola, 2008) by obtaining and living sustainable practices in simple, cooperative human settlement (Bang, 2005; Christian, 2003; Dawson, 2006). I have selected Ekbacka Gård as an emerging ecovillage in Southern Sweden as a case study to explore their motivations and challenges in the context of the ecovillage principles as well as how they are aiming to achieve degrowth transition through a grassroots initiative.

## **1.2 Research Aim and Questions**

The aim of the thesis is to explore, if the ecovillage as grassroots initiative is suitable to facilitate degrowth transition. In order to achieve this aim, I have proposed two research questions:

1. To what extent do the principles and motivations of an ecovillage manifest degrowth transition through grassroots initiative?

2. In the process of establishing an ecovillage, what are the challenges and what are the possible solutions of these challenges to facilitate degrowth transition?

To answer these research questions, I conducted a case study in Ekbacka Gård, Kalmar, Sweden, which is an organic farm attempting to establish an ecovillage. By using Ekbacka Gård as a representative of the grassroots initiative, I attempt to identify the perspective of degrowth transition standing behind Ekbacka Gård's motivation of establishing an ecovillage. Furthermore, I want to explore what kind of constraints can occur in the process of establishing an ecovillage that ultimately hinders the process of a transition towards degrowth.

### **1.3 Contribution to Sustainability Science**

This research contributes to sustainability science by addressing sustainability challenges like resource depletion and social distortion caused by complex global phenomena such as conventional economic growth, which are consequently affecting the people on a local scale. I show how grassroots initiative on a local level can put positive impacts on the global level. Thus, I am spanning the range diversely from the global to the local level (Jerneck et al., 2011; Kates et al., 2001). In this thesis, I have attempted to demonstrate that the ecovillage movement is a local initiative that actively integrates and works on four dimensions: ecological, economic, social, spiritual (Dawson, 2006; H. Jackson, 1998). These dimensions are not only similar to fundamental sustainability principles (economic, environmental, institutional and social) (Tom et al., 2011), but the integrated application of these four dimensions on ecovillage results in achievement of the objectives of sustainable development in a long term perspective (Tom et al., 2011).

## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 What is Degrowth?

Degrowth can be defined as a future state of the human society which will be more sharing, simplistic, caring and welcoming with a sense of collectiveness (D'Alisa et al., 2014). Degrowth also describes the future human societies as less exploiting of the earth's natural resources and is characterized by increased human wellbeing by equal distribution of resources among the residents of the earth (D'Alisa et al., 2014; "Research and actions," n.d.). Degrowth follows the idea of 'smaller can be beautiful', therefore, the present culture of production, consumption and materialization will not be the central goals of future societies (D'Alisa et al., 2014; "Research and actions," n.d.).

#### 2.1.1 What Degrowth Criticizes and Why?

Degrowth offers a range of diverse concepts, ideas and proposals where criticism of growth and commodification are the most discussed concepts (D'Alisa et al., 2014). In the degrowth literature, growth is denoted as economic growth and the current social system requires constant growth of the economy in order to persist (D'Alisa et al., 2014). Accordingly, GDP is understood as the measurement of economic growth (Pretty, 2013) and commodification is referred as the process of converting all the services and relationships among and within the society and ecology into monetary objects (D'Alisa et al., 2014). Moreover, to keep the economic growth constant, the current growth system has to increase production constantly, thus encourages and spreads the culture of overconsumption among the general society (Pretty, 2013).

The concept of degrowth does not criticize education or health care or renewable energy because degrowth followers believe that those sections of the society are needed to be developed further in the future (D'Alisa et al., 2014). However, degrowth offers criticism against the overdeveloped economies and growth systems of the present society because according to the degrowth concept, growth is unsustainable and unfair for the ecology, economic, social and spiritual aspects of human society (Böhm et al., 2015; D'Alisa et al., 2014; Pretty, 2013). Growth leaves complex and interrelated impacts on each aspects of the human and environmental well-being that are described below:

Growth is **ecologically** unsustainable as degrowth concept says, because the raw materials needed for production are often extracted from the underdeveloped territories of the world (D'Alisa et al., 2014). Those areas are left exploited and polluted with wastes and thus the local or marginalized people suffer from the environmental degradation (D'Alisa et al., 2014). The adoption of extracting industries such as monoculture agribusiness, oil and coal extraction for the sake of development are

the leading causes of climate change, resource depletion as well as land degradation and these are leaving devastating impacts on the biodiversity and livelihood of the local people (Böhm et al., 2015).

Growth is **uneconomic** because to keep up the economic growth, unlimited production of commodities is necessary which causes the unequal exchange and exploitation of resources among and within nations. Most often the marginalized people pays the real cost of growth and suffers most from the environmental degradation (D'Alisa et al., 2014). To meet the basic human need, economic growth is required but unlimited growth does not contribute to sustainable development (Tom et al., 2011). The benefits of growth retain to relatively few drivers of a growth society (D'Alisa et al., 2014) which implies that the benefit of material prosperity is not evenly distributed among the world population (Böhm et al., 2015). One-fifth of the world population consumes 20 times more than the poorest people (Trainer, 2000). Furthermore, if the present population continues to follow its current consumption rate, then by 2060 all the nonrenewable resources will be exhausted (Trainer, 2000).

Commodification of all services and relationships has been the reason for the weakening of **social** amenity and well-being (D'Alisa et al., 2014). Social relationships such as care, hospitality, affections as well as natural services became commodities for markets and their values are measured on a monetary basis. This leads people towards gaining profit by exploiting each service and results in the devastation of social morality (D'Alisa et al., 2014). Moreover, the laborers are the main key of the huge production process, but the profit of production is in the hand of relatively few drivers. Workers suffers from less freedom and unequal wage distribution; over exploitation of the labor, land and resources are the result of overgrowth and increased level of production (Gregory, Johnston, Pratt, Watts, & Whatmore, 2011).

Economic growth and prosperity above a certain point cannot increase the life satisfaction or Human development Index nor support **spiritual** growth (Böhm et al., 2015; D'Alisa et al., 2014). When people become addicted to consumption, their needs are never satisfied and they cannot decide where exactly to stop consuming which is the beginning of frustration (D'Alisa et al., 2014). Community bonding breaks when certain people are favored by free flowing economic policies; crime rates increase, if not, all parts of society do enjoy the equal benefits of wealth (Dawson, 2006).

### ***2.1.2 Degrowth and Autonomy***

The compensation of the environmental and social costs resulting from mass production and consumption, creating more advanced and efficient technology, will not be effective in reality as described in Degrowth concept (Böhm, Pervez Bharucha, & Pretty, 2015; D'Alisa et al., 2014). This

has two reasons. The first reason is described as Jevons' Paradox<sup>1</sup> in the degrowth literature (D'Alisa et al., 2014); when a technology becomes more efficient regarding the use of energy and raw materials, it uses less resources and thus the technology becomes cheaper and available to more people. Since the world population is increasing enormously, more people will need to use the technology. Thus there are less possibilities to limit the consumption and production rate and minimize the environmental and social costs of technological aggression (Böhm et al., 2015).

The concept of degrowth offers a second reason to reject the idea that all problems will be fixed by efficient technology. While the current growth society constantly provides the newest and more efficient products to keep the market going, these innovations and products are promoted in a way that make individuals feel as if they needed them to solve problems in every aspect of their lives (D'Alisa et al., 2014). The growth society creates unknown needs and imposes decisions for individuals, takes away their "independence" of decision making and fosters their subconscious addiction on the market system (D'Alisa et al., 2014, p. 56). The more people put their trust on new products and technology to solve their personal and social problems, the more they become addicted on such goods and commodities. Consequently, it threatens the capacity of an individual to practice action and to take own decisions according to their own values which is described as "Autonomy" in the degrowth literatures (D'Alisa et al., 2014, p.56).

The definition of autonomy in degrowth literature covers various aspects. According to Castoriadis, autonomy describes the ability of people to decide individually or collectively for the sake of a better future without any influence from outer sources (Castoriadis, 1987 referred by D'Alisa et al., 2014, p. 8). The current growth society is considered to be such an outer source in this thesis. Autonomy does not necessarily mean being utterly independent from the society. According to Castoriadis, autonomy means the freedom to decide what is actually needed in life to survive and what can be regarded as luxury. The material comfort and the current growth system's argumentation make it difficult for human beings to differentiate between what is luxury and what is necessity (D'Alisa et al., 2014).

Autonomy in degrowth literature also means to strengthen the social integrity by remaining interconnected and foster collectiveness (D'Alisa et al., 2014). Convivial and voluntary approaches are thus encouraged in the degrowth literatures to build connections between individuals in a society (D'Alisa et al., 2014). Any small enterprise is encouraged such as a Do-it-yourself workshop or a bicycle repair shop, which does not require a complex system or expert personnel to operate where

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, Jevons' Paradox is not discussed in detail rather I used the essence of the concept in this section.

everyone in a community can participate as a volunteer and appreciate the collective production rather than making profit (D'Alisa et al., 2014). Voluntary approaches as such also support the building of convivial relationships within the communities and promote the sense of appreciation for the relationships between individuals and society (D'Alisa et al., 2014).

In summary, the concept of autonomy according to the degrowth literatures emphasizes the freedom of individuals' to make decisions without outer influences as well as the sense of appreciation for the interactions among the members of a society; all of which represents the core values of one of the concepts of the transition towards a degrowth society.

### ***2.1.3 Transition Towards Degrowth Society through Ecovillage***

Degrowth concept does not only challenge growth, but it also proposes several concepts of transition towards societies which live in a simplistic and collective way (D'Alisa et al., 2014). Among the diverse concepts of transition, which are relevant to this thesis is the concept of grassroots economic practice that follows the core values of autonomy as described previously (D'Alisa et al., 2014). According to degrowth literature, the grassroots practices have five distinctive features: Shift from production in exchange for money to production for use (or share); Promotion of volunteer activities instead of professionalized wage labor; Exchange of goods and services rather than in search of profit; Aim for non-accumulated and non-expanding enterprises and Establishment of value of collectiveness among the participants by real connections and relations between them (D'Alisa et al., 2014).

Eco-communities are one of the paradigms of grassroots initiatives, which functions according to the five distinct features to promote a sustainable life-style and degree of autonomy (D'Alisa et al., 2014). Ecovillages are included in eco-communities (D'Alisa et al., 2014, p.165) and one of many examples of communities who practice these five distinctive features and progress towards a greater transition to degrowth and sustainable future (Böhm et al., 2015). Despite the global, national and regional governance taking actions and policies against the hegemonic practices, grassroots action are also important in creating change (D'Alisa et al., 2014, p.14). Therefore, in this thesis I focus on already existing or emerging alternative communities, which are successful in living sustainably and can provide a rich source of wisdom and vision that inspire a society to walk against the dominant growth paradigm (Böhm et al., 2015).

## 2.2 Ecovillage

### 2.2.1 What is an Ecovillage?

An ecovillage is a “Human scale full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future” (Dawson, 2006, p. 13). This definition of ecovillages has emerged after an extensive study of twenty-six initiatives including traditional villages, cohousing communities and alternative communities around the world (Dawson, 2006; H. Jackson, 1998). Since this definition is less explicit (Dawson, 2006), does not include the spiritual and social dimensions and the word “full-featured” might create some confusion (H. Jackson, 1998), I want to refer to another definition of ecovillages, given by the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN)<sup>2</sup>. It states that, “An ecovillage is an intentional or traditional community using local participatory processes to holistically integrate ecological, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of sustainability in order to regenerate social and natural environments” (“What is an Ecovillage?,” n.d.)

The number of community member in ecovillages can vary significantly. Some ecovillages have 10 members (Brithdir Mawr in Pembrokeshire, West Wales, “Brithdir Mawr Community,” n.d.) and some ecovillages have more than two hundred members such as Findhorn ecovillage in Scotland or Wilhelmina Ecovillage in Holland (Bang, 2005). In fact, an ecovillage community consists of sufficient inhabitants to be seen and heard and enjoy daily interaction with each other (H. Jackson, 1998). The initiatives are formed by the civil society (Dawson, 2006), can be living both in rural or urban areas (Gilman, 1991), designing their own settlements together and sharing a common (Siracusa et al., 2008). The settlements provide a balanced approach to satisfy human needs like food, education, home, leisure, trade, business and social life, for both the individual and the community. However, they do not aspire to be isolated from outer society (Bang, 2005). The main difference of ecovillages compared to normal human settlements is that ecovillages practice a non-linear approach to resource use, which aims to decrease the negative impacts on the environment by protection, preservation, and restoration (Bang, 2005; Siracusa et. al, 2008).

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<sup>2</sup> Global Ecovillage Network established in 1996 in a UN Habitat conference. Its main aim is to encourage the evolution of sustainable settlements across the world through internal and external communication services and facilitating the flow and exchange of information about the ecovillage and demonstration sites, networking and project coordination in fields related to sustainable settlements and Global Corporation and partnership, especially with the United Nation (Dawson, 2006). Further information to be found on website: <http://gen.ecovillage.org/en>.

### **2.2.2 Common Principles and Motivations of Ecovillages**

Even though ecovillages worldwide differ regarding their goals and objectives, they still agree to take on four critical dimensions: - ecological, economic, social and spiritual (Dawson, 2006). As Dawson explicitly states (2006, p.23), “Ecovillages tend to see themselves as being in service to a wider cause, generally phased in terms of ecological restoration, strengthening community, nurturing the local economy and/or deepening spiritual insights.” Moreover, H. Jackson (1998) states that the ecovillage movement is supporting self-reliant communities that aim to be environmentally, economically, socially and spiritually sustainable. Therefore, in this following chapter, I will explain the general principles and motivations of ecovillages in these four critical dimensions. It is important to note that the principles and motivations of ecovillages in these four dimensions are interrelated, inter-dependent. Consequently, attributes in one dimension can be overlapping with another dimension, and put influences one each other as well.

**Ecological dimension:** Ecovillages aim to produce the **least negative impacts** while interacting with their ecological environment (Bang, 2005). For instance, recycling, the reduction of new input of raw materials and energy-efficiency are the most fundamental approaches of any ecovillage (Wiberg, 1998). The design and technology used to develop the land and infrastructure aim to protect the natural eco-system (Bang, 2005; Jackson, 1998) and want to act in harmony with history and cultural values and do not expose human of any danger (Wiberg, 1998). Ecovillages are **against unsustainable practices** such as using toxic chemicals and fertilizers in farming. Instead, they use alternative ways such as permaculture and organic food production both for small scale and on the community level (H. Jackson, 1998; J. R. Jackson, 2000).

**Economic dimension:** Ecovillages avoid exploiting business or consumerism within their community (Bang, 2005). Any kind of transaction of money or services or business running in the ecovillage has to be legitimate and trustworthy (Bang, 2005). Therefore, economic activities inside an ecovillage are mostly focused on sharing and redistributing economic wealth and **create small scale entrepreneurship** to support the local production, so that there is no place for gaining excessive profit from the business (Dawson, 2006). Moreover, ecovillages protest against the economic activities that undermine the cultural values and destroy resources as well as the local economy (Dawson, 2006).

**Social dimension:** The working environment in an ecovillage consists of productive social interaction and “cooperative interdependence” which permits the community to **enjoy rewarding work** (Jackson, 1998, p.7; accentuated by author). Ecovillages are entirely initiated by the members of the



civil society who gather due to disappointments towards their governments failing to address environmental and social issues (Dawson, 2006). Human communities cannot run effectively without having a systematic approach regarding democracy, decision-making or leadership; therefore, ecovillages follow a well-defined and proper constitution to avoid conflicts and fights (Bang, 2005).

Parts of the social dimension of ecovillages are **centers of research, demonstration and training**. They provide opportunities for research in sustainable living and offer education with the purpose of sharing the expertise with other people (Dawson, 2006). The fields of training usually consist of sustainable living, permaculture, energy efficiency, alternative economy or governance (Dawson, 2006).

**Spiritual dimension:** The inhabitants of an ecovillage have the inclination to come under a single roof because they **share common values and goals**, which create the “glue” or “cohesion” among them (Dawson, 2006; Bang, 2005). They believe that by changing mentality and lifestyle both in groups and on the individual level, they can “restore, sustain, protect” the environment (H. Jackson, 1998, p.7). The values or common grounds among ecovillagers can be based on a variety of ideologies (Bang, 2005). For instance, they can aim for either ecological restoration or energy efficient buildings or organic food production. Although ecovillagers believe and act as a group for a single goal, they are also tolerant regarding diversity that exists in individuals. As stated in Jackson (1998), honoring and **empowering the whole person** and **thrive for diversity** is valuable for surviving among all cultures and species. Thus, Dawson states that ecovillages should be the “model of cooperation, equality, equity and ecological sustainability” (Dawson, 2006, p.36). They not only share common goals and a vision, but they also share common facilities like houses, ecological resources, works, which increase the meaningful connection with each other and enables resource restoration.

Ecovillages are different from movements that focus on negative aspects (Dawson, 2006). They work with positive approaches and work for the solutions, not criticizing the approaches of other activities. They are “quiet builders of a new vision” (Jackson, 2000, p.78).

### ***2.2.3 Challenges Faced by Ecovillages***

Ecovillages are very diverse in their orientations, goals or principles yet they usually face similar challenges or obstacles during different phases of the building up of an ecovillage. In the previous section, the principles and motivations of ecovillages are discussed in four critical dimensions. For an easier understanding, the challenges faced by ecovillages will be explained in the same four dimensions – ecological, economic, spiritual and social. In this chapter, each dimension of the

challenges faced by ecovillages is discussed from two distinct perspectives: the internal perspective sheds light on challenges that come from within and the external perspective looks at challenges that come from outer society or even from the dominant growth society. It is also important to observe within challenges that constraints in one dimension can critically impact other dimensions. In order to fulfill goals and visions of an ecovillage and grow for a better future, it is important for ecovillages to discuss the causes and dynamics of challenges beforehand as well as ways to solve these challenges considering all four dimensions simultaneously.

**Ecological challenges:** Internally, ecovillages face the challenge to keep up the organic food production constantly without exploiting the natural reserves (Gilman, 1991). Like other human settlements, ecovillages produce a certain amount of waste. Therefore reducing the waste as well as recycling and processing is a massive responsibility (Gilman, 1991). Since ecovillages put greater emphasis on environmental impacts, they are more cautious in avoiding negative impacts on the earth e.g. when building ecological friendly buildings or using means of transportation (Gilman, 1991).

Externally, ecovillages face the pressure of globalization in food production and food processing (Dawson, 2006). Global markets take a large portion of land and water resources for conventional agriculture and tourism (Dawson, 2006). Therefore, small communities often cannot access local resources or they have to recompense also for ecological distortion as much as big corporations do which is a big burden for the small communities to bear (Dawson, 2006). Secondly, ecological distortion caused by big corporations makes the small community suffer more than anyone else (Dawson, 2006). They have to clear away the pollution in order to provide safe organic products to everyone according to their objectives (Dawson, 2006).

**Economic Challenges:** To avoid the application of exploiting economic practices among members of ecovillage, they need to clarify among themselves the terms and regulations of sustainable non-exploiting economic activities (Gilman, 1991). Since there is a lack of templates for the ecovillages to be followed (Dawson, 2006) and all ecovillages are different from each other in terms of location, climate and principles, they need to determine their own procedure of an ecologically and economically efficient business (Gilman, 1991).

Ecovillages promote small-scale local production. However, they cannot compete with huge industries' mass production of goods, which are cheap and often subsidized (Dawson, 2006). Any product made from an ecovillage, which could be handmade baskets or woven sweaters, face an uneven competition on global free markets because even in local markets, large scale produced

things are sold for a cheaper price than locally made products. Small-scale production from the ecovillage cannot compete with global markets, as the small community cannot offer low prices for their commodities due to less investments and higher land prices. They also cannot afford glamorous advertisements but only depend on their local networks (Dawson, 2006; Kasper, 2007).

Ecovillages face a major challenge in terms of finances. Most of the times, they **depend on private resources for funding** (Dawson, 2006). Many ideas cannot be implemented or face restricted growth due to a lack of sufficient funding. The banking and local currency system is also strict for ecovillages. If an ecovillage wants to form a community bank, it needs five million Euros according to the European Union regulation (Dawson, 2006). Hence, creating a communal bank with local currencies becomes impossible for a small ecovillage.

**Social challenges:** It is critical for an ecovillage to maintain the fairness and being uninfluenced from exploiting examples of the outer society when deciding the method of leadership and **determining the governing body** (Gilman, 1991). Moreover, they need to decide for the method of enforcement and conflict resolution while not destroying the unity and commonness among the members (Gilman, 1991).

Externally, ecovillages face stricter regulations during their establishment than other citizen development plans do since the innovative and non-traditional ideas make the authorities more anxious (Dawson, 2006). Therefore, more money is usually required to obtain legal authorization through signing a legal advisor additionally to buying, transporting or building infrastructure (Dawson, 2006).

Consequently, these external challenges in the establishment stage restrict ecovillages in their development and therefore they **remain smaller in terms of participants**. Stricter regulatory frameworks create boundaries to have more participants for the ecovillage (Dawson, 2006). With the fewer amount of participants, it is troublesome for the ecovillages to flourish because they become too involved to “stay afloat” so that there is little space left for innovativeness (Dawson, 2006, p.73).

**Spiritual Challenges:** Although the initiators of an ecovillage gather under the same roof with a common vision and motivation in their minds, maintaining the commonness is sometimes problematic since one of the ecovillage’s core values is respect for the diversity among individuals (Gilman, 1991). Under this condition, ecovillages have to find an adequate compromise between unity and diversity to avoid conflicts (Gilman, 1991).

Spiritual challenges are mostly internal; however, the causes can often come from outer sources such as the influence of consumerism or individualism. The trend of individualism often affects the values and core beliefs of ecovillage members (Dawson, 2006). Members often demand private allotments of resources, houses or food preferences. Moreover, living in a community can be challenging for some individualistic people and that creates **problems in communication, decision making and governance** (Kasper, 2007). The sense of solidarity breaks down when the members incline to separate monetary resources. Thus, the weakening of core principles hinders further growth and prosperity of ecovillages (Dawson, 2006).

Apart from these challenges in the four different dimensions named in the beginning, an ecovillage faces another challenge from an overall perspective which is referred to as a whole system challenge (Bang, 2005; Gilman, 1991). To create as well as to maintain an ecovillage, all the values and strategies are needed to work simultaneously which requires time, money and patience (Bang, 2005; Gilman, 1991). It is common that some strategies change in unpredictable ways which puts other strategies under pressure (Gilman, 1991). It is one of the biggest challenges of ecovillages not to expect all accomplishments at once regardless of their motivation and available resources (Gilman, 1991).

#### **2.2.4 Critiques of Ecovillages and Concerning Their Ideology**

The ecovillage movement is not exempt of criticism. Some scholars deny to address it as a movement, but rather describe ecovillages as an “elitist exclusive club” with a core interest in sustainability (Fotopoulos, 2000; Garden, 2006). Ecovillages are getting attention mainly by the global North whereas the global South is deprived as usual which denotes the class structure of ecovillage movement (Fotopoulos, 2000). It is also under criticism that the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) imposes that living ecologically is not possible in mainstream society (Garden, 2006), while in many mainstream societies, adopting or building energy efficient houses or solar systems has become mandatory to avoid energy waste (Garden, 2006).

Garden (2006, p.2) also criticizes the fact that the GEN is a “self-appointed” group who claims to lead the global ecovillage movement. Long established or recent ecovillages who decide to join GEN to convey solidarity have to be “qualified” as ecovillages by fulfilling the criteria provided on the GEN website, which generates another argument that GEN is taking sole control in deciding (Garden, 2006). GEN defends itself with the argument that, there are many ecovillages around the world who do not know the GENmovement, but still live a sustainable life (Dawson, 2006). According to GEN,

the evaluation criteria are to be used for self-auditing of an ecovillage and the whole process is still better than being evaluated by outsiders (H. Jackson, 1998).

Lastly, although ecovillages claim to be full-featured human settlements, they still depend on services provided by the state regarding health care, education and the welfare system. They are no autonomous settlements within the state. If inhabitants of ecovillages are fully engaged with working within the settlement, it is not clear how they pay taxes to the government for the services they get and how the laws of state are applied to them. This question can be included in further research.

## **3 Method**

### **3.1 Methodological Perspective**

My ontological and epistemological approach is critical realism. This approach describes that reality exists as well as the structures and causal mechanisms working behind the existence of the reality (Dickens, 2003; Easton, 2010). As in Easton (2010), a critical realist acknowledges that the knowledge is socially constructed but a critical realist also explain the relationship between different entities and the situation behind the events (Easton, 2010). For instance, in this research, I explained that the resource depletion exists as reality and the analyzed causation behind the resource depletion is growth culture and it's overconsumption and production. The entity of growth culture has the causal power to generate resource depletion and social instability and thus generates the event ecovillage as an outcome of the behavior towards that entity.

### **3.2 Research Strategy**

A qualitative approach allows the researcher to open the space for interviewees, so that they can go deeper down the topic and give different insights into relevant and important issues (Bryman, 2012). This study is underpinned by a qualitative strategy because the in-depth discussion about motivations and constraints of Ekbacka Gård was compulsory. Semi-structured method in qualitative approach also allows asking questions outside the interview guide (Bryman, 2012). This was appropriate, because during the interview, sometimes the discussion was leading to interesting topics, which showed to be relevant for my research aim.

In this study, I adopted the inductive approach for exhibit the relationship behind theory and research. Inductive approach first draws conclusion from the observation by obtained from data collection and then the theory is used as the background to support the observation (Bryman, 2012). In this study, based on my interest on ecovillage, I have chosen Ekbacka Gård as an object of observation and I gathered data by interviewing the stakeholders. By analyzing the discussion with the stakeholders, I found that degrowth can be used as a supporting theory in this study.

### **3.3 Research Design**

According to Bryman (2012), the case study approach is implemented when a particular community or an organization is needed to undergo an intensive examination. I adopted the case study design to comprehensively observe the particular community of Ekbacka Gård and their approaches towards an ecovillage. Moreover, by adopting a case study, my critical realist perspective in this research is

appropriate since the case study research design acknowledges that findings can be dependent on the observer from a critical realist perspective (Yin, 2014). This was obvious, as the findings in this study were more dependent on the author as an observer, as well as how they were interpreted and translated based on the theory.

### **3.3.1 Case Study: Ekbacka Gård**

For this study, I conducted a single case study in Ekbacka Gård as an emerging ecovillage and thus it might arise the question of statistical significance might arise. However, according to Yin (2014,p.21), “case studies...are generalizable to theoretical propositions...In this sense, the case study, like the experiment, does not represent a “sample,” and in doing case study research, your goal will be to expand and generalize theories (analytical generalization) and not to extrapolate probabilities (statistical generalizations)” (accentuation is original). Therefore, with this single case study, I ‘generalize’ the theory of degrowth and ecovillage, while being statistically significant was not my goal.

I have preferred an emerging ecovillage like Ekbacka Gård rather than a well-established ecovillage. My attempt is to acquire insights what sorts of challenges might come in the development phase of an ecovillage and what steps can be adopted to avoid these problems to establish a future degrowth society.

Ekbacka Gård is an organic farm established in 2006 and situated in Kalmar, Sweden, with 20 hectares land to accommodate farm animals and grow organic vegetables. One family owns this farm and since they provide volunteer opportunity, they do not have constant number of residents at the farm. Ekbacka Gård started their journey towards establishing an ecovillage after one of their family member went for permaculture course in another organic farm. I have been on the farm for a field visit for nearly 12 days from February 23 to March 06, 2015 staying in exchange of volunteering work in the organic farm. I chose the field work in Ekbacka Gård because I had my WWOOFing<sup>3</sup> there in the summer of 2014. This was also when I was introduced to their sustainable living standpoints and their approach towards ecovillage. Therefore, I got interested to adopt Ekbacka Gård as my case study.

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<sup>3</sup> WWOOFing is the acronym for World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms. It is a worldwide platform that provides volunteering opportunities on organic farms in exchange of food and accommodation. More can be known from <http://wwoofinternational.org/>. Those who engage in volunteering through this organization can be named as WWOOFer, accordingly working on the farm is called WWOOFing.



Figure 1: Preparation for sowing seeds (Photo taken by Katrin, 2014).

### 3.4 Data Collection

#### 3.4.1 *Semi-Structured Interview*

I chose the method of semi-structured interviews to collect data because it opens the door to an in-depth study of the case and allows to 'theorize about social world' (Silverman, 2010, p. 131). I conducted individual semi-structured interviews with three stakeholders of Ekbacka Gård. I prepared an interview guide with open-ended questions. While asking questions on specific topics following this interview guide, adopting semi-structured questions facilitated the application of bringing a narrative interpretation of the reality (Silverman, 2010) presented by interviewees. Therefore, it helped me to comprehend the underlying reality of the motivations and challenges of Ekbacka Ecovillage; that further allowed identifying the social theory behind the motivations and challenges.



Figure 2: Conducting Interview with one of the participants (Photo taken by Katrin, 2015).



The historical background and important information about Ekbacka Gård was mostly obtained from discussing with one of the owner of Ekbacka Gård, Katrin. The other two interviewees, Svantije and Luisa(name has been changed for privacy reason) are resident of the Ekbacka Gård, who decided to stay there for long term and offered their time and labor in exchange of food and accommodation. I used a semi structured interview questionnaire for the interviewees however; with Katrin, the interview also contained a lot of discussion element. Interviews were recorded with mobile phone device and later transcribed at the end of each session. The interview times lasted from 45 minutes to 2 hours.



Figure 3: Drawing about the plans of Ekbacka Ecovillage (Photo taken by Luisa, 2015).

### **3.4.2 Direct observation**

Working as a WWOOFer in Ekbacka Gård, I had the opportunity to collect data through direct observations. My observation process was less formal and made throughout the occasions during working in the farm, informal conversations with the farm family members or interviewees and during the interview process as well. Direct observation on the field was useful to assess the causation of specific problems stated by the interviewee (Yin, 2014) as well as show the interrelations of motivations and challenges.

### **3.4.3 Limitation of the Data Collection**

The reasons why I have only interviewed three participants are manifold. First, in Ekbacka Gård, the numbers of stakeholders are only three families. Two of them live on the farm but around 5 kilometers away. I could not interview these two families due to their unavailability caused by their

personal business. Even though I tried to contact with them several times, I was not able to win them as my interviewees. Therefore, I interviewed one person (Katrin) from the family living in the farm, whom I position as the representative of the whole family.

My other two interviewees were full time participants of the farm who planned to live there for long term. The major drawback was that I could not get an interview of any volunteers or WWOOFers at that time because at the time I conducted my fieldwork was wintertime in Sweden. Consequently, there is not much farm work to be done and not many WWOOFers apply for working there. Nevertheless, the inclusion of volunteers was not crucial in this study, as the main constraint for Ekbacka Gård was found to be the insufficiency of long-term participants.

### 3.5 Data analysis

For this thesis, I conducted a case study on an organic farm Ekbacka Gård that is characterized by small-scale organic farming, energy alternatives, sustainable life style and a WWOOFing center for volunteers. They are currently attempting to establish an ecovillage with these resources. Therefore, I have used the name **Ekbacka Gård** to denote the current state and condition of the farm. By using **Ekbacka Ecovillage**, I have denoted the state of the future ecovillage in Ekbacka, which would be well established with an association, governing body, and devoted long-term participants.

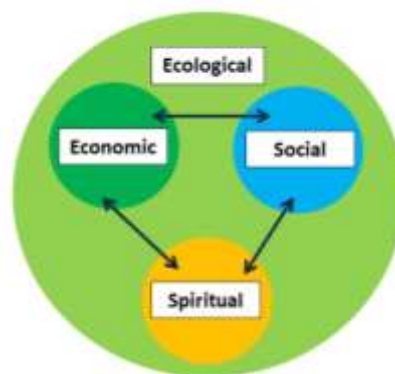


Figure 4: Nested Sustainability Model (Source: Author; inspired by (Tom, Jean, Aviel, & Tarah, 2011)). Figure shows that ecological dimension is the foundation for human well-being. The other three dimensions are nested on ecological dimension because ecological dimension can survive without human interactions of economy, social and spiritual dimension (Jerneck et al., 2011; Tom et al., 2011). Moreover, equal importance is given on spiritual, economic and social dimension because in current growth society, economical dimension dominates other dimensions. However, this study attempts to place equal importance on each dimension to achieve sustainability and how the effect on one dimension influences the others and creates a complex phenomenon.

Adopted from the Nested Sustainability Model (Tom et al., 2011), first I have explained why growth system is not sustainable based on the four dimensions of sustainability: ecological, social, economic and spiritual through the lens of Degrowth concept. Thereafter, I have structured the general principles and motivations of ecovillages based on these four dimensions (Figure 4). After having gathered data on Ekbacka Gård, I analyzed the motivations and challenges they face as an emerging ecovillage based on four dimensions and how their motivations and challenges correspond with the concept of degrowth transition. By interweaving my direct observation and statement from the interviewee, I found that arranging Ekbacka Gård's motivation and challenges in four dimensions of sustainability create an interconnected and complex phenomenon. Some literature reviews were added to strengthen and support Ekbacka Gård's activities as an ecovillage. While analyzing and discussing the data gathered from Ekbacka Gård, I mentioned the interviewees' name in initials at the end of the respective sentence.

## 4 Results And Discussion

### 4.1 Research Question 1: The Principles and Motivations of an Ecovillage

Ecovillages worldwide differ regarding the objectives they pursue and challenges they experience (Dawson, 2006); yet from this research, ecovillages can be said to be a possible paradigm to manifest the future degrowth society since they focus on the well-being of humans and the natural environment in ecological, economic, social and spiritual aspects (D’Alisa et al., 2014; “Research and actions,” n.d.). By analyzing Ekbacka Ecovillage as a case study, I found that their ecological, economic, social and spiritual motivations are the affirmative demonstrations of degrowth transition towards a sharing, simplistic and caring society. Ekbacka Gård shares similar principles of ecovillages worldwide along their establishment process. Before analyzing Ekbacka Gård’s motivation, the following table shows motivations of Ekbacka Gård in all four dimensions of sustainability and how the motivations are the positive demonstration of Degrowth concepts. Thereafter, broad discussion of the motivations has been done and literature reviews of other ecovillages are added to support the activities adopted by Ekbacka Gård towards the establishment of an ecovillage.

**Table 1: Ekbacka Gård’s motivation towards manifesting Degrowth transition (Source: Author)**

<b>Sustainability Dimensions</b>	<b>Ekbacka Gård’s Motivations</b>	<b>Degrowth (D’Alisa et al., 2014)</b>
Ecological	Living in harmony with environment-organic farm, dry toilet, combined energy system	Conservation and equal distribution of natural resources
Economical	Sharing ideas, knowledge, experience - workshop	Non-accumulation of wealth and profit, deprofessionalization
Social	Emphasizing voluntary approach-work willingly for ecovillage Provide satisfactory work environment	Non-exploiting work for wage, de-commodification
Spiritual	Freedom to be diverse yet united-individual empowerment, multi-cultural ecovillage	Practicing autonomy, freedom to take decisions without capitalist influence

#### **4.1.1 Ecological Aspect: Living In Harmony with the Environment**

Ekbacka Ecovillage aspires to be an exemplary case for the modern society by living in harmony with the ecological environment and putting the least negative impacts on the earth (K). By being a model of a 'little sustainable society', they aspires to demonstrate the outer society that it is possible to live in a way without destroying the environment for cash and profit and without depriving the rights of other people while living in a healthy environment (K). All of the participants mentioned that through Ekbacka Ecovillage they want to achieve sustainability and leave less negative impacts on the earth.

To achieve the aim to live in harmony with the ecological environment, Ekbacka Gård is acting in several areas. First of all, Ekbacka Gård is an organic farm who aims for organic food production on their farm. Their special toilet system (Appendix 1) and combined energy system of wood and solar power demonstrate that they are adopting technology to use least resources and leave less pollution on the earth. Adopting designs and technology that use least resources and avoid pollution of water and air is one the major principles followed by ecovillages (Bang, 2005; D'Alisa et al., 2014). According to Dawson (2006), adapting a combination of low and high technology enables ecovillages to reduce their ecological footprint by reducing external inputs of raw materials and increasing their internal resource flows. Literature review also showed that, Sieben Linden Ecovillage in Germany has been successful by adopting high and low tech in their energy requirements and managed to reduce their CO<sub>2</sub> emission to ten percent per capita where in all over Germany, per capita CO<sub>2</sub> emission is twenty-eight percent (Dawson, 2006). Sieben Linden has adopted similar methods as Ekbacka Ecovillage: both photovoltaic panels and wood are used for heating the living area and warming water (Dawson, 2006). Although not at the same scale as Sieben Linden Ecovillage, Ekbacka Ecovillage could reduce their CO<sub>2</sub> emission per capita by adopting high and low technology on their energy requirements.

Ekbacka Gård has built water free urine separating toilets, which was highly appreciated by the authorities of Kalmar Municipality (K). Generally, one reason for the building of these toilets by Ekbacka is to avoid the unnecessary waste of fresh water, especially when fresh water is a limited resource on earth and Ekbacka Gård is concerned that a massive part of the population in developing countries cannot access fresh water (R. B. Jackson et al., 2001). Moreover, a conventional flush toilet system requires an expensive treatment system (Langergraber & Muellegger, 2005) which requires energy, chemicals and more waters to treat human sewage (Remy & Jekel, 2008). Another argument for dry toilet is the use human excreta as compost for food production on the farm (K). It also serves the purpose of avoiding the use of chemical fertilizers, knowing chemical fertilizers' negative impacts

on soil as well as on human bodies (H. Jackson, 1998; J. R. Jackson, 2000). Ekbacka Gård is concerned about the facts that fresh water is a limited resource; massive population on the earth is deprived of safe drinking water and proper sanitation facilities, and drawbacks of the chemical fertilizers on the soil and human bodies (K). Therefore, Ekbacka Gård wants to be the role model by avoiding water pollution (K). Their dry toilet system is one of the practical steps to stand by their own motivation of living in harmony with nature and human society. Touching upon the degrowth concept, as future Degrowth society would least exploits earth's natural resources (D'Alisa et al., 2014; "Research and actions," n.d.), it can be said that Ekbacka Ecovillage is also putting practical steps on pursuing the well-being of natural and human environment.

#### **4.1.2 Economic Aspect: Sharing Resources**

Ekbacka Ecovillage's devotion is to build an "*Ekbacka organism*" where money shall not be an exchange object, but inhabitants will share and exchange their work, experiences and available resources with each other in the Ekbacka organism. One of the prominent functions of ecovillages is to offer training or a teaching center to share their expertise and knowledge with local people (Dawson, 2006). Ekbacka Ecovillage has the objective to run several workshops to share the knowledge and expertise on carpentry, sewing, permaculture and herbal medicine. These workshops will serve the purpose of teaching the local community not only how to make their own goods, but also to engage them in an activity of de-professionalization. For instance, by teaching people how to make and repair furniture, a house and other wooden craft in a carpentry workshop, Ekbacka Ecovillage will widen the participants' horizons beside the usual professionalization. As degrowth criticizes the trends of confining the production in relatively few hands (D'Alisa et al., 2014), Ekbacka Ecovillage aims to de-professionalize through their workshops and work against that dominant trends of confining production. Moreover, people do not have to hire and pay a professional every time they want to build or fix their furniture when they know how to make necessary goods for their own use, not for commodifying and making profit. Thus, the ecovillage is against other trends of growth culture like producing goods for sale and to make profit, instead of their immediate use (D'Alisa et al., 2014). Furthermore, they want to restrict the exchange of services for money in general. In the long run, people will be able to help each other and share their knowledge and expertise with others in need because they believe in sharing not hiring. The carpentry workshop is one of the few examples where the degrowth society can start de-professionalizing the production. Therefore, it is the sense of a "social movement, which is inspired by the principles of self-organization by promoting alternative projects" (D'Alisa et al., 2014, p.62). Thereby, Ekbacka

Ecovillage's small-scale initiative such as the carpentry workshop will be one of the examples of the persisting degrowth value of non-accumulating wealth and profit.

#### **4.1.3 Social Aspect: Emphasizing Voluntary Work**

Ekbacka Ecovillage aims to demonstrate that a community can thrive without waged labor (L). Ekbacka Gård is a center of training and learning for the WWOOFers and volunteers who contribute their labor and ideas into the ecovillage. Being exploited or humiliated in a work place for low wages is common practices in the modern society which is criticized by the degrowth movement (D'Alisa et al., 2014). The voluntary approach gives freedom to the individual to choose their favorable works; helps nurturing social relations, hospitality and affection by offering free labor to people in need in exchange for their learning of new skills, food and accommodation; and increases social amenity because there is no unequal wage distribution involved in the volunteer approach. In the dominant growth society, social relations are measured on a monetary base that destroys the social amenity because commodification makes people work for profit (D'Alisa et al., 2014). On the other hand, in ecovillages, the volunteers and members work for the farm not because they are forced or paid, but they enjoy it and understand themselves as a part of the farm. One interviewee stated that, *"people become so invested that you end up getting much more labor out of them and they enjoy it, they are not suffering"* (L). Moreover, volunteers can contribute their knowledge to the farm and they do it willingly. Ekbacka Gårds' affiliation with volunteers thus contributes positively for the social amenity where waged laborers in outer society are exploited for profit and fail to obtain social amenity.

Not only being confined in ecovillages, with a voluntary attitude, it is possible to achieve big successes also outside the ecovillage spectrum. In July 2005, when world leaders gathered in Gleneagles, Scotland, in order to attend the G8 summit, a temporary ecovillage model was built near the venue (Dawson, 2006). The purpose was to demonstrate a practical model of sustainable living in opposition to the granting "wasteful policies" in the summit (Dawson, 2006). A full-fledged living area was built within few days consisting of nine compost toilets, twenty grey water systems and thirteen kitchens. The organizers had demonstrated the togetherness by sharing works, commands and responsibilities (Dawson, 2006). Most importantly, all the organizers deliberately took the responsibilities and finished their assigned jobs not for the sake of finishing it, but for really being a part of the whole organization and nurturing social relations (Dawson, 2006).

Ecovillages also aim to provide a creative and meaningful work place (H. Jackson, 1998). As learned from the interviews, Ekbacka Ecovillage aims to provide a safe space for people with special needs who are not only handicapped or mentally retarded, but also for the people who had faced a

disastrous situation in their life and are searching for a way to escape the reality (K,L). Ekbacka Ecovillage aims to be the place where people can be healed and will increase their self-esteem and confidence. The workshops running in Ekbacka Ecovillage will provide an opportunity for people with special needs to feel like being part of the community, so that they can learn and be engaged in a meaningful job as emphasized by one of the interviewees (K). Moreover, the social department of Sweden sends foster children to the Ekbacka family because it has been proven to be a great place for them (L). Ekbacka Gård is not an urban place like an apartment with lots of modern gadgets, but with lots of activities and this environment helps Ekbacka Gård to achieve their vision of helping people with special needs. Therefore, Ekbacka Ecovillage showed that it will be a place for satisfactory, fulfilling and non-exhaustive work as well as provide a safe place for people with special need.

#### ***4.1.4 Spiritual Aspect: Freedom to Be Diverse Yet United***

One the core ethics of practicing autonomy of degrowth is to “promote a sense that includes a conscious recognition of relationships that binds” human beings to “life” (D’Alisa et al., 2014, p.55). Ekbacka Ecovillage aims to achieve peaceful togetherness, strengthen their social integrity and eventually create Ekbacka Organism. Moreover, voluntary small-scale approaches of Ekbacka Ecovillage as mentioned before would facilitate the building of connections between individuals in a simplistic and welcoming way, as it is emphasized in D’Alisa et al. (2014, p.55). Social relations are built by collective projects; in this thesis, ecovillages are defined as collective project. The whole idea of freedom meaning to be diverse, yet united, was emphasized by one of interviewees in one single sentence: “*One is all, all is one*”; one is growing as a whole “all” and all are united as “one” (K).

Apart from volunteering works that increase social integrity, one of the interviewees mentioned the creation of a common space in Ekbacka Ecovillage in order to celebrate different festivals to develop social interaction. Literature review also shows that creating such a common space is good for social interaction among members. For instance, Sunrise Farm, Australia has a common place where they celebrate different festivals which contributes in a positive way to the sense of community among the villagers (Bang, 2005). Wilhelmina community in Netherland has also a communal place where cooking, eating and relaxing takes place together while all the inhabitants have separate apartments to live in (Bang, 2005).

Moreover, practicing the freedom to decide individually or collectively for the sake of a better future without any influence from outer sources is defined as autonomy in degrowth literature (Castoriadis, 1987 referred by D’Alisa et al., 2014, p. 8). Ekbacka Ecovillage is providing the space to each



individual to be empowered and to grow as an independent person without being influenced from the outer world. According to the opinion of one of the interviewees, Ekbacka Gård has already stated an example by allowing their children to be different (S), whereas the modern society imposes an individual to be stereotypic. One of the interviewees mentioned that in Ekbacka Gård, *“people are in an atmosphere that encourages or that reaffirms people’s self-worth no matter how they look, no matter, if they short or tall, or Muslim or Christian or whatever”* (L). Ekbacka Gård does not discriminate anyone or force the residents to follow certain rules which provides the perfect environment to the individual to develop as a whole person, as confirmed by the interviewees (S, L). In addition to that, one interviewee expected to meet members of diverse age: young, middle aged, old people are welcome in Ekbacka Ecovillage and will increase the quality of interaction among people (S). People from different cultures and ethnicities are welcome in Ekbacka Ecovillage as they want to create a multicultural ecovillage. According to H. Jackson (1998), this aids them to achieve a great diversity and thrive in any culture and situation.

#### ***4.1.5 Insights in Ekbacka Gård’s Principles and Motivations***

Ekbacka Gård’s motivations and principles are to preserve earth’s natural resources through their lifestyle; distribute natural and human resources equally among residents of the ecovillage; working united along with people of diverse backgrounds against exploitation by encouraging volunteering works. These values are well in accordance with the concept of the degrowth movement of creating a sharing, simplistic and caring society with a focus on equal distribution and conservation of the earth’s natural resources (D’Alisa et al., 2014; “Research and actions,” n.d.). Moreover, Ekbacka Gård is manifesting degrowth transition in all four aspects of sustainability: ecological, economical, social and spiritual dimensions.

However, if Ekbacka Gård’s motivations and principles are broken down into attributes of grassroots initiatives, Ekbacka Gård’s motivations reciprocate with the feature of grassroots initiatives such as volunteer activities, educational workshops and promoting collectiveness among members. The following table in the next page shows to what extent Ekbacka Ecovillage motivations are well harmonized with the core features of grassroots initiatives:

**Table 2: Summary of the extent to which Ekbacka Ecovillage manifests (Source: Author)**

<b>Five Distinctive Features Of The Grassroots Practices (D'Alisa Et Al., 2014)</b>	<b>Motivations Of Ekbacka Gård Towards Establishing An Ecovillage</b>	<b>Contribution to Four Dimensions of Sustainability</b>
1.Shift from production in exchange with money to production for use (or share) 2.Aim for non-accumulated and non-expanding enterprises 3.Exchange of goods and services rather than in search of profit	Have a strategy of workshops to share their expertise and knowledge with local people. Workshops teach people how to make own goods for their immediate use instead of profit. People can share their knowledge and goods with each other thus aiming non-accumulation of wealth and against enterprises for profit.	Economic
4.Promotion of volunteer activities instead of professionalized wage labor	Ekbacka Gård is center of training and learning for the wwoofers and volunteers who contribute their labor and ideas into the ecovillage.	Social
5.Establishment of value of collectiveness among the participants by real	Making their social integrity stronger and eventually creating Ekbacka Organism	Spiritual

The table shows that Ekbacka Ecovillage has the ability to manifest degrowth transition in three dimensions: economic, social and spiritual. It is apparent that their ecological motivation is missing to follow the features of grassroots initiative. Although Ekbacka Gård is taking practical steps in ecological dimensions, those steps are separated from other objectives and are not incorporated within the other three dimensions of sustainability. Therefore, Ekbacka Ecovillage has to develop an ecological strategy to function along with grassroots initiatives. It is necessary because before establishing an ecovillage, the principle attributes need to be contemplated (Bang, 2005). Failure or success in achieving g one goal will have inevitable effects on achieving other goals. Therefore equal priority on obtaining each of the principles is important for obtaining sustainability (Kasper, 2007).

Ekbacka Gård is a small example of how an ecovillage can be motivated and approach towards the transition of degrowth. However, it is apparent that Ekbacka Gård or the future Ekbacka Ecovillage follows the idea of the degrowth movement unintentionally, because the degrowth movement was not mentioned in specific by the interviewees.

### ***Points of Critiques in Ekbacka Gård's Motivations***

Ekbacka Gård has mentioned that in Ekbacka Organism, money shall not be an exchange object. However, they also want to earn from selling their courses and workshop what I found contradictory. Although Ekbacka Ecovillage aims to de-professionalize their expertise area, they need to find alternative economic strategy if they want to embrace their value of de-commodification.

### **4.2 Research Question 2: The Challenges and the Possible Solutions**

While asking my interviewees about the constraints and problems they face in establishing Ekbacka Ecovillage, they talked about several problems but none of them had mentioned ecological constraints. I speculate the reason behind that fact to be that the interviewees think Ekbacka Gård is an organic farm, well established in the production of organic vegetables; and there are many resources (Appendix 1) available in Ekbacka Gård to improve the farm if necessary. Another reason could be that the interviewees were more concerned about other challenges and ways to solve those, therefore ecological constraints have not been so much in the focus of the discussion. Hence, in this section, I will present the constraints Ekbacka Gård is facing in the other three dimensions, i.e. the social, economic and spiritual challenges. The interviewees also discussed about possible solutions of the challenges, which I added along with examples of other ecovillage supporting Ekbacka Gård's strategy. First, a table shows a summarized version of Ekbacka Gård's challenges identified by author and possible solutions as suggested by interviewees and then the detailed discussion follows the table.

**Table 3: Challenges and Possible Solutions to establish Ekbacka Ecovillage (Source: Author)**

<b>Dimensions of Sustainability</b>	<b>Obstacles Faced by Ekbacka Gård</b>	<b>Possible Solutions Suggested by the Participants</b>
Social	A) Lack of sufficient number of long term participants B) Organizational problem	Events and festivals Creating a website or blog Association with a governing body
Economic	Lack of sufficient amount of money	Foundation or association Alternative economy practices Miscellaneous solutions for monetary obstacles
Spiritual	Conflicts and lack of maintaining togetherness	Consensus and group meeting

#### **4.2.1 Social Challenges: Inadequate Number of Participants and Organizational Problem**

##### **A) Inadequate Number of Participants**

A significant obstacle I identified during the discussion with my interviewees is the lack of a decent number of residents to join in the process of the ecovillage establishment. Ekbacka Gård is still an organic farm and too small to be demonstrated as an ecovillage. Although there are no rules for a minimum amount of members, a small community faces more difficulties during the process of establishment, since the few members are mostly occupied with general works and everyday tasks to drive and maintain the ecovillage; they have less capacity for further activities (Dawson, 2006). More people are needed to settle down in Ekbacka Gård and take the responsibility for animals, plantations, the field and housing because at that moment there are too few people to start something new or big. However, Ekbacka Gård has enough land to grow food for all people living on the farm and the experts who could initiate the big projects that are needed for the establishment of Ekbacka Ecovillage are in situ already, too. For instance, there lives one person who is an expert in building houses and carpentry works, and another person has the expertise in textile works, permaculture and farm animals. Yet they cannot initiate the workshops or the building of new houses as the members have to work in order to earn a living for their family and children. It is important to find a way to look for and invite people who would be interested in getting involved in the ecovillage. According to one of the interviewee, there are many people who want to get involved, yet they do not know how to be connected (L).

##### **Possible Solutions for Lacking Number of Decent Participants**

###### **Events and Festivals**

To get in touch with possible new participants, Ekbacka Gård plans to organize a big brunch at a low price every second Sunday (K). During these events, Ekbacka Gård can provide people a space to participate and observe how the farm and the ecovillage works (L).

By organizing a lot of educational events and festivals (like a pumpkin harvesting festival), Ekbacka Gård can bring more people on the farm (L). Through all these events, people can gain firsthand experiences about the farm. Furthermore, the visitors can afterwards talk to other people about it like family and friends (L). Thereby it would be a good advertisement for the farm, too. The importance of sharing information about Ekbacka Ecovillage by word of mouth was confirmed by one interviewee (L) who stated that *“Digitally you can reach more people, but with the word of mouth people who are more likely to come.”*

One interviewee (S) thinks that WWOOFing is a good idea to share and spread information about the ecovillage since WWOOFers get to know the place and the people by staying on the farm for a couple of weeks. Therefore, it becomes easy to decide for them, if they want to join in the ecovillage. This interviewee (S) also thinks that WWOOFers and volunteers who have been on the farm can talk with people who share their enthusiasm regarding ecovillage movement.

Those activities can be realized with the help of volunteers or WWOOFers. Kibbutz Lotan farm in Israel has been successful in organizing festivals, courses and workshops for the volunteers, students as well as for tourists (Bang, 2005). Kibbutz Lotan has kept the door open for different groups of people for the courses, which can be a useful approach for Ekbacka Ecovillage, too.

Creating a training center on a topic in which Ekbacka Gård is specialized e.g. permaculture or medicinal herb would be a way for inviting new people to the farm. The ecovillage named The Farm, Tennessee, USA runs a training center that helps to create an ecological community in two ways: First, by “breathing in” the people from the outer community, i.e. providing a space for people who need training and friendship. Simultaneously, it “breathes out” the essence of learning from the ecovillage into the world (Bang, 2005, p.18). In the same way, Ekbacka Ecovillage could welcome interested members on their farm, spread the word about the project and earn some income for the ecovillage fund.

### ***Creating a Website or Blog***

Another suggestion on how to solve the problem of a sufficient number of participants, proposed by one interviewee (L) is to create a website sharing every step that is taken, with lots of picture and descriptions. By this, interested people could easily learn about Ekbacka Gård and the process of establishment of Ekbacka Ecovillage. She also mentioned that Ekbacka Gård could raise awareness by sending emails and advertisements about their movement to people they know or who signed up for the newsletter.

One interviewee proposed to create or be involved in a pool of Ecovillages where everyone can get in touch with each other (S). From that pool, interested people could get an overview and pick an ecovillage where they want to spend some time in order to decide finally which ecovillage they want to join.

In my opinion, these options might be useful because having a networking system connecting the geographically distant ecovillage projects will also help the ecovillagers to learn about each other’s goals and movements. They can learn from other’s mistakes and successes as well as create new

ideas by discussing them on the common platform (Jackson, 2000). Regarding Ekbacka Ecovillage's website, with regular updates, the farm keeps people living in distant areas interested and this opens the window of having members from different cultures and societies. Consequently, it fulfills Ekbacka Ecovillage's vision of creating a multicultural ecovillage.

All the activities mentioned above are useful to invite interested members to the ecovillage and can be realized by a few volunteers. Nevertheless, the progress of establishing an ecovillage will be much slower than usually because it might take a lengthy effort to invite and gather active members for the ecovillage through the festivals or courses. Furthermore, those potential members have to gather money to contribute on their own, which could be another obstacle because the people who are interested to join an Ecovillage are not necessarily wealthy. Ekbacka Ecovillage also needs to be careful in avoiding conflicts among new participants because social amenities create in the long run shared ideals, but not necessarily the practicalities of living in a community (D'Alisa et al., 2014).

### ***B) Organizational Problem***

The shortage of decent participants is bringing another major problem which is of organizational nature. There is a significant amount of tasks to be accomplished daily on a farm. As Ekbacka Gård is trying to establish an ecovillage, they have to put a lot of effort into that project. Therefore, the task concerning the farm and the ecovillage come into conflict with each other. Due to the lack of decent participants, all the volunteers and members of Ekbacka Gård have to focus only on farm works and there is no additional time to focus on the ecovillage establishment process. According to one of the interviewees (S), *"...there's so much work that you might get lost ... you don't know where to start with. Sure we have to start with planting ... otherwise we will not eat but other projects are so difficult to decide which one you just start and finish."*

### ***Possible Solutions for the Organizational Problem***

#### ***Association with a Governing Body***

To run the whole procedure of establishing an ecovillage efficiently, Ekbacka Ecovillage is planning to build an association with a governing body when they will have a sufficient number of participants. The association would help to implement a systematic approach including democracy, decision-making or leadership; thus, the ecovillage can follow a well-defined and proper constitution to avoid conflicts and fights (Bang, 2005). Through this association and the governing body, Ekbacka Ecovillage can select one responsible person for each task and divide the responsibilities among members without conflicts and confusions. The responsible person will conduct meetings where

every member can express his or her opinion, but the responsible person will have the right to take the final decision. Moreover, everyone can be in charge via a rotation system. One of the interviewees (S) mentioned the same idea of selecting the responsible person: the person who is in charge of a particular chore (for instance knowledge about herbal medicine) can have an assistant so that the assistant can learn about the task. After some time, if the responsible person needs a break or becomes unable to do his/her job, the assistant can take over the position. In her opinion, a responsible person should not work for a year at a stretch as everyone deserves and needs a break.

One of the interviewees (K) also brought up the idea of building a foundation/association or becoming a member of an existing foundation. She described the manifold purposes behind this idea: first, it would put all the members under a single roof, so that everyone has the same vision and works for similar goals and objectives. Second, through the foundation all the members can share their works and resources when needed. Third, those who are living outside of Ekbacka Ecovillage can be a part of the ecovillage virtually and contribute their resources and efforts. Through the association, members can share labor, works and resources with each other and increase social amenity and well-being. As an overall purpose, the foundation/association will be the governing body facilitating the achievement of other objectives.

#### ***4.2.2 Economic Challenge: Lack of Sufficient Cash***

The monetary obstacle is a crucial problem to be solved because it restricts the growth of the ecovillage (J. R. Jackson, 2000). Without money, new infrastructure cannot be built; most ecovillages face this problem at their early stages (J. R. Jackson, 2000). Economic insufficiency is currently the second major problem faced by Ekbacka Gård. There are two reasons for this situation: Ekbacka Gård does not have enough participants to join and contribute money; furthermore, Ekbacka has not yet consulted with any funding source to ask for help. Correspondingly, they need either more people who can contribute their private money to the farm, so that they can start executing the tasks of the ecovillage and buy new things to initiate these tasks. As the expert person in carpentry is the only earning member in the family, it is not possible to start working to make new houses and workshops. There are only two volunteers or helpers on the farm and it is obvious that a big contribution of money is not possible for the volunteers now. Even if they had a sufficient amount of money, they would not start big projects without enough hands to help.

Moreover, one of the interviewees raised objections regarding the right procedure to share monthly costs and resources of the ecovillage (L). She was concerned about the question how much money should everyone contribute to the formation of Ekbacka Ecovillage. Another problem she sees is

connected to the possible withdrawal of a person who contributed to the ecovillage and wants to leave; what kind of strategy should be followed to give back the money s/he contributed?

### ***Possible Solutions for Monetary Obstacles***

#### ***Foundation or Association***

The possible solution for the monetary obstacle is again to form either a foundation or an association. From that foundation or association, people can join under a solid platform and more money will be contributed so that they can finally start to work for the ecovillage. In the association, everyone will work for the same vision and there will be an advantage in exchanging works and labors between the members of the association. The members can help each other at the farm when laborers are needed, especially during harvesting of fruits and these sorts of farm works. However, to form an association, they first have to solve the participant problem. Since they do not have sufficient members at present, an alternative possibility to solve the monetary problem for Ekbacka Gård is to join in an existing foundation. Therefore, Ekbacka Gård would avoid trouble of creating a new one. One interviewee (K) mentioned the Solmarka Foundation<sup>4</sup> as the nearest biodynamic farm as a possibility for Ekbacka Ecovillage.

#### ***Alternative Economy Practices/Donations and Funding***

To advance the process of establishing an ecovillage in Ekbacka Gård, they could take several steps to apply for donations or funding. J. R. Jackson (2000) mentions a business plan based on the traditional banking system, but with improvements in the ecovillagers' design. Here, interested shareholders or participants contribute or buy shares at a certain price for everyone. The interest received from the bank will be used for further financing of the development of the ecovillage. The bank would get a personal guarantor for the joint account (J. R. Jackson, 2000, p.50). However, ecovillagers have to consider carefully which banks to choose. Most traditional banks lend money to organizations who exploit the environment by creating new businesses of weapons, tobacco, chemical fertilizer, fossil fuels and other sorts of exploiting industries (J. R. Jackson, 2000). Most people do not know what their savings in the banks are used for nor the effects of it on the environment (J. R. Jackson, 2000). Ecovillages would not want to receive the interest generated by their money that was used for exploiting the environment; therefore, they have to choose the banks carefully.

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<sup>4</sup> Solmarka Foundation is also situated in Kalmar County, Sweden. They are a biodynamic farm running for 20 years. More about them can be found at - <http://www.jdb.se/beras/print.asp?page=28>.



To avoid confusion with traditional banks, Ekbacka Ecovillage can create a trust to solve the money issue. In 1988, Ross and Hildur Jackson founded the Gaia Trust as cooperative entity. Each member was a trustee and contributed 150dollars as a share. The reason behind the success of the Trust was that no member gained personal benefits and had the authority of electing and approving the decisions (J. R. Jackson, 2000). However, Ekbacka Ecovillage should leave the creation of a trust for future planning because at present they have very little capacity to create a trust. Therefore, they should rather choose a trustworthy bank to create a joint account.

Another option would be the creation of a common monetary fund as mentioned by one interviewees (S). She proposed a starting fee for everyone who joins the Ekbacka Ecovillage. She suggested that those who have the ability to contribute 100,000 SEK as a joining fee can contribute this amount at once. Then they would have to share the monthly costs of the ecovillage only. On the other hand, those who do not have the capacity to afford the joining fee instantaneously can pay on installment along with the monthly costs of the ecovillage.

However, one of the interviewees (S) was concerned about the problem of distributing the monthly costs of the ecovillage fairly among the members who would not contribute or work equally (S). She said, *“There are ... couples working on the farms because they have the skills only they couldn't pay any. But if there is other couple who also live here but both of them have good job outside but they live inside they have to pay more.”* That might not be the final solution according to her, but she suggested implementing a constitution for the ecovillage. Another interviewee (L) mentioned that the solution has to be manifold because one-size-fits-it-all rules to solve the conflicts or difficulties will not work due to the fact that everyone in the farm is and will be different. She emphasizes that there might be people with lots of money who can contribute to the farm and there will be people who have no financial means to give, but are willing to work for the farm. Therefore, Ekbacka Ecovillage has to cut out different conditions for each person who joins. It goes against Ekbacka Gård's character to behave like a big institution that treats everyone alike. Accordingly, she also mentioned that Ekbacka Ecovillage should focus on equity, not equality.

Ekbacka Ecovillage can learn from another successful experience of Auroville Ecovillage, India. This ecovillage has developed a strong economy of solidarity. One of their methods is to invest money into common funds by small installments. It is applicable for the residents who have the capability to invest from their private incomes. There is also a 'circle system' where 20 members share their incomes in a common jar to reduce the inequalities among members. Thus, private money becomes available for the commons and the wealth is redistributed within the community. All the members are able to earn the basic income. By means of this strong structure of economy they become able to

promote 125 different collective enterprises such as handicrafts, computers and food, building, energy, food and waste-treatment technologies (Dawson, 2006, p. 26). Similarly, Sieben Linden Ecovillage in Germany follows a shared economic structure. Incomes generated by the members are kept in a common pool and are allocated according to needs (Dawson, 2006). New Bassaisa Ecovillage in Egypt formed a cooperative and all the members contributed the small amount of money they had and bought land for the ecovillage (Bang, 2005). Inspired from these case studies, a circle or pool system can be a useful consideration for Ekbacka Ecovillage to avoid inequalities among members. Ekbacka can also consider an installment process if they want to raise their funds slowly.

### ***Miscellaneous Solutions For Monetary Obstacles***

The interviewees also anticipated several small-scale solutions for the monetary problem. One option could be that some residents of Ekbacka Gård work outside to earn some money for the farm. Another option could be that, Ekbacka Gård starts selling its products on local markets. The products could be excess vegetables grown on their farm or wooden crafts made in the workshop. One interviewee (S) also suggested that Ekbacka Gård could offer some courses for both grownups and kids that people can attend for a small fee.

### ***4.2.3 Spiritual Challenges: Conflicts and Maintaining Togetherness***

Apart from the monetary and participant problems, the interviewees stated that the biggest obstacle would be to find the togetherness among the current and future residents of Ekbacka Ecovillage. Creating a community with people who do not have the same thoughts and same vision creates problems. The creation of 'group identities' is not straightforward solely by living in a community (D'Alisa et al., 2014, p.166). Furthermore, the lack of communication creates misunderstanding, which causes anger and conflicts among members. *"Because it's not only about people that are coming here, it's about the people who are already here, we are all different, we all have to find a way to peaceful togetherness. I think it's the biggest obstacle to get this going"* [K].

### ***Possible Solutions to Solve Spiritual Challenges***

#### ***Consensus and Group Meeting***

According to one of the interviewees (K), it is always preferable to decide something with the method of consensus. She mentioned a method that Native Americans use in their tribes where everyone can be a chief and have the responsibility once. By discussing issues in a big circle (like a talking circle), the chief will come to a decision after everyone participates.

Another interviewee (L) mentioned almost the same idea. Instead of electing a chief or head of the group, Ekbacka Ecovillage could choose a facilitator for the meetings out of all the members. Therefore, everyone will be able to take the responsibility. The interviewee also shared her personal experiences of living in a cooperative housing. There, they used to have meetings every week and the residents of the house could put any important issue on the agenda, which they wanted to discuss with the other residents. The agenda was sent out to everyone before the meeting, so that everyone could prepare accordingly. If someone was unable to join the meeting, s/he could write a mail to everyone regarding a particular topic s/he wanted to talk about. Thus, everyone had a chance to speak and express his/her opinion. After discussing, a decision would be taken by consensus. Although she thinks that the consensus method might take longer than other methods, it is fair for everyone and gives people the opportunity to understand each other's opinion. In her opinion, *"you talk about things for a long time and then you really have to try to understand each other with the one people who disagree."*

To solve the personal conflicts and take important decisions, some literature warns that consensus might be a disappointing method, since it takes a lot of time (Jackson, 2000). However, in Ithaca Ecovillage in USA, the consensus process was judged to be appropriate when the decisions were about to be taken on an important task ("An Exercise in Efficiency, Community, and Planning: EcoVillage TREE Neighborhood," 2012). A decision was finalized only after being discussed in a group for a sufficient amount of time and with lots of reformation and evaluation of the proposal. A committee was formed to help each of the members to understand the information. The main benefit obtained from the consensus was that each of the members was conscious about the choices and could take informed decisions with complete awareness ("An Exercise in Efficiency, Community, and Planning: EcoVillage TREE Neighborhood," 2012). As one of the interviewee (K) stated, it is an interesting solution for conflict resolution and method for group meeting and it would be a great way to take decisions even if it takes longer than with other methods.

However, some ecovillages have come up with different ideas to solve conflicts among the residents. Zegg Ecovillage in Germany created a Social Forum. It works as a tool to prevent and solve the conflicts as well as maintain openness among the inhabitants. An experienced group and a facilitator create interactions among the members with the help of a volunteer who becomes a focus person. The focus person guided by the facilitator opens the discussion to bring out the problems and presents solutions (Bang, 2005). Another good example is Lebensgarten ecovillage, Germany. They turned conflict management and resolution into their consultancy business because they had to

solve enormous conflicts among the residents in the beginning. It is an excellent example of how an ecovillage can utilize its skills to promote itself and earn a living for them (Bang, 2005).

#### ***4.2.4 Insights in Ekbacka Gård's Challenges and Possible Solutions***

It is obvious for a newly emerging ecovillage to face several challenges during the establishment process. Ekbacka Ecovillage is primarily facing challenges on a social dimension that are making other challenges complex to solve. Ekbacka Gård does not have an adequate amount of participants, therefore they cannot create an association with a governing body to solve the organizational problem and they cannot gather sufficient fund to initiate the projects of ecovillage. Therefore, the possible solution needs to prioritize the gathering of new and long term participants for the ecovillage project. Moreover, challenges in all dimensions are interrelated and it is important to work on all dimensions simultaneously to establish a well-organized ecovillage.

The possible solutions suggested by Ekbacka Gård to solve the challenges are not complete or full-length. This might be the case due to their lacking discussions in a formal meeting (like in an association meeting with governing body) and the lack of setting their common grounds and values. It can be desirous to seek for learning points from other examples of successful ecovillages. However all ecovillages differ in their geographical location, member specificity and of course regarding their core motivations. Therefore, rather than following a template, Ekbacka Gård should discuss their challenges and solutions in a group to develop a concrete and specifically tailored strategy.

Ekbacka Ecovillage has to be careful about being too ambitious. Therefore, they have to be aware of their own capacities and 'limited power' (D'Alisa et al., 2014, p.167). Expecting to make a 'change in the world' with such limited scope can bring disappointments, result in the collapsing of values and motivations of the society and can create more complexity in the spiritual dimension of challenges.

## 5 Conclusion

“Eco-communities provide insights as to how a degrowth society might look” (D’Alisa et al., 2014, p.167).

In the beginning, this thesis has illustrated the global problem of resource depletion and climate change due to over consumption and production in an economic system based on growth. Anthropogenic activities along with growth culture (Böhm et al., 2015) have put the human well-being at unpredictable risk (Jerneck et al., 2011), leaving inescapable and irreversible effects on the ecology, economy, spiritual and social aspects of the human and natural world (Böhm et al., 2015; Pretty, 2013). Therefore, as a holistic solution to these complex global challenges, this paper proposes the degrowth as a concept of transition towards a human society which is simplistic, collective and does not aim for consumption and materialization (D’Alisa et al., 2014). Applying degrowth concept’s grassroots initiative features in ecovillage, this thesis aims to explore the potential of ecovillages for advancing the paradigm of a degrowth society.

The findings of this thesis show that Ekbacka Ecovillage’s general motivations are reciprocated with the degrowth transition and provide the insights on opportunities to establish more ecovillages in the degrowth movement. This study also shows that in the establishment state, an ecovillage faces several interconnected and complex challenges. Therefore, it has to take special care to preserve the degrowth transition and ecovillage principles simultaneously. Ekbacka Gård is facing interconnected challenges in the social and economic dimensions. They have to put extra effort in both of these challenges concurrently, if they want to cross the hurdle and establish an ecovillage on their farm. Therefore, in the inauguration phase of the development of the ecovillage, priority should be given to identify the challenges and the reasons behind these obstacles as well as way to find a way to solve them (D’Alisa et al., 2014). Otherwise, exploitations of values of the organization and dignity among members might appear which hinders further progress of the ecovillage (D’Alisa et al., 2014).

An ecovillage is a small, single example of how the degrowth transition can be manifested and create a simplistic society. However, starting from a small simple step is more preferable than starting with complex challenging policies that are harder to apply (D’Alisa et al., 2014). It is important to acquire insights what sorts of challenges might come during the development phase of an ecovillage and what steps can be adopted to avoid these problems for a future degrowth society. Because “if the community survives in the initial phase, then a degrowth practice made of sound ecological performance and social conviviality is likely to emerge” (D’Alisa et al., 2014, p.167).

## 6 Further Research Scope

While practicing voluntary simplicity, ecovillages risks to avoid being part of social and global political movements, because sometimes they are very confined with their own lifestyles and earning. This is why they cannot cooperate beyond their own boundaries and promote changes according with their vision (D'Alisa et al., 2014, p.167). Ecovillages lack the connection with the government and state. They act within "closed borders" and avoid engagement with social and political actions (D'Alisa et al., 2014, p.167). Again according to Ostrom (2007), if the initial set of rules is set by the government without considering local settings, long term sustainability will not be achieved. Therefore, further study can focus on how to integrate the ecovillage movement into the state, so that ecovillages are no separate entities fighting against unsustainability, but can cooperate "beyond boundaries and promote universal societal change" (D'Alisa et al., 2014, p.167).

Moreover, this thesis structure could also be framed within a complex socio-economic structure (Ostrom, 2007). The concept of an ecovillage and its related core subsystems such as Governance Unit (Ekbacka Gård), Resource Unit (Organic farm), and Users (members of ecovillage) can be framed in further studies to analyze the complex socio-ecological system of the ecovillage and how the different subsystem interacts with each other.

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## 8 Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### Case study-Ekbacka Gård: Organic Farm, the place for WWOOFing and future Ekbacka ecovillage

Ekbacka Gård started as a small organic farm in 2006<sup>5</sup> situated in Kalmar County, Sweden. The farm has 20 hectares of land with a small lake and oak garden in the middle of the farm where it gets its name Ekbacka Gård (Ekbacka in Swedish means Oak hill). Among the 20 hectares of land, 5 hectares of land is virgin natural resource that has never been cultivated either with machine or by hand. There are three hectares of forest within the farm area, which contain birch, oak and pine trees. 10 hectares of land are used for cultivation of food for both farm animals and farm inhabitants. Among these 10 hectares, only half a hectare of land is used for potato cultivation and other vegetables like beetroots and carrots. On the rest of the land hay grass is being grown as the fodder for the farm animals. The remaining two hectares are farmyard, stables and housing areas.



Figure 5: Total area of Ekbacka Gård, Yellow line indicates the boundary (Photo by author, 2015).

**WWOOFing place:** Ekbacka Gård offers opportunities for volunteering on the farm since 2008 in exchange of food and accomodation, which is known as WWOOFing.

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<sup>5</sup> Ekbacka Gård's detail website orientation can be found in here: <http://www.wwof.se/host-list/WWOOF-SE-50/>



Figure 6: House for volunteers (left side of the picture) and main house (right side of the picture) (Photo by author, 2014).

**Urine Separating Toilet system:** One of the distinctive features of the farm is the toilet system. The toilet separates human urine and excreta to be further decomposed and used as a fertilizer on the farm. These toilets were first made by the end of 2012. The urine is separated and collected in a tank of 3000 L capacity and then poured in a tank to be further decomposed for 6 months. After this time, the decomposed urine is diluted in a 4:1 ratio with water. The diluted and decomposed urine is directly applied on the soil or green house.



Figure 7: Chambered room to decompose human excreta (Photo by author, 2015).

The excreta are collected in a wheel cart and dumped in a three chambered room. Each chamber is filled with excreta and it is decomposed for the next two years. After two years, the excreta undergo a mushroom treatment since mushrooms can take up the entire heavy and toxic chemicals from the human excreta and break it down to nontoxic metabolites (Stamets, 2006). The Mushrooms are edible, too, since those heavy metals do not remain in the mushrooms. They have their own digestive system to use up all the toxics (Stamets, 2005, 2006). After the mushroom treatment, the decomposed excreta is used as a fertilizer.

**Energy and Heating System:** The main alternative energy and heating systems in the farm are solar panels and the wood stocks. From the solar panel, the farm gets energy for heating of water and room heating. The solar panels mostly work during the summer season. In winter, wood burned in order to produce heat to warm the water and living areas. There are 40 Sq meter of photovoltaic solar panel to be mounted soon, which will make use of the daylight. Therefore, there will be no need for sunrays, which is important because in Sweden the sunshine is the one of the rarest resources in winter season.



Figure 8: Solar Panels used for heating water mounted on the main house (Photo by author, 2014).

**Housing Areas:** The farm contains four houses at present where almost 20 people can live. Moreover, they are planning to renovate the current storage house in the future. In that house, people will be living in the attic part and downstairs, there will be big community kitchen since the current one is too small. The big kitchen will also be used for celebration, brunch and more festivities like those.

**Animals:** At present there are goats, sheep and horses on the farm. In the future, Ekbacka Gård will have a big stable or winter house. In the summer, they can stay in an open area (which is more than 5 hectares) where natural grass grows for them. This natural grass grows as fast as the farm animals eat it. Therefore, there is no need to take care for the feed of the farm animals from the end of March till November. On the other hand, hay grass is grown on more than 18 hectare of land in the farm which is enough to feed the animals during winter time.



Figure 9: Strawberry cultivation in Permaculture method (Photo by author, 2014).

**Permaculture:** The whole farm is designed by Katrin in a permaculture way. She participated in training on permaculture in Nibble Gård<sup>6</sup> in Stockholm and learned about the ecovillage movement there.



Figure 10: Tomato cultivation in Green house (Photo by author, 2014).

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<sup>6</sup> More about Nibble Gård can be found: <http://nibblegard.com/>

**Land for Food:** Root veggies like potatoes, beetroots and carrots are grown on less than one hectare of land. Currently these vegetables are grown only for the family living on the farm. In the beginning of the farm, 6 hectares of land were cultivated to grow potatoes. But the total amount of acreage had to decrease due to lack of laborer. However, 20 hectares are enough to grow food for more people in the future, as mentioned by one interviewee (L).

## **Appendix 2**

### **Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

**Question 1: What are the biggest motivations and principles behind the aim to establish the ekbacka ecovillage?**

- \* How did the idea of establishing an ecovillage in Ekbacka Gård come up?
- \* Why do they want to establish an ecovillage there? What is the biggest motivation behind it?
- \* What do they want to see in the near future? What are the visions, goal, objectives they want to fulfill in the ecovillage?
- \* What steps are they taking to fulfill these goals/objectives?
- \* What resources they have at their disposal in the Ecovillage?

**Question 2: What problems, difficulties and constraints are they facing in the process of establishing an ecovillage in Ekbacka Gård?**

- \* What are the problems, difficulties and constraints they have faced so far?
- \* How do they want to solve the problem? What resources do they have to solve the problems?
- \* How useful would it be for the people of Ekbacka Gård to visit other ecovillages?
- \* How does the role of volunteers (eg. WWOOFers) as short-term participants influence the establishment and progress of ecovillages (especially in sharing experiences and education)?