

The Comings and Goings of Suderbyn

An analysis of how an ecovillage navigates the contradictions of real utopias and its implications for degrowth strategies of change

Berber Bakker

Master Thesis Series in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science,
No 2026:020

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Lund University
International Master's Programme in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science
(30hp/credits)



LUCSUS

Lund University Centre for
Sustainability Studies



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Submitted May 11th

Supervisor: Elina Andersson and Stefan Schüller, LUCSUS, Lund University

Abstract:

Humanity is faced with multiple interconnected crises, ranging from the climate breakdown to searing inequalities. There is an urgent need to move towards a different socio-political-economic system. Degrowth scholars envision a post-capitalist society centered around ecological and social wellbeing. One way to get there is by building on existing interstitial initiatives. At the same time such 'real utopias' are inherently contradictory in nature. Through ethnographic fieldwork I investigated how these tensions play out in the Suderbyn ecovillage, which has a strong focus on education. Their educational efforts align with degrowth principles but also impact the stability of the place and can impede achieving other objectives, such as self-sufficiency. The community navigates these trade-offs through continuous dialogue and flexible decision-making. Suderbyn shows how the inherent contradictions of ecovillages limit their potential to "erode" capitalism and need to be combined with other strategies in order to facilitate a degrowth transition.

Keywords:

Ecovillage, Gotland, Degrowth, Interstitial Transformation, Alternative Education, Community

Word count: 11.990

Acknowledgements

There are many people that I would like to thank for their support in writing this thesis. First of all, I want to thank all the inhabitants of Suderbyn, who opened their home to me and made this research possible. Your warm and inviting energy meant a lot to me, and I really appreciated you letting me tag along for little adventures, such as sledding in the forest. A special thanks to everyone that took the time to do the interviews, I could not have written this thesis without your honest reflections. I also want to thank everyone for the lovely communal lunches, I don't think I have ever eaten so well (and a special appreciation for T's vegan kebab). During my stay, I got to experience the community life and see how much love you all have for each other. It was beautiful to witness, and I hope that you will have such strong connections with all future Suderbynians.

Being in Suderbyn made me more aware and thankful for my own little community in Lund. While it has been an intense past couple of months, somehow it always felt manageable thanks to the people around me. I want to thank Madita and Mila, who were the best peer review group I could have asked for. The weekly check-ins and feedback sessions helped me a lot and I always felt that both of you really took the time to discuss things, which I really appreciated. I also want to thank my supervisors, Elina and Stefan, for patiently going through my many (and often excessively long) proposals and pushing me to make the most out of this thesis. Many thanks as well to Océane, Sophie and Anja for all the mental support during this period, you were always there for advice or a well-needed laugh. I also want to thank Vali, Kathi, Ivana and everyone else that came to our weekly Sunday night dinners. These dinners were lovely breaks from all the thesis work and were always a highlight of my week. A big thanks as well to my family and friends in the Netherlands for their frequent check-ins and encouragements. Lastly, I want to thank my fellow LUMES students, who made the last two years unforgettable.

As a final note, I want to acknowledge and thank all ecovillagers, and everyone who aspires to live more harmoniously with nature and others, for making their little corners of the world a better place. As Gandalf once said: "I found it is the small everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keep the darkness at bay."

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1 Introduction

“You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.” - Buckminster Fuller quoted in Raworth (2018)

We live in a world full of contradictions. Some people live in poverty, while others consume and waste excessively without a second thought. Governments organize awareness campaigns, telling their citizens to take shorter showers, while they continue to subsidize fossil fuels. The Amazon rainforest is cut down so that Brazil can host world leaders at the COP30 to talk about how we “really should start doing something about climate change...” The list goes on and on. It can easily make one feel defeated. Yet, there is another list. People choosing to help each other even when they have very little left to give. Activists fighting tirelessly to give a voice to those who have been silenced. Acts of kindness in a burning world. An ecovillage next to a military base.

It might make one reflect on how we got here and whether there is not a better alternative, a way to build a kinder, more just and resilient world. These are certainly thoughts that occupy the minds of degrowth scholars. Degrowth scholars have identified the exploitative capitalist system based on continuous economic growth as the root cause of the current socio-ecological crises (D’Alisa et al., 2014; Hickel, 2021; Kallis et al., 2015). Degrowth envisions an alternative post-capitalist society centered around ecological and social wellbeing that is based on sufficiency and justice (Helker-Nygren & Katz-Rosene, 2025; Kallis et al., 2015). In order to ensure an equitable and just transformation, it is important that the transition occurs through bottom-up voluntary processes (Schulken et al., 2024). Therefore, one of the degrowth strategies is to build on initiatives that prefigure an alternative society by experimenting with different social practices and forms of organization (Burkhart et al., 2024).

Erik Olin Wright (2013), a Marxist sociologist who shares degrowth’s anti-capitalist stance, called this an interstitial strategy of transformation. In this strategy, prefigurative societies, or in his words interstitial initiatives, attempt to escape capitalism and build alternatives in the “interstices” of the system, like plants growing in the cracks of concrete. Wright noted that this is not a straightforward process and coined the term “real utopias” to capture the contradictions that emerge when putting “utopian” visions into practice.

There are already many interstitial initiatives out there that embody the change degrowth scholars propose. Among these are ecovillages. The Global Ecovillage Network defines ecovillages as “an intentional, traditional or urban community that is consciously designed through locally owned, participatory processes in all four dimensions of sustainability (social, culture, ecology and economy)

to regenerate their social and natural environments” (“Concepts,” n.d.). Through their alternative low-carbon lifestyle, voluntary simplicity and communal values ecovillages oppose dominant consumerist, material and individualistic societies at the heart of capitalism (Renau, 2018). Degrowth scholars have similarly identified ecovillages as a way of bringing about interstitial transformation (Cattaneo, 2015; Lockyer, 2017; Monticelli, 2018).

While building alternatives is a valuable strategy, it is also important for these initiatives to maintain some form of societal engagement and build up solidarity networks in order to go beyond attempts of just ‘escaping’ capitalism (Chertkovskaya, 2024). This is especially relevant for ecovillages as there is debate about their transformative potential. Some scholars have raised concerns that ecovillages risk becoming isolated and exclusionary communities where the inhabitants distance themselves from mainstream society (Dias et al., 2017; Meijering et al., 2007). Others have observed an increased outward-orientation among ecovillages, through educational efforts and networking (Lockyer & Veteto, 2013; Magnusson, 2018). Ecovillages can thus be seen as effective interstitial initiatives for degrowth when they maintain engagement with society and go beyond the maintenance of their community.

1.1 Research Aim and Questions

Ecovillages could be a valuable building block for the degrowth transition. Yet, it is important to acknowledge the complex nature of these real utopias. Although previous studies have identified ecovillages as a type of interstitial initiative (Ergas, 2021b; Monticelli, 2018; Renau, 2018), no research has applied Wright’s concept of real utopias to investigate how the tensions inherent in these initiatives materialize in ecovillages. Analyzing the contradictions that emerge when turning utopian visions into reality is important for understanding the potential and limits of ecovillages as a strategy for change. With this thesis I intend to fill this gap by providing insights into the following overarching question: *How do the tensions inherent in ecovillages shape their potential as a strategy for a transition towards a degrowth society?*

I do so by exploring how the tensions manifest in a specific case study, namely the Suderbyn ecovillage on Gotland (Sweden). Suderbyn hosts many educational events and programs, and in this way maintains the societal engagement that is vital to the degrowth strategies for change. By analyzing Suderbyn as an enactment of a real utopia, I explore how Suderbyn can contribute to societal

transformation through its educational efforts and how the inhabitants navigate the trade-offs that emerge in this process. I will thus answer the following research questions:

- *In what ways can Suderbyn’s approach to education contribute to a degrowth transition?*
- *How do the tensions inherent in interstitial initiatives play out in Suderbyn?*
- *What can we learn from how the inhabitants navigate them?*

These questions can bring valuable insights for sustainability science. For a long time, sustainability science has been a largely problem-oriented field occupied with criticizing existing unsustainable structures and practices (Schirone, 2025). In the last decade, however, sustainability scientists have called for more normative solution-oriented research that can support societal transformation (Schirone, 2025). With this thesis I intend to do so by furthering scholarship on strategies for change. More specifically, I add to existing degrowth literature by shedding light on the challenges that ecovillages experience as interstitial initiatives and the implications this has for their role in a degrowth transition. With this, I engage in the debate regarding the transformative potential of ecovillages. Through ethnographic fieldwork in Suderbyn, I provide rich and detailed descriptions of the tensions that emerge and how the inhabitants maneuver them.

2 Ecovillages as Interstitial Transformation

In this section, I discuss ecovillages as an important player in interstitial strategies for degrowth. I review how ecovillages attempt to resist capitalism by building alternatives on its margins, while maintaining engagement in society, and end with a description of Suderbyn specifically.

2.1 Evolving Ecovillages

Ecovillages are the most recent example of a long history of intentional communities that were established as a response to counter dominant regimes (Henfrey & Ford, 2018). However, the emergence of ecovillages in the “Global North” can be traced back to the counterculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Fonseca et al., 2022).¹ The ecovillages consisted of various projects, but shared

¹ Ecovillages can be found anywhere in the world, but this section focuses on ecovillages in the ‘Global North’ since Suderbyn is located there and because the call for degrowth mainly focuses on nations that have already exceeded their ‘fair share’ of resources (Helker-Nygren & Katz-Rosene, 2025).

a common aim to protect ancestral values and local practices that were perceived to be threatened by modernity (Fonseca et al., 2022).

Despite their association with the countercultural movement, Henfrey and Ford (2018) argue that the first ecovillages did not adopt a clear “resistance” stance and instead emphasized a holistic mindset of pursuing alternative lifestyles without openly criticizing dominant regimes. Many prominent ecovillages established around this time, such as Findhorn in Scotland, were initially centered around spirituality and only later incorporated sustainability concerns (Jackson, 2004). Ecovillages that were established later, such as Sieben Linden in Germany in 1997, can be considered more explicit forms of green political radicalism (Bocco et al., 2019; Henfrey & Ford, 2018). This exemplifies a general trend of the increased politicization of ecovillages where they more openly voice their critique of dominant social, political and economic regimes (Henfrey & Ford, 2018). Alongside this trend is a strategic shift from an inward focus on self-sufficiency towards a more outward-orientation through educational efforts and collaboration with other citizen initiatives (Lockyer & Veteto, 2013). One way that ecovillages work together is through the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN).

2.2 The Ecovillage Movement

The GEN was officially launched in 1996 at the United Nations (UN) Habitat conference, and the network maintains close ties to the UN (Dias et al., 2017). The GEN was involved in developing the curriculum for the UN Decade of Education and Sustainable Development (2005-2014) (Dias et al., 2017). This exemplifies the role of ecovillages as important learning laboratories where curricula and other pedagogical tools for sustainability transitions can be developed (Papenfuss & Merritt, 2019; Roysen & Cruz, 2020). The GEN was also present at the COP30 in Brazil to demonstrate that ecovillages are “mature, scalable responses to the climate crisis, ready for mainstream policy integration” (Braga, 2025). They urged governments to establish National Ecovillage Agencies to support the communities, reform land laws to facilitate their development, and include ecovillage representatives in national climate policy development (Braga, 2025).

Since the establishment of the GEN, many scholars have identified ecovillages as a type of social movement (Dias et al., 2017; Ergas, 2021a; Monticelli, 2018). Jackson, one of the founders of the GEN, described ecovillages as a new lifestyle movement against corporate-led globalization which protests not through demonstrations on the street but by “walking their talk” and building sustainable communities (Jackson, 2004). Although Jackson has not proclaimed himself a “degrowther,” he shares their criticism and articulates how it is not the ecovillagers that are living as “idealists,” but politicians

who believe that continuous economic growth will solve all problems (Jackson, 2004). Other scholars have similarly identified ecovillages as key sites of active resistance against the current neoliberal capitalist system (Brombin, 2015; Schiffer, 2018; Van Schyndel Kasper, 2008; Wittmayer et al., 2019). Indeed, ecovillages put many of the degrowth principles into practice, such as reducing environmental impact, re-localizing production and consumption, re-orienting economic priorities, and fostering democratic decision making (Lockyer, 2017; Zeiss et al., 2025).

Ecovillages in Europe and the United States tend to have lower material consumption levels and a smaller environmental impact than the “average” citizen (Sherry, 2019; Wiest et al., 2022). This is usually achieved through relocation, with many pursuing some degree of self-sufficiency regarding water, energy and food (Skrzypczyński, 2021). In addition, ecovillages often experiment with agroecological practices that prioritize the ecological rehabilitation of the land (Dias et al., 2017). Their reduced environmental impact is also facilitated by co-housing. Many ecovillages consist of smaller individual living quarters and bigger communal spaces, which allows inhabitants to share utilities and fosters a community spirit (Tao & Vyas, 2024). Furthermore, ecovillages implement alternative forms of governance, with smaller communities often opting for direct decision-making processes, while bigger ones sometimes select a representative council and committees (Lockyer, 2017).

At the same time, ecovillages are still embedded in, and constrained by, the capitalist system that they attempt to resist (Morris, 2022). This becomes apparent in the homogenous nature of the inhabitants. Although many of the practices adopted in ecovillages are compatible with the needs of low-income communities (Chitewere, 2010), the inhabitants of ecovillages tend to be mainly (upper-) middle class, ethnically ‘white,’ people with a higher education (Dias et al., 2017). In this way, ecovillages risk perpetuating existing injustices as well as class and ethnic divisions. Nevertheless, inhabitants have frequently expressed interest in more diversity within their community, but many have not managed to achieve this (Dias et al., 2017). While this issue requires further attention, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to do so. Ecovillages therefore cannot completely escape capitalism and instead can be seen as a place of negotiation between the current system and the desired future (Monticelli & Petersen, 2025; Morris, 2022).

Ecovillages thus implement many degrowth principles and are actively building up solidarity networks, which are deemed crucial for effective interstitial strategies towards a degrowth transition (Chertkovskaya, 2024). I will now present Suderbyn, which through its membership of the GEN, educational efforts and other collaborations, maintains close engagement with society (*Ecovillage – Suderbyn*, n.d.).

2.3 The Suderbyn Permaculture Ecovillage

Suderbyn is an intentional community ranging from 15 to 25 people, located on Gotland, a Swedish island in the Baltic Sea. It is around nine kilometers away from the main town, Visby, and is situated next to the main road across from the military base (picture 1). The ecovillage was founded in 2008 by Ingrid Gustafsson and Robert Hall, who bought the land cooperatively and over the years developed it into a permaculture landscape (*Ecovillage – Suderbyn*, n.d.; Svensson, 2008). Nowadays, Robert no longer lives in Suderbyn, while Ingrid still spends some time there during the summers (personal communication, February 16, 2026).



Picture 1. The view of Suderbyn from the road, with their anti-war banner giving a clear statement to their neighbors across the street (own photograph).

Shortly after Suderbyn's establishment, the founders created the non-profit NGO Relearn, which operates in close collaboration with Suderbyn and enables it to host volunteer programs and other educational events (*Greenskills – Suderbyn*, n.d.). There are two main volunteer programs, which are organized through the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) and funded by the European Union (EU). Since 2010 Suderbyn hosts the Green Skills program, where eight to ten people come and stay in Suderbyn for eleven months (*Greenskills – Suderbyn*, n.d.). During this program there are two working domains, namely the permaculture garden and the infrastructure team, which takes care of the maintenance

and improvements of the place. In addition, Suderbyn hosts a three-week volunteer program, called ReGreen, in the summer for twelve people (Eladly, 2025).

The ESC programs play a central role in Suderbyn's structure as the majority of inhabitants were either current ESC participants or came originally through the ESC program and decided to stay. This also explains why most of the inhabitants in Suderbyn are young people (between 25 and 35), mainly from Western Europe. Only six out of the eighteen people living there when I visited were Swedish. There were a few people who had not come to Suderbyn through the ESC, including one mother, who lives there with her two teenage daughters. Other than that, there are no families at Suderbyn. Five people are currently employed by Relearn to run the volunteer programs, others work outside Suderbyn or are looking for jobs.

The social organization of Suderbyn consists of participatory governance based on sociocracy, which is done through open community meetings where decisions are taken on based on consensus (*Co-Living Principles – Suderbyn*, n.d.). Sociocracy decentralizes complex organizations into working groups or 'circles' that are semi-autonomous, and where specific roles are rotated to prevent power imbalances (Kelemen et al., 2026). Practically it means that a group of around four people work in their circle, which has a specific aim, and update and consult the other circles in monthly assemblies. In Suderbyn there are eight circles: the garden circle, infrastructure circle, core circle, people care circle, food and household circle, ecology circle, outreach circle, and admin circle (Interview 9). Through these circles they manage Suderbyn in a horizontal but structured way.

3 Theoretical Framework

In this thesis, I draw on degrowth theory and the work of Erik Olin Wright (1947-2019). While degrowth sets the stage for the thesis, Wright's framework is the main analytical tool for analyzing the findings. Ecovillages can be seen as an attempt of bringing about a degrowth transition through interstitial transformation (Cattaneo, 2015; Lockyer, 2017; Monticelli, 2018). Since Suderbyn has a strong focus on educational exchange, I draw on degrowth scholarship on education, and specifically Jones' pedagogy of limitations, to analyze their efforts as an interstitial initiative. Wright's concept of real utopias then comes in to understand the challenges that emerge in this process.

3.1 Degrowth

The term degrowth (*décroissance*) was coined in 1972 by André Gorz in France and was strongly influenced by the radical environmentalism of the 1960s and 1970s, specifically by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and Donella Meadows's *Limits to Growth* (Chertkovskaya, 2022; Kallis, 2018). Since then, degrowth has become an international academic-activist research area and, some argue, a social movement (Chertkovskaya, 2022). Degrowth poses three central critiques of economic growth. First and foremost, infinite economic growth is physically impossible on a finite planet (Kallis, 2018). Secondly, economic growth is linked to growth in bio-physical throughput which leads to ecological degradation (Chertkovskaya, 2022). Lastly, economic growth in the "Global North" is based on the appropriation of labor and resources in the "Global South" (Hickel, 2021).

Degrowth envisions an alternative post-capitalist society based on sufficiency, social justice and ecological sustainability (Chertkovskaya, 2022; Helker-Nygren & Katz-Rosene, 2025). At the same time, degrowth remains a "concept in the making," with variety in the field of how such a society ought to look like and how to get there (Zeiss et al., 2025). Still, in the last years degrowth scholars have given increased attention to strategies for change (Schulken et al., 2024). They define strategy as "a thought construct that details how one or several actors intend to bring about systemic change towards a desired end state" (Schulken et al., 2024, p. 18). Degrowth strategies encompass all parts of society, from individual consumption to government policies (Brand, 2024). One important component in degrowth strategies, which ecovillages also engage with, is transforming education (Brand, 2024).

3.2 Degrowth and Education

Education is a form of political intervention in the world by raising the next generations to think and act in specific ways (Díez Gutiérrez & Díaz Nafría, 2019). The current dominant neoliberal ideology of competition, individual responsibility, and even the pursuit of economic growth, is engrained in educational institutions (Díez Gutiérrez & Díaz Nafría, 2019). Students are taught to be "self-optimizing subjects," that aim to maximize individual interests, encouraging competitive relationships between people (Díez Gutiérrez & Díaz Nafría, 2019). Degrowth offers a key set of questions, critiques and proposals that are essential in rethinking education in the context of the climate crisis (Tannock, 2025). Similarly to Tannock (2025), I approach education as a broad social institution and an extended field of practice which reaches beyond the classroom.

Jones (2021) proposes a “pedagogy of limitations” based on degrowth principles as the ultimate educational good. His pedagogy of limitations includes four key aspects, namely simplicity, conviviality, care and the ritual destruction of accumulation (Jones, 2021). The goal of *simplicity* is cultivating an ecological conscientization and habits among students to commit to simple living. This builds on what degrowth scholars call voluntary simplicity, which implies both a conscious reduction in wasteful and resource-intensive consumption, and a re-imagination of what a “good life” entails, by prioritizing non-materialistic sources of meaning (Alexander, 2015). Adopting voluntary simplicity enables us to move away from materialism and consumerism towards conviviality, creativity and cooperation (Rennstam & Paulsson, 2025).

Conviviality in its simplest definition means living well together (Adloff, 2016). For degrowth scholars, conviviality highlights the importance of relationships, as we are at the core social beings who depend on each other (Adloff, 2016). In education, conviviality means modeling interdependence and reciprocity, highlighting both the relationship between people and with the earth (Jones, 2021). This includes reducing power asymmetries between teachers and students. Promoting ethics of *care* counters the idea of competition and encourages students to put other people first. And finally, the *ritual destruction of accumulation* refers to actively countering the encouragement of material accumulation as well as “forms of noetic accumulation, consuming or appropriating knowledge at a never-ending pace” (Jones, 2021, p. 17). According to Jones, these habits of knowledge extraction feed into the capitalist growth paradigm.

Jones’ pedagogy of limitations could form a basis for reshaping the formal education system. Yet, history shows that much of the radical education initially is developed in informal settings outside schools or universities (Tannock, 2025). Many ecovillages have developed such alternative educational approaches and form important learning laboratories for sustainability education pedagogies (Papenfuss & Merritt, 2019). Education is one of the ways in which ecovillages can contribute to interstitial strategies of change.

3.3 Erik Olin Wright’s Strategies of Transformation

In his article *Transforming Capitalism Through Real Utopias*, Erik Olin Wright (2013) coined the term “real utopias” to capture the tension between dreams and practice. The words “real” and “utopia” do not easily go together, as utopia signifies an imaginary and unreachable ideal place (Wright, 2013). By bringing in the “real,” Wright captures the contradictions of developing “utopian” visions of alternatives, including the trade-offs and unintended consequences that may emerge when

experimenting with putting such visions into practice. Real utopias thus hold on to idealist visions while recognizing and being attentive to the complexities and contradictions that are integral in realizing those ideals (Wright, 2013). This can include self-destructive dynamics, difficult dilemmas and normative trade-offs (Wright, 2013). Wright developed a framework to understand the relation between capitalism and its alternatives, as well as to propose strategies for realizing such real utopias.

He identified three strategies for transformation in the anti-capitalist struggle, namely interstitial, symbiotic and ruptural strategies. *Interstitial initiatives* build alternatives in the margins and “cracks” of capitalist society, where they do not pose an immediate threat to dominant powers, yet they resist the harms of capitalism by showing that alternative ways of living and organizing society are possible (Wright, 2013). *Symbiotic strategies* improve conditions within the existing economic system, deepening the institutional forms of social empowerment by collaborating with governments and other actors (Wright, 2013). In doing so, they open up the space and can provide more support for interstitial innovations (Wright, 2013). Although symbiotic transformations take place within capitalism, they are often undesirable for the elites and will thus be resisted, leading to confrontations. *Ruptural strategies* aim to create new emancipatory institutions by breaking with the existing structures and institutions (Wright, 2013).

However, in his later work Wright (2019) excluded ruptural strategies as a means for transformation and instead noted that the most effective strategy is to combine bottom-up interstitial initiatives that resist and escape capitalism with symbiotic state centered strategies of taming and dismantling capitalism (Wright, 2019, p. 56). Wright called this combination “eroding capitalism.” He excluded ruptural strategies, arguing that examples of revolutionary seizures of power did not result in more egalitarian democratic alternatives to capitalism, making it an implausible strategy for overcoming capitalism (p.42). However, degrowth scholar Chertkovskaya (2024) suggests a different conceptualization of ruptural strategies that can occur on a small scale and be temporary. She refers to civil disobedience, such as the blocking of coal mines, as useful ruptural strategies that can empower other forms of actions (Chertkovskaya, 2024).

Wright’s real utopia helps to understand the contradictions and trade-offs that emerge in interstitial initiatives like ecovillages. I will use the concept to analyze how these tensions play out in Suderbyn, which faces specific challenges and trade-offs due to its focus on educational exchange.

4 Methodology

4.1 Case Selection

In order to investigate the tensions that emerge in ecovillages as interstitial initiatives, I conducted case study research. I selected Suderbyn as a case to represent how the newest generation of ecovillages actively maintains engagement in society (Magnusson, 2018). This is illustrated by their collaboration with the EU through the ESC programs and their membership of the Global Ecovillage Network. However, during my fieldwork I discovered that the ESC programs play a much more central role in the ecovillage than I originally thought, making them more of a unique case. Nevertheless, Suderbyn's experiences still bring relevant insights into how the tensions of real utopias can materialize in ecovillages.

Based on the practices listed on their website, Suderbyn seemed to implement many degrowth principles (*Co-Living Principles – Suderbyn*, n.d.). This was another important consideration since there is diversity among ecovillages, with some being more mainstream and others more radical in their rejection of the capitalist ideology (Fonseca et al., 2022; Lennon & Berg, 2022). While the inhabitants of Suderbyn may not consciously work towards a degrowth transition, their aspirations and practices seemed to align with the degrowth vision. This made them a suitable case to investigate ecovillages as interstitial strategy for degrowth.

4.2 Data Gathering

The main method for this research is ethnographic field work, including participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and informal conversations. Participant observation has mostly been used for studying small communities in informal settings and often over a longer period of time (Platt, 2004). I stayed and volunteered at the Suderbyn ecovillage for three weeks (16th of February – 9th of March). Although my stay was relatively short, it was grounded in the same epistemological commitment of ethnographic fieldwork to get detailed descriptions and situated insights into the community life (Wardell, 2025). Staying there as a participant observer was crucial to get a better understanding of Suderbyn's organization. I attended several meetings (a people-care circle meeting, a community meeting, a sharing circle and circle assembly), where I experienced how the wellbeing of the community is looked after and how communal decisions are made. In addition, being there as a volunteer allowed me to learn more about the people and the place as I was working with them. These informal conversations were very valuable as they guided me to challenges that were relevant to the

community at the time. While I was in Suderbyn I took notes of my experience and the topics that came up in informal conversations.

During my stay I conducted twelve semi-structured interviews with the current inhabitants lasting from 36 minutes to an hour (Appendix A). The interviewees were informed of their rights and asked to sign a consent form beforehand (Appendix B). After my fieldwork I held an online interview with one of Suderbyn's co-founders. All the interviews were recorded on a mobile phone and transcribed with the help of the dictate function on Word.

4.3 Data Analysis

I applied a thematic analysis for analyzing the interviews and used the software NVivo for coding them. In order to identify themes, I used an abductive approach which combines deductive and inductive reasoning (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). While I conducted the interviews with degrowth and Wright's transformation theory in mind, the specific themes I observed were not heavily informed by theory. For example, Wright's notion of real utopias provided an overarching category, but the trade-offs I identified came purely from the empirical data.

As a first step, I operationalized my research questions into four broad categories that would help guide my initial round of coding (RQ1: Contribution to change, RQ2: Tensions real utopias, RQ3: Navigating tensions and Other findings). I used both descriptive and interpretive codes and coded almost every line of the interviews. After my second round of coding, I ended up with five overarching codes for RQ1, nine for RQ2 and three for RQ3 (Appendix C). I did a final reorganization of the codes and made mind-maps to identify the themes and relations between them. I also coded my fieldwork notes, which I had written down in a physical notebook, deductively looking for the themes I had identified based on my interviews, since they form the main dataset of this research.

4.4 Reflections and Limitations

Conducting ethnographic fieldwork comes with a lot of ethical considerations. As Spradley (1980) states: "Ethnography research always pries into the lives of informants" (p. 22). During my stay in Suderbyn, I was very aware that I was invited into people's home and I tried to be mindful of the privacy of the inhabitants. In addition, by being both an observer and participant, I adopted a dual role as researcher and experienced how the lines between the two can become blurry (Platt, 2004). Although

everyone at Suderbyn was aware that I was there as a researcher, the inhabitants could have forgotten at times that their interactions with me might be used as data, especially when working together or during social events. I tried to address this by drawing almost exclusively on data from the interviews in my findings. Still, the participatory observations and informal conversations strongly influenced my interview questions. In order to ensure the privacy of the inhabitants, the data I gathered during my stay was processed carefully and the interviews made as anonymous as possible. This was done in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

It is important to note that I do not claim neutrality as a researcher. As someone who is very concerned by the current state of the world, I am naturally sympathetic to the ecovillage movement and other attempts at constructing alternatives. In addition, by adopting a degrowth lens, this thesis is undeniably political. Then again, all research is (Harding, 1992). Moreover, being sympathetic is not the same as being uncritical. I tried to present Suderbyn, both its efforts and challenges, as fairly as possible. Within sustainability science there is debate whether scientists should act solely as detached observers and presenters of facts, or whether their knowledge comes with a moral obligation to act (Ampe et al., 2024). With this work, I hope to join other scholars who acknowledge the normative dimension of research and embrace the dual role of researcher/activist, with the aim of contributing to a better world (Ampe et al., 2024; Gardner & Wordley, 2019).

5 Findings and Discussion

In the following section, I present how the tensions of real utopias play out in Suderbyn. More specifically, I show how Suderbyn's openness to visitors and efforts to educate others create other challenges for the community. I begin with a discussion on Suderbyn's educational efforts and how this can foster a degrowth mindset. After that, I discuss trade-offs that emerge because of these efforts. In the final section, I reflect on how the inhabitants navigate these tensions and conclude with some final thoughts.

5.1 Spreading the Degrowth Mindset

5.1.1 *Inviting in the world*

Before zooming in on Suderbyn's educational efforts, it is helpful to briefly present their general approach to "outside" engagement. Magnussen (2018), who analyzed the evolvement of the ecovillage movement in Sweden, identified Suderbyn as a prominent example of how the 'fourth generation' of ecovillages puts more emphasis on outreach and networking. However, I found Suderbyn's current approach to engagement to be more about "inviting in" the world, rather than "reaching out," making Suderbyn a place of many comings and goings. This movement of people frequently came up in the interviews as a way in which Suderbyn contributes to encouraging wider societal change, by enabling many people to experience an alternative way of living:

We want to be this place.. we want to show something to the world, how you can live more closer to nature and environmental and also to live together.. close together that, at least in Sweden, not many people do. It's also to show another lifestyle and this with community, so it's good that people come and visit. (Interview 13)

As this quote illustrates there is a combined focus on ecological and social wellbeing in Suderbyn, which is central to the degrowth vision (Chertkovskaya, 2022). By being an open and accessible space Suderbyn can open people's eyes to other ways of living (Interview 5). For many of the visitors and volunteers, Suderbyn is their first experience with an eco-community (Interview 2,8,9,12). One interviewee reflected on how few ecovillages are as open as Suderbyn:

I think places like Suderbyn that are open and allow for so many people to pass through are really important and they're lacking and they're needed. I think they offer something that a place like the ecovillage I lived in before can't. (Interview 2)

Other studies have similarly shown that ecovillages can risk becoming quite isolated from society (Dias et al., 2017; Meijering et al., 2007). By inviting in the world, Suderbyn manages to maintain some form of engagement and can spread their way of life through the people that pass through. Many interviewees described this ripple effect as a meaningful way to contribute to change and mentioned that living in Suderbyn has had a big impact on them:

I feel like Suderbyn completely changed me, like it's like so deep in me now, that I'm also by myself like spreading it a bit like here and there, with my friend, my family or whatever. (Interview 10)

While most of the interviewees were certain that Suderbyn contributes to positive changes in society, three people said that it is quite a small impact, especially on a local level (Interview 4,9,11). One of them noted that perhaps the value of Suderbyn lies more in its symbolic meaning by showing that there are alternative ways to organize society. Through its openness, Suderbyn tries to educate others about these possibilities.

5.1.2 Educational exchange

Since its establishment, there has been a big focus on education in Suderbyn. The co-founders wanted it to be a place where young people could come and learn about sustainable living (Interview 13). Already in the first year, they organized a permaculture design course (Interview 13). Later, they created the NGO Relearn to facilitate educational projects. Suderbyn is the headquarters of Relearn, but they also organize projects outside of Suderbyn (Interview 1). The two biggest educational projects that take place in Suderbyn are the volunteering programs through the ESC: Green Skills (1 year) and ReGreen (1 month). During these programs, the volunteers learn about permaculture and sustainable building.

Aside from learning practical skills in these domains, the volunteers also adopt the alternative lifestyle of Suderbyn. The inhabitants practice voluntary simplicity and consciously minimize wasteful and resource-intensive consumption (*Co-Living Principles – Suderbyn*, n.d.). They share utilities and appliances, eat local, organic and seasonal vegan food, reuse and recycle, and work with traditional knowledge and low-tech solutions (*Co-Living Principles – Suderbyn*, n.d.). In this way the inhabitants and volunteers cultivate an ecological conscientization and commit to living more simply, which is a central part of Jones' educational good. Jones (2021) further noted that much of education occurs through experience. In Suderbyn, learning is not confined to the coordinated volunteer work, but part of the everyday life in the ecovillage.

Aside from Suderbyn's approach of "learning by doing," they also see it as "mutual learning," where there is no clear delineation between the teacher and the student:

.. we are opening to teach and to learn.. and everyone, you know the people that teach something, they can learn about other things, so.. It's really like a circle, at least like.. I would say like all the ESCs, like all of us that have been here, we have learned so much.. so.. so much. But I think we have also, like you know, shared our knowledge as well with the people, and there was this space to do that. (Interview 5)

In line with this circular knowledge sharing, the Green Skills volunteers are involved in organizing the ReGreen program in the summer by showing the new volunteers how to use the building and garden tools (Interview 3,4,5,7). The mutual learning approach in Suderbyn is an example of conviviality in education. Through shared learning, they encourage reciprocity between people and reduce the power asymmetries between teachers and students (Jones, 2021).

When I asked the recently “graduated” ESC volunteers what they had learned in Suderbyn, many noted that the experience greatly impacted their personal development and social awareness (Interview 4,7,10,11,12). Some inhabitants also referred to practical skills that they picked up in Suderbyn (Interview 4,10,11). Others reflected on the importance of community:

I think the most valuable thing that I've learned in Suderbyn really is about community. It's not necessarily about growing vegetables, although of course I mean like that's sick, and I'm so glad I know how to do that. But about how important kind of other people, and centering other people, as opposed to.. I don't know, like a job or something, is.. like how that feels as a human, and how good that feels. (Interview 8)

The importance of centering other people ties back to the concept of voluntary simplicity, as a part of re-imagining what a “good life” entails, by prioritizing people over things (Alexander, 2015). Community living is an important aspect of Suderbyn’s educational programs. The volunteers not only learn how to live more sustainably, but also how to live well together.

Conviviality is thus a central part in Suderbyn’s educational exchange. This counters the drive for competition that is common in more conventional education, and encourages ethics of care (Jones, 2021). Moreover, in Suderbyn they value learning over performance, which contradicts the strong emphasis on accomplishments and quantitative outputs in formal education (Jones, 2021). One inhabitant mentioned that they tried to grow mushrooms and didn’t succeed, but that they didn’t mind since in Suderbyn, there is the room to experiment and no shame in failing (Interview 3). Not being afraid to make mistakes and being open to trying new things are important components in degrowth-oriented education (Brand, 2024). Another interviewee shared that their self-worth used to be heavily influenced by their academic achievements before coming to Suderbyn:

I think in Suderbyn I really learned to let go of this and to .. not see my worth as how intelligent I am, or how much I know. And instead how, I think instead I find it in how much I can care for people, or for the earth, for a bird I see.. or how much empathy I hold maybe. (Interview 2)

In Suderbyn the volunteers and visitors are taught the importance of care for both people and the planet. The inhabitants thus, albeit unknowingly, apply Jones' principles of simplicity, conviviality and care in their educational efforts. Jones' ritual destruction of accumulation, where behaviors of accumulating resources and knowledge are discouraged, also came up. The same interviewee noted how Suderbyn changed their relation to knowledge acquisition:

And I have also started asking questions that I don't answer, like finding, coming to peace with .. yeah not wanting to know, but also being okay with not knowing. Wondering I guess, being curious, but not .. yeah, but for the sake of being curious and not for the sake of knowing.
(Interview 2)

This quote illustrates what an alternative to noetic accumulation can look like, by countering the prevalent idea in academia that knowledge should be endlessly pursued, and instead encouraging curiosity over appropriation (Jones, 2021).

Aside from the two volunteer programs, Suderbyn hosted a project about eco-anxiety, a permaculture design course, a training called Reforage about surviving in nature, and a linen workshop (Interview 1,2,3,4). In addition, Suderbyn receives visits from local schools and universities (Interview 4,13). Robert and Ingrid even used to give lectures at the University in Visby (Interview 13). Over the years, Suderbyn has received many researchers who were, like myself, curious to learn more about ecovillages (Interview 9,13). Through these events and connections, Suderbyn can share their educational approach with others. Perhaps one day it can be scaled out into more formal educational settings. This shift can start small, and might already be happening as one of the current inhabitants is a teacher and shared that they adopt learning experiences from Suderbyn in their classes (Interview 6).

By including principles of simplicity, conviviality, care and the ritual destruction of accumulation in their educational approach, Suderbyn implements Jones' pedagogy of limitations. Their efforts could be valuable for inspiring different approaches to education elsewhere, as well as spreading the degrowth mindset through those who pass through the ecovillage. However, Suderbyn's openness and educational efforts also bring some challenges with them.

5.2 Tensions of Real Utopias

5.2.1 Home or learning center?

Through its openness for visitors and educational programs Suderbyn manages to maintain connections with the “world outside.” But it’s not always easy to share your home. The dual role of Suderbyn as both a home and an educational center was a common theme that came up during the interviews:

But when I was already living here seven months and visitors came in and sort of treated my home as a playground I .. it didn't feel disrespectful, but I felt a bit of a disconnect, because.. yeah, there's some sort of calmness to feeling like this is your home.. and there I think.. is a bit of a clash sometimes, that it's difficult to embrace, that this is an educational space that teaches people this way of life, while also being your home where you just want to have people around you that you feel comfortable with, that has to feel safe. (Interview 7)

Although it can be challenging, many inhabitants expressed that they value the educational focus of Suderbyn and that it should remain open for visitors (Interview 1,2,3,6,8,9). They noted that visitors bring new ideas with them and that their enthusiasm reminds the inhabitants of how special the place is (Interview 2,6,12). Other inhabitants struggle more with the continuous flow of visitors as it can be quite tiring and socially draining (Interview 4,5,10,12). During busy periods, they became less engaged and retreated more to their rooms:

Some of us did really, really .. we became like, kind of, like super remote. Like we show up for work and for those things we have to and then everybody's .. [gesturing people spreading out] like trying to run away in their cave or something. (Interview 4)

The inhabitants that enjoy receiving visitors are aware that not everyone has the same energy levels to be available for visitors (Interview 1,2,7). While some take on more responsibilities than others, there is an understanding and acceptance of people’s different capacities:

I think everybody tries within their capacity to do what they can, yeah. And it just happens that some people have way more capacity than others, which is fine. (Interview 7)

Suderbyn’s focus on educational exchange is made possible by the people who live there. As one interviewee described, it is a delicate balance to maintain an open space, while also taking care of the wellbeing of the inhabitants:

I think it's important that Suderbyn keeps holding workshops and trainings and.. allows for visitors to come. But at the same time, there needs to be a Suderbyn to do this. The people that are here need to be happy and feel safe, and they need to have energy to hold these spaces and these people coming. So, it's .. yeah, I am sure that there is a balance that can be found, but I think if we tip too much to one side, were going to lose the other. If too many visitors are going to come, the permanent members here, the long term residents, they are not going to thrive and they cannot hold this space. (Interview 2)

The tension around Suderbyn's dual role as a home and learning center is one example of the dilemmas and trade-offs that emerge in real utopias (Wright, 2013). The long-term residents need to have the capacity to run the ecovillage for others to be able to experience it. This can be quite a challenge, especially since they are so few.

5.2.2 Not a place to settle

Suderbyn's focus on educational exchange has an impact on the stability of the place. The majority of inhabitants expressed that the openness of Suderbyn makes it more difficult for people to live there long term (Interview 3,4,5,6,7,10,11,13). Even the people who experience the visitors positively, note that they do not see themselves staying in Suderbyn for a very long time (Interview 3,6). Many brought up that Suderbyn is not a place where you settle down:

I think that's the main reason, because it's not meant to be a place where you .. it's not meant to be a home really.. Like it is a bit, but it's more like.. like not school, but you know a training ground kind of, like for people to have a first idea of what it is to live like this and get some firsthand knowledge and then, then I guess move along and grow even further into their interests and those things. But I don't think this place is meant to be like.. the place where you're gonna settle, you know. (Interview 4)

However, the educational focus is not the only reason why few people decide to stay in Suderbyn. The co-founder explained that the initial vision for Suderbyn was for it to be both a stable place where families could stay and to have room for volunteers (Interview 13). They wanted to build small ecofriendly houses on the property, but then the military base was re-activated and their building permits were rejected (interview 6,13). Today Suderbyn still has one main house with a kitchen and living room that everyone makes use of. Therefore, it would not be possible to have many more long-term inhabitants without reducing the number of volunteers and visitors. This illustrates how

ecovillages are embedded within a larger system and limited by external factors (Morris, 2022). In addition, it is an example of how the government can play a role in encouraging or restraining initiatives like Suderbyn. While Suderbyn's location next to the military base makes it an exceptional case, the GEN had similarly called for the reform of land laws to facilitate the development of ecovillages indicating that it is a common struggle for ecovillages (Braga, 2025). This further highlights how symbiotic strategies are needed to support interstitial initiatives like ecovillages.

The centrality of the ESC programs has impacted the structure of Suderbyn through the frequent turnover of inhabitants, with eight to ten new people coming and going every year. Since Suderbyn has few long-term residents, the people who volunteer there have a big impact on the social dynamics of the place. This can deter people from staying longer, as every year can be a very different experience (Interview 4). The lack of long-term residents puts pressure on the few people that do decide to stay and keep everything running. For the last four years there were four long-term residents that took care of the place and ran the volunteer programs (Interview 1). While many were employed to do so (through the NGO Relearn), it still is a lot of responsibility to take on:

.. at times it was really.. really high pressure, I would say. Because, yeah, it was just so much to take care of you know, and we were five.. most of the times four people, you know, just trying to like hold everything. And you could really feel that like, wow there's you know, like.. if you want to have a healthy functioning community, you need so many different aspects.. (Interview 9)

The fact that Suderbyn has such a small permanent crew is not only challenging for them but can also affect the stability of the place. Suderbyn consists of multiple entities, the foundation which owns the land, the cooperative which takes care of the rent and food, Relearn which takes care of the educational side, and the community itself. One of the inhabitants, who has lived in Suderbyn for over six years, shared how they were the only one involved in all these different entities and how this is not good for the resilience of the place:

So I am also part of the board, and I am part of Relearn council, so that's a bit.., and member of the community of course. So I am a bit everywhere, which is not nice. It's not a personal statement. It's like a general statement. It should not be that way. It's not very resilient, and also, even if I try to navigate them as much as possible, there can be conflict of interests rising. [...] It's not very good, it's not very healthy. It's not a sign of health. It is just that we are so few. (Interview 1)

As this quote shows, the inhabitants acknowledge the challenges that Suderbyn experiences because of its structure. This recognition is an important element of real utopias, as they need to be attentive to their inherent contradictions in order to move forward (Wright, 2013). Indeed, the inhabitants are actively trying to adapt to such challenges, as I will discuss in more detail later.

5.2.3 Maintenance or activism?

Suderbyn's small permanent crew has had their hands full with the maintenance of the place (Interview 1,9). This, together with the frequent turnover of inhabitants, limits other forms of societal engagement, such as political activism and active participation in networks. The inhabitants in Suderbyn are encouraged to get involved in local democratic processes, political issues and civic movements (Suderbyn, n.d.). Suderbyn was involved in the Almedalen (political) week in Visby for many years, and the inhabitants have taken part in various protests, ranging from pride demonstrations to singing for the protection of local water (Interview 6,13). During my stay, a former "Suderbynian," came by for a visit and told me that they used to join Extinction Rebellion's highway blockades in Stockholm (personal communication, March 6, 2026). Through such civil disobedience actions, the inhabitants used to engage in ruptural strategies, as defined by Chertkovskaya (2024). In addition, the inhabitants recently organized a "farmers for Palestine" community dinner to raise money for a food sovereignty project in Gaza (Suderbyn Ecovillage, 2025). However, some of the interviewees pointed out that currently Suderbyn is not as engaged as it used to be:

I think that it was more these politically oriented people that used to live in Suderbyn, and I feel that nowadays we have less of them, which is fine, you know, it's just.. it's a phase. Maybe it will change again. (Interview 9)

This illustrates how Suderbyn's political engagement is dependent on the people who live there, which changes every year. Some interviewees also attributed the fact that Suderbyn used to be more politically active to the presence of the co-founder Robert, who was a politician and more involved in various organizations (Interview 9,11). When Robert still lived in Suderbyn there was also closer cooperation with the GEN, as he became involved in the creation of the regional Baltic Ecovillage Network (BEN) in 2011, and was elected as the President of GEN Europe in 2015 ("Robert Hall," n.d.). Moreover, Robert assisted in the launch of the ECOLISE network of European Community-Led Sustainable Initiatives in 2014, where the GEN, together with the transition and permaculture movements, created a common political platform at the European level (Henfrey & Ford, 2018; "Robert Hall," n.d.).

The GEN actively works with existing institutions such as the EU and the UN. While some scholars argue that such partnerships impede structural transformation, it is likely that some form of coordination with existing international institutions is needed for ecovillages to influence society (Dias et al., 2017). Wright would have agreed, as his symbiotic transformation involves strategies that improve conditions within the existing economic system. Symbiotic strategies work through institutional forms and can open up the space for interstitial initiatives (Wright, 2013). Through the GEN, ecovillages thus manage to implement both interstitial and symbiotic strategies.

However, currently the role of the GEN seems to be less prominent in Suderbyn. The inhabitants sometimes go to the annual meetings if it is accessible by green travel (Interview 9). Meijering (2012) similarly found that in the Danish ecovillage Toustrup Mark the inhabitants' political engagement and involvement in environmental movements decreased over time. In Suderbyn this can partly be explained by the limited time and energy of the permanent inhabitants. One of the interviewees noted that at some point the community decided to prioritize maintenance over political engagement:

I mean it's also geographically a bit difficult, because there's not so many people.. not so much political activism happening on Gotland, I think. But it has been more active in the past, I know, and then there was.. the community was also once like half of them wanted to be like, really like, an activism force, and the other half was like "no, but the house is falling apart, we have to like take care of these things first.." (Interview 12)

This is another example of how the inhabitants need to navigate the normative trade-offs of real utopias, and how they consciously decided to prioritize maintenance over other efforts. This is further exemplified in Suderbyn's winding road towards self-sufficiency.

5.2.4 Slow progress toward self-sufficiency

Suderbyn's structure with the constant movement of people can make it challenging to achieve other objectives, such as becoming more self-sufficient. On Suderbyn's website they state that they "aim to live close to nature and achieve a more sustainable lifestyle, striving for self-sufficiency in food production and renewable energy.." (*Ecovillage – Suderbyn*, n.d.). This, however, can be difficult to combine with Suderbyn's efforts to educate others:

.. it's harder to really go towards self-sufficiency, because like Suderbyn became as much a learning center as it is an ecovillage, which is nice. It's really good to be a learning center, but it can be also counterproductive regarding some objectives of Suderbyn. When you want to

be self-sufficient you need to have people that have a lot of skills, that are committed long term, that go in the same direction and that work hard, and stuff. (Interview 1)

While the inhabitants are actively working towards self-sufficiency in food production through permaculture practices, there is room for improvement when it comes to energy as the place is still connected to the grid (Interview 3,10). Fortunately, Sweden is quite progressive in terms of renewable energy, as only 27% of the Swedish energy supply comes from fossil fuels (Ritchie & Rosado, 2025). However, most ecovillages still pursue some degree of energy self-sufficiency in order to be more resilient to global economic crises and less dependent on infrastructure networks that are linked to unsustainable practices (Skrzypczyński, 2021). The reduction and relocalization of energy is also an important component in the degrowth transition (Zeiss et al., 2025). In Suderbyn this, however, remains a work in progress. They had experimented with a biogas and aeroponics project for years while the co-founders still lived there (picture 2) (Interview 9,11). However, they never managed to operationalize it and after the co-founder left, the community decided to discontinue the project and focus on more essential tasks (Interview 9,11). Another inhabitant similarly emphasized the need to prioritize maintenance over improvements:

Yeah, we have so much to do like the.. the main house could collapse any moment, so like we need to fix this before thinking about energy, you know. [...] if you do the energy, put solar panels everywhere, but in the meantime your main house is collapsing.. bah at the end, all the effort you put and the money and.. it's going to be for nothing.. (Interview 10)



Picture 2. The biogas production container and aeroponic towers still remain in the dome at Suderbyn (own photograph).

Interviewees also described that they lacked the people, knowledge and capacities to improve their self-sufficiency in energy even though the infrastructure is there (they have uninstalled wind turbines and solar panels) (Interview 3,9,10,11). The relatively short stay of most inhabitants is another recurring issue:

..there's not many people who for sure can say that they would be here in like two or three or five years, you know, or ten years even. Yeah, and then like also if.. self-sufficiency, for example, if we were to make an electricity grid, that would be super nice, but then like what if the person that did it like moved away, and then the knowledge kind of gets lost also a little bit. (Interview 12)

The centrality of the ESC programs in Suderbyn makes it a difficult place to settle, leading to an absence of long-term inhabitants that have the knowledge to operate complex systems, such as off-grid energy. It also affects the economic self-sufficiency of the place, as Suderbyn is financially dependent on EU funding.

5.2.5 Different dependencies

The ESC programs are essential to the existence of Suderbyn as it is today (Interview 1). The money allows people to work full time as coordinators of the ESC program and pays for the food and rooms of the volunteers. If the funding were to stop, Suderbyn would change completely:

..if we don't have this money from the European Union, could it work? No, absolutely not. It's absolutely vital right now. If we lose our label as a hosting organization of ESC [...] it's a catastrophe for Suderbyn. We would need to fire all the employees, they are paid by this money. Yeah, it would be a completely different model. Suderbyn would maybe survive, but it would need to reshape drastically. (Interview 1)

At the same time, the ESC programs have been running for sixteen years now and Suderbyn has a good reputation with the national agencies (Interview 1). The real uncertainty lies more in the amount of money that Suderbyn receives as they have to apply for it each year and the amount always differs (Interview 1). This decision is largely informed by the report that Suderbyn submits after every ESC program which puts a lot of pressure on the education coordinator who writes it (Interview 1,8). The dependency on EU funding can be seen as an example of self-destructive dynamics of real utopias (Wright, 2013), since it makes Suderbyn vulnerable to external forces and creates an uncertain future. For Wright, this relates to an important question of the viability of real utopias: whether the

unintended consequences and self-destructive dynamics that can emerge make the alternative in question unsustainable.² In Suderbyn's case, many inhabitants agreed that the ecovillage should move towards a different model to become more resilient (Interview 2,3,5,8,9).

However, not everyone sees the dependency as an issue. Some inhabitants have faith that if the funding stops they will figure out another system (Interview 4,6,13), others think it is important to start looking for alternative income streams already (Interview 2,3,5,9). Two inhabitants also reflected on the moral implications of receiving funding from the EU. One of them critically stated:

.. it's not like my hands are clean and I'm saintly because I live in an ecovillage, like this ecovillage is dependent on.. on, you know, money that has been raised by closing European borders.. (Interview 8)

The interviewee touches upon a core issue in interstitial initiatives, namely that they inevitably interact with the capitalist context: the state (or in this case the EU) and the market (Monticelli, 2018). Other studies have similarly discussed how ecovillages both resist and perpetuate the broader social and economic systems in which they are entangled (Grubbs, 2025; Morris, 2022; Mychajluk, 2024). This is especially apparent in the Scottish ecovillage Findhorn, which started out as a small spiritual community but evolved into a "retirement village for rich people" consisting of "mostly privately-owned expensive 'eco' houses with green technology" (Grubbs, 2025, p. 1). Even though eco-houses and green technology seek to mitigate the environmental destruction of capitalism, they maintain capitalism's social and financial exclusion (Grubbs, 2025).

Another example is the paid workshops and events that many ecovillages host (Dias et al., 2017). Although the monetization of their knowledge does not reduce the educational value, it does make it less accessible. While Suderbyn partly avoids this as the EU funding allows them to offer education for free, they in turn are collaborating more closely with capitalist institutions (Johnston & Regan, 2018). However, these entanglements are part of interstitial strategies for transformation. As Monticelli (2018) reflects: "Isn't it exactly through the interaction with the capitalist context that prefigurative movements are going to erode it?" (p. 513). Another inhabitant used similar reasoning to justify receiving funds from the EU:

² The use of the term unsustainable by Wright here is meant in a literal sense, namely that the alternative cannot be sustained over long periods of time.

..so like they gave us a lot of money, but at least this money is not given to all those other stuff in the European Union that is not really useful, you know [...] And I think it's nice.. it's nice to yeah, prevent this money to go in the capitalistic world or whatever.. (Interview 10)

By using the EU money for non-profit ends, namely teaching people about ecological and social sustainability, Suderbyn operates in the modern market economy without adopting all its practices (Price et al., 2020). As part of living in a real utopia, inhabitants of ecovillages learn to navigate trade-offs by taking on some aspects of the mainstream economy in exchange for “the greater good” (Mychajluk, 2024). In Suderbyn’s case this entails that the EU funds allow them to be a place of learning and experimentation.

Thanks to the funding, Suderbyn is not financially dependent on the work they do in the ecovillage. This gives the inhabitants a lot of freedom as it allows them to try out different projects without the pressure to succeed (Interview 2,5). It also frees up time to spend on the wellbeing of the community:

I think this EU money is making it so that we can have a four hour work day, at least coordinated work day, and that we can just be busy with having meetings with each other, and talking about how to make this space like more comfortable for people. (Interview 7)

If Suderbyn would start to rely on other activities for income streams, such as selling vegetables or opening up a cafe as some suggested (Interview 2, 3, 5, 7, 9), then it would be tricky to maintain the relaxed atmosphere and experimental nature of the place:

I mean the second we start to financially depend on.. what we do, then our time becomes money, and then we are kind of back at where we wanted to have a break from. (Interview 2)

In this sense, Suderbyn’s ‘scaling out’ potential is limited as their approach to work could not easily be adopted without external support. This exemplifies how the efforts of interstitial initiatives need to be combined with symbiotic strategies that involve the state in order to truly erode capitalism (Wright, 2019). One policy that degrowth scholars propose is the implementation of an Universal Basic Income (UBI), which entails the regular provision of a fixed, age-dependent amount of money that covers people’s basic needs (Dengler et al., 2024; Paulson, 2024).³ One inhabitant reflected on how living in Suderbyn as an ESC resembles the idea of an UBI and how Suderbyn shows that having this security does not make people less inclined to work (Interview 5). Policies like an UBI would support interstitial

³ For discussions on how an UBI could be financed see the book *Financing Basic Income. A Dual Income Proposal* by Pereira (2023).

initiatives like Suderbyn, enabling them to educate others without the financial uncertainties that the EU funding currently brings.

Suderbyn's dependency on EU funds is another normative trade-off where the inhabitants prioritize educational exchange and strong community, despite the financial uncertainties it brings. As I will now present, it is precisely through Suderbyn's strong community that the inhabitants navigate all the contradictions of real utopias.

5.3 Navigating Tensions through Community

By being an open place and learning center Suderbyn spreads the degrowth mindset through the people that come there. At the same time, it impacts the stability of the place and can be challenging for the inhabitants. So how do they navigate it all? The answer seems to lie in the social organization and decision making processes of the community.

Suderbyn has a deep participatory and horizontal governance structure drawing on sociocracy (*Co-Living Principles – Suderbyn*, n.d.). Aside from the working circles, Suderbyn holds community meetings where decisions are made and sharing circles where inhabitants can share personal challenges and support each other. The communal decisions are based on consent, meaning that everyone has to consent to a proposal for it to be implemented. In reality people rarely veto decisions, as it can feel a bit daunting to do so (Interview 4,5,12). Instead, they have a third option by saying “yes, but I have concerns” (Interview 4). This gives the inhabitants a safe way to express themselves and opens up the conversation for potential compromises (Interview 4,5). Before voting on a decision, they do a round of questions and comments:

And also, if we do this round of opinions, and then you already know “okay, some people are really not okay,” and then I also see that people that make themselves.. they would be fine with having a visitor, they also have the concern because they know some other people will be affected. So I think that works quite well. (Interview 12)

Others similarly expressed that when people voice their opinions, they find it equally important that the other people feel comfortable (Interview 5,7). The different rounds also give everyone the opportunity to speak without having to claim the space to do so (Interview 7). These systems ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in the decision-making process, which is crucial for the bottom-up transition that degrowth scholars propose (Schulken et al., 2024). At the same time, the decisions made in the community need to align with Suderbyn's original vision as noted in its

statutes (Appendix D) (Interview 6,13). This ensures that despite the frequent turnover of inhabitants, Suderbyn does not stray away from its original purpose.

Suderbyn's governance structure allows for a lot of flexibility, as decisions can be revised and adapted to meet the needs of the current inhabitants. During my stay the topic of visitors was discussed and some alternatives proposed, such as a closed season or breaks in between visitors. Through continuous dialogue the community can keep Suderbyn and its educational programs running while taking care of the wellbeing of the inhabitants. It is of course not always a straightforward process and a continuous learning curve. One interviewee also reflected on whether Suderbyn can be a place where anyone can live and have their needs met, or if Suderbyn's mission to educate others is more important:

Can Suderbyn meet all needs that might occur here? And when should Suderbyn say that the vision is more important than this need that someone comes with. So if someone has a need for the stability, when should Suderbyn step in and say "no, we need Suderbyn to be open, we cannot meet this need because then Suderbyn is going to fundamentally change." (Interview 2)

While it may be an unresolved question, so far it has not come to this as even the inhabitants that struggle with Suderbyn's openness feel heard and supported by the community (Interview 4,5,10). The open and respectful communication, as well as the flexibility to make changes all contribute to a safe atmosphere.

The flexibility also enables Suderbyn to respond to challenges more effectively. Since Suderbyn struggled to attract long-term residents, they decided to change the rent system last year to make it more affordable. Before, everyone paid the same amount of rent per room category, now people pay less rent depending on the hours they work in Suderbyn (40 hours = zero rent). Anything can be counted as work as long as it benefits five or more inhabitants in Suderbyn (Interview 2). This year almost all of the ESCs decided to stay longer and some mentioned that the new rent system played a role in this decision (Interview 3,4,7). Having a larger permanent crew would help with some of the other challenges, such as the lack of stability and the slow progress towards self-sufficiency.

The sociocracy system makes everyone feel involved, even if they only stay in Suderbyn for a little while. When I attended the community meeting I also got the opportunity to express my opinions. Although it may be more symbolic for people who stay as briefly as I did, it does foster a sense of inclusivity and makes everyone feel like a part of the community. Suderbyn also demonstrates that openness to other people does not make the community less close. It might even have the opposite

effect, as many interviewees shared that Suderbyn is the most closeknit community they have ever experienced:

I have seen other communities.. maybe nothing on the scale of Suderbyn.. I mean it's quite unique.. I don't think there are many places like that. In Sweden maybe it's the only one, who lives like this lifestyle. [...] I think it's the most tight community ever, I've been into. (Interview 11)

Through their strong community, open communication, flexibility and participatory decision-making processes, the inhabitants of Suderbyn navigate the contradictions inherent in real utopias.

5.4 Final Reflections

By zooming in on how the tensions of real utopias play out in a specific case study, I have attempted to sketch a detailed picture of what they can look like in practice. In Suderbyn these tensions seem to be centered around their educational efforts. While most ecovillages engage in educational activities (Dias et al., 2017), the tensions they experience may take different forms. The central role of the ESC programs, and the accompanied dependency on EU funding, make Suderbyn quite unique as it is not common for ecovillages to be dependent on *one* external income stream (Rautan et al., 2026). Still, Suderbyn's struggles as interstitial initiative, such as balancing different objectives and navigating normative trade-offs are relevant for all ecovillages (Morris, 2022; Mychajluk, 2024; Price et al., 2020).

When it comes to the "eroding potential" of ecovillages, Suderbyn shows that the inherent contradictions limit ecovillages' role in facilitating a degrowth transition. Although Suderbyn's strong community life and approach to education embody degrowth principles that could potentially be scaled out, both are currently dependent on EU funding. This shows how, as Wright similarly noted, a combination of interstitial and symbiotic strategies is needed in order to "erode" capitalism.

The inhabitants of Suderbyn are aware of the ecovillage's limitations. When I was conducting the interviews, I was surprised at how open and honest the inhabitants reflected on the challenges they experienced. In Suderbyn they do not shy away from the trade-offs that emerge in real utopias. Instead, they brave them together as a community and maneuver them as best they can. Here I think lies a crucial lesson: building alternatives is a complex process that comes with many dilemmas and acknowledging these contradictions is crucial for moving forward. Ecovillages are by no means perfect models. As Pickerill (2025) stated: "While many eco-communities attempt to transform all elements of their daily lives [...] these processes are always incomplete, in-the-making, unfinished and messy" (p.

1). Interstitial initiatives therefore do not present a straightforward path to change, but this does not mean that they should be dismissed either. As long as their limitations are acknowledged, they can be part of a plurality of degrowth strategies (Schulken et al., 2024).

6 Conclusion

We live in a world full of contradictions and life in Suderbyn is no exception. In this thesis I analyzed the Suderbyn ecovillage as an enactment of a real utopia to explore how the tensions inherent in such interstitial initiatives impact their potential as a strategy for a transition towards a degrowth society.

Degrowth scholars envision an alternative post-capitalist society centered around ecological sustainability and social equity. One way to get there is by building on existing prefigurative initiatives. Wright called this an interstitial strategy of transformation and noted that initiatives that put ‘utopian’ visions into practice are inherently contradictory. I found this to be true for Suderbyn.

Suderbyn’s educational efforts align with degrowth, as they implement practices of simplicity, conviviality, care and the ritual destruction of accumulation. Through their openness to visitors and their approach to education they can make valuable contributions to a degrowth transition. At the same time these efforts bring several challenges with them. Suderbyn’s dual role as both a home and educational center can be demanding for the residents and the frequent turnover of inhabitants through the one-year ESC program makes it a difficult place to live long term. As a result, they have a small permanent crew which impacts the stability of the place. The permanent inhabitants have their hands full with the maintenance of the ecovillage and the volunteer programs, leaving little time for other forms of societal engagement, nor for improvements of the place. This is illustrated by their slow progress towards self-sufficiency in energy. The centrality of the ESC programs in Suderbyn also impacts their financial self-sufficiency as it has made them dependent on EU funding.

The inhabitants acknowledge these trade-offs and navigate them through their strong community, continuous dialogue, inclusive decision-making and flexibility. Suderbyn demonstrates the importance of acknowledging one’s challenges in order to move forward. At the same time, Suderbyn shows that the inherent tensions limit ecovillages’ potential for facilitating a degrowth transition and that they need to be combined with symbiotic strategies in order to “erode” capitalism. Further research could look into how collaboration with governments and local municipalities can support ecovillages and their efforts to spread the degrowth mindset in society.

Interstitial initiatives are complex, contradictory and incomplete models of an alternative society. Yet, they remain important as they build alternatives in the 'cracks' of capitalism. In the end, as Buckminster Fuller noted, you change something by building a new model that makes the existing model obsolete. Real utopias attempt to do just that.

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8 Appendix

A) Interview guide

Note: I used the questions below as possible entry points for conversation rather than as a strict check list to follow. When I started my fieldwork, I had not yet decided to solely focus on Suderbyn's educational efforts and therefore other types of societal engagement were addressed in the interviews as well.

How long have you lived/ volunteered in Suderbyn?

How did you find out about it?

Why did you decide to move here?

In what ways do you think that Suderbyn contributes to fostering wider societal change?

Do you think there are any downsides to these efforts?

Have you been involved in any of the NGO Relearn activities or other forms of knowledge sharing with visitors and short-term volunteers? Can you tell me about your experiences in this involvement?

Have there been any other events or collaborative projects during your stay?

Did you attend any events affiliated with the NGO Relearn that were not hosted at Suderbyn?

Do you feel like you have a say in the type of projects that Suderbyn is engaged with?

Have there been many visitors/ short term volunteers while you were here?

As far as you're aware, are the visitors that come here already familiar with ecovillages or is it their first experience with them?

How has this stream of visitors (especially during the summer) impacted your experience in the ecovillage?

Do you think that Suderbyn offers any tools or support for when inhabitants are feeling overwhelmed? If so, what?

Do you think it is important for Suderbyn to receive visitors? Why?

Suderbyn is part of the Global Ecovillage Network. Can you tell me more about what this collaboration looks like in practice?

Is there any collaboration with other ecovillages?

Do you think that Suderbyn maintains any form of political engagement? If so, in what ways?

What do you think of the current structure of Suderbyn with the frequent turnover of inhabitants?

Do you think that Suderbyn's educational focus and openness for visitors and volunteers impacts its progress towards self-sufficiency? *(this question was informed by a statement made in interview 1)*

What do you think of Suderbyn's decision making system?

What do you think of Suderbyn's current dependency on EU funding?

Do you think there should be some sort of financial safety net in case the funding ever stops?

For the recently 'graduated' ESCs:

What are the most important things you have learned from your stay in Suderbyn?

Have you acquired any specific knowledge or skills here you previously did not have?

Would you have volunteered at Suderbyn if your stay wasn't funded by the ESC?

Why did you decide to stay after your ESC year ended?

B) Consent form

Thesis Fieldwork Consent Form

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in an interview as part of a master's thesis about ecovillages and their role in societal transformation. The thesis is to be submitted in May 2026 by Berber Bakker at Lund University, Sweden, as part of the master's program in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science. The interview can take up to an hour. Below you will find information about the data management and your rights in this research.

If you have any questions or worries you can contact me via email (berberbakker@hotmail.nl). Thank you for your trust and participation.

Data management

This study complies with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The interviews will be recorded via a mobile device and stored there until the completion and assessment of the thesis. The interviews will be transcribed and anonymized without reference to your identity. The analysis of the data will be conducted by me, Berber Bakker. After submission the thesis will be made available online on Lund University's website for published student papers (LUP Student Papers).

Consent

If you have read this form and decide to participate in this study, please understand that your participation is anonymous and voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without providing reasons. You may also refuse to answer any question.

I agree to being interviewed in the context of the aforementioned Master's thesis. I confirm that I agree with the recording of the interview, and with the processing and storage of this data under the terms described above. I have received the information and understood it. I confirm that I was given the opportunity to ask questions.

Date:.....

Signature:.....

C) Interview codebook

Clarification for code RQ1 Contribution to change: when I started the coding process, my first research question was broader than it is now, looking into all the ways in which Suderbyn maintains societal engagement. When writing the results, however, it became clear that both their political engagement and networking were not as prominent in Suderbyn anymore and could be better seen as part of the trade-offs they experience. I therefore changed my RQ1 to focus solely on education.

Code:	Description:
(RQ1) Contribution to change	In what ways does Suderbyn maintain engagement in society and build alternatives that can contribute to a degrowth transition?
Activism and political engagement	Reference to the ways in which the inhabitants are engaged politically through activism and other initiatives
Founder politician	Reflections on how the fact that one of the founders was a politician made the inhabitants more politically engaged in the beginning
Not as active	Inhabitants reflecting on how Suderbyn is currently not so politically active anymore
Palestine dinner	Reference to the Palestine dinner the inhabitants organized in December to raise money for a food sovereignty project in Gaza (2025)
Collaborations and Networks	How Suderbyn collaborates with various other actors, organizations etc.
Contact with other ecovillages	Descriptions of Suderbyn having contact with other ecovillages in Sweden and abroad
GEN	Reference to the Global Ecovillage Network, and Suderbyn's connection to it
Previous Suderbynians connections	Projects or collaborations that happen through contact with previous Suderbynians
Reaching out	Reference to the inhabitants reaching out to the world, the community on Gotland etc.
Instagram	Reference to Suderbyn's Instagram account as a way to share with more people the lifestyle and community at Suderbyn (+ mentions of inhabitants finding out about Suderbyn via Instagram)
Local involvement	Descriptions of the inhabitants' involvement in projects and collaborations on a local level (on Gotland)
Trainings through Relearn	The role of the NGO Relearn to bring inhabitants of Suderbyn to trainings and workshops elsewhere
Educational exchange	References that are connected to forms of educational exchange, including events, workshops, and volunteering activities (ESC program) that involve knowledge sharing
Defining Suderbyn	Category for the different labels the inhabitants have given Suderbyn in relation to education, such as learning center, laboratory, and training ground
ESC Programs	Reference to the ESC programs as a way through which Suderbyn is educating young people and having a positive impact
Events at Suderbyn	Descriptions of the various education-related events held at Suderbyn
Knowledge sharing	References to ways of sharing knowledge within Suderbyn ('mutual learning' approaches)
Permaculture	Reference to permaculture as the content of educational exchange, teaching people about eco-friendly farming techniques
School or Uni visits and collaboration	Visits from local schools or universities to Suderbyn, as well as student visits for research, and other collaborations with universities
What inhabitants have learned	Inhabitants sharing the main things they have learned in Suderbyn (ranging from personal development to practical skills)
Openness of Suderbyn	Category of different descriptions that refer to Suderbyn being a very open place, where everyone can come and see what the ecovillage lifestyle is like

Inviting in the world	Refers to Suderbyn contributing to change by inviting people in
Lasting impact on those who stayed at Suderbyn	References to how Suderbyn has made a big impact on the lives of those who stayed there, especially the ESCs and long term inhabitants
Opens people's eyes	Staying at an ecovillage or community for the first time can open people's eyes to different ways of life (includes stories about first time visitors)
Passing through	Reference to Suderbyn being a place where many people come and go, and most of them not staying for a very long time
Place of rest	Reference to Suderbyn as a place where people can rest, take a break from the 'conventional' fast paced life
Ripple effect	References to how those who stay in Suderbyn then continue to inspire others and in this way spread the mindset and values of Suderbyn out into the world
Symbolic meaning	Reference to how the fact that Suderbyn exists carries symbolic significance that other futures are possible
Small impact	Inhabitants reflecting on Suderbyn making a very small contribution to wider societal change
(RQ2) Tensions Real Utopias	How do the tensions inherent in ecovillages as 'real utopias' play out in practice?
Challenges of community life	Category that describes the various challenges that come with community living
Bubble risk	Risk of Suderbyn being a bit of a bubble where the inhabitants live their life amongst themselves with little engagement on a local level
Community life takes a lot of energy	References to how living in the close knit community of Suderbyn requires a lot of energy, socially and mentally and that not everyone can do it for a longer period
Frequent goodbyes	Inhabitants reflecting on the fact that they have to say goodbye often, because of Suderbyn's open structure with many people coming and going, which can take an emotional toll
Hard to set boundaries	Reference to how it can be difficult for inhabitants to voice their opinions and set their boundaries, especially in relation to the question of receiving visitors
Working 'outside' vs. community life	Reference to when inhabitants have a job outside of Suderbyn they miss out on aspects of community living, like communal meals or communal work
Dependencies	Category that describes the ways in which Suderbyn is dependent on external forces
Funding dependency	Reference to how Suderbyn is financially dependent on the EU funding through the ESC programs
Alternative income streams	Inhabitants reflecting on other ways to make money to reduce dependency on EU funding, such as selling vegetables, opening a bakery, becoming an eco-retreat center etc.
Financial uncertainties	Reference to how in Suderbyn they do not know how much money they will receive for the ESC programs, as it can change a lot every year
Neutral or positive attitude	Inhabitants describing the funding dependency on the EU in a neutral or positive manner
No funding is catastrophe	Inhabitants talking about how if the EU funding were to end, it would have dire consequences for Suderbyn, noting that it may even stop existing
Trust that they will figure it out	Reference to inhabitants trusting that if the funding stops they will find another way to get by, it won't be the end of Suderbyn
Not financially dependent on their work	Refers to how currently thanks to the ESC program (and this external financial dependency), the inhabitants of Suderbyn are not financially dependent on the work they do. So in this sense the ESC dependency allows for freedom in their work.
Lack of stability and resilience	Refers to how the structure of Suderbyn, including the fact that it has a small permanent crew, is not good for the stability nor resilience of the place
Not a place to settle	Descriptions of how Suderbyn is not a place where people settle down
Now more permanent inhabitants	Reference to more people staying longer and people building their own tiny homes in Suderbyn, which could potentially increase the stability of the place

Small permanent crew	Refers to how Suderbyn has had the past few years a very small group of 'core' people who stayed for multiple years, which puts pressure on them to keep things running
Limited capacities	Reference to how Suderbyn is limited in its capacity to host people and events, since it is restricted by the limited buildings and living space they have because of the re-activation of the military
Limited space for visitors	Now that many ESCs decided to stay longer, there is less room available for visitors
Military means no building	Descriptions of how Suderbyn is limited by the re-activation of the military as it means that they are not allowed to build anymore houses and structures on the property
Missing connections with the outside	Descriptions of how there is little connections or collaborations with the locals
Difficult to attract local visitors	Reference to how the inhabitants of Suderbyn struggle with getting locals to their events and workshops
Language barrier	Reference to the language barrier preventing more strong contacts with locals (as most inhabitants are international and speak little Swedish)
Little outreach	Inhabitants describing Suderbyn as a bit of a bubble, that they do not go out that much, and having little connection to locals
Prejudice from locals	Inhabitants note that Suderbyn struggles to be accepted locally, and name stereotypes and the prejudices of the people as a reason for this
Social needs fulfilled in Suderbyn	Reference to how inhabitants tend not to go outside of Suderbyn so much because all their social needs are already fulfilled inside the ecovillage
Self-sufficiency	Category for all the subcodes related to self-sufficiency and the progress towards it
Slow progress towards self-sufficiency	Reflections on how the structure of Suderbyn (with the prominence of the ESC program and the fact that it is a learning center) slows down progress toward self-sufficiency (food, energy, finances etc.)
Difficult to plan long-term	Because the number of people in Suderbyn can vary a lot, it is difficult to plan long-term, especially in the garden the plans can depend on how many people will be available to help with harvesting etc.
Discontinued projects	Reference to projects and systems that were started but discontinued over the years, mainly the biogas and aeroponic projects in the Dome, started by the founders
Limited people to improve the place	Because the permanent crew is so small and many do not stay for long, there is limited time and energy that then goes into the necessary maintenance instead of improvements and progress toward self-sufficiency
Maintenance first	Reference to how it is important to make sure that everything works and is well-maintained before starting any improvements to the buildings and property, including solar panels etc.
Reliance on specific people's knowledge	Reference to how it is difficult to set up systems relating to self-sufficiency, such as electricity, when only one or two people have the knowledge how to do it and maintain it, when they move out then the community has a problem
Reteaching all the time	Because there are few long term people, and many people coming and going, they constantly have to teach people how to do things around Suderbyn
Structure of Suderbyn	Referring mainly to the big role of the ESC program, the frequent turnover of people staying there, in the structure of Suderbyn. As well as other quotes regarding the structure and changes in it.
People make the place	References to how Suderbyn is defined by the people that currently live there, and that this implies that there can be variation (regarding its priorities) depending on the inhabitants
Vision of Suderbyn	References to the vision of Suderbyn, the mission or future outlook of the place.
Changes over time	Reflections on how the vision for Suderbyn, or lack thereof, changed over time

Home vs. Education center	Inhabitants describing the dual role of Suderbyn being both a home and educational center, and that it can be a challenge to make sure that both elements are taken care of sufficiently and in a balanced way
Lack of vision	Inhabitants saying that Suderbyn does not really have a long term vision
Visitors	Category that includes all mention of visitors and how the inhabitants experience the continuous flow of visitors
Different capacities and energy	Reflections on how some people have more energy and capacity to deal with visitors than others
Ideas for future regarding visitors	Reference to alternative ways of organizing the visitors in Suderbyn, such as set periods of receiving visitors or having breaks in between
Positive visitor experience	Inhabitants sharing positive experiences with visitors (seeing it as an exchange of ideas, experiencing renewed appreciation for the place, more hands to work)
Struggling with visitors	Describing how the inhabitants and long term volunteers can struggle with receiving so many visitors (socially draining, retreating to one's own space)
Bad previous experiences	Inhabitants sharing previous experiences with people hosting events at Suderbyn or visitors that were negative
(RQ 3) Navigating tensions	What can we learn from how the inhabitants navigate the tensions?
Community	References to the importance of community in Suderbyn, and how they form quite a tight group of people.
Sociocracy as a way to deal with issues	Reference to the sociocracy system in place in Suderbyn in regard to navigating trade-offs
Community meeting bringing people closer	Reference to how the community meetings allow for deeper connections with people, getting better insights into how they are doing and what they may be struggling with
Flexibility	Reference to how using sociocracy allows for flexibility in the community
New rent system	The 'core' team developing a new rent system in order to attract more long term inhabitants
Good and open communication	Inhabitants sharing that they feel that in Suderbyn the communication is good, and that it is a safe space to share and openly discuss things
Reforage experience	Reference how the community dealt with a negative experience with one of the events called Reforage that was hosted at Suderbyn
Improvements in sociocracy	Inhabitants reflecting on how they improved their sociocracy system over the years
Tools for tensions around visitors	Category for the tools and support in place in Suderbyn to help them navigate trade-offs and deal with conflicting interests, especially surrounding the issue of visitors.
Active yes system	Reference of their active yes system in helping people express themselves and set boundaries. In Suderbyn all inhabitants decide together for visitors to come and projects to be hosted there. In this system there is an "active yes," "neutral with potential concerns," and "no" option.
Desired improvements	Inhabitants expressing what is missing in terms of support and how Suderbyn can improve in this area
Heartkeeper system	Inhabitants refer to this system they have, where people sign up to be "heartkeepers" who can then be approached at any time to talk about things
Lacking support	Inhabitants feeling like there is insufficient support from Suderbyn for dealing with the visitors specifically
Summer disintegration	Reference to how in the summer the processes and tools in place like the sharing circles and meetings stop happening for a bit, because there is so much else going on
People-care circle	Reference to the people-care circle, one of the working groups in Suderbyn that takes care of the social aspects. It is also a place where social tensions are sometimes first discussed before bringing it to community meetings
Other findings	Category for miscellaneous things that might be relevant somehow..

Accessibility and lack of diversity in Suderbyn	Reference to Suderbyn's accessibility and reflections on the lack of diversity in Suderbyn (mostly white middle class western Europeans)
Alignment degrowth	Reference to habits or principles that align with degrowth
Changes over time	Descriptions of the ways in which Suderbyn has changed over time, in terms of social organization and more practical things
Comparing Suderbyn to other ecovillages	Inhabitants comparing Suderbyn to other ecovillages, especially in terms of the intensity of the community aspect
ESC funding important for coming to Suderbyn	Inhabitants reflect on whether or not they would have come to Suderbyn if it was not funded by the EU
Info relevant for background chapter	Information about the general organization of Suderbyn or other useful statements
Staying after ESC ended	Reflections on why inhabitants decided to stay after their ESC ended (some out of convenience, role of new rent system and the closeness of the community)

D) Statutes of Suderbyn

Below I included a copy of the first part of Suderbyn's statutes. The second section is relevant as it describes Suderbyn's original purpose and the guidelines the inhabitants are obliged to follow.

Statutes for the economic association Suderbyn People-Care

Adopted on 17 August 2020

§ 1 Association name

The association's company name (firm) is Suderbyn People-Care economic association.

§ 2 Purpose and activities

The association aims to promote the ecological, social, cultural and economic interests of its members by providing food, accommodation, work and leisure of the highest quality and in accordance with the Earth Charter.

Member participates in the activity by:

- to develop sustainable food production according to permaculture principles,
- to enrich biological diversity and reduce ecological vulnerability
- to create the conditions for sustainable housing and a developing community
- to promote local and "green" employment.

§ 3 The seat of the association

The association's board has its seat in Region Gotland, Gotland county.