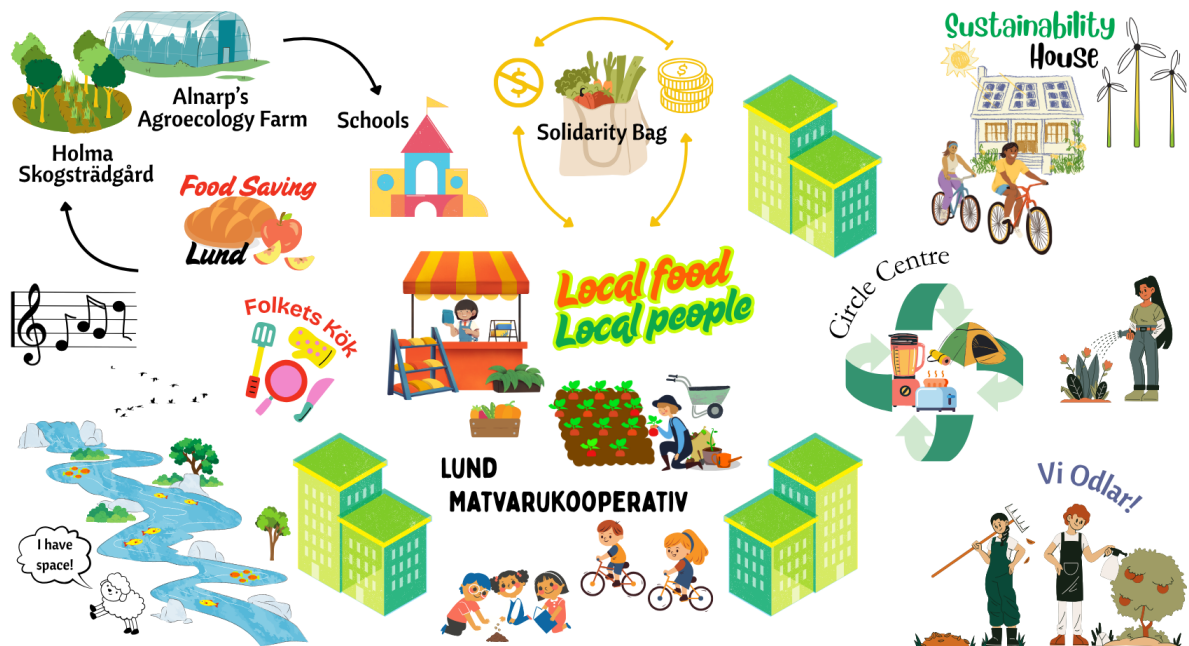


Foods for Future: Grassroots Innovations and Climate Action in a Scanian Foodscape



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Abstract

The thesis assesses the role of grassroots organisations in climate action through sustainable food practices, focusing on social innovation, collective learning, community-building and local resilience inside the city of Lund, in the Skåne region of southern Sweden. It intends to understand how local groups, combining practical knowledge with community-based innovations, collaborate to build a culture of social and environmental regeneration, creating a more diverse, balanced, and egalitarian foodscape to combat the global climate crisis. Qualitative research methods were used, including participant observation, interviews, surveys, and participatory action research, to elicit activists' perspectives on their motivations and the impacts of their efforts. The findings uncovered that the initiatives prioritise low-cost, locally adapted solutions that challenge corporate food systems. They nurture community and education through shared activities such as communal farming, local food chains, food rescue and sharing, and culinary cultural gatherings, consequently enhancing social bonds and identity. The research suggests that these groups generate socio-ecological value by creating alternative futures focused on social and environmental justice. The activists recognise the limitations of their efforts but consider their role crucial in sharing knowledge, raising social awareness, political cohesion, and a culture of sustainable and regenerative practices. Those initiatives are living laboratories of social creativity and environmental resilience, advocating a shift to a socio-ecological economy rooted in reciprocity, ethical values, and local agency. Conclusively, collectively developed local innovations are essential for transforming food systems, illustrating the importance of culturally grounded, low-dependence social technologies to ensure the future of food.

Keywords: Agroecology; Climate Action; Food Sovereignty; Foodscapes; Grassroots Innovations; Social Ecology; Sustainability.

To Cora, for a safer and greener future for all children.

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1 — Introduction: Food as a Starter

A Scanian city steeped in history and home to a prestigious Swedish University, Lund boasts a unique research setting. It features a diverse range of attractions and historical sites, plenty of green spaces, a dynamic student population, and a commitment to eco-mobility through extensive bike lanes. Having a vibrant international community does not hinder the opportunity to observe and identify a small part of the distinctive character that forms the core of Swedish culture. It actually invites us to go beyond the stereotypes often associated with the country, and to embrace both the celebration and the challenges of contemporary diversity. With the most international university in Sweden, Lund is home, together with Malmö, to a multicultural foodscape, full of international food events. They comprise the Öresund region with Copenhagen, in Denmark, a cosmopolitan segment of Scandinavia. Food culture is commonly fused with a random assortment of elements, such as meal traditions, heritage, regionalism, celebration dates, religion, and ethical eating. While these aspects are certainly part of the food culture, they are indeed the tip of the iceberg of its deep impact on society, the environment, and the economy. In that sense, the bare act of “eating is political” (Rowan, January 2025), as one of the local farmers stated during the present research. What do people eat, and where does the food come from? Do people grow their own food or buy it? Where and how? For what price and at what social and environmental cost? These are some of the questions that moved this research from the start.

During the autumn of 2023, I interacted with a diverse range of individuals and networks, including the University Student Mentors Program, the Student Ambassadors Program, and immigrant workers from the Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) course, exploring this matter. The elements that intertwined food and multiculturalism were intriguing, and I had begun conducting interviews and taking field notes for my courses, which led to some findings on the role of food in identity, sociability, and belonging. Nevertheless, my personal interest in finding a research theme that also focused on the environment and climate action led me to Food Saving Lund, an organisation that rescues food. I missed an opportunity to participate in one of their activities in 2023, which was frustrating. So, the plan to include sustainability in my local foodscape studies only became possible in March 2024, when I first met the Lund Matvarukooperativ, a local cooperative.

Despite Lund University's impressive third place in the QS World University Sustainability Rankings and its research excellence, there are remarkably few grassroots environmental

movements in the city's foodscape. The scarcity of active members within the grassroots network creates a significant gap between the academic science being produced and the practical social technologies that would impact the emergence of local community- and nature-based solutions. Swedish big companies in the food sector, on the other hand, have many of their stores, offices, and even their headquarters in the city, like Tetra Pak for packaging and Alfa Laval for dairy processing machinery. Meanwhile, Lund is home to many agritech and plant-based food startups and especially research. Major global investments in sustainability are directed toward technological solutions rather than social innovations and cultural change.

The present research aims to cover the climate action of some of those few grassroots initiatives and their social innovation in the Lund and Lomma landscape, namely the Folks Köket (People's Kitchen) — FK, Alnarp's Agroecology Farm — AAF, Food Saving Lund — FSL, Lund Matvarukooperativ (Lund Food Produce Cooperative) — LMK, and Vi Odla! These organisations are mainly involved in building a local food system and tackling food waste and loss. Most were founded less than a decade ago. Even though they cover different spheres and approaches to the food chain, they show significant potential for collaborating, which they sometimes do. Another feature they have in common is that they take direct climate action rather than trying to influence institutional political decisions most of the time.

Lund Matvarukooperativ, founded in 2016, concentrates on supporting and strengthening the local food chain and is composed of both local organic farmers and local consumers, which is rather innovative—most cooperatives in the sector are either consumers' cooperatives or local farmers' cooperatives. It was started by students from Lund University who contacted local farmers and potential consumers. Since COVID-19, more local workers have been taking an active part.

Food Saving Lund was founded in 2014 and focuses on food rescue and sharing, with a strong social commitment to combating waste. It works by contacting stores to give away their leftovers before they expire, and then throwing them away so that families and students in need can access food. Meanwhile, it is accessed by people motivated to prevent waste or unwilling to sponsor unnecessary overproduction of goods. Students from Lund University also started it, but there are now a few local workers on the board and several families signing up for pickups at the group's new location and at the partner stores.

Folkets Kök (The People's Kitchen), founded in 2021 by the Ecosocialist Collective, aims to prevent food waste and share rescued food by dumpster diving, cooking, and serving it. Although a team operates throughout the week, the main activities start on Wednesday nights, with dumpster-diving teams visiting mapped spots in the city where supermarkets throw away food. The food is collected and transported mainly by bike to Smålands Nation, a socialist student organisation. Often, there is extra food from Food Saving Lund and, eventually, from Alnarp's Agroecology Farm. On Thursdays, there are cooking, serving, and cleaning teams for the free dinners, which are open to contributions.

Alnarp's Agroecology Farm produces organic food through agro-ecological methods. It started in 2021, too, based in Lomma, a neighbouring city of Lund. The farm operates a Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) model with distributions both in Lund and Malmö. It has a few part-time paid positions and a main volunteer-based workforce. Custodians of the farm who subscribe to the bags regularly volunteer as well, and all are essential for the farm maintenance. Some vegetables are sold on the farm to visitors, and some key events are held to build the community and either sell or distribute extra food.

Finally, Vi Odlar! founded in 2014, was the latest organisation I could include in the research. It focuses on urban gardening and education around food and sustainability by collectively keeping a small plot in Brunnshög, a neighbourhood northeast of Lund. The project, together with FSL, is part of the ABC—Active Contributions for People and the Environment, a non-profit organisation founded in Lund in 1998 that supports projects related to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The primary objective of this research is to explore the role of grassroots innovation in climate action, focusing on the perspectives of individuals actively engaged in efforts to reduce CO₂ emissions and promote changes in the local foodscape. Additionally, the study aims to uncover the significance these organisations hold for participants in taking direct climate action, how they learn from one another, and how they collaborate as a community to achieve their goals. The research will investigate their visions, how they deal with different stakeholders, the University, the Lunds Kommun, and the public policies. What are the potentials and threats for the future of food?

2 — Fieldwork and Methodology

Participant observation and thick description were adopted as the main tools for the research, as they helped track my findings in a completely new environment. Thick description is an anthropological approach that highlights culture as a system of shared meanings, from which the researcher provides an interpretation of social actions and their significance (Geertz, 1973). The method has been useful for examining observable social practices in the context of their meaning and purpose.

My first take on Lund's cultural food scene took shape through a sequence of participant observations and interviews, with a focus on the cultural aspects of cook-along activities. They went from Swedish welcoming events to celebrations among immigrants to food-tasting exchanges with international students, and to discovering fieldwork sites I was unaware of. Working for a long time with rural and traditional communities became like my cup of tea and my comfort zone. So, it was a challenge for me to adapt the methods I knew and those I was learning to an urban setting.

Nonetheless, the joy of discovering a multicultural landscape and attending many gatherings around food and culture during my first semester, with people from so many distinctive backgrounds, opened my eyes to new possibilities. The subjects of my first field notes were the participants of a Cinnamon-roll Day cook-along with students, a food-related celebration in Sweden. Right after, a potluck organised by Interkultur i Lund social hub in the autumn of 2023, composed mostly of immigrant workers. Further, a similar activity at the Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) course was another rich food culture exchange.

In the spring of 2024, at last, I had the opportunity to include the missing ingredient I had been seeking in my research through my early contacts with grassroots movements working on sustainable food initiatives. The first one was working on organic local food consumption through the organisation of a network to buy from local farmers. Over time, the fieldwork began to include participation in food-saving practices, cooking activities, visits to local farmers, and volunteering at an agro-ecological farm started by students. Through this process, data gathering sparked discussions about the environment and social organisation from the perspectives of local consumers and producers. The research question was initially presented by the Lund Matvarukooperativ itself: what motivates people to volunteer long-term in a sustainable food non-profit organisation? But it was gradually extended to investigate the role of grassroots initiatives in climate action from the emic perspective. The

current research distinctly investigates the role of grassroots sustainable food innovations in urban and peri-urban environments in one of the so-called developed countries, particularly in Scania, the southernmost historical province of Sweden.

Beyond the intricate and nuanced nature of development and growth, this work aims to gather qualitative data from local activists on what could constitute a sustainable foodscape in the future. Collect information on how they are working and struggling on a daily basis to build a climate-resilient local food system. Participant observation, as mentioned before, was definitely the jack-of-all-trades for the present anthropological study, providing direct insights into community dynamics. Field notes were sometimes blended into the exploration of potential thick description paragraphs to offer a detailed account of the observed social and cultural contexts, supported by secondary source readings.

Meanwhile, semi-structured interviews helped identify the research question and the main subjects to focus on. Fortunately, there was a shared interest in conducting workshops on envisioning the future of Lund Matvarukooperativ. That step opened the doors to the use of participatory methods, actively involving the members in the research process, and assisting in implementing practical solutions. Later on, it was possible to spread Participatory Action Research (PAR) to other organisations by discussing the Sustainability Hub, using tools such as World Café and SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) mapping.

Throughout my time in Sweden, I have conducted participant observation in various settings, including engaging with farmers, consumers, and volunteers. That means some of my first observations were made when I didn't even have the subject well-defined or my fieldwork setting. So, I was unaware that I would be involved in this particular topic. Being a researcher from the Global South was a unique opportunity to identify differences and similarities across cultures, and to invert the standard North-South research tradition in the South-North direction. Henceforth, this is the opposite of the "going native" perspective of colonial anthropology. Somehow, adapting to a European country was, for me, the reverse experience, with a feeling of "going native" in the Global North, facing the challenges and exploring the contradictions of development.

Actually, when I started interviewing students about their experience with food in Sweden, I did not realise they were "all" from the Global South. This bias was a clear blind spot. It happened that they were the people closest to me and were facing similar issues in the new country, so it felt natural and, somehow, political. The same used to happen in the social hub

activities or the Swedish language course. Perhaps that shows how unaware we can be of our own biases, and that is one reason it is crucial to look for different perspectives in qualitative research. Not that it was hard to make a few Swedish friends from the start, but more a matter of where I was and what I was looking for. The fact is, I took a bit more time to get to know more people from the Global North. Sometimes, it just does not flow spontaneously as people might assume, but is the outcome of quite an effort and the deeper development of our social skills.

Conversely, it was an integral component of the exercise of “making the strange familiar and the familiar strange”, which in ethnography involves questioning everyday practices and cultural norms, and not taking things for granted, to uncover underlying beliefs and power dynamics. Assumptions are dangerous traps for any ethnographer. That mechanism became increasingly important to be aware of the farther I got involved with the organisations. Another thing I could not ignore is that the shortage of money had a significant impact on my experience and frequently became concrete struggles, taking up a lot of my time and energy. Applying for jobs, raising money for extending the immigration permit for my whole family, asking for financial help from my new friends, temporarily working in another country during the Summer, paying back my debts, doing part-time jobs and so on.

As I did not find permanent accommodation for a long period, I had to change residence many times in the surrounding areas, which, in turn, led me to experience the outskirts of Lund and neighbouring towns. Whether I lived in renovated barns, old cabin annexes with low roofs, or in trailers next to the fields and wind turbines, that undoubtedly gave me a unique opportunity to observe the monocropping landscape changing colours with the seasons. Likewise, saving money on transportation by cycling has been a way to lower the research carbon footprint. Most importantly, it helped me better understand land use in the Lund and Lomma areas of Scania County.

I passed daily through fields, pastures, stud farms, and natural reserves, gathering a great deal of information, often accompanied by my daughter. We saw a variety of local crops, such as wheat, rye, potato, sunflower, canola, carrot, beetroot, cauliflower, and mustard, shift with the seasons. Plus, it was great to identify places to pick a profusion of berries, especially blackberries (*björnbär*) and delicious wild strawberries (*smultron*), which grow wild in the summer. It was amazing to gaze upon the tiny log cabin allotments during the autumn, filled with garden apples (*trädgårdsäpplen*), which are structures that Latin American cities

definitely do not have in their cityscapes, given so much real estate speculation and low regulation. It was amazing to map apple trees in different neighbourhoods: some started producing early, while others kept producing until winter. Still, I really missed joining mushroom picking with a local expert and couldn't gather much, except for a few people who told me they were good to eat.

Long story short, after meeting Lund Matvarukooperativ, Alnarp's Agroecology Farm, and Food Saving Lund, I found links between food in the context of Lund and the environment and grassroots movements in the spring of 2024. By the autumn of 2024, I came closer to Folkets Kök, and we held some participatory sessions that initially applied to the Lund Matvarukooperativ envisioning workshops. Since the objectives were closely related to the study, it was logical to align the cooperative's requests with the Participatory Action-Research (PAR) approach, which aims to amalgamate practice and academic inquiry in the research process. PAR encourages grassroots groups to acquire reliable knowledge to facilitate social transformation through a continuous cycle of experiencing, learning, and acting (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991).

Thereafter, we started a similar process for Food Saving Lund. Our activities were escalating with a new partnership, and we were hosting food-sharing activities in some of the organisation's members' homes. So we started an application process for a place at Stenkrossen for Food Saving Lund, following action-research principles, as our knowledge was somewhat dispersed, especially among the new members. The primary need for project approval was a location to conduct weekly food distributions. On top, the location would serve as a venue for meetings, lectures, and workshops, improving the organisation's capacity to manage daily activities and run events. The project was the result of our shared action, knowledge exchange, and engaged research, and was fortunately approved.

In the meantime, new interviews helped shape and define the main categories and concepts to be explored, which are reflected in the thesis's chapters. Therefore, to delve deeper into the emic perspectives of each of these organisations, an exploratory survey was designed to provide additional information within the community. The goal was to collect diverse viewpoints and insights from active members of the five organisations where participant observation was being conducted. The effort contributed to understanding the collective process of building identity and systematising collective action.

Afterward, we worked together to facilitate the presentation of the Sustainability Hub project, which has been discussed by LMK, FSL, ABC, and Circle Centre. We used the World Café participatory method to discuss the Sustainability Hub's roles, stakeholders, and strategies, and, some months later, we applied the SWOT analysis. The main goal of the Sustainability Hub would be to coordinate sustainability-related initiatives in Lund, with a few of them being the organisations included in the research. Again, the need for infrastructure, especially a location, to support the initiative was at stake. The gathered information was systematised into a project and presented to Lunds Kommun following preliminary talks. This led to the idea of a pilot sustainability café in the city centre, recently baptised “HUB & Café”. There, LMK, FSL, ABC, Circle Centre, Lunds Bilpool, and other partners are working together as a reference for sustainability conveniently accessible to Lund’s citizens.

Choosing an engaging approach with the related organisations was a commitment through the research to contribute to the Lund community's sustainability initiatives. The present research involved approximately 376 hours of participant observation, 05 Participatory Action-Research meetings/workshops, 09 interviews, and 22 survey responses from organisations’ members to investigate unique perspectives on: sustainable local food consumption and production; food waste and loss prevention, and food accessibility; people’s motivation for activism and volunteering; grassroots innovations and direct climate action. The methodology included creating a thematic framework to conceptualise participants' perceptions and analysing the data to identify key themes and insights. Researchers may experience diverse outcomes depending on the method. They may be adjusted for each group's particularity and the type of question addressed.

The collection of data led to rethinking the initial assumptions, reorganising the framework, and even revising the research question through an iterative-inductive approach (O’Reilly 2009), moving back and forth between theory and analysis. As such, the theory is the precursor, medium, and outcome of ethnographic research and writing, and the research design is a reflexive process operating throughout the study. It was essential to raise the questions not only for the interviews but also from them. At a given moment, I shifted my focus from research on people's memories, backgrounds, and experiences of the present to inquiring chiefly about their perspectives on the future and the process of building it.

The interview questionnaire inherited some queries developed from previous explorations of Lund's foodscape, how Swedes handle historical change, foreign peoples' experiences of

moving to Sweden, and the diversity of gender roles, culinary culture, and identity. It included many conversations that highlighted the importance of community-building and collective learning. The questions were now designed more to explore their perspectives on engagement, regenerative food practices, and the grassroots organisation's impact on society. They highlighted the importance of communication, outreach, and active participation in promoting ecological food systems and social change.

The constant application of interviews and the adjustments to the exploratory surveys helped frame research contributions to the sustainability hub project and map the different organisations envisioning the near future. A process that began with the LMK envisioning workshops, the collective writing of the Food Saving Lund application for location at Stenkrossen, and has been put to the test again with the Sustainability Hub presentation and World Café. The World Café is a creative process that combines effective brainstorming for large groups, splitting them into small groups for discussions at multiple tables, each with a single subject. It is a structural conversation method that encourages diverse perspectives, collective knowledge, and new insights. A facilitator encourages each participant to express themselves. After each round, people change to a different table so that each can contribute to all the different subjects. The process resulted in more inputs to the project, including other organisations not related to food, potentially strengthening the concepts and practices that build alternative futures for food.

The research process helped connect the organisations and provided information for the project. We had a very positive conversation with Lunds Kommun about a central place with the possibility of opening a sustainability café at Stadshallen. The negotiations were seen as beneficial for both sides. The project was offered the location for a four- to five-month testing period, with refurbished or reclaimed furniture adapted to the different organisations' needs, and funds for hiring a coordinator, starting August 2025.

3 — Food Economics and Pluriversal Ecologies

The current state of the food system raises major concerns about climate change that is not natural. At least, not entirely. Desertification, droughts, and floods are not the causes, but rather, the food system that contributes to them. Increasingly, people are being influenced by Malthusian theories, which argue that humanity is at the root of the crisis. This perspective has contributed to the idea that we are living in the Anthropocene, an era characterised by the widespread impact of human activity on the planet. But is it true? Do all humans generate the same impact? Is it caused by the human condition itself or by a particular system? Is it not ignoring the existence of multiple anthropogenic ecosystems that thrive in biodiversity? What sort of human culture and society produces what type of impact? How is it related to global disparities and the gap between classes?

At the heart of the issue lies the question of value. Which activities create value, and how do they do so? Who defines value? What kind of value is generated, and for whom? In an accumulative system, a company that accumulates capital will hire workers to accumulate even more. Value in this case does not come from meeting society's needs or from complying with nature. Relevant jobs for society, such as care, nurturing, protecting, or restoring the environment, are often volunteer or low-paid. In contrast, climate action taken by food activists considers the value in building alternative futures that foster a regenerative and biodiverse foodscape. These activists advocate for practices that restore ecological balance, enhance soil health, promote diverse crop varieties, and support local farmers and the community. By prioritising sustainable agro-ecological methods, they aim to create a food system resilient to climate change and capable of nourishing future generations.

Strengthening the local foodscape is regarded as a crucial strategy for addressing both climate resilience and climate health. For that matter, it is vital to clearly define the foodscape and how it will be explored in this research. Foodscape studies are a multidisciplinary field that encompasses a range of issues and perspectives. Geography is the discipline that adopted the concept most notably. The term 'foodscape' was coined in the 1990s (Yasmeen, 1996) to address social and spatial disparities in public health and food systems by combining the conceptual notions of landscape and food. Initially, researchers developed a spatial approach using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and statistical methods, primarily to examine the diversity of urban foodscapes and their impact on diet. That approach included mapping

outlets such as shops, markets, and restaurants in a given area and contributed to the fields of health and nutrition.

Cultural and social insights, beyond mapping alone, can emphasise the role of society's cultural diversity and inequalities in shaping foodscapes. Conditions such as accessibility, transportation, prices, social status, migration and immigration, and community position play essential roles, along with everyday farm and food practices, representations of groups, and public policies and their influence on the landscape (Vonthron et al., 2020). Meanwhile, behavioural studies refer to physical, organisational, and sociocultural spaces where meals, cuisine, and related issues are experienced. They concentrate on eating behaviours and consumption patterns in indoor foodscapes, from hospitals, schools, and domestic kitchens to retail stores.

Systemic studies, on the other hand, view foodscape as a synonym for 'food system', focusing on physical locations of production and consumption (Ibid.). The present study embraces both sociocultural and systemic approaches to address the global food system as a source of unsustainable practices and to envision alternative strategies for the 're-spatialisation' of food and potential economic changes in the food chain. Through the lenses of the anthropological theory of value and social ecology, it will analyse the conflict of values within an urban, capitalist foodscape between the conventional corporate food system and the social changes promoted by environmental activists in response to the climate crisis.

Food is essential to maintaining labour (Smith, 1976), so all economies and industries are dependent on food production and consumption. How people produce, share, and consume food is key to understanding the norms, values, and practices of modern society. Agriculture, in particular, has long formed the basis of human economic development. It was among the main political drivers of the unfolding of civilisations, along with population growth and territorial expansion, which are intertwined with it.

Nevertheless, the advent of manufactured goods transformed the economy in many ways, as transformations in the market system and laissez-faire policy led to the commodification of food (Polanyi, 1944). The detachment between men and land that ended the European Middle Ages deeply affected the social and cultural aspects of agriculture. Moreover, the top-down approach prioritised technical expertise and economic efficiency over local knowledge, cultural dynamics, and political realities. This approach failed to recognise the complexities of regional contexts, resulting in adverse social, economic, and environmental consequences.

Early modern states had to deal with constant upsurges in food shortages as they supported the so-called free market, which treated food as a commodity, reducing it to numbers rather than need (Scott, 1998).

Mainstream economic jargon still depicts nature as an externality. This portrait of reality itself is a storytelling technique of contracting complexity to a small part through the political use of methodological reductionism. Control over narrative is essential to shaping and manipulating public opinion and controlling the present and future, as “who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past” (Orwell, 1949, p. 143). For that matter, envisioning possible futures is not exclusive to science fiction but supports planning contingencies and preventing collapse, especially in the present climate crisis.

One strategy to prevent people from taking climate action is to make them believe governments are taking responsibility, or that technological advancements will save humanity from doom, or even to deny the climate crisis. Another strategy is to make them believe the planet has survived many major changes and that we are just facing another one, or that all those processes are natural. In the same way, as the world was getting colder some decades ago, it is constantly propagated as just a natural cycle.

Taking isolated data and disconnecting it from its broader context is exactly how reductionist theories helped create the social and environmental disaster we live in today. Manipulation of the past and denial of the present are ways of keeping people distracted from humanity’s central challenges and from thinking and fighting for a better future. The reason is that they involved significant changes in economic and social structures and political upheaval to conserve the most fundamental ways of life. Doing the right thing is seldom profitable in the capitalist system. Damage and destruction, on the other hand, quite frequently generate Gross Domestic Product (GDP), even if they are bad for the economy, society, and the environment. It works like translating Bastiat's (1850) parable of the broken window to contemporary Bretton Woods’ GDP: If someone “invests” money to fix a window, it is counted as economic growth, overlooking the destruction and its consequences. It will be counted as good for the glass industry and the glazier, no matter whether the people in the house contracted a cold, cut their foot, or had rats eating their food. By the end of the day, breaking windows will be considered good for the economy. In social and ecological systems, damage can have a domino effect that cannot be reversed. Including the money spent on trying to fix it could be used for other purposes, preventing humanitarian disasters or promoting improvements in education and health care.

Given the world's social, cultural, and ecological complexity, one key idea about social and economic change today is that there is no ultimate, unique solution to the climate crisis. Nonetheless, the deep change required for more sustainable economies to flourish is based on multiple solutions for local economies and social organisations, like in the Zapatista slogan “a world where many worlds fit”. Not a single future, but multiple futures, multiple forms, the pluriverse (Escobar, 2018). By understanding and nurturing the pluriverse of practices and ways of living, humanity can secure its future on this planet. Rowan, one of the local farmers I interviewed in January 2025, said he does not see changes in global markets and politics, and that all the changes we need for a brighter future will come from acting locally. Actually, protecting local foodscapes, promoting regenerative agriculture, preventing waste, promoting sharing and a circular economy, decentralising renewable energy generation, and reducing consumerism are usually off the agendas of businessmen and politicians.

If an economy fails to save the resources it depends on, it is not truly being economic. Etymologically speaking, it is illogical for an economy not to be ecological. Both economy and ecology derive from the ancient Greek word οἶκος, meaning "house." In this context, the suffix νόμος in economy refers to the customs, ordinances, or norms of that house. When applied to a large-scale economy, including the town or the planet as our shared house, the economy should naturally align with λόγος, which signifies reason or logic. So, why do people uphold norms that conflict with scientific understanding when it comes to the future of our planet?

This behaviour is mostly due to the belief that there are always new ways of expanding the economy. The main capitalist countries and corporations deeply disregard the overexploitation of depleted territories and replace them with new ones. This has a high cost in terms of the lives of people in other countries. Food waste and loss, as well as the disruption of local food chains, go far beyond food, as they are byproducts of the imbalance in the world's geopolitics and global markets. The source of the ecological crisis is the unequal distribution of power and resources, a hierarchical system of human domination over nature and humans over humans, in which both humanity and ecosystems are disposable (Bookchin, 1982).

The mainstream narrative that capitalism generates development and wealth, rather than taking from society and nature, is challenged by one truth: as capital grows, nature shrinks, and the market cannot resolve the crises it creates. Excessive consumption or production

beyond our needs is an act of violence. In nature's economy, life is the true currency, not money (Shiva, 2008). Rather than externalities, one visionary economist wrote in the 1970s, not ignoring labour, that nature is responsible for a large share of capital. Once Chief Economic Advisor to the British National Coal Board, E. F. Schumacher (1973) was especially concerned with fossil fuels, calling non-renewable resources Natural Capital. He argued that economic endeavours should remain small and local to prevent the overexploitation of resources. When large companies operate without restrictions, they tend to exploit the world by seeking out cheap labour and inexpensive resources.

The variety of small local initiatives under workers' and community control aligns with the concept of economic democracy, suggesting that social control of natural resources is essential. This implies that horizontal economic and political relations are interconnected. During the Spanish Revolution, both economic cooperation and political coordination were modelled after the principles of federalism (Abad de Santillán, 1978). These principles inspired workers' organisations ranging from shoemakers to small farmers, and demonstrated the importance of sectoral unions and local cooperatives. That model of economy was based much more on needs than on the abstract numbers of profit and growth.

Grassroots initiatives that are not driven by profit but by a set of values are much more adaptable to adopting a social and environmental agenda through the emergence of multiple forms of economy, or a diverse ecosystem of economies. For example, the Argentine ceramic factory Zanon helped build and reform homes in its neighbourhood, providing ceramics at no cost. That is why it is important to emphasise social justice when addressing global warming, as cultures and societies vary and are adapted to their unique landscapes. These communities of people are as threatened and vulnerable to climate change as they have the potential to contribute to climate health for all humankind. By contrast, conventional climate summit leaders' discourses on climate change gravitate toward carbon stocks and footprints, carbon dioxide concentration, land cover, infrastructure investments, and so on. This reduces the representation of climate action to measurable market logic and, again, to abstract numbers.

But values are not limited by calculable means of measurement. Instead, "value is the way actions become meaningful to the actors by being placed in some larger social whole" (Graeber, 2001, p.254). Reductionism reflects the ideology of banks, political leaders, market operators, and transnational corporations that ignore the qualitative values of human virtues and natural systems and convert them to mere resources. A qualitative economy of well-being needs to replace the quantitative economy that tends to reduce people to a disposable working

force and nature to ashes. Commodification reduces the multiplicity of values in food—nutritional, cultural, ecological, and ethical—into a single price (Vivero-Pol, 2017). Wall Street values are not universal values, though. Local grassroots food movements uphold a diversity of values, including nurturing, care, identity, multiculturalism, holistic integration with nature, and so on.

The equal right to be different and to hold alternative values is at the heart of ontological pluralism (Escobar, 2018). The pluriverse of ontological designs, which arises from the diverse values associated with food, challenges reductionist and marginalist economics. This perspective highlights the complexity of reality and life, reshaping what is considered real and valuable. Dumpster diving, food sharing, and agro-ecological growth redesign what food means—not as a commodity but as a commons (Vivero-Pol, 2017), transforming waste into care and food production into biodiversity.

Pluriversal ecology is reflected in rescuing food ‘waste’ when the system discards it, in keeping heritage seeds when the system develops new GMOs, and in hosting local fauna by banning intoxicating inputs sold as solutions for farmers. That is going beyond the capitalist logic of seeing nature as a mere resource to be administered, and recognising its inherent value. Regenerative thinking means that working together with nature is a way to provide an incredible source of well-being and fulfil humanity’s social, physical, and psychological needs beyond the extraction or conservation dilemma. Geoengineering is not the only option to “Terraform the Earth.” Quite the contrary, helping the planet heal from our wounds with local community-led nature-based solutions is the most viable way. Grassroots actors are actively challenging the commoditisation of food, shaping food futures by rescuing surplus food, cooking meals from dumpster finds, growing local food, and promoting socio-ecological landscapes. They are also promoting care and well-being through the sharing of food and meals and community-building. These practices do not align with capitalist values and may not be reflected in GDP measurements, which is why they can actually challenge the current rate of planetary depletion.

They represent food not as commodities, but as a common need and a commitment that arises from the failure of a broken system that would otherwise lead humanity to starvation. They embody the core of commensalism: sharing over profit, sustainability over productivity, and waste. These practices and relationships enable survival and solidarity in and despite the crisis (Tsing, 2015). Focusing on local and participatory methods drives the development of a

local food system, promotes a circular economy, and combats waste to address the climate crisis. It involves thinking about a possible future together instead of no future. The reframing of economic theory as socio-ecological economics is meant to move beyond traditional reductionism in understanding reality, such as separating the human from nature and nature from the economy. A healthy ecology is deeply intertwined with a diversity of fair economic models and social justice (Bookchin, 1982).

The plurality of tools and convivial organisations would stimulate a diversity of ways of living that would embrace both memory—which means the legacy from the past, the tradition— and invention, which means creation (Illich, 1978). Shiva (1989) highlights that women in subsistence economies, who produce and reproduce wealth in partnership with nature, have been experts in their own right in holistic, ecological knowledge of nature's processes. A remarkable element that corroborates the unique role of feminism in the socio-ecological movements, including the present investigation, is that women comprised, not surprisingly, the largest group, with major contributions in both volunteering and leadership.

Further, examining the politics of ecological and pluralistic economies enables us to move beyond the idea of hegemony and domination by either capital or the state. It allows us to unveil a long history of popular resistance to overexploitation, as the Kurdish political thinker Abdullah Öcalan (2011) coined it: multicultural, anti-monopolistic, and consensus-oriented. In that regard, grassroots movements can be like futuristic laboratories, not the kind you see in high-tech digital startups, but in finding both straightforward and creative local solutions through changes in values and social organisation and organising politics from the ground up. They run diverse and innovative initiatives that may be key for survival on a rapidly changing planet and raise awareness of the need for a new food culture. The idea of sustainability is linked to maintenance and preservation, along with the quantification of natural, social, and cultural values, which reproduce the same reductionist methods that feed the mainstream economy. In the interim, the human-exploitative and environment-depleting system has already gone far beyond any limits.

Conclusively, the need for pluriversal ecologies that recognise and valorise diverse, local, and traditional ecological knowledge and practices opposes homogenised, industrialised approaches. Preserving local agricultural practices, seeds, and cultural relationships with land, water, and nature fosters resilience, diversity, and sustainability. Feminist, multicultural,

and intergenerational approaches are essential for valuing the knowledge required to implement community-led nature-based solutions. These ecologies encourage the coexistence of diverse ways of understanding and managing ecosystems, valuing cultural differences, and securing these complex ecosystems from the homogenising effects of reductionist corporate or industrial interventions. Such a reductionist behaviour is not exclusive to the Capital but is highly incorporated by the State (Scott, 1998). Highly technical solutions often overlook the social aspects of top-down innovations. Policies and funding typically prioritise heavy technologies and the fallacy of individual choices over collective cultural and social transformation. This approach benefits large corporations rather than promotes systemic change through local actions. As a result, grassroots initiatives are underfunded, which limits their broader impact. As an activist from Folkets Kök said:

“Without policies, the results from these small organisations will always be limited because the biggest actors will always do everything that they can get away with.” (Ember, April 2025).

Grassroots innovations struggle to compete with the majority of efforts and financing that focus on industrial and financial frameworks that profit from resource exploitation, keeping them on the periphery and avoiding transformative shifts. Overall, the climate crisis is a social and global crisis. Reflecting on the perspectives and agency of grassroots actors in a developed country as they create alternatives to the climate crisis, taking local direct action to regenerate the food system, is akin to observing the eye of a massive hurricane. In the centre, everything appears calm and orderly, while the surrounding chaos seems distant to pose a threat. Yet, change feels challenging as the entire planet faces pressing hazards that will, at some point, affect all of humanity and menace life on this planet. In a country where social-democratic welfare reinforces capitalism by building strong social cohesion around growth and accumulative wealth, can grassroots movements defy consent and bureaucracy while ensuring they can fix the system through technocratic green reforms?

4 — Grassroots Innovations

Grassroots innovations are social and technical solutions adapted to local contexts and alternatives to mainstream values and technologies. They are frequently linked to global networks but originally target local resilience and social change, despite rarely receiving policy support (Feola & Nunes, 2013). These innovations promote alternatives like local currencies and community energy. In the present case, the research specifically addresses their role in local food chains and in preventing food waste. They may be social, technological, or digital tools that emerge from the bottom up, not the other way around. While mechanical and digital innovations focus on artifacts, social innovations emphasise everyday practices and needs, promoting participation and resource access. Most useful technologies, social or mechanical, arise from practical needs and local solutions before being adopted by dominant systems (Kropotkin, 1906).

Grassroots organisations contribute to society and the environment through bottom-up social innovation and cultural shifts. They offer collective solutions and well-being by creating ways to address the negative effects of failed conservation and care. Adapting social technologies based on local knowledge is essential. Scott (1998) associates the Greek concept of *mētis* with a type of intelligence rooted in practical, *emic* approaches, including the skills necessary for navigating complex situations. Unlike technical knowledge (*techne*) and theoretical knowledge (*episteme*), *mētis* is practical and contextual, making it challenging to fit into conventional scientific discourse. Its effectiveness is reflected in achieving specific goals.

Anthropology has much to contribute to understanding the social processes of innovation and collective learning. For a long time, anthropologists were primarily seen as collectors of knowledge and practices from societies erroneously believed to exist in the past of modern civilisation, ranging from remote Indigenous communities to rural peasantry. Some still think studying remote human groups is like travelling in a time machine and looking back at their past. They do not understand that other contemporary societies, as diverse as they can be, do not live on different time scales.

Human cultures actually develop in different and innovative ways that may definitely help humanity survive in the near future. A historical example: a remarkable technological leap occurred in Europe in the 16th century, when an immense variety of food cultivated by Indigenous peoples of the Americas filled their markets and tables. Corn and potatoes

sometimes saved the self-proclaimed civilised peoples from hunger. Beans, peanuts, pumpkins, zucchini, and tomatoes became part of European cuisine over the centuries.

Most universities, research institutes, and innovation companies traditionally overlooked alternative knowledge systems, including indigenous, community-based, and non-codified forms of technical development. Instead of making a strict top-down/bottom-up dichotomy, open science and inclusive innovation are blurring these boundaries (Smith et al. 2016). Although collaboration with research institutions and technical staff is welcome in many contexts, the process is as important as the results.

They challenge both the conventional top-down growth agenda in the Global North and the development discourse in the Global South, leading processes of environmental education, conscious consumption, and agricultural transition toward a more sustainable future. Community-led creations question monolithic approaches, emphasising context-appropriate solutions based on locally shared competencies rather than imposed standards. Old cultural practices, intergenerational skills, and intricate ecosystems lie amidst the complexity of human and non-human actors as a social process (Latour & Woolgar, 1986).

Constructive participatory knowledge is founded upon local communities interpreting, creating, and modifying technologies based on their experiences. The idea of grassroots organisations as living laboratories involves experimentation and adaptation to environmental conditions, economic realities, historical processes, and infrastructure features. Individuals, communities, and institutions engage in continuous trial-and-error processes to find innovative ways to ensure food sovereignty with sustainable production and consumption patterns. The concept emphasises the interconnectedness of human activities and natural processes, and underscores the need for collaborative, adaptive approaches that integrate *emic* perspectives and local resources.

Concerning the intricate integration of local social innovation with mainstream technology in the digital era, there is no doubt that the use of internet communication, social platforms, and virtual transactions facilitates organisations' development. However, they did not prevent people from coordinating and innovating in the past through community sharing, unions' mutual aid, cooperatives' self-management, and many forms of horizontal organisations and affinity groups. This underscores the critical need to develop commons-based, shared technologies from the bottom up.

Because technology is not neutral, opaque technologies with high capital input would force these communities to conform to intensive, large-scale practices. Conversely, the promotion of commons-based technologies emancipates commoners to build a counter-economy. (Bauwens, Kostakis & Pazaitis, 2019, p. 29).

Through participant observation and an exploratory survey, it was possible to learn the perspectives of people taking climate action in practice and collectively. Many said they see technological innovations as limited, though the degree of their impact varies across answers. Notwithstanding, Indigo, a board member of Food Saving Lund, reminded us that we will rely heavily on them, as we may have reached a point where they will be crucial to reducing global warming. Yet, without social innovation, they may have fewer effects. So, they can more likely be great tools, but not enough to solve a deeper problem that also requires extensive change in society's standards of living and consumerist behaviour. Henceforth, they are likely to have a positive impact, but technological solutions are not designed to mitigate the non-technological aspects of global warming.

The current main approach to addressing global warming is to reduce CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions. Technological innovations contribute to this effort, but they cannot offset emissions from social consumption and waste habits. River from Lund Matvarukooperativ, who have long been involved in agroecology and food chains, expressed, “The technological innovations will never be able to influence people's will to consume. We need to change the pattern of consumption” (April 2025). Sequoia from Folkets Kök commented that measures like geoengineering to capture carbon in capsules show themselves more as short-term strategies than actual solutions, and may even have a negative impact in the long term. On top, they deviate from the systematic changes needed to continue business-as-usual. So, even when they are designed to tackle practical problems efficiently, there is always the risk of using them to continue our habits without any systematic change. That being said, they may even negatively influence consumption patterns.

Participants were overall pessimistic about the effectiveness of technological solutions within the current economic framework. Sage, from Alnarp's Farm and landscape architecture student, uttered “policies work very slow and are designed within the boundaries that exist in the landscape today” (April 2025). Those boundaries would need to be deconstructed for the policies to make a proper impact and not repeat the scheme of an already failed system. One view is that most technologies require substantial resources, undermining the very idea of

green growth, as there are limited resources on the planet. In that sense, even if they are a major component, it is still crucial to make technology work for the people, with social attitudes, consumer pressure, and government policies playing a key role. Profound changes in political and economic power structures are needed.

As noted by Juniper, from Folkets K  k and ecologist in forest pathology, more often than not, the most original ideas are inhibited by the big companies or discontinued. The main reason is that both companies' and political decisions are focused on profit over people and are not exactly driven to develop sustainable methods. Without adopting the proper policies, they divert from reducing practices that are the root causes of the phenomenon. So, most participants were not very confident about technological innovations alone and are especially concerned with relying on government policies. Thereby, they understand there is not much alternative without social innovation and grassroots initiatives. Plus, after a possible climate collapse, people can more practically rely on commons-based technology, solidarity networks and local production chains, and that is not about the future. Nonetheless, for most of the world population, it is how capitalism works already.

Besides, Feola and Nunes (2013) remark that the literature on the subject raises doubts about the effectiveness of grassroots innovations in driving sociotechnical change in response to environmental challenges. There is a need for greater understanding of the internal dynamics and external factors affecting their success. Research on community-based carbon initiatives is limited in scope, with little evidence on scaling up, and future studies should explore missed opportunities and discontinued initiatives. They also stress the role of community is at the core of grassroots innovations (Ibid.), yet these initiatives often face challenges in cohesion, inclusivity, and diversity. Factors such as the struggle for sustained participation, reliance on volunteers, internal conflicts and limited financial resources hinder their effectiveness. These elements are indeed points of concern for some organisations involved in the present research.

Grassroots initiatives may actually face several trade-offs when engaging with larger systems, especially as they try to scale their impact (Enarsson et al., 2024). A significant risk is to their autonomy. For instance, access to external resources, such as municipal funding, can create dependence, undermining their self-sufficiency. They may face regulatory constraints that limit their activities, such as restrictions on selling goods in municipal facilities for autonomous funding, or others that can repress innovation. An additional risk is that as

grassroots initiatives become more integrated into larger systems, they become vulnerable to potential co-optative attempts or dilution of their values. Given these obstacles, the grassroots innovations' ability to drive sociotechnical change related to environmental issues seems limited. Conversely, networking with local and global actors can aid in development.

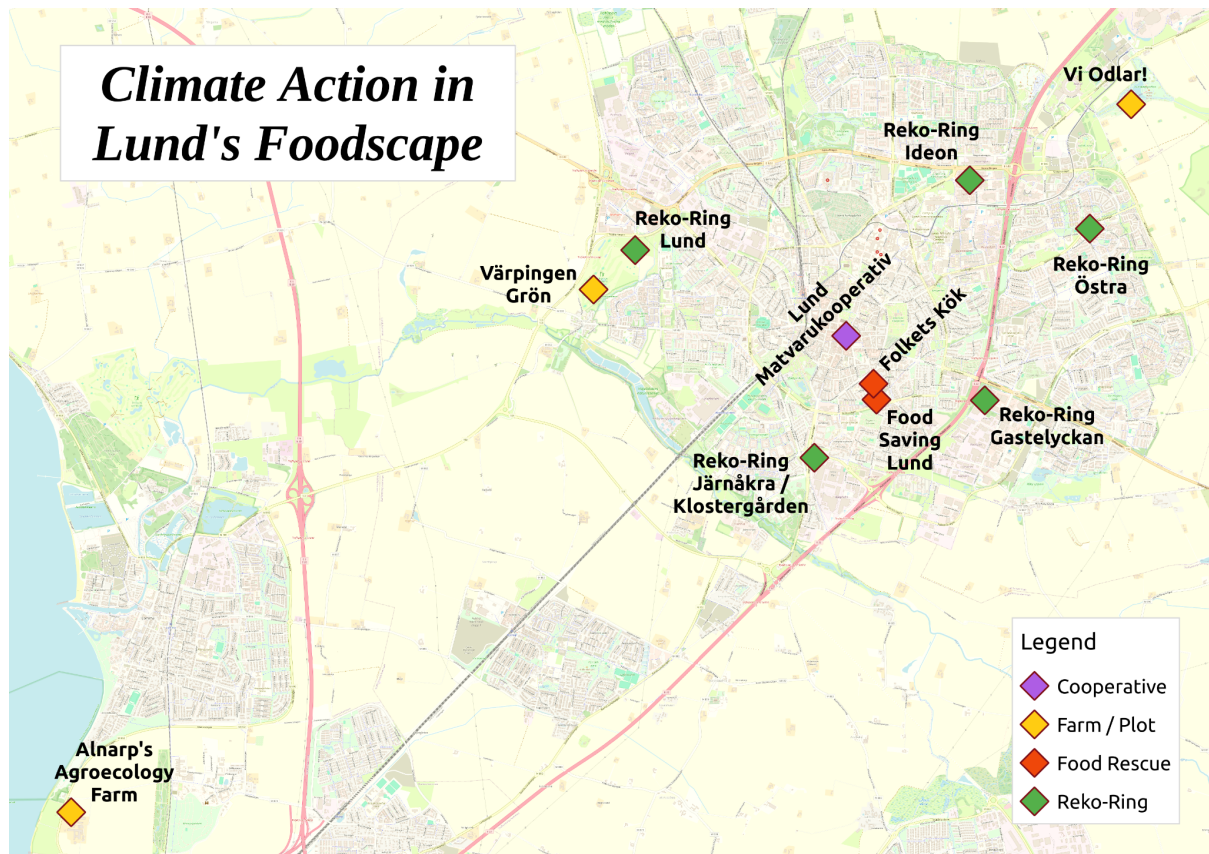


Figure 01—Sketch of various groups in Lund doing direct climate action

Research on a few grassroots initiatives in the Öresund region indicates that these initiatives contribute to shifts in the food system toward social and environmental justice (Vera, 2024). These organisations that combat food waste in Copenhagen, Denmark, and Malmö and Lund, Sweden, create resilient, community-driven practices that can inspire broader transformation and establish alternative spaces grounded in solidarity and care. The study highlights innovations such as Food Saving Lund and Folkets Kök, which aim to inspire other community kitchens by promoting their model for regional influence through replication and dissemination (Ibid.). This movement is already happening, with Folkets Kök Malmö hosting its first event on the 30th of January 2025, and many others after that.

Research in Gothenburg, Sweden's second-largest city, found that the growth of grassroots initiatives has been supported by favourable conditions, such as intermediary support,

transformational leadership, and collaboration with municipal actors (Enarsson et al., 2024). From 2013 to 2016, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) such as Studieförbundet and Hyresgästföreningen played crucial roles in nurturing grassroots initiatives through funding and support, enabling various grassroots activities to thrive. Increased recognition has led to collaborations with municipal actors to develop the “Smart Map” platform, a website that maps good initiatives in the collaborative sharing economy in Gothenburg. Besides, the period saw initiatives such as Fixoteket, which worked on urban development projects from 2016 to 2019, and the “Sharing City Gothenburg” project, connecting grassroots initiatives with real estate companies and municipal authorities from 2017 to 2020.

4.1 — Food Rescue and Sharing

There are two main grassroots organisations in Lund that work with food sharing and combating food waste and loss: the Folkets Kök and Food Saving Lund. Their activities are frequently interconnected. For Food Saving Lund, it is positive to have organisations picking up surplus food from partners. For the Folkets Kök, it's a reliable source of food, unlike what is randomly found during dumpster diving, which helps with planning recipes beforehand.

Dysfunctional food distribution values are indeed one of the main reasons for food waste and loss, and are deeply related to the commodification of food. The activists combating food consumerism and waste often call themselves food warriors and are concerned with social justice around food distribution, putting a high value on sharing, and reducing the impact of waste on global warming and plastic pollution.

Decommodification, or viewing food as a common good rather than a commodity, involves recognising its inherent value as a shared resource for humankind and the planet. This is both for humanitarian reasons and because food is produced out of privileged access to common goods like water and soil. Furthermore, foodscapes are not exclusive to human beings. They are shared with other forms of life, including the source of the food itself. This perspective emphasises that food should not be treated as a profit-driven product, just as health and education are regarded as essential services.

The Folkets Kök is an initiative undertaken by the Ecosocialist Collective to address accessibility and prevent loss by organising dumpster diving on Wednesdays and cooking and serving on Thursdays. It is open to participation, both as volunteers, where even first-timers can apply in an open spreadsheet online and communicate on the phone with someone responsible, or as part of the coordination team. There is no membership fee, and the diner is free, with a suggested donation value to buy complements and often help other organisations.

In the coordination team, people assume specific tasks to manage finances, such as buying complementary food when needed, communicating with Smålands Nation about structure, logistics, and storage, and coordinating when other activities are scheduled at the same time. The spreadsheet is always verified a few days earlier by someone from the coordination team to ensure people are volunteering for all the needed places. Several tasks and functions are involved, including keeping records of available ingredients, picking up potential food shared by Food Saving Lund, moderating the chat group, and organising events. For instance, this

year, a series of monthly lectures and debates titled “Food for Thought” has been scheduled, featuring different themes and guest speakers.

The dumpster-diving teams that go out on Wednesday nights after supermarkets close to rescue food from dumpsters that are still safe for consumption. The basic equipment for this includes a bike, gloves, and a lantern. After that, the food is delivered to Smålands Nation or on the following day. The main goal is to prepare meals primarily with the rescued food. The cooking responsible is usually someone from the coordination team or someone who has cooked there a couple of times with some previous experience at the required functions. From time to time, there is a cooking coordinator's workshop for people who have not coordinated before, as well as for those who have. There are always things to learn.

Cooking at the Folkets Kök, especially in the cooking coordinator role, requires checking the quantity, variety, and quality of the food retrieved through dumpster diving. It is always worth checking with the dumpster-diving team from the previous night to see what will be available the next day, so you can plan the dinner and look for recipes if needed. Once the cook coordinator arrives at Smålands Nation, they ask the Nation's office for the keys to the kitchen and the dining hall. Then it is fundamental to turn on the extractor fan and check if it is working. Usually, there is a place for a cook assistant to accompany the coordinator, and it is actually a great way to learn and take on the responsibility of coordinating the kitchen thereafter.

These two people triage which vegetables and fruits are suitable for cooking, which menu options can be created with them and the dry goods in storage, and whether any additional ingredients need to be purchased. The FK also has a cookbook with some of the most popular dishes, developed from food often found in dumpsters and easily reproduced with the kitchen's equipment. Before going shopping for any missing ingredient, there is the possibility of checking if some of them are available at the Nation's storage as well. Sometimes there will be dumpster-dived food on the fridge, or stored by Food Saving Lund, that needs to be checked. If some ingredients are truly needed after all, usually these two people go shopping together, preferably at a local grocery store.

Back in the kitchen with all the ingredients, it is time to follow all hygiene procedures and start washing, selecting, peeling, and chopping the vegetables. As obvious as crucial, the ones that will require more time to cook are before the ones that require less. The overall cooking time isn't much, especially if you take some of it for shopping. Fruits are typically for dessert

and left for later. If there is someone new, each one presents themselves, and someone explains the project, the procedures, and the kitchen rules. At this point, the cooking coordinator begins distributing tasks and responsibilities. For instance, someone may take over a specific dish or watch the food in the oven. When the savoury food is almost done, it is time to start preparing the dessert.

Usually, this is when there is a concentration of volunteers, because people from the serving and cleaning team are coming. Sometimes, some FK coordinators help finish the dishes and prepare the dessert. The serving team consults the cooking responsible to determine what will be served, then writes it on the board with creative text and colourful drawings. The food is taken from the kitchen to the pub counter. There is an announcement beforehand, so people discuss whether anything else will be announced that day besides the food, and who will do it. After that, a big bell is rung, and the announcement is made: basic information about the project, where the food came from, what will be served, and a request for donations to cover costs. And if it is a solidarity dinner, people announce where the donation is going. The food is then served, sometimes to around 100 people, and if there is enough, the bell is rung for a second round. The objective is to have everyone well-fed and no waste. Sometimes the food is not enough, so people cook more whenever possible or serve more bread and fruit.

Later on, the dessert is served. Banana bread and apple pies are the most common recipes, considering they are often found during dumpster diving or donated to Food Saving Lund. If there is any event, like a lecture, screening, or workshop, it is time to rearrange the place. The serving and cleaning team keep working at the place and in the kitchen so as not to finish too late before the other event begins. Even though there is a lot of effort involved, and it is completely volunteer-based, the result goes beyond the food that is rescued and shared. The People's Kitchen is a community and an educational initiative. The activists or volunteers can raise their awareness of food waste and their knowledge of ways to prevent it in a more practical way than most students would in any University course.

The other initiative in Lund on food saving and sharing included in this research is Food Saving Lund (FSL). The organisation has now been in existence for 10 years, and its main targets are to prevent food from going to waste, as a strategy that means going to dumpsters first, and to promote access to food through sharing. Food Saving Lund has two main methods of organising the pickups. One method is on-site pickup, which requires preview training and is managed through a specific platform, and the other is food distribution.

The method Food Saving Lund has been working with for a long time, and which remains the most straightforward way to rescue food from the local partners, is organising pickups directly at the establishments. For that purpose, it holds a monthly introduction meeting, often online, that serves as training for the new food warriors. Yet it is occasionally held during community-building or educational activities, such as a spring or autumn picnic featuring rescued food as usual, along with other contributions. The introduction meeting aims to raise awareness of the urgency of reducing food waste on the planet and of the importance of environmental and social sustainability. It presents the organisation's mission and values of sharing, fairness, respect, transparency, inclusiveness, accountability, and community-building, which are considered fundamental to the organisation's thriving.

Given that it is a small organisation in terms of the number of people handling everyday tasks, it has a considerable number of people handling pickups, which makes it very difficult to know everyone personally. Therefore, it is essential to have some basic knowledge of the people involved in the organisation for several reasons. Thus, the participants are asked to provide their complete names, their main activity, and how they were informed about the FSL. One reason is very practical—to identify who is responsible for picking up food each day from our partner establishments, which may have only a limited number of people assigned to each. Another key reason is to track potential flaws during the pickup process and prevent violations of our group's rules, such as selling rescued food or donations, which could harm the collective's mission.

Food Saving Lund uses a platform called Karrot, which was developed to organise the work of food-saving and sharing initiatives across different countries. It is also a source of communication between volunteers to share rescued food among themselves and between organisations, creating a potential network environment. The partner establishments inform the day and time when they will no longer sell the food, and this information is added to a schedule. Based on the size of the establishment and the amount and variety of food, sign-up places are opened.

Some organisations have fixed places on specific days, and when there is a large amount of food, they offer reliability so that FSL doesn't miss any pickups. In that sense, it is good for other non-profit organisations to have food for their activities without having to spend extra money, and for FSL because it offers reliability. That means when there is a large amount of

food, there is less risk of missing the pickup that day. Missed pickups mean no one shows up. Unfortunately, this may occur in establishments with daily pickups, especially during the summer, due to the large number of students and organisations taking breaks.

That is another factor in keeping the introduction meetings intensive. Other than leaving during the summer, many students permanently leave the city, including board members, so constant renovation is required. Still, organisations are assigned to just one place, and the other places are open for individuals to assign to. The places are filled in order of who assigns first, but rules can be applied to ensure the fair distribution of food. Concerning the rules, no one else can take the place of the person assigned. Also, late cancellations must be avoided so that others can show up instead, and there are restrictions if they keep happening from the same member. The same applies if people don't show up, because, beyond taking someone else's place, there's a risk the pickup will be missed, and the food will be wasted. For logistical reasons, the partner establishments where the on-site pickups happen are in Lund. This is so that people can access the stores on foot or by bike and on time, which is very important. For the time being, people are advised to arrive 5 minutes early, always bring their bags, and wait for everyone who has been assigned to the pickup.

Further, when it is time to approach the establishment, it is recommended not to enter with the whole group but just the number needed to communicate with the store. For instance, one person should pick most of the food, and the other should open the door. If there is more food, more people can come to help. The pickup team must take all the food offered by the store. It is the FSL's goal to prevent waste. Next, it is always good to have someone who has done a pickup before to show the group a proper spot and how to share the food in a less busy place. It is imperative to leave the place clean, not disturb the clients and the neighbourhood, and to distribute the food fairly. Finally, it is always valuable to send feedback on the pickup, reporting whether everything went well, whether everybody showed up, and an estimate of the quantity/weight of the food that was prevented from going to waste. The platform sends a reminder after the pickup for people to fill out the feedback information.

On the other hand, food distribution, the other method used by FSL, doesn't require the same level of training, although it is recommended and valuable for targeting the organisation's aims. The food for the distributions has mainly been supplied by partner organisations based in Malmö, such as Hjälpnhemlös and Folkets Skafferi. It is transported to Lund by FSL volunteers who try to combine their commuting or other activities in Malmö to load their cars

with food for distribution. The organisation has no membership fees and no additional funds to cover fuel or other costs.

Until 2024, the distributions were organised at members' flats or residential areas. At the end of the year, FSL applied to Lunds Kommun for a place at Stenkrossen as part of a social innovation initiative. In January 2025, it was conceded that, along with access to most facilities and equipment, FSL could access the new office. On the 5th of February, it had its first pickup at the new place. It happened to be indoors at the time because of winter, and to promote interaction with other Stenkrossen projects. The organisation did another pickup indoors after that but then decided to organise it outdoors, starting the next month, just outside the Petroleum huset. It is where the office is now located, and it is logistically easier to move products we sometimes have inside and to take the food out of the cars.

Due to the varying amounts and types of food available, the number of people who can be invited is occasionally limited. Consequently, some people may alternate weeks for pickup, except for those prioritised based on specific criteria of need. For the food distribution, people are informed of some general rules. It is important not to get there too early or too late; bring your bags; take only what you will consume; put one bag per person first; be polite; wait for your turn; and offer to help. There is a reminder to respect the neighbourhood, as this has happened many times at members' flats or in the common area.

People are advised to come by themselves and not bring others to pick up food. However, they are encouraged to show others how to apply for the pickup as well. A message is sent to a regular group of recipients, and new people can be added once they contact FSL and provide basic information. After that, they are asked to confirm their participation and present their names to the member with the list when they come to the pickup. Sometimes, depending on whether board members are unavailable, volunteers are called to help that day, for instance, to move the boxes and open them.

As soon as people present their names, they can choose the food they will get, in groups of three to five each time, depending on the available space. The volunteers try to evaluate together how many of each variety each can have to achieve a more balanced distribution, but some products are not enough for everyone, anyway. When some products come in large quantities, we also inform people to take as much as they want. After everyone fills their bags, some people often wait to see if they want to take more for themselves or distribute it,

to prevent waste, as is frequently the case. If there is still food, we offer it to other groups, such as people at Stenkrossen and the People's Kitchen.

Actually, some of the food we see is not enough to distribute, and the rest that can be useful for the Folkets Kök is also saved in the Petroleum huset fridge. It is conserved in the fridge until the other day of the week, on which FK has the communal dinner, no more than two. Sometimes people from the FK come to pick up food for dinner directly, and the same with Vi Odlar! that started picking up recently for their fika. Both Food Saving Lund and the People's Kitchen develop strategies and values that extend beyond their core activities. They strive to promote solidarity and environmental awareness through community-building events, lectures, and workshops. These initiatives aim to improve knowledge and facilitate the exchange of practices and tools to create a better tomorrow for people and the climate.

4.2 — Local Food Chains

In the Lund area, organic local food is regularly cultivated by farmers associated with the Lund Matvarukooperativ (LMK) and the Reko Rings, as well as by Alnarp's Agroecology Farm (AAF). The Culinary Farm, for instance, operates both a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) system and provides ordered food for the LMK. The value of the relationship goes beyond the simple producer-consumer model, as it involves collaboration and co-responsibility, and consequently requires other definitions for farm supporters, such as community or custodians in the case of AAF.

Regarding Lund Matvarukooperativ, having both actors within the same cooperative is quite innovative. Vi Odla! is, meanwhile, an excellent opportunity for the urban population, that is the majority nowadays, to experience the role of being both farmers and consumers. Although consumers' and producers' food cooperatives are an old way for people to organise, agro-ecological practices being close to those of farmers before the green revolution, innovation can sometimes mean rescuing old practices. People have disengaged from some practices for some reason and feel they need to rebuild them. Old practices may be renewed in this sense, in a new context, and based on current needs and new technologies. Even if Alnarp's Agroecology Farm is not located in Lund but in Lomma, they have their Community Supported Agriculture pickups in Lund and Malmö. Additionally, a significant number of the farm custodians are located there. They usually volunteer on the farm's workdays, notably on Saturdays.

Vi Odla! is an initiative in which people collectively grow organic food and other plants, which are often food for insects and birds, in an urban setting. They are now growing a plot in Kunskapsparken at Brunnshög. Their activities are opportunities to raise awareness of how to grow food and how food grows for people raised in the city. The ecological perspective is highlighted by the diversity of species grown in the same plot through organic practices and the use of beneficial plants for the environment. Local farmers also sell their products to the main food chains, but that was beyond the scope of the research to explore. However, an interesting way of organising local food chains that has become popular in the Nordics is the Reko Ring. Lund has a few places where they operate, along with a few more in the surrounding areas, like Stångby, Dalby, and Åkarp. Numerous studies have examined the origins and workings of Reko Rings. They function more as a network rather than a

structured organisation. Due to the limitations of the research, this aspect was not considered the focus. Yet, they are very important to mention, anyhow, and I visited spaces where they distribute their products after people order them in advance and go there to pick them up.

The Lund Matvarukooperativ is a democratically run cooperative that connects its members with local farmers to provide affordable, organic, locally grown produce while supporting local farming. The cooperative aims to eliminate the middleman in the food supply chain and promote a healthy landscape for the local food system. Lund Matvarukooperativ was founded in 2016 and has been operating for eight years, including enduring the challenges posed by the pandemic. The cooperative operates by organising food pickups at a designated location, where members can collect fresh produce directly from local farmers. In addition to providing access to organic and local food, Lund Matvarukooperativ hosts social events and outreach activities to recruit new members, raise awareness of local and sustainable food, and network with similar projects.

The cooperative's internal organisation follows a self-managing model, emphasising democratic decision-making and community involvement in food distribution. It plays a significant role in the local food scene by supporting local farmers, reducing CO2 emissions, building climate resilience, and raising awareness about the importance of local and regenerative food practices. Volunteers organise the cooperative pickups. Especially for fresh vegetables and fruits, the work starts with a member contacting local farmers to ask about the food they will have available. For dry food, the cooperative has storage where it can keep track of quantities and determine when new supplies are needed.

A group of volunteers comes early, before the pickup, to receive the products from the farmers. They help carry the boxes, check the list, and weigh the ones sold by the kilo or gram to put each one in its respective bag. Even though different farmers sell the products, the cooperative can offer them all in the same form and sell them through a single order. In that sense, the consumers who come to the pickup just need to make one payment and have all the products they ordered in the same bag.

The Matvarukooperativ has been building relationships with local farmers in Skåne and local food initiatives like: Grevlunda Bär o Vingård, Saffranstorp, Bee the Change Lund, The Culinary Farmer, Gnista Spirits, Sund Mat Lantbruk i Borgeby, Grönsaker och ägg från Söderto, Lackalänga PLB, Värpinge Grön Gårdsbutik, Ekoa, Fagraslätt, Gunnarshögs Gård,

and Honungsgården. The pickups are opportunities for community-building, and each local farmer can receive feedback from consumers. The Culinary Farm for example use the feedbacks to plan each next season, not only by talking with people during pickups but also providing a form and being active on the board and in the meetings. In addition to the bags with a variety of products chosen by each consumer, the pickups are filled with Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) bags from the Culinary Farm with seasonal vegetables.

The Alnarp's Agroecology Farm is a collective initiative primarily run by students from Lomma. It was established by Master's degree students at Sveriges Lantbruksuniversitetet (SLU—Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences) who sought practical experience in agroecology to complement their theoretical knowledge. At the farm, participants can improve their agricultural skills and their ability to manage a small-scale economic structure. Although it started recently in 2021 on a 400 m² plot within SLU, the farm has set a goal of becoming self-sufficient. In 2022, it expanded into an additional 2,000 m² and is now a fully independent entity with its own finances and administration.

Education and research remain central to the farm. SLU research projects are frequently conducted in the plot. The organisation constantly applies for funding that targets youth and education through workshops and the farming activities themselves. Besides being located in Lomma, the farm is part of the foodscapes of Malmö and Lund. Many volunteers from Malmö and Lund, as well as students from the respective universities, are part of the custodians' group, and the CSA veggie bags are delivered in both cities. Further, the farm is an important source of food for local fauna and is targeted by wild animals, as is usual on agro-ecological farms surrounded by standardised crops and life-poor soils. The collectively run farm, with its diversity of flora, fauna, and human life, is one of the few agrobiodiverse clusters set amid the overall monotonous, monocultural Scanian landscape (López Hösel, 2019).

The AAF has a wide variety of species, and the places and times of the year that they are planted and harvested are collectively planned. Indeed, most critical decisions are made this way: the farm layout, innovations, new activities, where to build the next polytunnel, and so on. Beds start to be prepared again in mid-winter, by January. They are still covered from before the winter solstice. Some parts of the soil that the wind uncovers are more exposed to rain and cold weather, and they freeze, forming clods as hard as stones. The soil is loosened with the use of broadforks, and the level of the beds is adjusted with rakes or a stirrup hoe.

The size of the beds is measured again and with new marks on them. The beds keep being prepared during February. Some seedlings are kept inside the polytunnels, and some seeds are being planted indoors. In 2025, there were some mizuna (Japanese mustard greens) growing in the polytunnels that could be harvested very early in the season. Part of it was donated to a Food Saving Lund event.

The most common tools I've seen in the local agro-ecological farms were shovels, forks, rakes, and pruning shears, followed by axes, hammers, and saws. It is noticeable that draw hoes are not found on most farms and gardens, whereas they are the most common small-farm tools in Latin America and Africa. I only found scuffle hoes for the weeding, and a lot of the weeding is done by hand. The same with post-hole diggers for planting seedlings, which are a very common tool elsewhere, but I've seen them using shovels instead.

In March, with the beds being prepared, it is often the time for the annual general meeting, when the most essential and broad agreements are made. More specific decisions are settled many times during the year. With the coming of spring, the first seeds and seedlings start to be planted in their definitive ground. It is still cold for some vegetables, like tomatoes, that need full sunlight. So, the seeds are first planted indoors at the end of the winter and transplanted outdoors around a month after the spring equinox, close to Valborg, at the end of April. Starting in June, some products will be harvested for sale at the farm's weekly market, the Reko-Ring Malmö, and the CSA veggie bags. The CSA distributions are located in Malmö, Lund, and at the farm in Lomma. The farm offers different subscription types that balance self-sufficiency with accessibility. Hence, they try to combine an affordable price, even though it is hard to compete with the conventional market, and calculate how many discounts they can offer for low-income/student bags. Apart from that, custodians can donate to support free subscriptions for people who can't pay for the bags—that is called the solidarity subscription.

The farm has collective work days depending on the workload. Sometimes, on Wednesday, it starts at 1 PM, and on Saturday, it is all day, from 10 AM to 5 PM. But other times, it starts Wednesday morning, with sessions in between, including Thursday and Friday, both from 10 AM to 5 PM, until Saturday. The weekly market is often on Saturdays, when the farm has most volunteers. The Saturday working session is usually from 10 AM to 5 PM and frequently includes a breakfast and a short meeting at the start to make practical decisions and build community. Sometimes people cook together, cook something for a large group, or

organise potlucks close to special days in the calendar. And even when people must bring their lunch, the farm most of the time provides some fika—a Swedish tradition similar to a coffee break, but taken really seriously, so one cannot say it to start a diplomatic crisis.

The last initiative to be included in the research was Vi Odlar! It was the one where I could not have as many hours of participant observation as the others, with a total of around 20 hours of volunteering and conversations during the fika. The plot is rented from the Municipality in a green area for families to practice gardening and grow fruits and vegetables. The project is part of ABC, together with Food Saving Lund, Bee the Change, and other initiatives in Lund. Most collective activities are done on weekends, but depending on the weather, they are usually interchangeable between Saturdays and Sundays. Many times, they coincided with Alnarp's Farm Saturday working sessions. On other days of the week, some volunteers do some specific tasks individually or in pairs. The on-site workload is generally from 11 AM to 1 PM, but with the fika and extra tasks afterwards, it often lasts three hours if people can stay. The project provides a fika where people can exchange opinions and experiences. Some fika food is provided by FSL, some comes from the plot, and people also bring some delicious food and drinks from their homes to share. Between fruit bushes and beds, the plot grows a variety of crops, including raspberries, blackberries, strawberries, pawpaws, figs, kiwis, and apples, as well as vegetables like less common varieties of potato and the tree sisters—beans, corn, and squash. In addition to the crops, some flowers are cultivated, and insect houses are built for pollinators.

Having a collective ecological food garden in the urban space, even a small one, certainly has an educational impact on the city's foodscape. Like most grassroots organisations in Lund, the initiative is an example of alternatives for a regenerative landscape for cities in general and for the future of food. People teach, learn, and develop practices through the exchange of knowledge. The first time I went to Vi Odlar! with my daughter, we constructed an insect house. The second time, I learned a technique developed by one of the members to grow many seedlings in the same pot, with their roots separated by a roll. It was actually similar to preparing a cinnamon bun, but filled with fertile soil and topped with seeds afterwards.

5 — Collective Learning

Throughout interviews and meetings, education and skill-sharing emerged as essential components in facilitating the cultural shift toward a climate-resilient future. A primary function of grassroots innovations is to build viable futures. The organisations examined in this research prioritise the adoption, development, and extension of practices deeply grounded within their communities, which require cultural transformation for meaningful change. Although these practices are both functional and applicable, they often conflict with prevailing contemporary behavioural standards. The cultural change advocated by grassroots organisations extends beyond information dissemination and is fundamentally educational.

Embracing customs that challenge consumerism and the commodification of food represents a significant turning point. A collaborative environment that favours mutual learning and support contrasts with competitive dynamics that feed idealistic bubbles of imagined purity, where individual behaviours and online activism frequently contribute to social isolation and political extremism, whereas initiatives that recognise the collective nature of social change are more effective in transforming systems. Plus, knowledge is understood as a social construct (Latour & Woolgar, 1986). Despite the demand for lectures and workshops, particularly to meet funding requirements for educational and cultural projects, grassroots education is inherently multidirectional. It encompasses learning while teaching, sharing traditional knowledge alongside critical inquiry and the cultivation of innovation.

Of course, both lectures and workshops are great occasions for knowledge sharing, but they are not the primary methods for learning and developing expertise, which is mainly about the everyday set of social innovations and practices. They are indeed beneficial for developing specific skills among volunteers and for opening the doors to new people. For both reasons, they are included in the various organisations' plans throughout the year. Some participants in the research gave the example of "Food for Thought", organised by the Folkets Kök. Ember, one of the group's activists, highlighted that it was possible to learn more about resistance movements in Latin America, and that there were meetings about Indigenous agroforestry, veganism, environmental direct action in Sweden, and so on. Sitting at the same table involves sharing opinions and experiences.

Our aim with the People's Kitchen is not only to share food but also exchange knowledge. With almost weekly events where we collaborate with other organisations or organised by the Ecosocialist Collective, the Food

for Thought lectures allow us to create a space beyond food, instigating thoughts about wider political issues (Sequoia, April 2025).

Regarding workshops, there are more examples. Between 2024 and 2025, Food Saving Lund organised pickling and kombucha workshops; Folkets Kök offered cooking-coordination and dumpster-diving workshops; Alnarp's Agroecology Farm offered bioeconomy and home gardening workshops, among others. Meanwhile, most of the learning and knowledge acquired from grassroots initiatives is based on practice, a constant process of observing, replicating, making mistakes, and improving while doing, finding better ways, and self-dependent solutions with low-tech inputs and costs. The autonomy and identity factors are key to sustainable education for the future, whether for self-sufficiency or to improve non-profit organisation models, concentrating on cultivating accessible, not-for-sale alternatives to the same system that causes the global warming people fight against. For that matter, most of the practices learned are connected to Do-It-Yourself (DIY) values.

Despite monthly training sessions and occasional workshops, one of Food Saving Lund's members, Indigo, stressed that most of the initiative's educational roles may not fit within a formalised infrastructure. On the contrary, they are made possible by means of the innovative nature of grassroots organisations. Members are empowered to explore new possibilities, to seek support where they need it, and this ability to work independently is part of the success of the now ten-year initiative. In that case, the exchange of knowledge, education, and learning is more a result of organisational processes than it would be in a formal education hub model. Furthermore, the coordinators and custodians of Alnarp's Agroecology Farm often discussed the initiative's educational role. The farm was intentionally started to practice what SLU students were learning in their classes. It has a detailed research, experimental, and educational purpose, not only to grow organics but to achieve self-sufficiency. Yet, beyond teaching people how to plan seasons, prepare and organise beds, plant crops, and take care of the soil, people also learn how to advocate for justice, connect with the local community, and spread a message.

That is how the farm was designed. Recently, I understood that the purpose of the farm is not to grow vegetables — that is only our core activity. It is about providing a space for participation, for learning and education, for community and empowerment. If asked, I would say the farm is farming a community of change makers. (Cedar, April 2025)

AAF has seen growing requests from institutions at the university level, as well as from high schools, primary schools, and the private sector, for more information on food production techniques and innovation. One of its members, Willow, a young farmer, mentioned the politically unstable times as a driver of a significant increase in interest in food security and crisis preparedness, making their work even more relevant. A handful of interlocutors in urban farming from Vi Odlar! stressed the skills they gained growing vegetables, constructing structures, and reusing materials. They described the practical challenges and experiences of food production, particularly the greater effort and unpredictability of organic farming compared to conventional agriculture.

For instance, organic crops are more susceptible to weed and insect damage. Additionally, eliminating plastic from these practices can be quite intricate. This embodied knowledge can provide valuable insights into the larger picture. So, although most of the examples presented by the research participants were specific skills they learned through practice, they included general knowledge related to their organisation's role. For example, some said they could learn more about the local landscape and food production in the region, or how much dumpster diving makes you aware of the amount of waste and the need to minimise it.

Brook, another research informant, highlighted the importance of learning organisational basics by running a Folkets Kök, coordinating the kitchen. The knowledge about how to organise can be put into practice elsewhere, in completely different projects. River, an international worker from LMK, underlined the learning process of acknowledging different people's opinions, and also how organisations work and how they do not. Those are practical experiences of participatory and direct democracy that change the way people see politics and how governments must be pushed to deliver climate action.

Altogether, volunteering by itself was considered a valuable experience. Even though the variety of skills an individual can learn in the collective process of each organisation is uncountable, the essence of grassroots initiatives as a community of practices lies in the learning environments that converge for agency and meaningfulness (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020). Participants engage in activities that contribute to their individual and collective goals. Value is created through ongoing participation, mutual engagement, and the development of capabilities that matter to the members. They are potentialised in the preparation and mobilisation for events to reach new people and connect different organisations.

All the events in which our organisation participates or organise allows people to meet and talk, exchanging knowledge and experience around food, cooking, and farming. In this way, I think that LMK is a hub for exchanging ideas and knowledge related to food and farming. (Cypress, May 2025)

Further, collective learning is characterised by shared risks and commitment in the processes of creation, replication, and innovation. By sharing knowledge and practice, one assumes responsibility for the entire community. “Social learning creates value for participants to the extent that they view engaging uncertainty and paying attention as contributing to their ability to make a difference they care to make” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020, p. 43). Blake, from Food Saving Lund, expressed emotional and personal investment not knowing the outcome: “I learned that real change takes time, energy, and a lot of compromises. Also, funding is really hard to get sometimes, which is frustrating” (May 2025).

In that sense, collective learning is a process in which members of a group create shared meanings (Kilgore, 1999). This mutual understanding allows people to align their personal identities with the group's collective goals, raising a sense of belonging and purpose. The entire idea of finding unity in diversity was very well-defined by Robin from FSL: “Social and environmental sustainability need to be thought of together. We have to take everyone's preconditions, background, culture, and starting point into consideration.” (May 2025).

The components of collective development include collective identity, group consciousness, solidarity, and organisation. Collective identity guides action, while group consciousness is the awareness of the group as a social actor, shaped by experiences that encourage its identity. Solidarity represents the unity among members, motivating them to engage in group processes and increasing the organisation's cohesion as an agent for change (Kilgore, 1999). Learning that there are multiple alternatives to the capitalist system and how grassroots organisations form and shape themselves was pointed out by another of the interlocutors as fundamental knowledge for the near future.

I learned that with the energy from many dedicated people that we all are deep inside when it comes to securing and hoping for a better future. We can achieve so much, learn from each other to extents beyond academic knowledge, and that we are more capable than we think. The community makes it possible (Sage, April 2025).

Although contributions of knowledge and resources are welcome, they should primarily be used to expand outreach and share the open-source blueprints of each social innovation for new codings, adaptations, and adoption by new people and new contexts. Dependency should be avoided, and Do-It-Yourself (DIY) values are the core of a sustainable education with a shared knowledge base and collective learning processes, where knowledge is not used for corporate control but for community agency, interest, and freedom. Cypress, from LMK, highlighted a crucial point about grassroots movements' educational role in fostering a regenerative future. To educate, it is essential to focus on outreach, because “good intentions are not enough if you do not reach the people” (Cypress, April 2025).

Ultimately, collective learning involves acquiring practical knowledge through activities such as workshops and collaborative projects with people, both within and outside, emphasising hands-on experience and focusing on techniques related to climate action, sustainability, and community self-sufficiency. This approach promotes alternatives to capitalism, encourages community independence, and values DIY principles while stimulating solidarity by sharing risks and responsibilities, which builds organisational cohesion. This ongoing process strengthens social bonds, collective identity, and shared values, while helping members align their identities with common goals, raising their sense of belonging and purpose.

6 — Community-Building

Indeed, modern Western and Westernised societies have historically developed highly individualistic values, with liberalism embodying the refined version of them. It is true that, historically, the Swedish working class was pivotal in establishing welfare policies in the country (Therborn, 1983) which contributes to the belief in the country to have strong unions. Through time, nonetheless, increased trust in the social-democratic welfare capitalist model state (Esping-Andersen, 1990) as the provider, occupied the space that used to be filled by organisation, unionism, and community support.

Regardless of the strong social cohesion of Swedish society, the country faces two significant challenges: grave issues with loneliness, and immigrants' integration, pointing to shortcomings in cultivating a sense of belonging and community. While most studies focus on loneliness among the elderly (Ågren & Pavlidis, 2023; Dahlberg et al., 2024), research has also highlighted concerning trends among adolescents and young adults (Hemberg et al., 2022). Moreover, Sweden was seen until recently as a nation that embraces liberal pluralism and equality, along with a pragmatic understanding of citizenship apart from traditional notions of nationhood, however, international communities in Sweden face serious challenges as well, regarding effective integration.

The lack of clear pathways for genuine inclusion in Swedish society makes participation reportedly difficult (Fernández, 2019). For that matter, it is noteworthy to consider both international communities and native Sámi Peoples. On the other hand, that liberal ideals can make it more complicated by prioritising individual rights over collective societal integration. Here lies an inherent contradiction between the Swedish ideal of social cohesion and liberal individualism. Such an emphasis leads to fragmented communities and hinder cultural interaction and mutual understanding (Faist, 2004), ultimately resulting in criticism of immigrant groups as failing to adapt as an easy answer.

It became evident in my fieldwork that there is a general tendency for the different social organisations to mirror existing patterns of segregation and form cultural bubbles, despite their effort to build alternative forms of socialisation. One of the challenges for grassroots food groups and environmental groups in Lund, thus, is to “break the ice” between Swedes, European internationals, and non-Europeans. Social hubs like Interkultur, host activities such as potlucks, fairs, and traditional celebrations from various countries, providing a sense of belonging for internationals in a nation with a strong self-centred culture. These gatherings

attract Swedes, too, who are seeking community, which assists with integration and language learning while offering opportunities to learn about other cultures.

One significant cultural aspect of food is its attribute to bring people together. One way to achieve this is by working collaboratively to strengthen local food systems. Further, discovering new methods to rescue food and share it can help create a sense of common identity among people.

Growing food together has had a big impact on my personal identity. I never valued community as much as I do since being part of the farm. Food is the one thing that connects every human being around the world and provides such a solid basis for connecting and mutual learning. (Willow, 30-04-25)

The present state of the corporate food regime surely plays a threatening role. As much as the changes from open markets and grocery stores to supermarkets are related to capital accumulation by conglomerates, they also influence cultural change toward a more fragmented society. The sociability between consumers and producers is replaced by invisible human and non-human mediators. Nuclear families replace extended families and communities as both social and economical units, as the actual tables where people eat together shrink. The same is true of the sometimes lonely work of local farmers in their fields, which used to be collectively laboured when farmers lived in small settlements, despite owning different plots. The land reform model of *enskifte* in Scania led to isolation among farmers and the dismantlement of old agricultural villages (Dahl, 1961).

At Alnarp's Agroecology Farm, working sessions are collective, and most of the farm's work is carried out by the farm's custodians. They experience a sense of community from the many beds they weed to every polytunnel they build. Activities can vary from thinking together about the new farm layout to cleaning the composting toilets and recycling the waste to fertilise the trees. At lunchtime, people eat together and bring extra food to share, or organise potlucks on special dates to build community. Recently, with the new kitchen, pizzas are back on Saturday afternoon, together with the farmers' market. Another example, while many local producers organise open farm days once a year. The Culinary Farm, which works alongside LMK, prepared a Community Day, during which people could learn more about what and who they are supporting through the CSA. Visitors were welcome to take on different tasks and lend their extra hand to the farm. They could learn about annual planning, procedures,

expansion plans, environmental recovery, and regenerative agriculture. After that, people celebrated together with a potluck and some cooked vegetables from the farm.

One of the main achievements of the grassroots organisations in this study is to rescue the value of commensalism, the gregarious aspect of food that is missing in different stages of the conventional food chain and culture nowadays. At Lund Matvarukooperativ, for instance, the consumers and producers plan the season together. There are specific teams to communicate with the producers about the availability of goods, send the forms, list the orders, and help the producers unload their products and organise the bags. By working together and sharing values and beliefs that motivate them, they foster sociability and build community.

“By contributing to LMK activity and organisation, I found myself being able to improve my language skills and communication skills, making decisions, taking action, belonging to a community where we understand each other and look toward a more sustainable world. It helped me become the person I am today: more open, more confident and convinced that people absolutely need to raise their voices for a sustainable future for us and especially for the next generations coming. The time that I engaged in the cooperative is fully and truly a part of my work experience and life experience.” (Cypress, April 2025)

Most participants in the research expressed that their involvement either strengthened or positively shaped their identity and sense of belonging. They highlighted that they felt part of a community that shared similar values, interests, and goals. Both Solstice, a worker volunteering at Lund Matvarukooperativ, and Cheyenne, an Environmental and Sustainability Sciences student from the People’s Kitchen, appreciated being surrounded by like-minded individuals and made really nice friends. Other volunteers, like Blake, a Physical Geography and Ecosystem Science student volunteering at Food Saving Lund, cherished people coming from different countries and backgrounds, all “working together to make the world a little bit better” (May 2025). A Development Studies student volunteering at the Folkets Kök, highlighted the role of community not only for socialisation in a new city and environment but as a safeguard to the upcoming environmental and economical challenges stated it has been “one of the pillars of my sense of belonging in Lund, it has strengthened my opinion that it is only through building communities that we can attain a more sustainable future.” (Brook, April 2025)

That sense of belonging strengthened their personal motivation and led to a more passionate and driven pursuit of their objectives. “It has supported me a lot in my life. It feels good to be surrounded by people living meaningful lives. One doesn't have to explain why we have to do more than others do.” (River, April 2025). Actually, a strong commitment to the environment and society, and the need for change, was frequently expressed through action. Instead of complaining about personal sacrifices, many felt rewarded by pursuing a common cause. They found extra energy to put in more effort and go beyond what most people do in their everyday lives.

“It has shaped my identity and sense of belonging greatly. My activism and active participation in the People's Kitchen gives me a lot of purpose and is my way of being radical and actively oppose the system we currently live in” (Sequoia, April 2025)

Many activists appreciated how their organisations cultivated a sense of belonging and placed great value on the friendships they nurtured as a result. They highlighted that being helpful made them feel good and happy. Witnessing the impact they could create together and seeing people engage with their hearts strengthened their belief in the possibility of change and motivated them to contribute.

“When it comes to belonging, the farm has built a beautiful community—one that offers support whenever it's needed. It makes our project feel solid and supported. I feel appreciated, heard, and truly part of something greater.” (Dakota, May 2025)

It is important to dismiss any belief that all the activists are extremely sociable people, as if there were not a noteworthy number of introverts feeling drained by social interaction but motivated by the environmental cause. Welcoming a diversity of people is what also makes it a community. Some activists mentioned they sometimes felt they needed to jump in and be more participative than they normally would like to. As for extroverts themselves, to be in the front motivating collective spaces all the time requires a lot of energy and effort and sacrifices. For that reason, they have to learn how to disengage, open space for others, and learn to listen more. It was mentioned by some to give up some individual traits and find the patience to conform with customs and norms that reinforce the community, which brings to the ideas of individual and collective freedom. I observed and heard from people how they try to balance personal sacrifices and rewards, collective risks and achievements. Long-term

commitment certainly involves that kind of balance. If the purpose and mission of the organisation can support outreach and strategic growth, the process of reciprocity, while forging a shared identity and nurturing collective improvement, appears to be key to maintaining long-term engagement.

Since I have been part of the farm for more than 3 years, I guess a lot of me is in that place, space, and community. And vice versa — it is a very reciprocal relationship — growth and coevolution at its best! Most importantly, the more I see people engaging and getting inspired — the more I engage and get inspired myself to continue the work. (Cedar, April 2025)

Another essential aspect mentioned by Ember, from Folkets Kök, was that the organisation provided a safe space. In a society often filled with judgment and hostility toward diversity, that is a great achievement. Hazel, from LMK, mentioned that participatory and horizontal decision-making processes, in contrast to hierarchical structures, contributed to a collective project. Additionally, the association aspect was esteemed for its connection to cultural values from their places of origin. The importance of connection was frequently mentioned, both socially and in relation to nature, particularly in terms of the links between food, sustainability, and regeneration as collective experiences in community activism.

I've learned so much during my time at the farm. I've gained a wide range of skills—from gardening and building to management and communication. This experience has made me feel empowered and capable of taking on leadership roles, organising events that connect the local community, and contributing to educational initiatives. By taking practical action, I feel like I'm part of meaningful change. Using growing methods that have been overlooked or forgotten, I'm honouring the knowledge of my ancestors and deepening my connection with the land. I've come to understand the rhythms of the seasons and the importance of caring for all living beings on this planet. (Willow, May 2025)

Community-building is also in the solidarity network between organisations. When Alnarp's Farm Kitchen burned down in 2024, participants in the Revolutionary Novisch Week helped clean the site and sort the various materials. The Folkets Kök organised a donation dinner to raise money for a new kitchen. Right after the Ecosocialist Collective, which has the FK as its main social initiative, organised a donation pub at Smålands Nation to support AAF as

well. On the other hand, AAF occasionally donates extra vegetables for FK dinners. When Food Saving Lund held an open day at Stenkrossen this year, they donated the vegetables they had, even when it was outside the harvesting period. Just before, FSL received fridges and kitchen equipment and donated them to AAF. So, different organisations are building a network of solidarity and increasingly coordinating their efforts to change the local social and environmental foodscape.

Food Saving Lund has also been working together with other organisations for a few years. In the last three years, post-Halloween pumpkin rescue activities have been organised in partnership with other groups. In 2023 with Interkultur Lund, in 2024 with the People's Kitchen, and in 2025 with other HUB & Café organisations. By the second semester of 2024, the partnership with Hjälpnhemlos, from Malmö, led to an increase in food distribution in Lund, which was very positive for both organisations' aims. In the first semester of 2025, when Hjälpnhemlos had to find another storage place, which disrupted logistics, FSL began a partnership with another Malmö organisation, Folkskafferiet.

Another initiative from FSL, together with other groups, was to plan Lund grassroots organisations' participation during Sustainability Week 2025, Hållbarhetsveckan i Lund, a joint annual event by Lund University and Lunds Kommun. The initiative was to coordinate FSL, LMK, and FK, later joined by Circle Centre, to plan activities such as workshops and film screenings, with the objectives of strengthening cohesion among the groups and reaching the event's public. As inscriptions for activities during the event were either made by university or municipality-related institutions, meetings were held with both Hållbart Universitet, a students' environmental association at the university, and Samhällsvetarkåren, the Social Sciences Student Union. FSL held a kombucha and pickling workshop at Stenkrossen, with the support of Samhällsvetarkåren. Meanwhile, the Hållbart Universitet proposed a Sustainability Hub World Café and a film screening. The film screening was held by FK at Smålands Nation after the regular rescued food dinner. The documentary Wasted Waste mainly focused on various initiatives in food sharing and dumpster diving in Portugal. Surprisingly, the Sustainability Hub World Café was not included in the Sustainability Week program by the university's Sustainability Forum's decision, which was frustrating given that the initiative was being assembled by three grassroots groups. The response was that the program already had too many activities, even though there was no demand for people or resources, and the place was already booked. Of course, grassroots initiatives do what they do, and they held the activity anyway, as they had the place and equipment at Stenkrossen.

Outreach is a key element to building community, but just shouting on the streets may not always be the best strategy. Time is precious for the working class and families, and it is hard to compete with the convenience that the current food system offers to them. Whether it's food consumption or fixing clothes and equipment, the market system is highly effective at doing so. Especially in a developed capitalist country, it will occupy the city centre and extend to different neighbourhoods, gathering multiple goods at the same place, offering delivery services, and so on.

Convenience and efficiency are easily noticeable traits of the ICA-System as highlighted by Värpinge Grön's organic farmer. Even when it seems that Swedish consumers value local, organic, fresh products, they choose to buy most of them from large-scale retailers like ICA, Axfoods (Willys and Hemköp), and Coop. Their capacity to spread throughout the city and offer a wide range of products close to consumers' homes, at low prices, among other factors, highly influences people's choices, or sometimes it is not even a choice, but what is feasible. That may be one of the reasons for the scarcity of free open-air street markets or market halls with fresh food from producers. On the other hand, that could explain why the Reko-ring model seems to thrive in Sweden compared to others that aim to approximate consumers and local producers. It is important to highlight, though, that convenience changes with time. Just a few decades ago, Mårtensstorget hosted a large open market, where people went not only to buy vegetables and other goods, but also to socialise and eat. Still, during the warmer seasons, a few people sell fresh products weekly, and some food trucks stop there. There are even some international food festivals. But the change in the forms of socialisation around food from intricate commensalism rules to more self-centred nutrition, immensely transformed consumption patterns. The same apparently happened to Saluhallen, the city's market hall, which used to have various stands for local producers, seen in old photos, and now hosts mainly small businesses, restaurants, and cafés.

At the end of the day, community-building and outreach work together, notably in a city with a constantly changing population, not only for growth strategy but for the very survival of most of the organisations involved in the research. Even though they must work more on recruiting local citizens, it will not change the demographic dynamics of Lund, which may be challenging but has a lot of potential. So, analysing the city's characteristics can be more beneficial for thinking about strategies than treating the symptoms. Social innovations that gather initiatives together in a central area of Lund, like the HUB & Café have the potential to enhance the impact of social technology on climate change in Lund.

7 — Social Change or Climate Crisis

Grassroots initiatives bring a social change perspective to the broader climate crisis. By promoting agrobiodiversity and low-carbon agriculture while developing a local food system, these initiatives effectively reduce the carbon footprint of food production through social innovation and local solutions. The impact of the corporate food regime on food culture is profound. Standardisation of practices adapted to specific crops, machinery, and markets supplants local knowledge, agriculture systems, and culinary diversity. Adaptation of consumers to processed and convenience food has taken over home-cooked meals from fresh food, which is less available without local food chains. The economic gap creates two major classes of consumers: a wealthy minority that can access gourmet, healthy, fresh food, and a poor minority that mostly access very low-quality, ultra-processed products (McMichael, 2013).

Land tenure inequality disrupts entire communities and ecosystems, threatening access to food and territory, and changing ancient agricultural practices and traditional diets. For instance, manifestations of commensalism that source family bonds, political alliances, and the reproduction of social organisation and knowledge through rituals and celebrations are seriously threatened by global chains. At last, the expansion of the agro-industrial complex generates a sort of neo-nature, with the emergence of genetically modified organisms (Oliveira & Hecht, 2016), and a highly technicised landscape. Agricultural activities become extremely dependent on external resources such as fertilisers and oil from fossil fuels, complex machinery and software, and water from ecosystems elsewhere. They have an enormous impact on the local water bodies and cycles through chemical pollution, deforestation, and earthmoving.

Concurrently, technical development in areas such as productivity rates is not matched by advancements in other spheres of human society. There are actually huge throwbacks in human rights, with high social and environmental costs (Carty, Kowalzig, & Peterson, 2016). Most importantly, we have been losing knowledge and practices that are part of humanity's common heritage and have been key to our survival on Earth until now. Along the way, the idea of the land as a natural resource and a means of production, as if it were an inanimate object, infected economic science with reductionist elements. Taking life in the soil, the seasons, and the weather as externalities is a perfect example. There is no surprise that powerful economic agencies and corporations are not only trying to deny the climate crisis,

but also to close their eyes to the vast economic impact it will have on most of the world's population. Economic reductionism is a strong ideology and a form of collective manipulation.

At the same time, the idea that fixing the system with a combination of policies and technical innovation will secure economic growth without making any impactful shift in the economic model has become hegemonic for the last four decades. It seems to be both the result and the aim of the 1987 United Nations' "Our Common Future" Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development in Geneva. Still, persuading Capitalism to limit growth is naïve because it is at the heart of how it works. Expanding profit from exploiting more people and extracting resources is the oxygen of this system, and it is essentially how it will fail humanity and the climate crisis. Attempts to "green" capitalism are flawed because the system relies on endless growth, and the technological utopianism that depends on engineering fixes to solve those problems is a widespread misconception (Bookchin, 1990).

Concerning the Corporate Food Regime, the current technification model is the source of even more serious issues. High technology in agriculture has alienated farmers from nature and their production processes, leading to greater dependence on high-tech, large-scale investment companies. In the meantime, the pictures on the packaged materials on supermarket shelves substitute for the life forms from which they originate. The representation of reality—the fetish—replaces the real phenomenon (Bookchin, 1976).

Also, the distance between consumers and the land affects social relations and widens the gap between farmers and the community that depends on their goods. A regenerative food culture is essential for human survival, as it involves preserving seeds, varieties, and foraging knowledge. That is why the concept of food sovereignty has been steadily reinforced by international peasant social movements like Via Campesina in the context of food security. Plus, deep cultural shifts in values are needed to change the food regime. "Food sovereignty cannot be achieved without gender and intersectional justice, equity, and economies of care" (Pimbert, 2015, p. 01). The commodification of food, with a focus only on its exchange value, contributes to the dismantling of old social fabrics such as local knowledge exchange, in-situ seed maintenance, and even intergenerational education practices related to food and agriculture. Because the link between exchange and value is politics (Appadurai, 1986), commodity value is created by the pure purpose of trade and accumulation, overlooking the forms and functions of reciprocity and circulation.

From a cultural perspective, food encompasses strategies for accessing seeds, land, water, and territory, and for reproducing knowledge and practices necessary for the preservation of people and the varieties, species, resources, and landscape. Additionally, it entangles traditional ideas about nutrition and health—what constitutes healthy food, what we eat to maintain our well-being, and what we eat to define our identities. Food and culture are deeply intertwined in what people eat, why they eat, how they eat, and in traditions of food exchange, sharing practices among relatives and allies, creating bonds, building communities, and establishing alliances. Just as important are the ways in which food is produced, distributed, and consumed, and what is done with the waste generated by the system.

Food waste and loss are a massive source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions worldwide. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (2024) report on food waste footprints, GHG emissions from food produced and not eaten were estimated to be 8-10% of anthropogenic emissions. On the other hand, food transportation accounts for around 20% of total food-system emissions worldwide. Regardless, high-income countries, which account for only 12.5% of the world's population, are responsible for 52% of total food miles and 46% of global emissions (Li et al. 2022). GHGs aggravate the greenhouse effect and global warming, which are projected to exceed the 1.5 °C tipping point before 2030.

During participant observation, it became apparent how much food supermarkets consistently waste. Despite claims that most waste in Sweden is recycled, food waste is still substantial, even when it is still in good condition for consumption. Products companies cannot sell, but for some reason, the private and public sectors have not found mechanisms to address. It is true, however, that in Sweden the majority of waste is domestic, which means more education is needed. Grassroots organisations are best at engaging the community in that sense.

The high import share contradicts many other aspects of the narrative about clean technologies, energy alternatives, and efficient recycling, as it overlooks the significant CO₂ and methane emissions from food imports alone, which can be counted as a form of exportation of emissions. For even another example, one can see ambiguities arising from the lack of support for local initiatives in Sweden. In spite of the welfare state's individual protective policies, local farmers and social initiatives remain highly vulnerable to liberal policies unless they adapt to the prevailing business model.

In agriculture, the role of local farmers is frequently marginalised, with their traditional practices and food systems being relegated to a niche economy. Sustainable local agriculture

is frequently associated with high-end gastronomy and tourism. It is far from being regarded as a source of food security to the country or a potential sector for providing substantial economic input with reduced environmental impact. From an socio-ecological perspective, a regenerative, systematic approach is needed beyond the sustainability premise, as an urgent economic change is mandatory. Instead of exhausting finite resources, we must invest our time and knowledge in improving the planet and society's capacity to constantly generate renewable resources, restore biomes, and promote agrobiodiversity, a model based on health for Earth and humanity.

In addition, there are notable disparities between the Global North's achievements on Sustainable Development Goals and its external policies. The import of food and offshore exploitation of natural resources reduce their emissions by exporting them to where the raw materials are produced. Some of those countries' investments in financial capital in green technology reinforce the net-zero narrative while ignoring their ongoing economic growth driven by emissions overseas. Besides, efforts frequently focus on individual choice for those who can afford it or on high-tech green innovation. That usually means high-cost, complex measures with the potential for large profits, while neglecting community-led nature-based initiatives in favour of business-as-usual for big companies.

Ultimately, that means developed countries have the right to keep growing while exploiting resources overseas, as long as they compensate the underdeveloped ones. This results in exporting pollution and GHG emissions, both by financing basic industries with lower costs and wages and by continuing to exploit raw materials. At the same time, Global North countries enforce conservation policies in undeveloped or developing countries, even though these policies diverge from their global industrial and commercial framework, in which developed countries have significant influence and reap enormous profits. This contradictory behaviour leads some countries to doubt that the Global North's true intentions are to keep them underdeveloped. On the ground, they tell local governments what to use and what not to use, while constantly protecting the interests and the right to profit of their international businesses. Ibrahim Traoré, president of Burkina Faso, raised that question again recently. He has been criticising not only conservation programs but also international aid and development projects, which are constantly flowing in the face of the interests of international companies and the continuous exploitation of local people.

Choice should be available and affordable for everyone, be it North or South of the Globe. It should be convenient and efficiently supported at least as much as the subsidised mainstream food supply system. Nevertheless, innovative social technologies are far from being the main target of EU policies. They are subject to funding and grants for a few demonstrative projects and awards, with only a temporary impact and are highly competitive to approve. Thus, the experience on the ground with grassroots movements in the local foodscapes of the South of Sweden revealed some contradictions with the Swedish conceptual design of democracy. While Swedish society displays overall trust in the State to deal with its most important matters, climate anxiety has been notably critical in revealing cracks in that confidence and in the struggle for more direct participation in decision-making.

One outcome is the radicalisation of grassroots green movements, which view the situation as urgent and denounce the overall imprudence of companies and governments. Rather than passively electing politicians to represent them, the climate crisis has enabled new political actors to understand democracy as an active process. The intimate relations between fossil fuel companies and governments raised awareness of how the state and capital work to benefit the few despite the urgency of the climate crisis.

Some activists adopt a strategy of raising public consciousness while persuading the government to implement positive interventions. Others resort to immediate action by temporarily halting damaging activities by companies that profit from climate-destructive operations, calling for more participatory, direct democracy. Meanwhile, movements centred on food rescue, sharing, and strengthening local food systems are actively engaging in regenerative activities they believe are essential for building a feasible future, without waiting for governments to act.

In different ways, they are all pushing the Swedish social-democratic welfare capitalist model (Esping-Andersen, 1990) to adapt and rebuild trust, consent, and legitimacy, which are important values in Nordic societies. Notwithstanding, social environmental grassroots groups expose the wounds that the capitalist-state apparatus constantly works less to settle than to hide, because they are innate to the economic system. While these social and environmental organisations are practising direct, participatory democratic decision-making within, they actively demand accountability from municipalities and regional authorities. Contesting old welfare capitalism beliefs, they show consent is not a possibility, with governments openly facilitating the concentration of capital by fossil fuel companies and warfare interests.

The climate crisis exposes the fragility of the well-being ideal, rooted in individualistic values of personal responsibility, that is strongly embedded in Scandinavian culture. Rather than the liberal individual right, freedom appears more as a collective achievement. Filling the gaps in a discredited system—at least from the climate activists' perspective—grassroots initiatives are building autonomous, collective responses to the urgency in different shades.

8 — The Future of Food

In October 2024, a few envisioning workshops were held to collect ideas on what makes the LMK unique in the Lund landscape. At first, it could only be done with LMK as part of the reflexive process it has been working on, which motivated this research from the beginning. To facilitate this, the members had to discuss the organisation's core purposes and values to reach its ideology and envisioned the future. We had questions like: What does the LMK do that no other organisation is doing? As one of our exercises, I suggested drawing a map of the envisioned future to identify where the LMK was located in Lund's foodscape and what kinds of relations it was building with whom. One intriguing point for me about the map is that LMK was initially not in the centre or anywhere else. The centre was actually filled with the local producers. The participants were drawing everything the LMK was involved with, and the different groups were trying to build what they thought were part of the transformation for the future of food. Just after the map was almost done I asked where we could spot LMK on the map, people concluded that the LMK was everywhere. It was the energy moving the whole map.

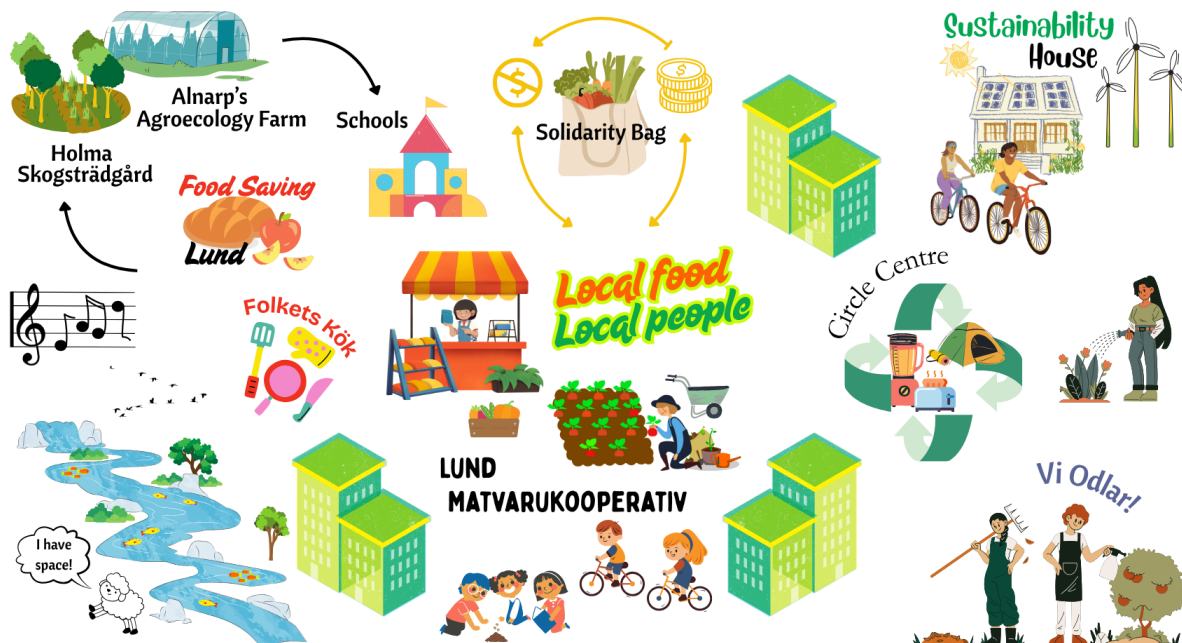


Figure 02—Sketch of participatory mental map made at LMK Envisioning Workshop

Another striking element for me was that local agriculture was drawn in the centre of the map. It was not like a conventional city in the centre, surrounded by local farmers. Thereby, the local farm and the local market are both in the middle, with the wording “local food to

local people”. Consumers were included in the map in a very inclusive way, with wealthier people financing bags for those with less money so that all could access fresh, healthy, local food. The member who drew it said it was inspired by Alnarp’s Agroecology Farm CSA model. Another element was the cooperative supplying healthy, locally sourced food to children in preschools, as many are run by parents’ associations and have their own kitchens.

As for the partner groups included in the envisioned future, the map included the People’s Kitchen and FSL as the main groups working against food waste and also in social inclusion. Near the centre, another partner group, the Circle Centre, was inserted as the main promoter of a sustainable circular economy. Together with the LMK, it began operating at the Hållbarhetshuset, or Sustainability House, which is represented in the middle of the map. The new place idea is to build a reference point in the city for sustainability-related grassroots initiatives, where people can find information about the different groups and where the groups can meet to coordinate their activities.



Figure 03—Drawing by LMK member (Guillaume Pédehontaa-Hiaa, 2026)

The regeneration of nature was notably highlighted on the map, represented by rivers teeming with fish and recovered forests, the result of regenerative agriculture supported by LMK and its farmers and partners. Music was included in the map by drawing beamed notes. It was acknowledged as desirable for community-building and for promoting a transformative culture, with songs about the future we want. One key idea for envisioning the future was to find, in a few words, what inspires everyone to contribute to the cooperative. People found it

essential to include the motivation of bringing local food to local people and reshaping the landscape to a community-driven, sustainable food system.

Thus, people immediately remembered one of LMK's suppliers, Värpingen Grön's motto: "Köp den mat som ger det landskap du vill se", which means "Shop the food that gives the landscape you want to see". The idea of building together the local foodscape was discussed for quite some time. After gathering many ideas and making an effort to synthesise them, people arrived at a new motto: "Tillsammans, väljer vi hållbar lokal mat!", meaning "Together, we chose sustainable and local food".

Governance is a central issue for substantive change on global warming, including the power to stop the use of fossil fuels, combat mass consumption and waste, or even embrace degrowth. Awareness about consumption may be just as important as organisation around production to change the ways we address modern society's needs. As Sequoia highlighted, many policies targeting global warming and the climate crisis are implemented solely in the interest of profit over people and life on the planet. They are unable to tackle the roots of the problem. "We need more drastic and impactful changes. Unfortunately, I do not see this happening any time soon, especially with the rise of far right governments in the Global North." (April 2025)

That doesn't mean that corporations' policies can't have an important impact on climate mitigation. They are actually highly responsible and should be obliged to heavily invest in solutions. Unfortunately, they cannot think beyond making even more profit from it. For Ember, from Folkets Kök, the issue is that they usually require substantial funding and intensive resources, which depend mostly on decisions at the governmental level. Most participants, though, believe we cannot count on the political class. As for Oakley, from Alnarp's Farm, the kind of initiative needed to address the climate urgency will not come from government policies at all. Cheyenne, also from Folkets Kök, remarked that a complete system change is needed to prevent the climate crisis. "The government is not on a good path," and we can't rely on it to change things (April 2025). Often, conversations start from a pre-apocalyptic scenario.

Even though some believe that not all governments are the same in how they address environmental issues, pursuing a profit-driven production model only leads to greater global warming. That could mean mass extinction, environmental injustice, climate refugees, and large-scale conflicts for resources between countries and between peoples. Willow, from

AAF, stated that by growing agro-ecological food, people are showing alternatives to the current system, which is vital in order to achieve a sustainable future in food systems, and that being a farmer, it is hard to influence changes that are needed on the policy level to achieve this on a bigger scale.

Instead of seeking solutions for mankind and the planet through negotiations for peace and global order, powerful countries and big corporations keep seeking new ways to profit, promoting conflict over the new borders of Capitalist expansion. For example, through the Arctic resources race. That is why active pressure from organised groups is fundamental in influencing significant political decisions. There is an understanding that, even if it depends on them at this stage of the climate crisis, politicians are not reliable enough to make the move themselves. That is why it is crucial to create popular pressure. Otherwise, corporations will always diverge from the global goals.

Traditional communities, in general, are highly affected by this conflict. They are also the source of many local solutions to the climate crisis. Commonly regarded as undeveloped or archaic, distinct human groups have adapted to and survived the drastic changes in their ecologies and economic relations within an expanding global system. Many times, in response to the hegemonic economic system, they were forced to develop technologies and alter their social organisation to handle massive transformations and often endure violent territorial and intercultural conflicts. They experienced severe environmental changes and the relocation of their lands, while they constantly adapted and developed local solutions that, more than ever, may, together with traditional knowledge, address some global problems. In the face of inevitable change, both technological and social innovation reveal themselves as key to overcoming the consequences of global warming, but they will only work if they thrive together as a massive social movement. Acting locally to address the abuse of fossil fuels and overconsumption may be perceived as a way to support as impactful as an informational campaign, or even more so.

Accordingly, development is not a politically and economically neutral concept. Remembering my conversation with Värpinge Grön's organic farmer, there are hundreds of pathways a society can take to fulfil its needs and interests. As we talked, he showed his rare collection of wheat and rye varieties, organically produced on his peri-urban sustainable farm, surrounded by corporate initiatives and urban expansion projects. Definitely, technology advances really fast now, and that frequently seems marvellous, but is it taking

the right path? The footpaths of current globalisation, from mercantilism to the industrial revolution, have a high cost in terms of natural and human resources.

Henceforth, when technology-driven improvements are not paired with social progress and community-based solutions, they often yield complex, expensive answers to seemingly simple questions. Companies and governments still look for solutions that can generate more profit and GDP, which, meanwhile, are part of the roots of the problem. The costs in terms of natural assets and human lives are regarded as externalities that benefit and reproduce the system. Could people examine other possible paths and restart from there? Not only that, but could the solutions already exist where people are incapable of glancing? What keeps industrial society from perceiving that there are people in the world who thrive on protecting their natural resources? These are some questions produced *in situ*.

That is usually the case, too, with governments and public policies. When policies benefit the hegemonic system, laws and tax money from workers serve to externalise nature and reproduce labour. The State-Corporate Complex (Chomsky, 2011) ultimately perpetuates significant social inequality, including low wages in the Global South, immigrants' poor rights in the North, the reproduction of cheap labour, and environmental damage, for which corporations often do not pay. The state covers infrastructure projects for the big companies while subsidising and financing their endeavours. For small farmers and the most vulnerable workers and consumers in the food sector, government policies fail to provide stability.

As members of Lund Matvarukooperativ, River remarked that food policy requires long-term planning and consistency, with the engagement of people, knowledge, resources and infrastructure, but the world changes fast, and policies change with governments. Hazel commented that even when public resources are allocated differently, government policies are too limited to mitigate the climate crisis. Solstice added that public money and efforts are increasingly restricted, even when they are needed to have a significant impact. Yet, Cypress highlighted that people have the power to take action and educate themselves to prevent the political class or individuals from abusing laws that protect fauna, flora, and water.

Likewise, people can organise themselves to ensure access to fundamental needs, such as food, water, health, and safety. Although it appears that, overall, the participants understand that the results of grassroots organisations are limited, they can become unarguably more impactful once they have access to policies. From creative new ways of doing things to the recovery of traditional practices, there are plenty of grassroots innovations — primarily social

innovations — that can efficiently build human and environmental resilience to the climate crisis.

Whereas some organisations' goals defy the profit-driven system, such as stopping fossil fuel extraction, local degrowth initiatives, or initiatives to prevent the depletion of natural and traditional territories, others just show that there is no government will to change. One iconic example in Sweden is Återställ Våtmarker's pledge to restore peatlands. After extensive discussions between climate activists and scientists, it was agreed that peatland restoration would be an effective measure to store carbon. For this reason, it had all the necessary components to be a successful campaign, especially since it would require minimal government funding. Nevertheless, the initial lack of governmental effort to pursue this initiative indicated a reluctance within the system to act.

Modifying the unbearable economic dynamics based on fossil fuels, with their high energy and resource consumption, requires changing the structure of society, power imbalances, and social inequality. It may probably be the only way to prevent a major climate crisis and a world mass extinction. Not surprisingly, those needs are rarely mentioned in most official reports from government agencies or companies, except for general negotiations under the flags of some developing countries. Yet, this unfortunately matters more for the regional elites than to the local people. That is why the major challenge in tackling global warming is perhaps to take the simplest measures. Feasible, less costly solutions and technologies are usually available, but they do not generate profit and control, so they are not supported and sometimes even abandoned. Many of them are based on local knowledge and observations, creative innovations, or new ways of organising people to solve problems directly or raise awareness of the problems. They give to the people what the system fears the most: power and autonomy.

At first glance, some social innovations spotted in Sweden and perhaps in most of Western Europe resemble those found in other countries. However, that does not make them less innovative. Further, even if globalisation of hazards creates diverse countries facing similar challenges, local conditions and solutions are far from identical. All organisations use horizontal decision-making close to self-management models. The board members have more executive functions and responsibilities than any kind of hierarchical position, and they are mostly held by volunteer teams, even though one of them has a few positions that receive some financial assistance. The role of these organisations in community-building and

education was highlighted in both the interviews and the exploratory surveys as essential to addressing the climate crisis.

It is difficult to calculate the total amount of food saved by PK and FSL, or the numbers are inaccurate. FSL can currently estimate around 150 kg of food per week, although there are some extraordinary weeks with either less or more. The numbers vary with the seasons, the arrival of new partners, temporary partnerships, and not all collaborators provide pickup feedback, and people usually do not carry a weighing scale to make it more precise. What can be said about dumpster diving organised by the PK is that it is even harder to estimate. Weekly savings depend not only on the number of people dumpster diving, but also on the quantity of food and its overall conditions thrown out by the supermarkets. Sometimes, a very small quantity of food can be saved, while in the next week it becomes a substantial amount taken from supermarkets' dumpsters, both south and north of the city, depending on the number of activists doing it. In general, all transportation is done by bicycle. Then, given the quantity of people eating each week, the amount of food saved can range from 25 to 50 kg. Dumpster-dived food may range from 30% to 70% of it. Between 20% and 40% would be an estimate for rescued ingredients through donations like FSL and AAF surplus. Around 10% to 30% would be for ingredients bought rather than rescued.

Even though LMK's commercialisation of 120,066.00 SEK in 2023 (LMK, 2024) does not compete with corporate food chains, it generates an important impact in supporting local farming and landscape and prepares the ground for future changes. Citing market shifts in Austria and Denmark, Liefferink and Wurzel (2026) concluded that, aside from limited individual purchasing power, consumers wield considerable economic power and that changing consumption patterns often drive product changes. Presumably, small grassroots groups' main role is not to solve problems generated by a huge, business-focused food system but to build alternatives, raise awareness, and generate pressure for public policies. Notwithstanding, it is hard for most people involved in the organisations to believe in changes at the high level of economics and politics. Therefore, these are the types of initiatives that lead to greater participation, less greenwashing, and more accessible actions for the population.

“In order to effectively address the compelling, complex and multidimensional problem of climate change, we need *more* democratic and just governance, not less. It is precisely securing *this*

goal—just and democratic governance— that is the most important challenge of our time.” (Cornell & Gupta, 2020)

One aspect raised by the envisioning workshops for its participants was that, to fulfil its purposes, strengthening its connections with other organisations and its social insertion in Swedish society became essential to the cooperative's survival. The search for a new place for the cooperative's office and basic storage was closely linked to cultivating interinstitutional relations. The Sustainability House flag became clearly part of this strategy. It became the starting point for a network of self-managing organisations in Lund focused on sustainability. That way of organising is rooted in the ideas of direct democracy and municipalism in the face of social ecology. Given the fragile credibility of representative democracy under oligarchic influence, active democratic engagement became particularly relevant for responding to the climate emergency.

People in Western societies are losing their memory of politics as an active, vital process of self-management, while the enervated concept of citizenship—as voting and tax-paying and the passive receipt of State-provided services—is mistaken for citizenship itself. Deracinated from community, the individual is isolated and powerless, alone in a mass society that has little use for him or her as a political being.

But if people lack apparent interest in public life, as so many commentators today lament, it may be because public life lacks meaning—that is, because it lacks substantial power. (Biehl, 1996, pp. 9-10)

Self-organising autonomous groups, like those found in Lund, are driven by the commitment and the need for immediate action on issues that governments are failing to address. Mobilising diverse social segments was vital for solidifying conversations with local administrative actors, who also showed interest in an active body of citizens working towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, which are part of their political agenda. Even though State policies tend to benefit businesses, the cultivation of grassroots economics, public ownership, and self-managing cooperatives is integrated into the process of municipalising the economy (Biehl, 1996). The interests of local political forces, especially when workers and grassroots organisations are involved, will inevitably clash with those of national and international oligarchies. This has been especially evident in environmental issues, which often cause significant damage with little benefit to the local population, with the climate crisis perhaps the most prominent example of worldwide escalation. As a result,

municipalism has been developed as a political strategy and organising tool to raise local citizens' environmental awareness and to challenge the undemocratic adoption of large-scale, highly damaging economic projects at the local level.

While grassroots organisations in Lund face significant challenges, such as the flow of student population and limited opportunities for retention, there is the other side of the coin. Lund's foodscape is privileged by the constant input of highly competent students and workers from both Sweden and other countries. People who have just moved from faraway countries have shown they are already open to intercultural exchange, willing to take risks, and eager to embrace creativity. Considering the university's commitment to sustainability, its focus on innovation, and its international environment, it is advisable for organisations to embrace the context rather than struggle against it. Sustained outreach and recruitment seem like inherent conditions for any grassroots organisation in Lund to thrive, which may also be its strength. The proper social technology must evolve to make them less dependent on individual connections and knowledge, and to rely more on crafting ways of doing and dynamic structures that can adapt to circumstantial changes without losing their essence. This means, perhaps, developing an autopoietic system that interacts with its environment while maintaining internal coherence, adapting over time through repeated interactions, even remaining governed from within (Maturana & Varela, 1980).

Applied to social systems, the concept of autopoiesis refers to the ability to create its own norms and evolve its practices, including the power to generate meaning. Regardless of the political environment, the system is capable of preserving its internal logics, such as horizontal structure and identity, despite external pressures (Luhman, 1995). For instance, demonstrating integrity in the face of funding shortages, oppositional policies, and economic crises. It is apt to sustain itself through internal feedback, such as social learning and shared values. Autopoietic social systems are often embodied in territory and culture, yet not absorbed by them, creating relative interdependence while remaining resilient to co-optation, limited resources, and state interference. To identify the social technology that binds all grassroots sustainable food organisations in Lund was not an individual task but a collective one. The aim of this research is to suggest some directions, in particular, regarding the role of each organisation and an emerging coordination effort in committing to the local future of food. This includes strategies for achieving success and survival while navigating a hostile corporate food system environment.

9 — Socio-ecological Value

The event portrayed the collaboration between the two organisations in this research, an activity to rescue food and share it, addressing both food waste and social vulnerability, with all its limits. Among the people I interviewed for the research, some were international individuals facing hardships, and I spoke with a few Swedes in need about the issue. I hope the study methods were careful enough to avoid any exposition and to keep anonymity. Yet, it indicated that access to food is unfortunately still a problem for a few Swedes and for many people moving here, both students and workers. Secondary sources, nonetheless, reported a proportionately low figure for Sweden: 3% of people aged 16 or more living in material and social deprivation (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2022). People are not numbers, and more than half of the children born outside Sweden are considered to live in low-income households (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2021).

For international students, it is concerning that, during this research, some have expressed unease about material deprivation. They are a considerable part of the population in Lund, and this situation is most probably not reflected in the statistics. So, that is not only a case of cultural shock or feeling homesick, which are legitimate concerns for students from other rich countries with a more similar currency strength. Mainly, Global Southern students had to significantly lower their food consumption standards due to higher costs of living in their host countries and limited access to part-time jobs.

Organisations such as Folkets Kök and Food Saving Lund view the social aspect of their work as constitutive of their engagement with environmental justice. The same goes for Alnarp's Agroecology Farm, which offers veggie bags at discounted rates for low-income families and students, as well as solidarity shares. Accessibility is an issue for members of Lund Matvarukooperativ, and is sometimes discussed at meetings. Anyway, all the organisations cited are driven by strong values of inclusivity, community-building, sharing, environmental health, self-development, education, and so on. The issue of values came up in the research from the outset of my approach to the Lund Matvarukooperativ. They have long been constrained by volunteers coming and going, knowing the city's strong international student profile, and by not having many fixed residents engaging with the organisations. Even though the Swedes are a fair proportion of local farmers and of people who buy products and support the CSA, it is not the same for the people doing the cooperative's administrative work. There are many factors that could attract more Lund residents to become

the cooperative's "clients," but what would be the missing elements for long-term engagement?

For instance, convenience is very important, as the *Lundabor* may be looking to buy fresh local produce, and they can certainly spread the word to the neighbours and heat up the business. Yet, building commitment may require understanding people's goals and values beyond what an individualistic, monetised society has to offer. In a nutshell, it is not easy to gather young students who are aware of the climate crisis to commit to most organisations. So, what is the size of the challenge? Can the cooperative alone reach out to people who are not even aware of their role in the climate crisis? What can move them out of their comfort zone and help them understand the urgency of climate action?

By interviewing cooperative members and engaging with other organisations, I started to focus on what motivated people to participate in the activities they were involved with. The overall absence of financial rewards was seldom mentioned, except when the conversation shifted to topics like limitations and the potential to do even more, or when discussing job scarcity that forced some to leave the city. The responses from the semi-structured interviews I conducted frequently addressed themes such as belonging, community, reciprocity, education, and collective commitment. Throughout this process, I needed to identify the appropriate tools for analysis. What was the central subject? Was it the future, climate change, or foodscapes? I reflected on how these themes were addressed in the field of anthropology and on the contributions my fieldwork could make to the discipline. Despite readings on climate anxiety, environmental dystopias, and participatory planning that could all address these themes, a connection to the research question remained missing.

On top of that, I had been hearing words like 'purpose' and 'meaning', and 'social capital' for a long time without fully addressing them. While economic anthropology featured in my would-be theory chapter, I decided to weave it throughout the thesis, but that was precisely when I realised that the anthropology of value was starting to take over as a more convenient tool. I shifted towards more structured question formats to facilitate a qualitative survey that incorporated the perspectives of additional members, still using open-ended questions. The research participants' diverse professions and study fields could offer further intriguing perspectives on how one can perceive grassroots organisations' climate action in their foodscapes. However, the grade they can actually relate their careers to their activism may vary a lot. In all cases, connecting to the organisation meant fulfilment and a sense of identity within a community.

Meanwhile, the high monetisation of the economy historically allowed the detachment of the concept of value from that of worth or virtue. In that sense, the meaning of the accumulation of goods could be withdrawn from the essence of good as a value. In other words, virtue was left out of the equation. As a result, labour, the source of all value, has been disconnected from meaningful action, along with the detachment between workers and the value they create. Moreover, the people who were working primarily on their organisations were, unsurprisingly, the ones who showed greater fulfilment and purpose in what they did, seeing the connection between their daily tasks and their organisations' aims. One Alnarp's Farm member stressed: "The farm has kind of become my life. It is my passion and my job, and I would not want to do anything else in this world. It gives me a future, and that is exciting!" (Cedar, April 2025). Another one said that by engaging with a large international community, they are empowering "young people to be leaders of the change they want to see in the world" (Dakota, May 2025). On the other hand, one Latin-American volunteer who works on the farm on weekends while having another job on weekdays commented, "I do not see any benefit that my job in the tech industry contributes to a more connected, sustainable, or just future. I often feel my job contributes to the opposite." (Oakley, April 2025).

An essential concept in Hegel's (2018) philosophy of history, under the concept of alienation, is that the estrangement between a human being and his acts becomes a barrier to the individual's understanding of the realisation of the spirit (*Geist*). Thus, alienation between workers and their craft has an evident impact on individual fulfilment. Second to him, alienation could be transcended through different stages of awareness and education, and humanity would progressively find its completion. Left Hegelians, on the other hand, understood that Hegel's ideal of Geist itself was an expression of the ruling class ideology. By opposing Hegel's idealism, Feuerbach (1881) intended to invert the direction of the process itself from the metaphysical approach to developing materialism as his philosophy of the future.

Consequently, the Hegelian individual could not find freedom through understanding his role in the development of the collective spirit. In fact, left Hegelians, such as Bakunin (1970), recognised that material conditions would shape consciousness, so that historical dialectics could not lead to reconciliation with the rational totality, but rather awaken rebellion. More importantly, the connection between alienation and the rise of the market economy, along with increased monetisation, emanates from how production and exchange are mediated by cultural values that shape the sense of achievement and realisation.

Seeking practical examples, various human cultures have distinct objectives regarding the exchange of goods and services. For many societies, the primary objective of exchange is the social value it involves, which means social exchange rather than economic exchange. In gift economies, objects may have personalities and virtues, and there is no alienation between the people and their masks and talismans (Mauss, 1966). Their intrinsic value persists even after their exchange because they still bear the memory, not only as objects of retribution and alliance, but also because of it. They serve as mnemonic devices for both the value of the exchange and the value of the object.

Among the Iroquois Nations, wampum belts were mnemonic devices that carried historical and moral narratives. They were not originally Iroquois, but instead manufactured by the Algonquian peoples of the coast of North America and obtained through the fur trade. Their value among the Iroquois was based on the relationships and stories they held, and could not be quantified solely by material worth or by its value of use and exchange. They were valued as a means of strengthening alliances in a gift economy through social exchange, rather than mere barter or trade, while maintaining the Haudenosaunee League (Graeber, 2001). That meant the Great Peace among the Mohawk, Onondaga, Oneida, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora peoples.

Afterwards, Dutch and English invaders used wampum to trade fur with the Iroquois and exploited the Algonquian peoples to produce surplus wampum. After Algonquian peoples were virtually exterminated, the European foreigners started crafting it themselves to keep the trade. As the Iroquois became dependent on trade with the invaders, they were forced into debt, which established wampum as a currency and monetised relations among indigenous peoples. At this point, the original significance of wampum as a gift gave place to the accumulation of economic power and hierarchy (Ibid).

The debt economy replaced the gift economy. Power relations that arose from exchange began to overshadow reciprocity. This shift led to an emphasis on exchange value rather than the reciprocity value of the exchange, which holds ritual or symbolic significance to promote peace. When objects shift from being created for their ritual, artistic, or use value, which is qualitative, to being produced for the sole purpose of accumulation, they become merchandise and commodities that bear only exchange value, which is quantitative.

Work becomes not only the means to create value, but to maximise profit and accumulation, which is the end in itself. In contrast, realising the spirit of Capitalism is not gratifying for

workers beyond the level of their survival instincts, because the purpose of their labour and the amount they produce are inconceivable to their immediate experience. From a socio-ecological perspective, the same applies to struggles against the reckless use of natural resources. Once the focus is on production rather than the product's use value, or on the producer's welfare or the impact on natural resources, the entire process becomes dehumanised, entropic, and overly quantitative. Hence, when jobs are incapable of providing significance to workers, activism and volunteering become sources of meaningful action for people who seek purpose in their daily lives, as means of socio-ecological production of value.

While all participants showed they seek purpose through volunteering and activism, many try to reconcile it with their job market and pursue careers that contribute to a sustainable future. Notwithstanding, in a system that values profit and accumulation over need and well-being, this is not always materially achievable, and many express doubts about the possibility of success within a system that has failed in terms of ecology and humanity. Although some of them could express satisfaction in what they accomplish, they often feel limited. Cypress, a cooperative member, for instance, stated that her job at a synchrotron light source facility enables the scientific community to enhance its knowledge in materials science, medicine, and food, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable future. Even though the institution has a Sustainability Working Group, she believes it is contradictory for them not to make sufficient effort to enhance greener lab practices.

It is notable that some institutions make substantial investments in technological innovation while failing to apply modest measures to prevent waste and unnecessary pollution, which has a substantial impact that is frequently overlooked. That is the sort of everyday education and commitment that is rarely achievable without grassroots awareness campaigns and community-building, which demands social innovation. The political-economic system is unable and especially unwilling to change the root causes of the climate crisis, such as the consumption culture.

Overall, the organisations studied are supported by volunteers and activists with high levels of education, who provide critical feedback and contributions to the research. Despite their diverse professional backgrounds and fields of study, they all shared extensive knowledge about global warming and social justice. Considering their jobs and fields of study, some participants reported being mindful that they cannot live out their values in a world that is how it is. Regardless of the field, and knowing how meaningful social initiatives are, Indigo,

from FSL, said she felt constantly wrapped up in the “how does this help business” framework.

Ember, from Folkets Kök, highlighted how studying and working in the field of the environment can sometimes be misleading. For instance, many Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) initiatives, which are closely linked to the future of food, tend to focus on addressing problems created by the existing system. The given approach often reinforces conventional, unsustainable practices rather than exploring entirely new paths and alternatives for a sustainable future. Blake, a student in Physical Geography and Ecosystem Sciences from FSL, stressed that despite her studies aligning with themes of sustainability and climate change, they focus much on theoretical science. At the same time, involvement in grassroots organisations like Food Saving Lund is more practical and socially oriented, which has brought her much greater fulfilment.

Meanwhile, one activist from Alnarp’s Agroecology Farm studying landscape architecture gave an example on how experience can also contribute to theory making a sharp reflection regarding how people are disconnected to the bigger picture of our existing landscapes, “a resource we exploit and whose product we can import from the other side of the world without seeing the true cost of its impact in the long term” (Sage, April 2025).

While the connection to social change and climate action might not be immediately apparent, some branches of education can still significantly support the collective goals and enhance social awareness. Indigo, a Master’s student in management, brought this up, saying she feels the leadership, management, and networking skills she acquired at university are beneficial to Food Saving Lund. Additionally, Solstice, from Lund Matvarukooperativ, has become more aware of the importance of a healthy diet, thanks to knowledge gained working on research on Type 2 diabetes. Looking for a healthy diet often leads to local, fresh food. That sort of knowledge surely reaches people around them, who become more committed to spreading information and influencing public policy whenever possible, thereby generating new links to the organisation's prominence.

Some other students reported that even broader study programs, such as Development Studies, address important issues in the food and climate debate, including carbon-emission policies, food security, and food sovereignty. The transversal approach to sustainability and climate change often plays a pivotal role in the popularity of the theme across universities’ programs. Grassroots movements regularly serve as practical laboratories for the type of

change that students and even professors typically deal with in theory. Not surprisingly, this is one of the values created by organisations intrinsically tied to their origins, as many of them originated from Lund University or from SLU students' projects and initiatives.

Yet a fair number of people I approached perceive that they work in jobs that do not align with their values or contribute positively to the planet. Thereby, the opportunity to take meaningful action is a clear driver of their commitment to long-term volunteering with grassroots non-profit organisations. As humans, we look for meaning in everything we do. When we stop doing so, it is because the system has dehumanised us. That is in the roots of alienation. Given the proper conditions, people strive to find a more significant role in society and the environment, even if it means risking their jobs to explore new possibilities. Some people change their strategies for supporting themselves and their families, for creating socio-ecological value as if their mental health and survival depended on it.

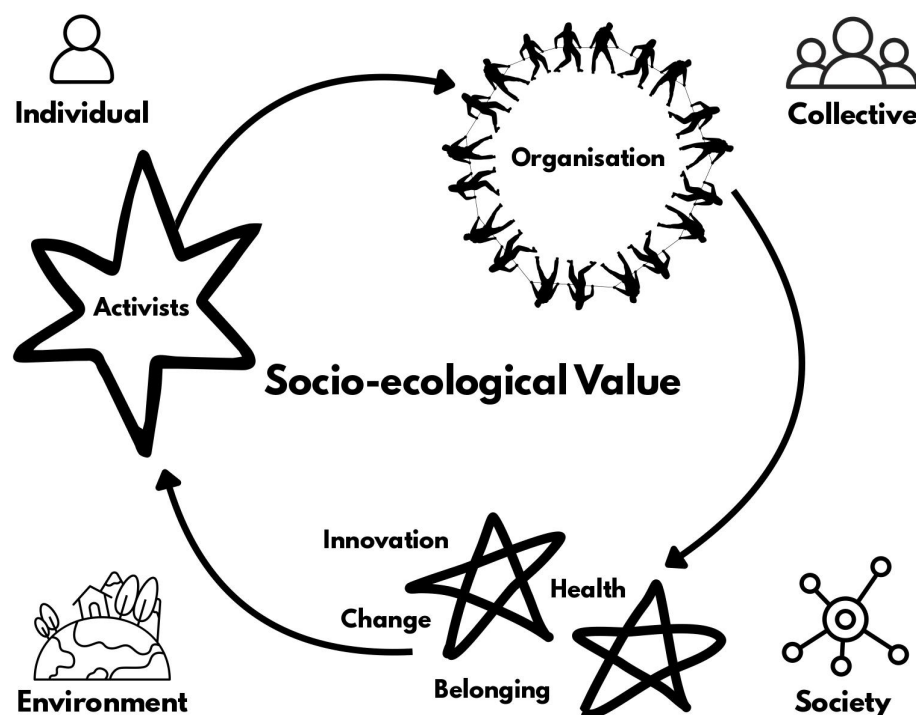


Figure 04—Diagram of the circular production of Socio-ecological Value

Thus, the purpose of this meaningful action goes beyond simply acquiring social capital as defined by Bourdieu (1986), which is akin to the “exchange of goods” through networking, trust, and prestige. Besides being collective by nature, those social goods can be possessed and accumulated by institutional and well-established arrangements and are somehow convertible to economic capital. That is why socio-ecological value shall not be confused with similar terms such as eco-social capital or eco-social markets, nor be associated with

greenwashing efforts in the market economy and politics. Distinctly, meaningful action focuses on the “exchange of goodness” as a symbol of virtue and worth. Within these environments, people learn from one another, build solidarity, and engage in reciprocal relationships without currency or barter, meaning their connections are not monetised or debt-generating, but are based on reciprocity and gift.

An exchange of this nature nurtures a sense of belonging and fulfilment among members of a given organisation, providing support in sometimes indirect, yet meaningful ways, rather than functioning like a typical job market. Nonetheless, socio-ecological economies cannot thrive in this setting without confronting Capitalism, which consistently seeks to outdo other forms of living in the name of profit, often through promoting consumerism, exploitation, and expropriation. The clash between different economic paradigms is evident. Most views presented by the participants point out that achieving climate goals will be unattainable without the escalation of transformative grassroots economics. Conversely, others contend that knowing the severity of the current situation, people are at the mercy of corporations and traditional decision-makers, leaving us in a pre-apocalyptic scenario.

Finally, in grassroots organisations, one member creates value that benefits others. Their collective efforts ultimately generate benefits for society as a whole, which, in turn, satisfy the members of the organisation, too. Italian thinker Enrico Malatesta (1933) emphasises that the voluntary act of cooperation for the greater good is not a philosophical debate about selfishness and altruism. It's a recognition that all individuals are self-interested, seeking their own satisfaction. Anyhow, some find their ultimate fulfilment in contributing to the collective good, aligning their actions with their values, and finding profound meaning in their lives. That is more associated with the pleasure of collective accomplishment and celebration, expressed through festivities, than with satisfying commodified, privatised desire (Graeber, 2004), nurtured by individualism. By collaborating, they can multiply the value they create within a network of mutual aid. Whether an environmental organisation or not, building socio-ecological alternatives to the capitalist economic system itself may reduce general overexploitation, ultra-processing, over-transportation, consumerism, and waste.

9.1 — The HUB: Hållbarhet, Umgänge, Bildning

In practice, how can organisations create socio-ecological value for both activists and society? How can they survive as mostly non-profit organisations through recognition for their social and environmental role? How can we address the escalation issue and have a greater impact on the environment and society? At the start of this research, both Lund Matvarukooperativ and Circle Centre shared Petroleumhuset, an old brick house next to Stenkrossen's main building in Lund. The building, now home to Food Saving Lund, once supported LMK and Circle Centre through a three-year development support project that was about to expire. Facing the loss of this space, the two organisations decided to collaborate on creating a Sustainability House in Lund. This project aimed to secure a shared, central location and establish a visible sustainability network for the city.

Meanwhile, as part of my role as Partnership Developer at Lund Matvarukooperativ, I worked with some other board members to find a new location for the organisation. This process began in early March, when the need for a new space became urgent due to external circumstances. Anyway, we were still betting most of our chips on the Sustainability Hub as our best chance to find a long-term solution. Alongside other committed cooperative members and representing FSL as External Relations, I kept gathering information from the municipality and other sources. I was determined to find a place before finishing my research and leaving Sweden. Plus, I felt it was important to intensify coordination between organisations, regardless of whether they already had a space.

All organisations pursued a new shared location and the development of a Sustainability Hub, uniting around sustainable social innovations such as the circular economy, local food chains, sharing, and waste prevention. The goal was to position the Hub as a citywide point of coordination and reference for grassroots initiatives. Finding a central location for that project was a key factor in creating not only a space for community-building, but for outreach. For nonprofit organisations, this also means needing support from public policies to cover rent expenses. The establishment of a Sustainability Hub in Lund would benefit the surrounding community by fostering engagement, cohesion, and integral health. The Hub could offer workshops on sustainable practices, social events, and lectures to enhance environmental awareness. The concept combined social and environmental aspects of many Sustainable Development Goals, such as Sustainable Cities and Communities, Responsible Consumption and Production, and Climate Action, SDGs 11, 12 and 13. It covered the aims of Life on

Land, as well—promoting a local agrobiodiverse foodscape—and Partnerships for the Goals, respectively SDGs 15 and 17.

Activities to boost the local food chain and encourage circular economy would create a lively atmosphere and improve public health (SDG3). They promote sustainable consumption and facilitate access to organic, local, fresh food, reducing overall pollution, and enhancing well-being, while supporting the local economy and farmers (SDG8). A Hub would become a reference for social innovation, community-building, and collaborative networking. It would cultivate partnerships and research in sustainability that align with the municipality's and community's needs, and showcase successful initiatives and discuss improvements in ongoing projects. It would serve as both a platform and an incubator for new initiatives, building a network where people can access resources and expertise to strengthen their sustainability efforts. In collaboration with local schools and universities, it could educate future generations, positioning Lund as a leader in community-driven sustainable innovation.

In the meantime, conversations had been ongoing since the 28th of March. Lunds Kommun held an open meeting at Stadshallen concerning a space that used to be a café. Initially, there was no certainty about how to align the expectations of both the municipality regarding the location and our original proposal. Some initial information was shared in a meeting that was open to different suggestions. As we developed the concept of the Sustainability Hub, we scheduled an open event featuring a presentation and a World Café during Sustainability Week. The idea began to take shape more and more concretely. The initial thought behind the Sustainability Hub in Lund was to create a space where various sustainability-focused grassroots organisations could collaborate. The place would not only promote local farmers, circular economy, food saving, and other sustainability practices but serve as a reference in the city and build a community. That means fostering participation and raising awareness on city sustainability. The role of the Hub would be that of an incubator, a node for innovative social green technologies and talents.

It took around two months from the conversations for us to have a larger meeting with the Lunds Kommun's representatives at Stadshallen on the 22nd of May. At this point, the proponents included LMK, Circle Centre, FSL, ABC, and Lunds Bilpool. We could gather more details about the municipality's aims and how the group could contribute to them. Moreover, we could evaluate whether we had the conditions required to assume the task and whether the place could meet the needs of the different organisations and be strategic for their

goals as well. What was an initial idea began to evolve into a concrete plan. The organisations now started to consider the opening hours, the space layout, and the open events that were expected from both Lunds Kommun and the various organisations' goals of outreach and education.

How could the volunteer-based work fill the weekly compromise of hosting visitors, spreading information, and serving snacks and coffee? Each organisation had to consider its own needs and how they were related to those of others. For instance, the suitability of the installations and furniture for hosting LMK food storage and pick-ups. Additionally, each one would install some activity that would be a sample of what kind of socio-ecological innovation they operate with, for example, a shared fridge for Food Saving Lund, or what other services is the community missing that the Sustainability Hub could offer? A Do-It-Yourself repair station? Fermentation workshops? Could it be a children-parents friendly area in the city centre with repaired toys? Clothing swap activities to stimulate the circular economy? Shared bookshelves? Perhaps the café could become itself a zero-waste experiment?

INTERNAL	<i>Strengths</i> <i>People (committed, skilled, qualified)</i> <i>Experience (know-how)</i> <i>Diversity (age, targets, organisations)</i> <i>We are non-profit</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i> <i>Lack of specific skills</i> <i>No business approach</i> <i>Few organisations yet</i>
	<i>Opportunities</i> <i>Visibility</i> <i>Lund Support</i> <i>Convenience</i> <i>Other organisations interested</i>	<i>Threats</i> <i>Dependency on key persons</i> <i>Constant rotation of people</i> <i>Dependency on Lund's Municipality</i>

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Figure 05—SWOT matrix produced during HUB & Café planning

During the research, practical questions emerged from our meetings and conversations during activities. Lunds Kommun offered furniture (refurbished or reclaimed) adapted to the organisation's needs, and a four-month period during which they could cover the rent.

Likewise, the organisations raised the need for a coordinator, which, after another meeting, the Lunds Kommun agreed to pay for. To think strategically and maximise the potential of this opportunity, we conducted a brief planning exercise by answering four simple questions based on the SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats). What makes us unique, and what do we excel at? What are our limitations, and what abilities are we lacking? Who might value our initiative, and what can work in our favour? What challenges might we face and by whom? Furthermore, we had another meeting in which we discussed them together.

Close to one month after it was decided to name the initiative HUB & café, in which HUB stood for Hållbarhet, Umgänge and Bildning, which means sustainability, community, and education. The new space is, therefore, operating from September 2025. Moreover, it is essential to embrace the unique opportunity that Lund University presents to the city each year by attracting numerous highly talented people from around the world. There are a few reasons why they may be particularly attracted to the organisations. When they move to a new country, they often miss social connections and seek out new communities. A significant number is drawn to Lund University due to its strong ranking in sustainability. Considering all the steps they took to move to Sweden and study abroad, they frequently are people that tend to be proactive, and many receive positions or scholarships as a result of not only their talents but their efforts. So, although organisations can establish a core group of active members from the local community, it is advisable to continually recruit new members and maintain good outreach to the influx of students. The central setting has the potential to strengthen the local community of Lund citizens around sustainable practices and engagement with the various forms of climate action.

10 — Conclusion

This study discusses how local groups are building communities, learning together, and sharing skills to build a stronger future in the face of climate change, especially in how we produce and consume food. They have a different way of educating that is not merely about passing on information, but about involving everyone in an exchange, embracing traditional knowledge with new ideas and practical actions. They also emphasise how these projects move away from mass consumerism and individualism, valuing collaboration that directly transforms social systems.

The research question was formed by participants' active contributions. The initial question remained pertinent and was addressed throughout the study: What motivates people to volunteer long-term in a sustainable non-profit organisation? It then extended to asking: What would constitute a sustainable food landscape in the future? But the one that stood out as the primary research question was: What is the role of community-based innovations in climate action from an *emic* perspective?

Through participant observation, interviews, and qualitative surveys, it was possible to determine grassroots organisations' activists' perspectives on the effect of their efforts on the international climate urgency to reduce global warming. The research identified locally grounded means to confront climate change with relative autonomy. These include cheap, simple solutions that use available resources rather than the complex proposals governments and companies frequently promote. Most activists recognised the limitations of their actions, while also expressing scepticism about corporate initiatives and elaborate governance in light of the immediacy. Regardless, they understand that governments and corporations should still be held responsible for their ultimate impact. In general, public pressure complements direct local action to manage the climate crisis.

This tactic brings forward social innovation in production and consumption, encouraging participation and access to local public policies. Although active democracy sometimes uses more conflictual strategies—such as boycotts and protests—these are not the main focus for these specific organisations. Grassroots climate action serves as a social laboratory in a pre-apocalyptic climate crisis scenario. It addresses climate anxiety and shows alternate futures featuring healthy foodscapes. These groups also educate people, through practical methods, on how to avoid the worst and construct a future that serves food, people, and the environment.

Consequently, grassroots organisations generate socio-ecological value for society. They do this through the meaningful actions of activists who fight to prevent global warming and safeguard the future of the next generations. Based on the left-Hegelian concept of realisation, which is rarely found in the job market, meaningful action results from the conflict between the State-Corporate complex mechanism for growth and the survival of humankind and the planet. Unfortunately, this means that good work for society is rarely paid for. People take action because it is urgent and necessary, while the State-Corporate complex pretends to oversee it. Based on the present qualitative research, collective education and society-building can generate long-term commitment from volunteers in non-profit organisations and create socio-ecological value back in a virtuous cycle, therefore answering the first research question.

The study shows that community-building and collective learning are closely related. Community-building is a form of social endurance in which group meals, collaborative farm activities, and reciprocal assistance promote a feeling of inclusion and cultural sharing. Collective learning encourages cultural change by promoting food practices rooted in traditional knowledge and self-sufficiency, and through fostering values such as DIY (do-it-yourself) and resistance to the commercialised consumption patterns driven by the capitalist system. They value sociability and the exchange of experiences within the community, involving people in collective activities such as cultivation, food preparation, food exchange, and community events like potlucks.

Furthermore, they seek to raise awareness of the environmental impacts of the modern food chain, such as waste and GHG emissions, and to promote a culture of self-governing, resilient, and connected communities through food, thereby strengthening the link between culture, identity, and eco-friendly practices. It goes beyond formal education, incorporating practical, everyday social innovations that people can do with their knowledge and resources. It is a way for bottom-up movements to actively contest dominant capitalist food regimes by developing open-source, adaptable blueprints for sustainability and self-sufficiency, and by drawing attention to a creative approach to enabling communities through shared knowledge and independence. These ideas highlight the need to unite cultural, social, and practical dimensions to establish resilient, participatory systems for climate and social change.

Regarding the second research question, a sustainable food landscape for activists would be characterized by some key elements, such as a local food system focused on the community and prioritising social justice and environmental health. Communities would be a source of

strong local agency and autonomy to co-manage production and consumption, reducing overproduction, exploitation, and environmental degradation, and reinforcing solidarity, reciprocity, and purpose. Furthermore, systemic change would force the adoption of policies against corporate dominance and an end to subsidies for those who destroy, while requiring inert governments to support self-managed grassroots innovations. Ultimately, the food landscape would nurture equitable access to physical and mental health, wholesome food, cultural values centred on well-being, and environmental stewardship, moving beyond profit-driven models to ones rooted in social ecology.

This vision of the future is at the root of the concept of socio-ecological value, as it is the product desired by the worker as a result of their effort. Its value transcends economic exchanges, nurturing reciprocal relationships and collective efforts to achieve positive social and environmental impacts. Exchanges are based on trust and giving, strengthening a sense of belonging and communal purpose, which are closely related to food culture. Therefore, it challenges capitalist paradigms by prioritising ethical values of social engagement and the common good, advocating for an ecological and social economy.

The possibility of morally and ecologically grounded consumer choices challenges the industrial production line system and criticises models that perpetuate inequality and resource depletion. A platform like Hub & Café, bringing together diverse sustainable initiatives, foregrounds the importance of integrating regenerative agriculture, local and circular economies, community coordination, and collaborative space as possibilities for choice and even convenience. On top of that, the organisations in the study presented innovative ideas. Activists stressed the need to combine technological solutions with community engagement and social innovation to avoid expensive and unrealistic responses.

Grassroots innovations are low-cost initiatives that demonstrate that effective change can occur without significant government intervention. Self-managed organisations can create their own norms, thereby strengthening the autonomy of activist groups. Food rescue and sharing actions promote social justice and community bonds. Beyond that, values such as purpose and meaning motivate engagement and illustrate the role of psychosocial motivation. Economic exchanges are redefined to focus on reciprocity and virtue, challenging the profit paradigm. Work and activism become stronger sources of sense to dehumanised systems. Local organisations work as labs of social creativity, uniting education, research, and innovation to nurture real and regenerative changes.

In light of the third research question, there was a strong tendency to recognise that their organisations play a fundamental role in transforming the future of food through community-based social justice and educational initiatives. They contribute by creating local alternatives to the industrial system, and promote social cohesion and sustainable and conscious practices, raising public awareness and pressing for fairer policies. Likewise, they act against power systems dominated by large corporations and governmental inaction, seeking political change through grassroots activism. Many advocate for degrowth and anti-capitalist practices to minimise environmental impact and waste. Grassroots groups prioritise local empowerment, autonomy, and social innovation, supported by values such as solidarity and purpose. Thus, they see their actions as essential to building sustainable, equitable, and community-based food systems capable of challenging corporate interests and global political inertia in the face of the climate catastrophe.

Conclusively, the three research questions are interrelated. The first demonstrates that socio-ecological value drives a virtuous circle in which work becomes meaningful action, often voluntary or low-paid. The second implies that the objective of this service is social and environmental justice and health, as seen in the vision for the future of food. And the third points to the means of progress, namely, grassroots organisations that propagate socio-ecological technology innovation, which ties back to the main research question. At its core, it is all about educating and organising, through collective learning and community-building, a society that learns to value work that generates social and ecological well-being, rather than a system that prioritises the profits of a tiny, privileged segment of society.

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