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**Applying Ecovillage Praxis to Foster
Regeneration and Urban Socio-Ecological
Transformation: An Exploratory Analysis of 5
Malmö Community Gardens**



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Applying Ecovillage Praxis to Foster Regeneration and Urban Socio-Ecological Transformation

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Abstract:

This research aims to fill the lacuna in the literature concerning the application of ecovillage praxis in spaces other than intentional communities by focusing on urban community gardens (UCGs) in Malmö, Sweden, as communities of practice where this could be integrated. It introduces both ecovillages and UCGs, as well as their associated praxis. Data was gathered about the first using semi-structured interviews with six ecovillage experts from the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) and the European Network for Community-Led Initiatives on Climate Change and Sustainability (ECOLISE), whilst information on the second was collected through narrative walks with five key gardening practitioners. The research explores ecovillage and UCG praxis to establish the potential for scaling across elements of the former to the latter, as well as to assist in the transition towards greater regeneration and an urban socio-ecological transformation. The results show that UCGs provide the foundation for incorporating ecovillage praxis as they already contribute to a sense of community and recognise the interrelationship of socio-ecological linkages. However, in contrast to ecovillage praxis, their approaches appear less holistic and intentional, and rather than speak of regeneration, the focus still seems to lie on sustainability. The research therefore suggests that UCGs can serve as spaces for bringing ecovillage praxis into an urban context and may simultaneously benefit in doing so, by becoming more effective agents of socio-ecological change.

Keywords: ecovillage praxis, urban community garden praxis, regeneration, socio-ecological transformation, communities of practice, alternatives, scaling across

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The most heartfelt gratitude to kinship, friendship, and sisterhood.

'Gärten sind nicht Wirklichkeiten, sondern stellen mögliche Wirklichkeiten da.'

(Gardens are not realities, rather they present possible realities).

— *Lucius Burckhardt (1925-2003)*

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Section 1: Introduction

‘Only the purpose of a coherent community, fully alive in both the world and in the minds of its members, can carry us beyond fragmentation, contradiction, and negativity, teaching us to preserve, not in opposition but in affirmation and affection, all things needful to make us glad to live.’ (Berry cited in Bollier, 2014:155)

Human Ecology is the study of human-environmental relations and focuses on the intertwining of environmental change, societal processes, and the relations of power that both maintain and generate unevenly distributed environmental impacts in global society. It aims to see past the human-nature dichotomy and move towards social and ecological justice. The overarching goal is therefore to formulate a notion of sustainability that represents an understanding of well-being beyond ecological modernisation and green growth imperatives (Brand and Wissen, 2017b:291). As multiple crises unfold and the current human-exacerbated climate emergency brings the very possibility of maintaining a habitable planet into question, Human Ecology contributes to investigating alternative future trajectories. This means promoting practices that do not vilify unquestioned economic growth to the detriment of humans and the more-than-human world.

To realise the above, we require different narratives to counter the dictum often attributed to Jameson (1994) that it is harder to imagine the end of capitalism — a system where the means of production are privately owned; the purpose of production is profit; commodities are sold on the market; and work is organised through waged labour — than the end of the world. As psychoanalyst Orange (2016) writes, we — citizens of industrial growth societies of the Global North — need to question current prescriptions, mainly technocratic in nature, and ask what is radically important. This brings to mind Lifton’s coining of the term ‘the absurdity of the double life’:

‘Whilst we live with the knowledge on the one hand that we, each of us, could be consumed in a moment together with everyone and everything we have touched or love, there is a tendency to go about business as usual as if no such threat existed.’ (Lifton cited in Norgaard, 2011:5)

It is thus time to foment catalysts to harness other ways of being, living, dreaming, and knowing, and welcome a holistic conception of regeneration. As Berry’s quote above implies, this includes movements which choose not to accept planetary dysphoria — the real and imagined process of Earth’s destruction and life as we know it (Apter, 2013) — and instead create humane, ecologically balanced communities in harmony with surrounding cultural and ecological regions (Geddes cited in Clark, 1997). One phenomenon which promises to break with the status quo and hopes to restore human-nature relationships, are ecovillages. These are communities founded on the intention to implement pathways to a regenerative future and to rethink ‘personal identities and relationships not bastioned by the moral virtue of productionism’ (Paulson, 2017:433). Ecovillages

act as a source of inspiration for communities in transition towards a sustainable society (Dias et al., 2017). They ultimately aim to solve collective challenges by creating new models and require active support from mainstream society (Lüpke, 2012). For this reason, their praxis, the process by which ideas are enacted, is the focus of this research.

If ecovillages are to present a model of living for the future and become more widely recognised as an alternative to material and profit-driven societies, their visibility and viability must increase. Bringing their praxis into urban spaces is one such way that has so far been understudied. As another social phenomenon, urban community gardens (from hereon UCGs) may offer opportunities to facilitate this process. Prior studies have argued that UCGs in some sense already serve as neighbourhood ecovillages as they provide spaces of self-sufficiency and social support within cities (Spilková, 2017). Most notably, De Lay and Berezan (2013) claim that they are a form of distributed ecovillage. Yet, the question of precisely how UCGs may serve as spaces to help fully translate and integrate ecovillage praxis into urban life remains to be answered.

This thesis explores how five UCGs in the city of Malmö, Sweden, could integrate ecovillage praxis to: (i) aid the visibility of ecovillages; (ii) enrich UCGs' own praxis; and (iii) more broadly advance a necessary socio-ecological transformation. Here, I take Brand and Wissen's conceptualisation and understand socio-ecological transformation to describe the 'political, socioeconomic, and cultural shifts resulting from attempts to address the socio-ecological crisis' (Brand and Wissen, 2017a:2). I thus recognise the potential of urban experiential places to serve as spaces for ecovillage praxis to be scaled across to and seek a focus beyond technocratic solutions to the socio-ecological crisis.

1.1 Research Aims and Questions

The term *ecovillage* came into usage during the 1990s and is still relatively new. Research gaps in this field are therefore manifold (Van Schyndel Kasper, 2008), making it an area of rich inquiry in need of further investigation. How to apply the ideals of a sustainable lifestyle as brought to life by ecovillages elsewhere, is one hitherto unexplored avenue. Wagner (2012), a key contributor to furthering ecovillage endeavours, affirms that questions centred around the application of ecovillage approaches are particularly relevant. Similarly, the field of UCG research also remains under researched; only a fraction of potential UCG research has been touched upon and most has been geographically limited (Guitart et al., 2012).

In this work, I do not intend to suggest that the ecovillage model is a panacea to scale up. Instead, I am interested in how to apply and scale its praxis across to already existing communities of practice. This may also help to bridge the divide between who is able to pursue a more regenerative,

communitarian livelihood, and who is not (Morris, 2020). I hereby take inspiration from a recent article in which Morris writes:

‘Scaling a solution requires a model that can be stripped down and transferred to other ecological and social contexts. Shifting away from the language of growth to describe grassroots sustainability initiatives — especially ones that are explicitly anti-growth — is an important first step.’ (2020, undisciplinedenvironments.org)

At its core, the aims of the research are thus threefold: (i) to assist in the effort of making ecovillage praxis, practically and in terms of the ecovillage ethos, a more widely accessible and realisable possibility; (ii) to understand how community gardens can serve as sites for realising this and in so doing incite greater regeneration, as well as an urban socio-ecological transformation; and (iii) to contribute to the necessary growth of both ecovillage and community garden research.

Taking the above into account, this thesis aims to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent can UCGs serve as spaces for bringing ecovillage praxis into cities?
2. How do ecovillages and UCGs differ in fostering transformative praxis?
3. How can ecovillage praxis be applied to UCGs to help advance both regeneration and an urban socio-ecological transformation?

I therefore identify both ecovillage and UCG praxis used to address the socio-ecological crisis, and through this research contribute to determining how the latter could be applied to the former. By doing research on ecovillages and using their associated praxis to do research with people active in my chosen community of practice (Bamberg, 2012) — the UCGs — the plethora of ways in which ecovillage ideals could prevail in an urban context will become more tangible.

1.2 Thesis Outline

In the ensuing section, I delineate the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the research. Here, I introduce the broader theoretical framework of Urban Ecology, before focusing on more specific concepts. These include: (i) whole systems thinking and regeneration; (ii) concrete utopia; (iii) communities of practice; and (iv) the boundary perspective. What follows in section three is an overview of ecovillages and UCGs as social phenomena that offer alternative pathways to dominant production and consumer-based lifestyles. I outline multiple definitions; introduce current literature on both; and provide reasons for making them the focus of this research. After I establish the link between ecovillages and UCGs, I proceed with an outline of the methods — semi-structured expert interviews and narrative walks — and methodology employed for the data collection, as well as descriptions of the selected cases. Thereafter, I present the results and analysis

of ecovillage and UCG praxis. Next, in the discussion section I consider the wider implications of this research and present some limitations of UCG praxis. Finally, I draw conclusions and offer suggestions for further research.

Section 2: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Considering that I am concerned with how UCGs can integrate ecovillage praxis and bring visibility to ecovillages in cities, I frame this research within the field of Urban Ecology. In the social sciences, Urban Ecology is understood as a ‘multidisciplinary approach to improving living conditions for the human population in cities’ (Langner and Endlicher, 2007:1), and has been used by various disciplines to ‘describe the study of humans in cities, nature in cities, and the coupled relationships of humans and nature’ (Marzluff et al., cited in Langner and Endlicher, 2007:2). Concepts are hereby taken from Human Ecology and applied to the urban realm to create cities in balance with nature (McManus, 2009). Since Urban Ecology is often referred to as a spatial science, it is important to outline the scale of this research. Namely, the micro-scale of the local neighbourhoods in Malmö where the five UCGs are based.

I also apply Urban Ecology as it places the focus on humans. Alberti et al. (2003) note that the challenge is to integrate humans into ecology; especially in cities where there is a profound disconnect from nature. UCGs are good practice examples where action is being taken to do this. I therefore hope that the importance of the following is elucidated: to recreate green spaces and reinstate the city’s ecological integrity; to redesign the systems of production and consumption and address the global problem of an unsustainable metabolism; and to revive urban citizenship and make the socio-ecological transition acceptable and accepted (Wolch, 2007). What follows is an introduction to concepts and theories that have previously appeared in literature on ecovillages and UCGs; hence their relevance for this research. I apply them to analyse the potential of scaling ecovillage praxis across to UCGs and to understand how this can contribute to a socio-ecological transformation.

2.1 Whole Systems Thinking and Regeneration

‘The idea that we live in something called ‘the environment’ ... is utterly preposterous ... ‘Environment’ means that which surrounds or encircles us; it means a world separate from ourselves, outside us ... The real state of things, of course, is far more complex and intimate and interesting than that.’ (Berry, 1992:34)

Sustainability, as currently practiced, is essentially an exercise in effectiveness and efficiency whereby the focus still lies on doing less damage to the environment, rather than learning how to participate with the environment (Reed, 2007). This is reflected in current approaches to natural

resource management which often happens in siloed ways; individually and separate from the whole. To address the socio-ecological crisis and realise the nature of the changes required, we need a shift from a fragmented to a deeply integrated worldview. Whole systems thinking recognises that the entirety is connected and underlines this evolution in understanding. Sterling (2003), a pioneer in sustainability education, uses the metaphor ‘one can’t see the forest for the trees’ to describe three levels of learning necessary for this paradigm shift. Reed (2007) summarises this as follows: level I is only seeing the trees, level II may be seeing the forest as a whole, and level III may be seeing that alternative forests exist and can be chosen. For Sterling, levels I and II refer to the idea of sustainability. Whilst level III is the most transformative as it leads to an understanding of the whole and to subsequent regeneration.

Regeneration hereby means moving the discourse from ‘doing things *to* nature, to one of participation as partners *with* and *as* nature’ (Reed, 2007:677). The path towards regeneration is therefore one of conscious interbeing, integration, and collaboration to establish thriving communities (Wahl, 2016). Inevitably, engaging in regenerative work leads to a deeper sense of caring and appreciation of the interconnectedness of human action. More holistic projects are established if we experience ourselves as part of a larger whole, and adjust values and aspirations (Reed, 2007). Regeneration as cultivated through whole systems thinking, is ultimately the action of creating something new, rather than sustaining at a certain level or avoiding the depletion of natural resources to maintain an ecological balance (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021).

As will become clear, whole systems thinking and regeneration are particularly pertinent to this study as they form the basis of, and manifest through, ecovillage praxis. In addition, both are still largely absent from attempts to address the socio-ecological crisis, yet necessary for transformative change. As aforementioned, the reason is that interconnections are made visible, and the status quo is reconfigured.

2.2 Concrete Utopia

I also place this work within Utopian Studies and the ever-present need to defend utopia against the naturalisation of capitalist society (Dinerstein, 2016). Drawing on Bloch’s (1986) Hegelian approach, the world is in a constant state of becoming. The future is a possibility anticipated by utopia and human activity plays a central role in its unfolding. Despite utopia meaning *no-where*, it commonly refers to a place where ideals are realised. It finds expression through the ways in which people live and work together and represents an element of all human activity (Bronner, 1997). For this reason, I focus on the idea of concrete, rather than abstract, utopia as it can be understood as putting dreams into practice (Bloch, 1986). Taking inspiration from Dinerstein (2016), I see

ecovillages and UCGs as grassroots utopias which assist in denaturalising capitalist-colonial society as the only possible society. I therefore aim to help advance the effort to make ecovillage praxis more visible through UCGs as spaces where this is realised. In so doing, they may contribute to greater urban regeneration and a socio-ecological transformation. In Wright's (2011) words: 'the danger is to be a cynic, seeing the flaws as the only reality and the potential as an illusion' (Wright, 2011:39).

The idea of concrete utopia is especially apt for the analysis of ecovillage praxis as it forms part of the attempt by ecovillages to build a new world within the old (Lüpke, 2012). Their vision of the future is thus materialised in the present. This aligns with Levitas' understanding of concrete utopia being a 'praxis orientated category' (Levitas, 1990:70). Furthermore, I use the idea of concrete utopia in relation to the narratives shared by ecovillages. Just like concrete utopias, they describe real possibilities and represent what the world could become.

2.3 Communities of Practice

Communities of practice provide a way in which to realise concrete utopia. This is one of the most influential concepts to have emerged within the social sciences and originally denoted a group of people who share a craft or profession (Lave and Wenger, 1991). It has since come to mean a 'process of collective learning within groups with a common concern or interest' (Maida and Beck, 2018:1). Wenger therefore refers to a community of practice as a social learning system where learning is located between the person and the world (Wenger, 2010). Communities of practice have existed since time immemorial and are said to: (i) share a sense of joint enterprise; (ii) interact on the basis of mutuality; and (iii) share a repertoire of resources (Lave and Wenger, 1991). According to Maida and Beck, this framework of informal knowing, belonging, and social learning, 'provides members with the skills to engage meaningfully in knowledge production, exchange, and transformation [...] by creating new ways of being in the world' (Maida and Beck, 2018:2).

As Snyder and Wenger (2010) write, the complexity of the challenges we face requires a 'commensurate capacity for learning, innovation, and collaboration across diverse constituencies and levels' (Snyder and Wenger cited in Blackmore, 2010:124). In applying this concept, I understand ecovillages and UCGs to represent two distinct communities of practice. Both enable individuals to participate locally and create possibilities for regenerative pathways. I therefore focus on comparing them to explore the transformative potential and possibility of scaling across the praxis from the former to the latter.

2.4 Boundary Work

Finally, I borrow ideas from the boundary work perspective. As Köhrsen summarises, ‘the notion of boundary work addresses the creation and transformation of boundaries between different social worlds that are inhabited by specific communities of actors’ (Köhrsen, 2017:3). The reason is that many communities tend to generate boundaries between each other. This includes the use of specific vocabulary, values, and objectives (ibid.). Whilst the boundary work approach has been used to find ways of managing boundaries, especially between researchers and policy makers, I use it to see how approaches to regeneration can be disseminated across different social worlds; from ecovillages to UCGs, and from UCGs to urban contexts more broadly.

I draw on Köhrsen’s (2017) work and consider his boundary bridging arrangements; ‘social arrangements that facilitate the communication between actors from different social worlds’ (Köhrsen, 2017:3). For this research, I take two such arrangements: boundary organisations and boundary settings. The former allows for ‘translation, coordination, and joint knowledge production between actors from different social worlds’ (Köhrsen, 2017:4). I understand UCGs to serve as quasi-boundary organisations as they are situated between ecovillages and the city. As a result, they can act as intermediaries to bring ecovillage praxis into urban spaces. Whilst the latter take on their boundary bridging potential when actors from different social worlds come together. These settings may be found within boundary organisations. Examples include working groups, joint projects, and round table discussions. Here, I also understand UCGs to provide potential boundary settings in assisting a wider socio-ecological transformation and urban regeneration.

Section 3: Defining Ecovillages and UCGs

3.1 Ecovillages as Settlements for Regeneration

‘We are entering into a world of rapidly increasing need for resilience. This need can be best addressed by those who live in awareness of themselves, of others and of nature. Ecovillages nurture this alignment by deepening the intentionality to live our lives in a way that is more reflective of our highest values, to develop more authentic relationships with those around us, and to practice behaviors that are more respectful of our planetary boundaries.’ (Figueres cited in GEN Annual Report, 2018)

To begin, most available literature on ecovillages is based on a Global North understanding (Dias et al., 2017). Whilst this applies well to the context in question, the world of intentional communities is richer than what this research is able to encompass. For many, the term ecovillage remains ambiguous. It is rarely listed among recognised solutions to the socio-ecological crisis and is seldom mentioned in mainstream discourse. Before finding a definition, their high heterogeneity needs to be acknowledged. This stems from their diverse origins. Ecovillage roots range from the

ideals of self-sufficiency and spiritual inquiry to the alternative education movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and the more recent back-to-the-land and co-housing movements in the Global North (Dawson, 2006). Yet they hold many shared characteristics, most of which are manifest in their approaches to regeneration. This helps to unify what has now become a global movement and solidify what is understood under ecovillage praxis.

Despite their diversity, what stands at the fore of many ecovillages, specifically those in the Global North, is their voluntary, and intentional, purpose of ‘ameliorating perceived social problems and inadequacies’ (Metcalf cited in Andreas and Wagner, 2012:8). Their aim is often to consciously devise and seek out a social and cultural alternative to hegemonic ways of being, seeing, and living. Regarding consciousness, I apply Pisters et al’s definition: ‘a dynamic, relational dimension that is constantly shaped in the interaction between people and their social and physical environment’ (Pisters et al., 2020:396). Ecovillages therefore serve as places where other systems of production and consumption are practiced and relationships to oneself, one another, and the environment are restored (Burke and Arjona cited in Lockyer, 2013). In other words, most communities intend to implement practices which slow down separation and instead enhance participation. As Robert Gilman, a sustainability thinker often cited as coining the term ecovillage, writes, 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.’ (Gilman cited in Christian, 2007:xviii)

As the primary platform for connecting ecovillages, the Global Ecovillage Network’s (GEN) definition also brings clarity and identifies three core practices: (i) they are rooted in local participatory practices; (ii) they integrate social, cultural, economic and ecological dimensions in a whole systems approach to sustainability; and (iii) they actively restore and regenerate their social and natural environments (ecovillage.org). These practices underline the data collected for this research through semi-structured expert interviews. They therefore indicate how to apply ecovillage praxis to UCGs and assist in furthering regeneration and an urban socio-ecological transformation.

Furthermore, ecovillages create alternatives to dominant regimes — regimes that have led, and continue to lead, to exhaustion, extraction, and extinction of the human and non-human world — through whole-systems design. This sets them apart from most other projects which aim for regeneration. As the Worldwatch Institute, a global environmental research organisation, wrote in a recent report: ‘as the world seeks to make the transition to a rich, diverse, and sustainable global society, the lessons learned by ecovillages are likely to be an important source of information’ (Starke and Mastny, 2010:190). They can therefore be seen as pockets of hope emblematic of how to advance regeneration.

What follows is a brief outline of the ecovillage approach to whole-systems design. This will help to guide the analysis when I explore the ways in which Malmö's UCGs can bring ecovillage praxis into an urban context, together with the semi-structured expert interviews on ecovillages. Ecovillage praxis is framed by the 4 dimensions of regeneration: economic; ecological; social; and cultural (worldview). Integral design weaves all these elements together through its emphasis on collaboration and participation. GEN has worked to divide the areas of regeneration into 32 distinct principles in what is known as the Ecovillage Map of Regeneration (see Table 1). This shows the futility of attempting to transition towards regeneration and a socio-ecological transformation without taking a holistic approach (ecovillage.org).

Table 1: Ecovillage Map of Regeneration using data from ecovillage.org

AREA OF REGENERATION	PRINCIPLES
<p>SOCIAL</p> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nurture diversity and cohesion for thriving communities 2. Develop fair, effective and accountable institutions 3. Practice conflict facilitation, communication and peacebuilding skills 4. Empower collaborative leadership and participatory decision making 5. Ensure equal and lifelong access to education and sustainability 6. Promote health, healing and wellbeing for all
<p>CULTURE</p> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Clarify vision and higher purpose 8. Nurture mindfulness and self-reflection 9. Enrich life with art and celebration 10. Honour indigenous wisdom and welcome positive innovation 11. Engage actively to protect communities and nature 12. Reconnect to nature and embrace low-impact lifestyles
<p>ECOLOGY</p> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Grow seeds, food and soil through regenerative agriculture 14. Clean and replenish sources and cycles of water 15. Move towards 100% renewable energy and transport 16. Innovate and spread green building technologies 17. Work with water as a valuable resource 18. Increase biodiversity and restore ecosystems
<p>ECONOMY</p> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 19. Reconstruct the concepts of wealth, work and progress 20. Commit to responsible production, consumption and trade 21. Cultivate social entrepreneurship for local regeneration 22. Increase economic justice through sharing and collaboration 23. Ensure equitable access to land and resources 24. Use banks and currencies that strengthen communities
<p>INTEGRAL DESIGN</p> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 25. Learn from nature and practice whole systems thinking 26. Identify assets, needs and leverage points 27. Adapt solutions to scale and context 28. Be aware of privilege and use it for the benefit of all 29. Build alliances across all divides 30. Engage all stakeholders in designs for the future 31. Spread core patterns of regeneration 32. Listen to the feedback of the world

3.2 UCGs as Mitigating the City-Nature Dichotomy

The contemporary UCG movement is considered to originate in the 1970s (Firth et al., 2011), and has since grown in popularity, becoming an important feature of urban landscapes; particularly in Europe (Spilková, 2017). This is due to the rise in urban sprawl and subsequent land scarcity, in addition to growing international concern for the environment (Ferris et al., 2001). Since Local Agenda 21, agreed upon during Rio de Janeiro's *Earth Summit* in June 1992, emphasis continues to be placed on local sustainable development. This has given fresh impetus to UCGs and similar place-based grassroots movements (ibid.).

The term *community garden* generally refers to an open space which is managed by members of the local community for the cultivation of food and/or flowers (Holland cited in Guitart et al., 2012). Yet, as with ecovillages, UCGs range in size, purpose, and character, and tend to adapt to their local setting. They have evolved to become multimodal spaces used for more than simply growing food and offer possibilities for different expressions, as well as active engagement (Hou, 2017). UCGs often serve as spaces which bring people together and inspire action, whilst also encouraging self-sufficiency and providing social support within cities (Linn cited in Firth et al. 2011). Tornaghi therefore defines UCGs as 'a grassroots singularity that is anchored in urban counterculture, acting as a participatory tool to bridge the divide between policymakers and grass-roots groups' (Tornaghi cited in Bonow et al., 2010:72).

Ferris et al. (2001) compiled a comprehensive list, albeit indefinite, that covers most kinds of UCGs, to highlight their diversity and reject finding a precise definition. Although their study was based on gardens in the San Francisco bay area, their groupings are useful for this research as their categories also apply to my chosen case studies: leisure gardens; child and school gardens; entrepreneurial gardens; crime diversion/work and training gardens; healing and therapy gardens; neighbourhood pocket parks; ecological restoration gardens; and demonstration gardens. UCGs therefore reflect a kind of pluralism and contribute to reconciling people, land, and sustainability (ibid.). This also holds true for ecovillages, hence the link between these two social phenomena.

To establish the connection between ecovillages and UCGs, I took further inspiration from the following quote:

'A world inspired by ecovillages would certainly consist of diverse and manifold social networks of support, solidarity and gift economy which would make it much easier to live sustainably and act in an environmentally and socially responsible manner.' (Kliemann cited in Burkhart et al., 2020:176)

I understand the UCGs in Malmö to represent one such network. Like ecovillages, they appear to focus on direct practice and experimentation in situ. As the definitions suggest, UCGs can become spaces for acting differently and reflect a potential post-growth society (Schmelzer and Everberg, 2017). They therefore have the potential to be exemplars of regenerative praxis and effective agents of change (Stocker & Barnett, 1998). In addition, UCGs challenge the city-nature dichotomy and attempt to mitigate what Marx called the antagonism between town and country (Marx cited in Foster, 1999). This makes them the closest urban alternative to ecovillages able to bridge the divide between this research's communities of practice. For this reason, I chose to explore how regeneration, as cultivated through ecovillage praxis, can strengthen UCG renewability and their potential for socio-ecological transformation.

Section 4: Methodology and Methods

I used an interpretive case study approach and employed qualitative data collection methods as the research is exploratory in nature, meaning that it is being done to gain further insight and not necessarily provide conclusive answers (Yin, 2009). I chose the research methods in accordance with the main research objective: to address the academic lacuna in our understanding of how to apply ecovillage praxis in other spaces. The investigation of the research questions involved three empirical research phases: (i) explorative context studies; (ii) qualitative in-depth case studies and interviews; and (iii) triangulation and comparative analysis.

I chose a case study approach as case studies are suitable for answering *how* or *why* questions investigated in qualitative research (Yin, 2009); particularly in this study. A case study usually refers to a community or organisation in a specific location that is typically examined intensively (Bryman, 2012). Intensive research has become well established in applied research projects and has greatly contributed to understanding other social phenomena (Yin, 2009). The case studies at the centre of this study are the UCGs in the city of Malmö, Sweden, alongside close analysis and tentative ideas based on data from semi-structured expert interviews and narrative walks. This methodological approach ensures that results are more robust as it encompasses multiple sources of evidence (ibid.). Data can therefore be triangulated.

A further reason I chose to do case study research is that 'broad generalisations based on case study evidence' (Yin, 2009:19) can be generated, as is the wider aim of this study. Though I also acknowledge that the generalisability of this approach remains disputed. I subsequently analysed the sources using an interpretivist epistemological approach and took ideas from hermeneutics and the sociological tradition of *Verstehen* (Schwandt, 1998). This approach lends itself to qualitative inquiry, serving as a guide for the 'generation of meaning and the understanding of experience'

(Vandermause and Fleming, 2011:367). I therefore had to remain open to unexpected or unfamiliar responses and make space for an interactive exchange to manifest throughout the data collection process (ibid.).

4.1 Data Collection

The focus of the study was an exploration of how UCGs approach regeneration in the city of Malmö and can serve as spaces for applying ecovillage praxis to: strengthen their potential for regeneration and socio-ecological transformation, and bring visibility to ecovillage ideals. I combined primary data collected from six semi-structured interviews with ecovillage experts from the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) and the European Network for Community-led Initiatives on Climate Change and Sustainability (ECOLISE), with five narrative walks conducted with community garden practitioners in the city of Malmö. Both of which are described in greater detail below.

4.1.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are one of the most common and important data gathering tools in qualitative research (Myers and Newman, 2007:3). They have been described as akin to night goggles, permitting the invisible to be made visible (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Importantly, in semi-structured interviews interviewees have the freedom to deviate from the questions set to avoid limiting their responses. This allows respondents to shed light on what they consider valuable, while an interview guide (see Appendix B) ensures that specific information about the topic in question is gained.

I conducted six semi-structured interviews with experts from the ecovillage movement (see Table 2) until the point of saturation for an enriched understanding of ecovillage praxis. This included approaches to regeneration, ethos, and transformative potential. More specifically, the interviews focused on the experts' understanding of ecovillages and their applicability to other alternative political ecologies; communities where concrete paths towards respectful relationships with the earth and between people are pursued (Burke and Arjona cited in Lockyer, 2013). The aim was hereby to determine the ways in which their praxis could be integrated into Malmö's UCGs.

All interviews were conducted online due to the geographic spread of the ecovillage experts. Before deciding to take part, participants were sent a participant information sheet (see Appendix A) along with a summary of the research project. The respondents could choose to be anonymised and consented to participate on a voluntary basis, as well as to the interviews being recorded. All interviews were conducted in English and took an average of 39 minutes (the shortest being 17

minutes; the longest 1 hour and 17 minutes). Timings were largely dependent on internet connectivity, availability, and the respondents' deviations from the questions.

Semi-structured expert interviews were most apt for collecting information on ecovillages and their praxis as I could adequately control the exchange. The data collected was therefore less unpredictable and more targeted. This was important as I wanted to gain a comprehensive understanding of ecovillage praxis and the ways in which it could be brought into other communities of practice.

Table 2: Ecovillage Experts

Name (anonymised)	Roles
Alba	Education and Research Director GEN International, Lead Link of the Coordination Circle GEN International
Caroline	Ecovillage Consultant, GEN Europe Council, Board Member GEN International, External Relations Hallingelille Ecovillage
Fern	Communications Manager GEN Europe, Co-President ECOLISE
James	Co-Founder NextGEN
Monica	President GEN Europe, Advisor GEN International, Representative of Damanhur Ecovillage
Ron	Executive Director ECOLISE, Auditor Baltic Ecovillage Network (BEN), Founder GEN Belgium, Board Member Suderbyn Ecovillage

4.1.2 Narrative Walks

The second method I employed were narrative walks. These have a long history in ethnographic research and interest has recently begun to grow in the social sciences (Clark and Emmel, 2010). Interviews are conducted on the move meaning that both participant and researcher are exposed to the 'multi-sensory stimulation of the surrounding environment' (Adams and Guy cited in Evans and Jones, 2011:849). Rather than being 'cocooned in a filtered *blandscape*' (Bijsterveld, 2010 and Edensor, 2007 cited in Evans and Jones, 2011:850), participants can engage with the landscape. This offers more intimate insights and prompts reflections related to self and sense of place (Solnit, 2001). As Connelly and Clandini write:

'Narrative and life go together and so the principal attraction of narrative as method is its capacity to render life experiences, both personal and social, in relevant and meaningful ways.' (1990:2)

I collected data on Malmö's UCGs through narrative walks with five key practitioners in five selected gardens. The aim of working with a small sample of participants was to obtain a rich and free-ranging discourse (Josselson, 2012). The walks focused on the story of the gardens; their beginnings, purpose, developments, and importance for the community, as well as how

regeneration is approached, which activities take place, and what the impact of the garden has been on those who visit. I wanted to obtain a sense of the sites, understand how they are being used, and see what potential they hold for applying ecovillage praxis.

As with the semi-structured interviews, I informed participants of the project's intent and asked for their consent before recording the walks. I gave no prescriptive instructions which meant participants were able to take control over what was said, both when and where in the garden. I therefore tried to decentre my role as the researcher and instead become the learner. Although I gave occasional prompts to allow for embodied participation and to generate more 'dynamic ways of knowing and feeling spaces and places' (Edensor cited in Costa et al., 2014:41). The average length of a walk was 48 minutes (the shortest taking 28 minutes; the longest 1 hour and 5 minutes). Other than availability, the duration varied depending on the size of the garden; for how long it had been established; its activities; and the participant's level of English. I collected photo documentation to better understand the UCG spaces and the extent to which they can serve as sites for incorporating ecovillage praxis. The photographs also helped to illustrate the information shared during the walks.

4.1.3 Selection and Description of UCG Cases

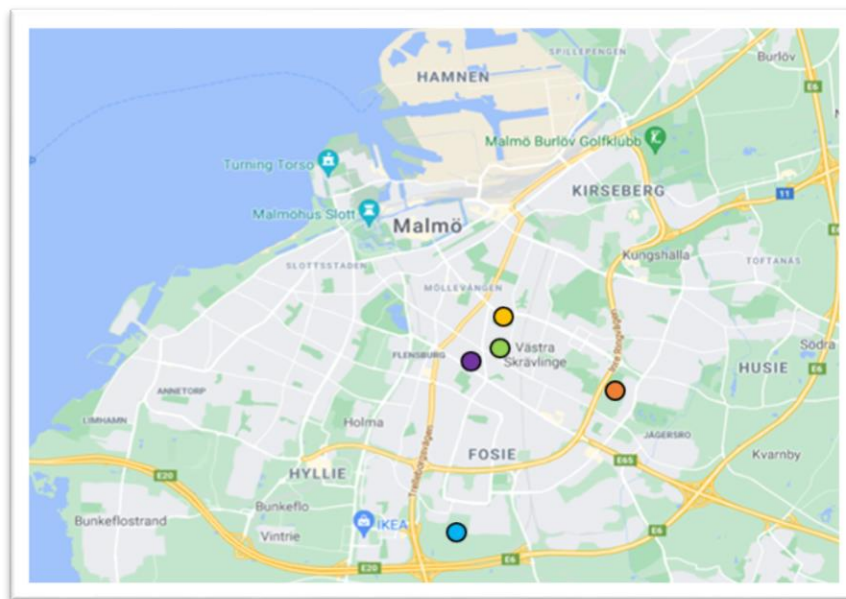


Figure 1: UCGs in Malmö (Google Maps, 2021)

- Enskifteshagen
- Guldängens Bygg och Odblingslekplats
- Kvartersträdgården på Seved
- Botildenborg
- Malmö Skogsträdgård Vårsången

For contextualisation, Figure 1 displays the five community gardens which I used for the data collection and subsequent analysis. What follows is a brief description of the individual sites and

photographic documentation. Beginning with the first, the Enskifteshagen UCG (see Figure 2a-b) is located in a park within Sofielund, one of Malmö's neighbourhoods, and is responsible for the care and cultivation of urban gardening in the area (stadsodlingmalmo.se). Enskifteshagen hosts individual growing boxes, a small forest garden, an open outdoor kitchen, a seating area for socialising, and is home to approximately 40 members.

The Kvartersträdgården på Seved (see Figure 2c-f), Seved's neighbourhood garden, lies a 15-minute walk away. Slightly smaller than Enskifteshagen and divided into 2 areas, the garden is nestled next to a block of apartments. The 30+ members coordinate recreational and organic food growing together with residents, property owners, and the municipality. In so doing, they aim to create green meeting places and a long-term sustainable urban environment (odlingsnatverket.se). As with Enskifteshagen, Seved is open to anyone and has spaces for growing, socialising, and hosting workshops; both indoors and outdoors.

Guldängens Bygg och Odblingslekplats, building and gardening playground, (see Figure 2g-h), is also located in the same neighbourhood and serves a slightly different purpose. The site is based around carpentry, construction, cultivation, ecology, food, and sustainability and has been created for and by children (vaxtvarket.se/guldaengen). Conceived as a green learning environment, Guldängen gives children the chance to be both builders and gardeners whilst adults supervise. The space is divided into different areas comprised of a building area; sensory garden; gardening beds; and a central socialising space around a fire pit.

Botildenberg (see Figure 2i-j) appears somewhat on the periphery yet is still within easy reach of the city centre. It serves as a well-established 'sustainable farm and meeting place' (botildenberg.se) in Malmö. Members of Botildenberg cultivate food, create work, engage in knowledge exchange, and foster community. The UCG therefore contributes to social, ecological, and economic sustainability (*ibid.*). As the largest of the gardens, the site has a social garden to host workshops and hold gatherings, an area to grow commercial food, and a greenhouse to cultivate plants.

Malmö's Skogsträdgård (see Figure 2k-l), the city's forest garden, is the final garden. In an area of 1800m², perennials — plants living for many years — are grown alongside vegetables, herbs, bushes, and trees. It therefore serves as a place for cultivation and harvesting, whilst offering opportunities to exchange knowledge and socialise (stadsodlingmalmo.se).



Figure 2. Photographs of the six UCGs where I collected data. **2a-b** show the Enskifteshagen UCG, (**2a**) first from afar as it is located in the Enskifteshagen park, (**2b**) and then from within; more specifically the small forest garden. **2c-f** show the Seved UCG, including (**2d**) the first half of the garden, and (**2e-f**) the second. **2g** shows part of Guldängen's gardening area, whilst **2h** shows one of the main open entrances to the garden. **2i-j** show part of the UCG at Botildenborg, including (**2i**) growing beds, and (**2j**) the social garden. **2k** shows the individual growing boxes in Malmö's Skogsträdgård, and (**2l**) the communal vegetable garden.

4.1.4 Sampling Approach

I selected the interviewees using a combination of non-probability purposive and snowball sampling (Heckathorn and Cameron, 2017). The main objective of the former was to produce a representative sample of the target population based on the participant's experience (Lavrakas, 2018). In this case, the candidate's familiarity with, and involvement in, the ecovillage movement. Regarding the UCGs, I identified the case studies using a map published by the city of Malmö's UCG network, Stadsodling Malmö (stadsodlingmalmo.se), after an initial internet search and with the help of snowball sampling. I then selected the final five according to their location within the city — all could be found within or close to urban neighbourhoods —, their recent activity, and whether they appeared to focus on more than solely gardening. The sample therefore appeared representative of different types of UCGs in the city of Malmö.

4.2 Ethical Considerations

I came to the UCGs with prior affiliations to the ecovillage movement and an interest in seeing how ecovillage praxis could be scaled across. As a researcher, I had to be clear about the purpose of the research and ensure that my communication was honest and transparent to maintain professional integrity. This involved declaring my involvement with the ecovillage movement. Regarding data collection, I conducted the semi-structured interviews and the narrative walks in accordance with the British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice (British Sociological Association, 2017), meaning that participants were prioritised to safeguard their well-being. I required their full consent prior to the study; they could discontinue the conversation at any moment; I informed participants that they could receive the final research; and I have anonymised all names. Finally, I made sure to store and analyse data as per General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) standards.

4.3 Analytical Framework

I used a hybrid approach consisting of an inductive thematic and content analysis to analyse the data from the semi-structured interviews and the narrative walks. Working inductively assists in giving meaning to raw data by reducing it into themes and categories (Thomas, 2003.) Taking inspiration from Owen (1984), I focused on repetition and recurrence to analyse themes derived from the semi-structured interviews. The former refers to specific words and/or concepts, whilst the latter refers to the same words and/or concepts being phrased differently. This is also a suggestion that Bryman and Burgess (1994) make; to look for the frequency of certain words and phrases to denote a theme. I memoed ideas throughout the analysis; memos being not just

‘descriptive summaries of data but attempts to synthesise them into higher levels of analytic meanings’ (Miles and Huberman, 2014:95).

In the first step of the semi-structured expert interview analysis, I read the transcriptions and manually identified what can be deduced from the data about ecovillage praxis, and how this can be brought into an urban context. I also applied this process to the narrative walk transcriptions. The focus hereby being on: (i) what kind of space the UCG represents; (ii) who the space is used by and what it is used for; (iii) the methods employed in the space; (vi) the impact the space has had; and (v) where its limitations lie. I repeated this process iteratively to detect recurring themes. Thereafter, I ordered each theme in terms of relevance to answer the main research questions, and established linkages between each theme. I sub-grouped minor, non-recurring categories under similar themes and where possible created clusters (Josselson, 2010). A fuller and more complex picture of the whole emerged through repeating this process.

For the content analysis, I relied on inductive coding. This refers to the ‘process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising data’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 61) to yield and group concepts. Text segments that appear to contain particularly strong meaning or relevance are hereby given codes, serving as ‘shorthand devices to label, separate, compile, and organise data’ (Charmaz, 1983:186). I divided the coding into two phases: initial coding and focused coding. I then collated the final codes, or rather concepts, under similar umbrella themes to those of the narrative walks: (i) ecovillages and their associated narratives; (ii) holistic approaches to regeneration; and (iii) the impact ecovillage praxis has had. Each theme contained further subcategories to aid my analysis of how ecovillage praxis differs from that of UCGs in Malmö and to identify which components can be scaled across.

Regarding the interpretive framework and philosophical assumptions, I positioned myself within the social constructivist, commonly known as interpretivist, paradigm. As Creswell and Poth (2018) write, the inquirer seeks to understand the world in which they live and develops subjective meanings of their experiences. In this paradigm, the researcher recognises that interpretations of the participant’s account are shaped by their own background. Ontologically — the nature of reality — this means that the researcher believes there to be multiple ways of seeing. All of which are constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with others. Whilst epistemologically — how reality is known — reality is assumed to be co-constructed between the researcher and the researched. This framework usually employs inductive methods such as interviews and observations to obtain data.

4.4 Positionality

I write as someone who, prior to this research, had a foundational understanding of ecovillages. I was aware of their limited mention in spaces other than intentional communities and knew of the need for greater cross-pollination of their praxis. This was confirmed both through the missing literature and by scholars whom I contacted within the ecovillage research field. I therefore position myself as someone who wants to contribute to furthering awareness about the existence of ecovillages; to find ways of bringing their praxis into other spaces; and to tell stories of alternatives to hegemonic regimes.

4.5 Limitations

My direct experience with ecovillages meant that my understanding of their praxis was more extensive than for UCGs as this community of practice was new to me. For this reason, I first had to gain a sensibility for UCGs and their organising. Whilst the narrative walks enabled me to develop a sense for the spaces and engage in in-depth conversations which semi-structured interviews would not have allowed, the analysis and results are limited to five people. Although I chose the final respondents on the basis that they were most knowledgeable about the UCGs, it would have been beneficial to employ additional data collection methods such as participant observation and other collaborative research processes. This would have resulted in a more holistic understanding of the cases. It is also important to note that I conducted the walks in English rather than Swedish which is likely to have restricted some of the participants. Another limitation lies in the inductive approach. I could not guarantee that the data collected on the walks would necessarily align with my research interests. However, having certain prompts helped to guide the conversations, whilst still leaving space for the participants to freely share their narratives.

Regarding the data analysis, a limitation lies in the range of ways in which thematic analysis and coding is described. This made it difficult to deduce which approach best to take. In addition, the inductive approach often depends on observed correlations to formulate explanations and theory. Whilst I collected data on both ecovillage and UCG praxis, I did not see either directly enacted. Finally, working intensively means focusing on individual agents using qualitative methods and analysis in a certain context (Easton, 2010). Although I have endeavoured to place this research's narratives into a broader frame so that the results from ecovillage praxis and UCGs can be extrapolated, the Global North context of Malmö, Sweden, should not be overlooked.

Section 5: Understanding Praxis of Ecovillages and UCGs

In this section, I outline the results derived from the semi-structured expert interviews and the narrative walks using embedded theory and reference to the Ecovillage Map of Regeneration (see Table 1). In delving into understandings of ecovillage praxis and Malmö's UCGs, I allude to the value of these two communities of practice in addressing the socio-ecological crisis and determine answers to the research questions.

5.1 Expert Interviews on Ecovillages

The following themes were particularly eminent in the analysis of the semi-structured expert interviews: (i) the holistic approach to regeneration as cultivated through participatory processes; (ii) inner development; and (iii) narratives of hope and possibility. I elaborate on these before moving towards the results of the narrative walks.

5.1.1 Ecovillage Praxis as Whole Systems Thinking: The holistic approach to regeneration

All the interviewees mentioned the holistic approach to regeneration which consists of the following 4 dimensions: economic; ecological; social; and cultural. This is an attempt by ecovillages to understand things as whole systems and, as Ron said, is rarely seen in other projects. As will be shown later on, the UCGs are a case in point:

‘[...] most projects are single sector projects [...] you can put up an energy system here, or a transport system here, or a food system here but ecovillages, and the ecovillage approach is trying to integrate all of these things so they make sense.’

‘[...] they're (permaculture/transition projects) not as comprehensive, they're not as deep. You know permaculture projects often don't focus so much on the human social aspects, the transition projects often don't focus so much on their interface with the earth, the water, the energy etc, or they can but it's often not completely comprehensive and it's often not 24/7.’

In like manner, James and Caroline stated how surprised they were to find many within the climate movement still seeing *eco* as something purely ecological: ‘I'm also consistently surprised by how many people, even within the climate world still see the *eco* as being something ecological or sustainability being a purely ecological thing’, and ‘it's not just one dimension that is green about ecology and the environment, but the four dimensions’. In contrast, the holistic approach to regeneration is a search for a more coherent way of thinking and aims to bring an awareness to the impact individual actions have. In Fern's words, ‘applying the ecovillage approach is about thinking holistically, so every action you do, every interaction you make, seeing its impact on all levels and working with that’. As Dias et al. (2017) write, only in practicing regeneration in a more holistic form can the founding principles of capitalist society be questioned. James' sharing is witness to this. He said that it was crushing to realise that there was little to sustain and instead found power

in moving towards regeneration: '[...] it's about regeneration, about what's coming, and that inspired me even more because sustainability always felt like a fight against something, now it's fighting for something'. He noted that this is being done through 'building things, creating something that is different, creating viable options and alternatives, and creating a new story'.

The above suggests that ecovillage praxis therefore makes a conscious effort to integrate elements relating to society, culture, economy, and ecology in all aspects of life. This aligns with Sing and Keitsch's work who write that ecovillages conceive 'new values, knowledge, beliefs, and [...] ideologies that underpin the cultivation of mind and spirit encompassing environment-centred actions and practices' (Singh and Keitsch, 2019:242). Transformative ways of being and doing are thereby brought forth. As James' sharing indicates, an ecovillage praxis inspires this through questioning and reflection:

'[...] we're gardening, but we're people gardening, how do we reach this out into the area? What is the economic impact of this? Even if it's just that people get to take the food home or you give the food to homeless people, whatever it is, as soon as you turn it from a gardening project into an ecovillage project where your focus is gardening but you're an ecovillage project so that means you're looking at the social side, you're aware of the economic side, what's our culture? What is the impact within the community? What is the culture within the community we're in and how are we impacting that?'

This illustrates how ecovillage praxis cultivates an awareness for the multifacetedness of all activities and tries not to see things as separate from the whole. Drawing on Brand and Wissen, this may deepen a socio-ecological perspective based on a consensus that profound societal changes are required to address the multiple crises (Brand and Wissen, 2017a).

Regarding the social component of regeneration, tools such as non-violent communication are used to enhance human relations and foster emotional intelligence. According to Caroline, it is inspiration from such tools that forms the ecovillage backdrop and serves as a foundation for intentional communities: 'so that anywhere I go in the world we can somehow speak the same language'. Emphasis was also placed on the active attempt to foster diversity and integration. In Monica's words this means 'to be extremely inclusive, it means to be able to look at diversity as a richness and not as a separation'. Whilst 28 year old James shed light on the intergenerational exchange: 'the relationship with adults, being given the space and time to take up space and having adults ask me who I was, what my opinion was', adding 'I think so many issues today come from a lack of connection to elders and especially in urban environments'. As Sacchetti et al. (2017) note, the solutions provided by social regeneration go beyond the use of material resources. Instead, they involve reciprocity, cooperation, inter-generational solidarity, and respect for the environment (ibid.). This strengthens the transformative component of ecovillage praxis as ecovillage ideals

become embodied and figure into real-world institutions, rendering alternatives in the form of real utopias possible (Wright, 2011).

Included within social regeneration is the importance of participatory processes, especially when it comes to governance. As Caroline shared, ecovillage praxis involves joint decision-making to ensure a ‘more collective way of operating’. Speaking from personal experience during my time at the Findhorn Foundation, one of the world’s largest ecovillages, a series of communal discussions were held as plans were unfolding for housing developments within the community. In addition, the interviews showed that collective decision-making uses ideas borrowed from whole systems governance approaches such as sociocracy. This also reflects my previous involvement with NextGEN, where all strategic and organisational decisions were taken using sociocracy. The data therefore aligns with Sacchetti et al’s conception of social regeneration as a process of transformation ‘based on inclusion and cooperation [...] informed by the goal of improving peoples’ lives through participation and deliberation’ (Sacchetti et al, 2017:2).

Furthermore, key to the holistic approach to regeneration is the understanding shown for the importance of culture. How this is realised within ecovillages is shown in Table 1. As Alba said, the inclusion of culture is a unique attribute of ecovillages:

‘[...] it’s like the way that you speak to each other or that you eat together, or like in Findhorn to have an attunement at the beginning of every work shift for example, tiny things that take 2 minutes but cultural practices that bit by bit erode who we thought we were and shape something else, and I think that’s not so often integrated into other projects [...] micro things that we can do every day to change who we are, and to not underestimate that when we hold something together, it’s stronger.’

This is reminiscent of Wagner (2012) who writes that different encounters with oneself, others, and the surrounding environment need to form part of daily routine on a path towards a viable future. We can talk about a utopian dimension of culture when this is realised and expressed through the arts and other cultural forms (Wright, 2011); as is the case with ecovillage praxis. I should also note that culture has an affinity with the words *agriculture* and *culture*, meaning the blade of a plough, and is ultimately a matter of nurturing (Eagleton, 2016). As Eagleton writes, ‘a good deal of culture involves less what you do, than how you do it. It denotes a set of styles, techniques and established procedures’ (Eagleton, 2016:5). This indicates that ecovillage praxis makes a different conceptualisation of culture possible. It appears to lead to entire ways of life and a whole style of world making being called into question (Escobar, 2018), whilst opening up space for transformation.

Overall, less was said about economy and ecology, though emphasis was placed on the proactive attempt to restore nature connectedness. As Caroline conferred, this is done particularly through

'building connections to the soil, nature, what you grow'. Finally, Alba explained that all elements are then woven together through whole systems thinking:

[...] the thing that puts them all together, so how do you design the currency so that it supports your biogas digester, or you know how do you eat together in a way in which supports your biogas digester, so it's a bit more on that level, how can we put the pieces together.'

Here, it is worth recalling research question 2, *How do ecovillages and community gardens differ in fostering transformative praxis?* Whilst UCGs have yet to be presented, what can be established is that ecovillages foster transformative praxis through being based on a holistic approach to regeneration. Taking inspiration from Wright's (2011) work on real utopias, possibilities of how the world could be are therefore lived out in the present. This further implies that ecovillage praxis is a form of prefigurative politics whereby desired futures are deliberately practiced (Raekstad and Gradin, 2020). It appears to be a process of constant transformation which is deepened further through inner reflection and personal growth largely derived from cultural regeneration. This may be a component to integrate into UCGs as a way of burgeoning their potential in acting as sites of socio-ecological change.

5.1.2 Ecovillage Praxis as Being in a Deeper Way: Personal growth and inner development

'What's the organization of a society that is capable of doing ecological design? What does such a society look like?... And what's the point, the ultimate object, of ecological design? It's not just about houses or water or any particular system. It has to be about how we think. The ultimate object of ecological design is the human mind.' (Orr, 2004:190)

Orr's quote aligns well with another key theme of the ecovillage interviews. Namely, the personal transformation many have undergone owing to ecovillage praxis. This came through particularly strongly during the interview with Alba:

[...] there is a lot of transformative potential for the individual, for people who step into or live in ecovillages, which I think I also touched on, where you get to see yourself in a different way, and I think everybody who I know who has lived in ecovillages for long enough knows that it requires a lot of personal work and growth to be there, but for the better, and that it's done in a place where community holds, but there's a lot of personal transformative and liberation and growth and maturation that can happen in community.'

Consistent mention was made of personal growth prompted through introspection. As James said, 'if I want to make a meaningful change in the world, it won't be me that does it because I'll have to change along the way'. Alba shared the following questions in relation to this:

'Who are we as humans and who do we want to be? What do we believe is our nature? Our role in the world? Our relation to the rest of the universe? And how is this expressed?'

And James added: 'What is my current impact on the planet, on myself, on the people around? Where can I do something different? Where am I over-prioritising convenience?'. Ecovillage praxis therefore appears to prompt a continual reflection of how we are in the world. The absence of this

element in the central UCG themes insinuates that this is done implicitly, rather than explicitly, in UCG praxis. According to Alba, in this sense an ecovillage praxis serves as an invitation to ‘be in a deeper way’. This brings to mind Edwards’ work on inner sustainability:

‘[...] bridging the separation from the natural world that many of us feel begins by reconnecting to ourselves and to where we live [...], by going within, we sense our connection to the web of life, beginning with our backyard.’ (Edwards, 2015:2)

Hence, the potential for socio-ecological transformation as alluded to by Fern:

‘[...] when we begin to transform our human relationships and start to work together locally, on anything from shortening our supply chain to growing food or finding local producers and buying together in a cooperative, changing how we have our meetings to be more inclusive, all of these things taken together really do have a big potential to help us be better with one another.’

This too stems from ecovillage praxis questioning the prevalence of dominant regimes and closely relates to adopting a holistic approach to regeneration:

‘[...] it is transformative because it questions so many of the normal relationships, power dynamics, decision making, flows of materials, all of these things are questioned in the ecovillage model because everything is rethought, why do we need these things? What makes most sense?’ (Ron)

Use of the following words are further indications of the impact ecovillage praxis has had on people: maturation; personal liberation; integration; and self-awareness. These are harnessed through the application of social technologies such as facilitation and conflict resolution, as well as through the creation of a space where personal growth is encouraged. The redefining of social worlds and structures thereby seems to be a process of transformation incited by ecovillage praxis and its nurturing of reflection. Pisters et al’s (2020) work on ecovillages presented similar results. They noted that many of their study’s participants began questioning hegemonic regimes through personal learning journeys as many ecovillages focus on turning to the inner world. This provides further substance for answering research question 2.

The results speak to an existing body of work, Napora (2017) amongst others, which calls for contemplative practice to establish compassionate, socially just, and inclusive societies. Ecovillages are therefore noteworthy communities of practice as individuals may be encouraged to reflect on the imperial mode of living; modern capitalist everyday practices (Brand and Wissen, 2017b). In turn, undergoing an internal transformation towards more conscious ways of being and doing.

5.1.3 Ecovillage Praxis as a Different Story: Narratives of hope and concrete utopia

What also shone through are the wider narratives in which the ecovillage approaches are embedded, particularly of hope and possibility; themes which have come to frame both ecovillage praxis, and the wider ecovillage movement. Alba introduced this by describing ecovillages as being ‘full of niches and possibilities, it’s possible, that you can do something else, little laboratories of autonomy

and hope'. She added that this comes with 'people consciously deciding to live in a different way, finding other ways of doing things, different concepts of being human'. Whilst simultaneously providing 'concrete solutions', as affirmed by Fern. Ecovillage praxis thereby aligns with Wright's (2011) idea of real utopia in being a sociology of the possible, and again represents a form of prefigurative politics whereby visions of change are directly enacted (Leach, 2013).

Caroline, Ron, and Alba further shared that 'it's a totally different story about lifestyle, about ideology, about approaches to life, different points of view' (Caroline), and:

'[...] they prove that something else is possible and that's extremely powerful, if you demonstrate that a society could be different, we have ecovillages that are deciding things on the basis of needs, common priorities, [...] it is possible [...] I mean it's what we're trying to work with, and work with ourselves to realise that we have these narratives that need to get out there.' (Ron)

'[...] we can create these autonomous zones, where these different forms of existence can be and with that, we can be more autonomous ourselves, but with that we can also show the potential and possibility and the hope and we can give other people the chance to then step into that and feel different and show that things can work with a different logic, to see that things that are assumed to be part of human nature are not, they are part of our socio-ecological cultural system, so it can be shifted.' (Alba)

The prevalence of hope and possibility in ecovillage narratives is heightened through ecovillages being places of experimentation. Fern described them as being 'living laboratories, microcosms where you can try things out [...] where innovative, unusual, creative things in all aspects, whether it's kind of in low tech, eco-technology or social technologies can be developed'. Again, this comes through applying a holistic approach to regeneration. In so doing, ecovillage praxis tries to adapt accordingly to a changing world and reflect the embodiment of another society, representing both a concrete utopia and another story. In Fern's words:

'[...] when you look through an ecovillage lens we can see many more resources, many more possibilities, and it helps you start to think about how you can do things together and sustainably [...] and I think there are a lot of possibilities that we don't see when we're looking through our everyday lenses.'

This suggests that ecovillage praxis becomes transformative through being explicitly based on narratives of hope and possibility as it paves the way for a different story; an absence of which was found in the UCGs. More is therefore done in using an ecovillage praxis to attain the ideal of 'transforming the world' (Dias et al. 2017:82). This helps to answer research question 2.

5.2 Community Garden Practitioners on UCGs

In this section, I move away from ecovillages and ecovillage praxis as presented by the interviewees and focus on UCGs in Malmö. Despite some differences, similarities related to the kind of space the UCGs represent; the activities they conduct; and how things are done, extend across all cases (see Table 3 for a full summary of the results using direct quotes from the collected data).

Examining commonalities through a cross-case analysis helps to create a more comprehensive understanding of the UCGs in Malmö, and to answer the research questions. The main themes emerging from the narrative walks were: (i) the importance of social sustainability; (ii) experiential learning; and (iii) participatory and collaborative processes. Whilst the thematic results of the UCGs are similar to the ecovillage interview results, noticeable differences lie in how they are put into practice; the language used; and the missing component of whole systems thinking.

5.2.1 UCG Praxis as Creating Exchange: Social sustainability and community

Beginning with the social aspect of the UCGs, Clara explained that in Botildenborg ‘everything is connected, but everything is related to social sustainability, because everything has to do with food growing, creating work, including people, [...] to include everyone in society’. In most cases, this is achieved through exchange between different groups of people; intergenerational dialogue; and encountering one another in new ways. As Hanna and Clara affirmed: ‘it’s mainly about the exchange with the people, and this is another dimension where you get to see your kid like building a house’, and:

‘[...] this thing of meeting people, people who are not used to community gardens or who hadn’t experienced it were just like *wow, I’ve met so many people* and this generational thing, it’s not natural in our society to spend time anymore with people of different ages.’

This is reminiscent of James’ reflection on the value of dialogue and intergenerational exchange within ecovillages. Furthermore, in Jonas’ words ‘one of the main reasons for being here is to get to know people in Malmö’. Indeed, mention of the exchange that takes place can be found in all cases. Magda expanded on this by saying ‘you know everyone here and it’s a very friendly atmosphere and more spontaneous, that people come down with something that they have, some food for sharing’.

Table 3: Cross-case descriptive summaries of key results from UCGs using data from the narrative walks

COMMUNITY GARDEN	GULDÄNGEN, HANNA	BOTILDENBORG, CLARA	ENKIFTESHAGEN, MARLA	SEVED, MAGDA	MALMÖ'S SKOGSTRÄDGÅRD, JONAS
DEMOGRAPHICS	Children, youth, families, public, schools.	Mixed, schools, intergenerational.	Students from Holma Folkhögskola (permaculture school), families, people who live nearby, people who walk by and see the garden, young people (mostly in their 30s)	People who live in the apartments, different socio-economic classes, mixed, intergenerational.	Families, intergenerational, mostly people from the inner city (rather homogenous, similar ages).
SPACE	Municipal land, place to experiment, open space, fire pit, adventure playground, sensory garden.	Private land, social garden, school garden, open space, space for integration, workplace, place to take a break, learning environment, conference centre, outdoor kitchen, fire pit.	Municipal land, possibility to do things, open space, outdoor kitchen, space for children, space for sharing ideas and knowledge, space for applying things.	Neighbourhood garden, outdoor kitchen, herb garden, indoor space, friendly neighbourly atmosphere, protected.	Municipal land, open space, bringing people closer to what they eat, located outside the city, social space, place to enjoy the outdoors.
ACTIVITIES	Building, gardening, open activities for the public, play, workshops.	Growing food together, exchange, meeting others, unwinding, commercial food growing, work programmes, workshops.	Forest gardening, small workshops, some social gatherings, weekly meetings.	Experimenting with gardening, growing plant cultivation, workshops, indoor activities in the winter, basement for building things, food sharing.	Forest gardening, free activities for children (previously done in collaboration with the municipality), vegetable gardening.
METHODS	Creative processes, co-creation, experiential learning, questioning, sensory experiences, visioning workshops.	Informal, co-creation, exploration, experiential learning, leading by example, sharing ideas.	Flat and transparent organisation, decisions taken by the board, spontaneously, participatory, permaculture principles, recycling materials, circular thinking, consensus decision-making.	Very relaxed, no need for consensus, trial and error, board meetings, sharing ideas, collaborations with MKB (Malmö's biggest real estate company), spontaneously.	Trial and error, more serious growing organically, Sunday as a structured day, collaboration, unstructured learning.
IMPACT	Seeing one another in a different way, social sustainability, nature connection, shared responsibility, embedded sustainability practices.	Nice space to be for lots of people, sense of care, exchange.	Community feeling, social exchange.	Sense of belonging, connection, sense of ownership, sense of care, sense of community, integration.	Met like-minded people, greater appreciation for the city, sense of community, sense of creating together.

Some UCGs have therefore created social gardens to foster interactions and host groups, including from schools. Many of these sites have designated spaces for people to socialise, often with a fire pit, outdoor kitchen, and seating area (see Figure 3a-b). As Clara shared ‘maybe I light the fire, but then people just talk and sometimes hardly and work gets done because people enjoy that so much, they stay and enjoy that exchange so much’. Rather than coming to the gardens to solely garden, the narrative walks suggest that many participants use the space to form new relationships and build community. Maria confirmed this by saying ‘like this community feeling, when I’m here people can help me to keep an eye on her [daughter] and then there are other kids coming here for the gatherings, it’s very nice and very social’ (about Enskifteshagen). And as Magda further shared about the garden in Seved (see Figure 3c):

‘[...] it became my favourite place in Malmö and it became my place to hang out and when I started gardening in Seved I’d lived in Malmö for maybe 3 years and I hadn’t really felt like it was my city, I was like *I live in Malmö but I don’t love the city* but as I got involved in gardening, it’s a whole movement, once you get involved in one place you get to know people who are doing things in other spaces here in Malmö and that was like I got involved in a community and I really began to appreciate Malmö in another way.’

Whilst all sites are centred around urban gardening, the significance appears to lie in their ability to create a social sustainability and subsequent sense of community. The former is a wide-ranging, dynamic concept that has emerged as a theme in its own right within the sustainability debate (Dempsey et al., 2011). Closely associated with social sustainability are the concepts of social exclusion, social capital, and governance (Manzi et al., 2010). In the context of the UCGs, I understand it to mean the fostering of relationships between individuals and their created socio-ecological environments. The aim hereby being to restore the separation from one another caused by Marx’s conception of the metabolic rift. In other words, ‘the material estrangement of human beings in capitalist society from the natural conditions of their existence’ (Foster, 1999:383). As for community, I take not only its traditional use of referring to a form of social organisation based on small groups, but also Cohen’s (1985) cultural sociological reflection of community being a symbolic structure concerned with identity and belonging. This corresponds with the idea of intentional communities, such as ecovillages, wherein people come together within a shared culture and common purpose (Christian, 2007).

These results affirm Hou’s (2017) idea of UCGs being multimodal spaces. They provide individuals with a sense of community, thereby fostering conviviality (Illich, 1973), and bring different demographics together to create greater inclusivity. Taking Wright’s (2011) understanding that real utopia can be found in places where lived experiences are shared and deeper connections sought, therefore makes UCGs spaces for incorporating ecovillage praxis. Furthermore, social sustainability is reminiscent of social regeneration found within ecovillages. The difference being

that the former appears to be engaged with less consciously, though steps are being taken to do so, and is rather a consequence of people being in the same community of practice. For the potential of UCGs to be realised, the principles of social regeneration as presented in Table 2 could therefore be scaled across with explicit intentionality.

5.2.2 UCG Praxis as Fostering Experimentation: Environments for Learning

Another prominent theme was that UCGs provide sites for learning, not in the traditional sense, but rather through experimentation. An outcome of having an informal setting with few formal structures is therefore the opportunity it provides for experiential learning. This refers to a more holistic approach which places emphasis on experience and reflection. With reference to Guldängen, Hanna mentioned ‘what is happening inside, the experience, and that aspect in the play, what does play actually mean?’. Learning is thus understood as ‘the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience’ (Kolb, 1984:41). The UCGs facilitate this form of knowledge acquisition in providing an open space for people, especially children, to try new things without prior experience related to gardening or building (see Figure 3d):

‘[...]if you always tell kids how fragile nature is, they can’t experience it, you can’t be too precious with everything, yeah you shouldn’t walk on the soil, that’s bad, but if a child does it, it’s not like you should make them feel guilty, you have to teach them to explore first, learn how to love it before you can protect it. They have to learn to touch, also adults.’ (Helen)

‘[...] like when they pick a flower which is important for the bees and try to stick it in the ground again and see that it’s not going to survive and ask *do you know why?* And then they can learn in that way instead of being like *no that’s wrong*. I think telling people what’s right and wrong is not always a good way, so getting them to experience something that is different and show them that it could work that way as well.’ (Cornelia)

This brings to mind Roysen and Cruz’s (2020) work on how ecovillages serve as transdisciplinary sustainability classrooms. Their results suggested that students visiting ecovillages were motivated to work towards greater sustainability owing to the following three elements: (i) the perception that there are alternative ways of doing things; (ii) the emergence of a feeling of co-responsibility for the world; and (iii) the sharing of knowledge, feelings, and affections. Considering that these were also present in the UCGs, albeit to a lesser extent, indicates that UCGs are already serving as sites where elements of ecovillage praxis are being applied.

The UCGs also provide freedom for learnings to be put into practice, giving participants the opportunity to restore a sense of nature-connectedness. On several occasions Maria said: ‘you have this space where you can really apply a lot of things’, a component of this way of learning being the embodiment of different processes. Hanna’s words are examples of this:

‘[...] maybe they don’t make that connection then but it’s going to be there for them in their memory bank when they start to think about construction or gardening or sustainable practices or teamwork or these things, and they’re going to remember ok that’s how we did it then and that’s different to how we did it at school.’

‘So you can just come in and put some seeds in and we come in here and taste things, here we have a lot of mint and lemongrass, and so it’s like, here we would have different signs with an eye or a nose or a mouth on it so you know if it has an eye you can look at it, or nose you can smell it, so you can kind of test what is what [...] the sensory experience is what this is about, touching, smelling, sweating, maybe even bruising yourself a little bit, *ab now I know I have to be careful with a hammer*, all of these things put together are super important experiences for not becoming screen-based, actually doing things with your body.’

In addition, the UCGs clearly serve as learning environments as they host workshops; offer work programmes whereby participants are taught skills to enhance their chances of employment; and welcome school groups to enable children to explore being outside. Most activities range from gardening specific practices to how materials from the garden can be reused or transformed into balms and similar products. Talking about Enskifteshagen, Maria said:

‘[...] we’ve had a lot of workshops with different themes like pruning [...] the forest garden, fermenting organic material, we build some compost on the other side and we had to clean up this small space here to grow some things and the whole building [outdoor kitchen] involved everyone and this building [container].’ (see Figure 3e)

Through education, hosting workshops, and allowing for experiential learning, the UCGs touch upon many of the ecovillage principles (see Table 1); especially in relation to providing access to education on sustainability and reconnecting to nature and embracing low-impact lifestyles. As with ecovillage praxis, the latter in particular may lead to participants experiencing inner growth and personal development. This reaffirms that UCGs can provide the basis for bringing ecovillage praxis into an urban context. By doing so, they serve as boundary settings to reconcile different social worlds and as sites of restitution (Köhrsen, 2017). As Ergas writes, this may help to restore the nature-town antagonism caused by the metabolic rift (Ergas, 2016).

5.2.3 UCG Praxis as Taking Initiative: Participation, Collaboration, and Co-creation

The third theme emerging from the narrative walks was that UCGs create space for participation; collaboration; and co-creation. Some of which are direct results of the social component of the gardens and the room they provide for non-structured learning. This too aligns with elements found within the ecovillage praxis of social regeneration (see Table 1). Regarding the first, participation is primarily encouraged through the gardens being open spaces in which people are invited to share their ideas. As Maria said about Enskifteshagen, and Magda about Seved:

‘[...] it’s a space where if you have any ideas or things you want to do, you have the possibility here, this potential [...] Even though it’s part of municipality space, we feel like we can do pretty much anything here so we have the permission to do things what we want.’

[...] like if you have any ideas, it's also the closeness to the board here, I got involved in the board the same year I got involved in the garden and so it was just so easy if you had any ideas to get the positions taken and I think it's maybe the same for people here because if anyone had any thoughts or ideas we're always here and so it's easier to get things done in that way.'

Indeed, this was mentioned during all the narrative walks: 'to make everyone feel that they can take initiative and say what is needed' (Jonas). Though it was also said that many who come to the UCGs seem reluctant to fully contribute due to feeling inexperienced, thereby continuing to rely on central organisers. Clara expressed this by saying: 'most people are a bit unsure; I think they think they don't know enough [...], they think they're doing things wrong'. Yet, efforts are being made to encourage greater participation through having less hierarchical and more transparent horizontal governance structures:

[...] the last 3 or 4 years we've had basically no employees and there's been a need for restructuring the organisation, so it's been about having a more flat and transparent organisation and really having more people getting involved.' (Maria)

This brings to mind the ecovillage praxis' social regenerative principle of empowering collaborative leadership and participatory decision making (see Table 1).

Related to the above is the focus the UCGs place on strengthening collaboration. In sharing both the land for growing and all available facilities, participants learn to work together. In addition, more formal collaborations happen between: (i) the UCGs and the municipality from whom the land is often received; (ii) the UCGs and partners able to donate reusable materials (examples include farms for manure and carpenters for wood); and (iii) the UCGs and school groups hoping to enhance human-nature connection. This helps to ensure that they are integrated into a wider network and include more people in creating regenerative cities, as well as an urban socio-ecological transformation. As Snyder and Wenger (cited in Blackmore, 2010) posit, a constellation of communities of practice is needed for the messy problems of civil society.

Furthermore, in learning to collaborate, the UCGs become spaces of co-creation. Elements of this shine through in Jonas' words:

[...] there's no big permaculture plan behind it, it just kind of happened, we got the land and the trees and we planted trees, so things have organically developed since then depending on who is here [...] this is maybe a 15 or 20 year idea so a lot will happen along with the trees maturing and becoming bigger, and then of course we work together and don't really know how the garden will evolve, I kind of like that we don't have a set plan or a detailed plan and so we never planned to have this big vegetable garden for example and now we're extending it for next year so now we're doing it.'

Most of the infrastructure in place is thus made for, and by, the people. What the narrative walks also suggest is that the stronger these components are, the stronger the sense of ownership and care is. Taking Hanna's insights:

[...] there are more people circulating here and feeling that sense of responsibility, and neighbours come and say to us *last night I saw someone in the greenhouse, take a look*, and it's really nice [...] they feel responsibility, they want to help, and do this.'

Considering that ecovillage praxis is also based on participatory processes further demonstrates that UCGs are compatible with ecovillages and are likely to benefit from applying ecovillage tools. Above all, as their praxis would become more comprehensive and go beyond sustainability.

The results suggest that UCGs already go some way to serving as sites where ecovillage praxis can be applied as they seek more than ecological regeneration. In addition, they strengthen an awareness for human-nature relationships through experiential and sensory learning and encourage participation to rethink dominant structures. This concurs with the ecovillage praxis themes of holistic approaches to regeneration, and personal growth and inner development. The basis for developing an ecovillage praxis in UCGs therefore seems to exist: (i) participatory approaches are used; (ii) various facets of regeneration are integrated; and (iii) socio-ecological environments are restored. The UCG themes also indicate how transformative praxis is subsequently fostered; though this could be done more consciously, as is the case with ecovillage praxis. Research questions 1 and 2 are therefore partly addressed. I elaborate on them further in the discussion, along with reflections on research question 3.

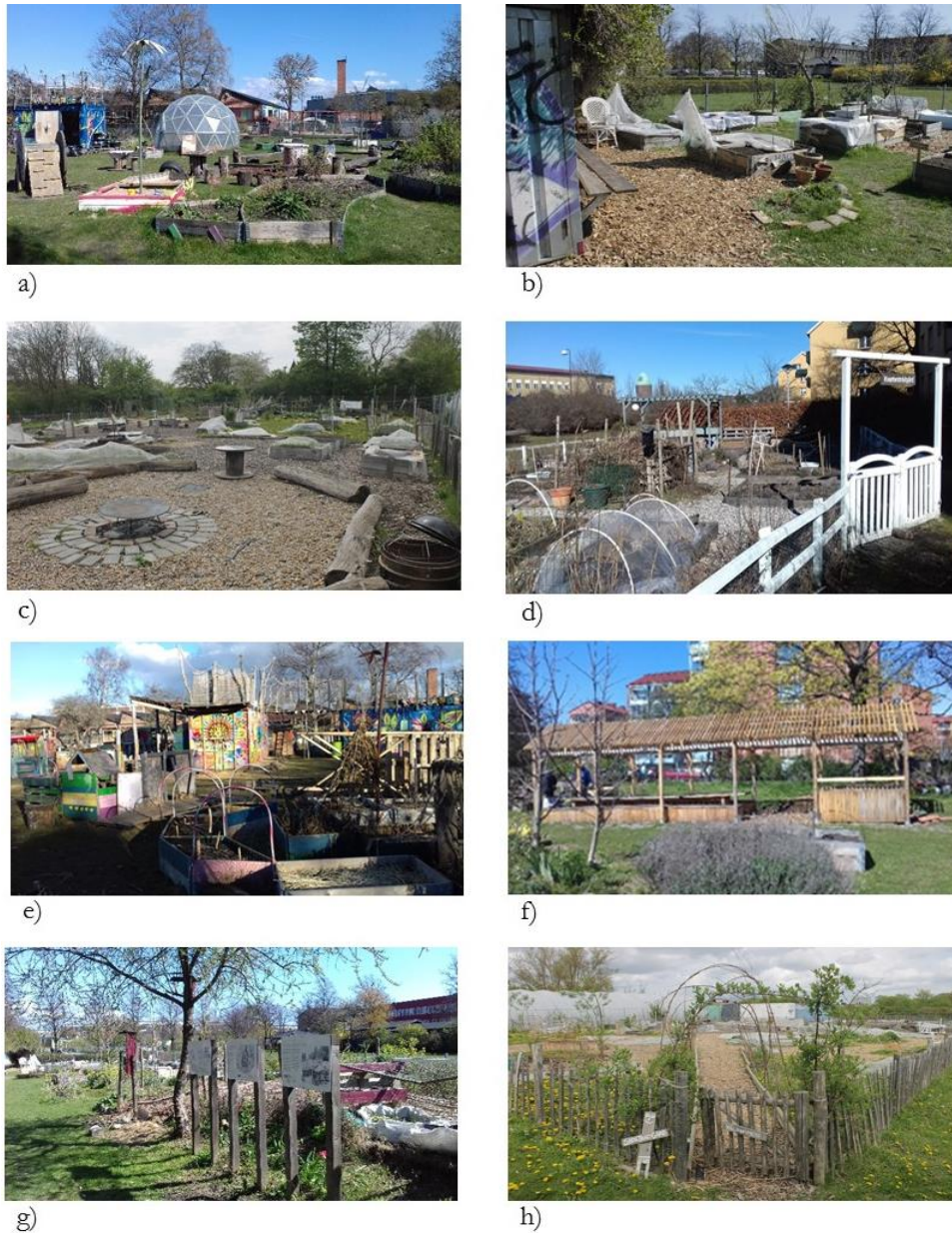


Figure 3. Photographs of the main UCG themes to illustrate references mentioned in the text. **3a-c** represent social sustainability; **(3a)** the central socialising area and fire pit at Guldängen, together with growing beds and a dome used for informal meetings and plant cultivation, **(3b)** the sun deck and social area in Enskifteshagen, and **(3c)** the fire pit in Botildenborg. **3d** represents community and shows the entrance to Seved; the UCG of particular importance to Magda. **3e-f** show participation and co-creation, **(3e)** including elements of buildings constructed by participants at Guldängen, and **(3f)** the collectively built kitchen in Enskifteshagen. **3g-f** represent learning; **(3g)** educational signs on permaculture and forest gardening, also in Enskifteshagen, and **(3h)** the entrance to the school garden in Botildenborg.

Section 6: Developing Regenerative Praxis

In this chapter I summarise the research results and discuss their wider implications in designing for a pluriverse (Escobar, 2018), a world where dominant processes are redefined by transformative initiatives and the metabolic rift is restored. I therefore lift the analysis and take the results beyond Malmö's UCGs. I hereby aim to confer the potential of scaling ecovillage praxis across to other alternative political ecologies and show how this forms part of necessary boundary work, as well as being regeneration in practice. In addition, I consider the limitations of the UCGs and explore how ecovillage praxis could assist in their potential as spaces for an urban socio-ecological transformation.

To return to the problem statement underlying this work: we are experiencing a socio-ecological crisis and historically unprecedented acquisition. This largely stems from capitalism and modernity — in this work limited to a Eurocentric understanding — representing unviable systems due to their priority being growth, rather than regeneration. As Escobar writes, this is a 'crisis of modernity to the extent that modernity has failed to enable sustainable worlds' (Escobar, 2007:197). Facing these problems requires solutions that do not come from the sources that created them. Hence, the valuable contribution of communities of practice which embrace ways of being and doing aligned with justice and the Earth (ibid.).

As I mentioned in the results, an attempt to heal the metabolic rift and ultimately the disturbance in the relation between human beings and the more-than-human world, can come through regenerative and whole systems thinking as cultivated in ecovillages through an ecovillage praxis. The challenge now lies in bringing this into common understanding — particularly within Western industrialised growth societies — so that the socio-ecological crisis is perceived and responded to as a whole and integrated system (Reed, 2007):

'Our mental model of the way the world works must shift from images of a clockwork, machinelike universe that is fixed and determined, to the model of a universe that is open, dynamic, interconnected, and full of living qualities.' (Jaworski cited in Reed, 2007:675)

What is needed, and also touched upon in the results, is a much deeper questioning of who, and what, we are. According to Wahl, whose work focuses on designing regenerative cultures, these questions can 'spark culturally creative conversations that transform how we see ourselves and our relationship to the world' (Wahl, 2016:2).

Herein lies the value of scaling across ecovillage praxis as it establishes regenerative pathways both through whole systems thinking and inner processes. However, considering that ecovillages usually exist in the form of small enclaves, they are limited in their ability to connect with, and bring their praxis into, mainstream society. As aforementioned, if they are to serve as exemplars of concrete

utopias that question profit and material driven societies, their ideals and presented solutions must become more widespread. Drawing on Clay (2017), who writes, if ecovillages do not find ways of integrating their praxis into other spaces, instead becoming walled gardens, then perhaps for all their material success they may be said to have failed.

UCGs on the other hand are clearly integrated into larger communities and urban centres where most facilities are found. They thereby provide spaces within which alternatives can easily be made more visible. Based on the results and applying Illich's (1973) concept of conviviality, they do so in creating spaces where relationships can be strengthened — both to one another and the environment — and where a dependence on consumerist systems is reduced. The implications of this, not only for ecovillages and UCGs, but for Urban Ecology and an urban socio-ecological transformation more broadly, are manifold.

UCGs appear to operate at the boundary between the rural and the urban, functioning both as social networks and physical sites where the city-nature dichotomy materially comes together. This provides opportunities for rich learning and new possibilities (Wenger, 2010). In the context of this research: (i) for the UCGs to strengthen their own praxis and subsequent role within urban regeneration; and (ii) for cities and the urban populous to be made aware of ecovillages through the application of their praxis in UCGs, thereby enabling ecovillages to enhance their visibility. Based on the results, I thus understand UCGs to be akin to boundary organisations (Köhrsen, 2017) as they have the potential to facilitate knowledge production and coordination between ecovillages and cities. This corresponds with the previous understanding of UCGs as grassroots singularities able to bridge the divide between policymakers and grassroots groups (Tornaghi, 2014).

In serving as boundary organisations, UCGs can thus assist in bringing regenerative and whole systems thinking into the urban context using an ecovillage praxis. This is especially important for cities where expectations about the material and social conditions in which we live need to be questioned most (Burke and Arjona, 2013). As the results suggest, an ecovillage praxis could facilitate this process in relation to: (i) how regeneration is approached; (ii) the inclusion of an inner transformation; and (iii) the importance of creating different narratives.

Furthermore, as UCGs seem to represent possible boundary organisations between ecovillages and cities, they naturally provide suitable boundary settings for all actors to come together in (Köhrsen, 2017). As previously alluded to, this may manifest in joint projects or working groups where possibilities for creating regenerative systems are discussed. Again, this could help to create dialogue between different actors and enable best practices to be shared on to how to restore the

metabolic rift. This aligns with Ferris et al's (2001) finding that UCGs can play important roles in community organising and the creation of social capital, including the formation of networks.

In the context of Urban Ecology, this means that UCGs could become sites of greater urban regeneration and socio-ecological transformation were they to integrate an ecovillage praxis. One of the main reasons being that their approaches would become more holistic and intentional. This brings to mind DeLind's (2002) belief that UCGs must become more than spaces for growing food, and rather places of engagement. In this way, they can help to revive urban citizenship and subsequently foster an ecological transition.

Regarding the value of scaling across, it stands in stark contrast to the growth imperative implied by scaling up, which is defined as 'increasing something in size, amount or production' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). I understand scaling across to happen when something is created and inspires others to develop it in their own way. This aligns with Morris (2020) who writes that 'moving away from the language of growth means seeing community projects as the emergent products of broader social relations, rather than as a blueprint that can be replicated elsewhere' (Morris, 2020). Scaling across therefore holds a deep reverence for the uniqueness of place and can be applied in accordance to place-specific needs. In addition, it represents necessary boundary-bridging work between different communities of practice as collaborations are strengthened and best practices shared. This can help bring visibility to a plurality of worlds and knowledges needed for creating imaginaries of hope (Kallis and March, 2014); alternative narratives and concrete utopias that question capitalism's endless pursuit of infinite growth. Scaling across can ultimately be understood as regeneration in practice; ways of being and doing are directly rethought without contributing to further accumulation.

Finally, to answer research question 3 I draw on the UCGs' limitations and discuss possibilities for growth. The aim hereby being to understand how to fulfil their potential in helping to advance an urban regeneration and socio-ecological transformation. Whilst I did not explicitly ask the UCG practitioners which elements of the UCGs could be improved, they made some indications as all were aware of my interest in exploring how to bring an ecovillage praxis into urban spaces. Beginning with social sustainability, four of the practitioners mentioned that more could be done to consciously foster this. As Jonas shared: 'I think we should put more effort into this, last summer we cooked some food together over the fire as a celebration, you know no work, no gardening, just social'. Whilst this may be sufficient in creating short-term social sustainability, incorporating a regenerative ecovillage praxis could deepen the active commitment towards building better social relations, as well as thriving communities. This includes ideas from conflict resolution and related facilitation tools, in addition to the principles listed in Table 1.

Related to the above was the recognition that there is often a flux of people coming to use the UCGs. As Clara mentioned:

‘[...] if you don’t have the commitment like *I have to come here because of this*, like so many people who really enjoyed it in the spring then stopped coming because it’s really easy to then think that you don’t have the energy.’

She complemented this by saying that the impact is greatest when people return, both to help create a sense of community, and to see changes: ‘now is the second year with some of these people and the more we get to know each other the more we can take things forward’. However, as with social sustainability, the tools appear to be missing to harness people’s engagement, especially in relation to collaborative governance. In the majority of the gardens, decisions are still made either by a board or select members. One way of achieving a greater sense of community and ownership could be through finding ways to involve more people on a continued and consistent basis. Drawing on Haraway’s (1991) conception of community as being a relationship of affinity, this is supported when differences and diversity are negotiated through a form of participatory democracy. For example, through joint decision-making processes as cultivated by ecovillage praxis using sociocracy.

Furthermore, whilst the UCGs serve as spaces for learning and experimenting, few are explicit about the approaches they apply. As aforementioned, many participants therefore learn by doing, whilst relying on the knowledge of the main coordinators. This implies that whilst UCGs function as sites for the reconciliation of land, people, and sustainability (Ferris et al.), some potential remains to be fulfilled. Talking about Enskifteshagen, Maria shared that ‘we really have to make sure that people understand this thing of building up good soil and how you can do it to have this more circular thinking’, noting that more could be done to directly teach about sustainability: ‘we could have more conversations about that, [...]to talk about sustainability and how to live a sustainable life within the realms of a possible carbon footprint’. Herein lies the aforementioned difference between ecovillage and UCG praxis as no mention is made of teaching about a holistic approach to regeneration. This may be a necessary shift to make if participants are to deepen their experience as being part of a larger whole (Reed, 2007).

Despite some limitations, Malmö’s UCGs clearly engage in practices that aim to restore ‘interrelated metabolic processes that capitalism has created a rift between, including humans’ relationship to nature [...] and the antagonism between town and country’ (Ergas, 2016:1195). UCGs therefore display facets reflected in ecovillage praxis towards regeneration, providing the foundation for bringing ecovillage praxis into cities as they contribute to a place-awareness and establish socio-ecological linkages (DeLay and Berezan, 2013). In addition, UCGs may simultaneously benefit

from incorporating an ecovillage praxis through shifting their focus from sustainability to regeneration, thereby creating more holistic projects.

Section 7: Conclusion

At a time of increasing planetary dysphoria, it has become critical to make space for fundamentally different conceptions of how to live. This includes communities of practice that carry us beyond fragmentation as they attempt to restore ruptures in socio-ecological fabrics through their praxis and create alternative narratives to dominant regimes. As Bruner writes, ‘a life as led is inseparable from a life as told — or more bluntly, a life is not ‘how it was’ but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold’ (Bruner, 1987: 31). This thesis has focused on ecovillages and UCGs as examples of projects which form part of a prefigurative politics for a more viable future.

Considering that the focus lay on comparing ecovillage and UCG praxis, I showed that UCGs have the potential to incorporate ecovillage praxis into an urban context and act as effective agents of regenerative socio-ecological transformation. The primary implications this has for both the ecovillage movement and UCGs are as follows: (i) ecovillages and their associated praxis could be more viable and widely accessible; (ii) the UCGs would most likely benefit from incorporating ideas borrowed from ecovillage praxis; and (iii) if applied, the divide between these two communities of practice would be bridged, subsequently creating opportunities for knowledge exchange to further the potential for wider regeneration and a general socio-ecological transformation. According to Ergas, ‘people have written fiction and utopian stories about recombining town and country, but real alternatives for cities need to be assessed if we are to create socially just environmental change’ (Ergas, 2016:1195); bringing ecovillage praxis into UCGs could be one such real alternative.

The research has also helped to demonstrate that many components of ecovillage praxis are not place based. Instead, they can be applied anywhere through taking a more holistic approach to regeneration. In the context of the UCGs, especially in relation to social regeneration. As the results suggested, one aspect to focus on would be to foster participatory processes through collaborative governance. This could help contribute to the conceptualisation of a different culture outside ecovillages and within UCGs. As Joubert and Dregger posit, ‘one of the most underutilised resources we have on the planet today is the good intention of citizens and our willingness to make a difference’ (Joubert and Dregger, 2015:21).

Finally, this research has provided an overview of ecovillage and UCG praxis and responded to the call for inquiries into how to apply the former in contexts other than intentional communities. Yet, much remains to be contributed to the growth of the ecovillage and UCG research fields. Further

investigations should focus more specifically on the four dimensions of regeneration, as cultivated in ecovillages, and their incorporation into other spaces. In the context of UCGs, it is key to find out whether this would lead to: (i) a more stable membership; (ii) strengthen the sense of community and belonging; and (iii) prompt greater inner transformation within members.

Why whole systems thinking and regeneration is prevalent in ecovillages and not in UCGs where sustainability appears to be the overriding paradigm also remains to be studied. Indeed, it may be necessary to look into how to shift the dialogue from sustainability to regeneration more broadly. This may be helped through research which looks into establishing networks and collaborations between different communities of practice. In addition, to address the socio-ecological crisis, it would be valuable to research the role of communities of practice, including ecovillages and UCGs, in aiding a wider socio-ecological transformation. The focus hereby being on how their praxis could reach a scale significant enough to bring about socio-ecological change, whilst also involving different stakeholders.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Participant information sheet

CONTACT DETAILS:
vi5050st-s@student.lu.se



Please take time to read the following information before deciding whether or not you wish to take part.

1. Why is this interview being conducted?

This interview is being conducted to study how community gardens could assist in bringing ecovillage praxis into the city of Malmö. The purpose of the interview is to help identify ecovillage praxis, as well as aid the researcher's understanding of how community gardens could apply these.

2. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited because you are involved in either the ecovillage movement, ecovillage research, community gardens, or the city of Malmö and have significant expertise relevant for this research.

3. What will happen to me if I take part in the interview?

You will be invited to meet either in person at a convenient location in Malmö, or remotely via video conference. If you agree to take part, you will first be asked to give oral consent. The interview should take approximately 30 minutes. You can ask to stop the interview at any time. With your consent, the audio will be recorded for an accurate representation of your thoughts.

4. Are there any potential risks in taking part?

Based on the recommendations of the British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice, the main risks relate to your right to privacy. Your permission is needed before any thoughts from the interview can be shared and you have the right to state whether you would prefer to remain anonymous or for a pseudonym to be used.

5. What happens to the data provided?

Any data that is not used in the final paper will be discarded.

Appendix B: Semi-structured Expert Interviews on Ecovillage Praxis

Demographic Questions

1. What is your age?
2. What gender do you self-identify with (and birth sex)?
3. What level of schooling did you complete?
4. What is your occupation?

Life Questions

5. What does the term ecovillage mean to you? How would you define it?
6. What led you to become involved in the ecovillage movement? When was your first experience in an ecovillage?
7. How do you see your role within the ecovillage movement?
8. What changes have you noticed within yourself since becoming involved in the ecovillage movement?

Possible follow-ups:

1. What does applying ecovillage approaches and/or living in an ecovillage mean to you?
2. What has been most important to you about being involved in the ecovillage movement and/or living in community?

Ecovillage Approach Questions

9. What do you think is most unique about ecovillages? E.g. their ethos, principles, and approaches.
Possible follow-ups:
 1. How do ecovillages differ to other projects aiming for sustainability? I.e. What can be found in ecovillages that is harder to find elsewhere?
 2. How would you describe ecovillage approaches and their underlying ethos? You may refer to the 4 dimensions of sustainability (economy, ecology, social, culture).
10. Ecovillages have been criticised for being on the peripheries of mainstream society. What lessons can be learnt from ecovillages and how could these be applied in UCGs?
11. How do you think UCGs could assist in making the ecovillage model more visible? How could a collaboration between ecovillages and UCGs help to shed light on the possibility of an alternative to dominant regimes?
12. What do you see as being the transformative potential of ecovillage approaches/the ecovillage model?

Concluding Questions

13. Is there anything about ecovillages or UCGs which we haven't covered that you would like to discuss?
14. Is there anything else you would like to add?