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Rethinking urban nature to promote human well-being and livelihoods
Workshop held on 25th January, 2018 at Radisson Blu Conference Centre, Malmö

Summary of Workshop Findings

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Introduction

On the 25th January, 25 researchers, social entrepreneurs and policy makers attended a MOVIUM and SLU Urban Futures funded workshop on “Rethinking urban nature to promote human well-being and livelihoods”. The objectives of the workshop were to identify and discuss integrated digital, social and nature solutions for the use, management and governance of urban nature in the City of Malmö; and to provide a platform for knowledge sharing and networking between researchers and practitioners.

Multiple enlightening presentations on how to plan, design and manage urban nature were provided by the cities of Malmö and Copenhagen, social entrepreneurs and academics. Each presentation guided a creative workshop activity that involved four groups creating an integrated solution using Lego and other materials to address the concerns of citizens presented in different scenarios relevant to the use and management of urban nature in Malmö. Each group was asked to present their presentation to the wider group, what inspired them the most from the workshop activity and how their understanding of integrated solutions in urban nature changed over the day. This report presents a summary of each group’s creations and findings.

Group 1

Summary of the group’s design

Group 1 was tasked with developing an integrated solution for Henrik and Trine, a young couple in Malmö interested in increasing levels of biodiversity and initiating urban gardening in their local park. At the same time, the couple is concerned about ecological gentrification. This scenario inspired a complex discussion involving both concrete and meta-approaches to integrated solutions. For example, the group, comprised of both practitioners and researchers, immediately suggested concrete suggestions to the problem such as a digital and physical meeting place in the park, a multi-functional storm-water management pond to attract and foster biodiversity as well as tactics for engaging and maintaining neighborhood volunteers in the park renovation. At the same time, group members struggled with how to address the overarching challenges of market forces in urban renewal projects and mosaic governance structures within and across neighborhoods.



Points of inspiration

This discussion resulted in several points of inspiration that shaped and shifted our understanding of integrated solutions over the day. First, we were inspired by the potent role that food can play as a driver in urban greening and neighborhood development projects. Yet we still are trying to understand the many ways in which food can be a part of integrated solutions. For example, who should be in charge of food-focused integrated solutions? The municipality, volunteers, green SMEs? We see the immense value of green SMEs in developing and bridging social and ecological capital in communities, but how can integrated solutions support capacity building of SMEs including succession planning? Ecological gentrification is a major challenge to integrated solutions. Perhaps digital approaches hold the potential the “level” the playing-field and include new voices and often unheard perspectives. On the other hand we acknowledge that digital tools can also exclude some from engagement in integrated solutions based on access and racial or socio-economic digital divides. Our last reflection and learning point regards governance of integrated solutions. If we are actually to realize green integrated solutions, we need to begin with the internal processes and networks of the actors involved in the planning, implementation and management of such projects. For example, in a municipality such solutions should span ‘siloes’ institutional cultures and be integrated into the vision and aims of each municipal arm including the economy and budget department. We need strong champions to reach this goal.

How the group’s understanding of an integrated solution changed over the course of the workshop

Throughout the workshop our group discussion moved back and forth between concrete and meta-approaches to integrated solution, drawing on experience and theory, culminating in a cross-disciplinary learning experience for all.

Group 2

Summary of the group’s design

Group 2 was tasked with developing an integrated solution for an immigrant woman named Maria who lives in the suburb of Holma. The solution needed to be developed by social entrepreneurs in partnership with residents and housing associations, and social support social inclusion among vulnerable groups in addition to different types of recreation and agricultural activities, including a greenhouse, outdoor growing area, green walls and social meeting area.

The group’s solution used the production of flowers, vegetables etc. as a means for creating a local, social arena within the grounds of a local housing estate, involving both social entrepreneurs and individuals like Maria. The social values derived from the initiative have higher priority than the concrete outcomes in terms of produce or money; however, it may be valuable for the long term sustainability not to exclude economic thinking. Therefore, we suggested including experts from the beginning. Horticultural experts may generate knowledge and inspiration to those who have no previous gardening experience. Other experts could be financial and business experts who can inspire in relation to alternative ways of generating income being these in financial terms, via goodwill or others. Together, the experts will help the project to steer in a direction of reality and potential positive outcomes. Such outcomes may be inspiration, and a sense of reality, but if invested properly it can also stabilize the initiate financially.

Only 60% of the budget should be allocated the solution from the beginning because it is important to secure funding and resources for a longer term engagement than the initial enthusiasm. The fact that ‘free space’ is left over from the beginning allows flexibility, as well as ‘late-comers’ to feel included and to set a direction themselves too.



Points of inspiration

The fact that Copenhagen have an ambition of planting 100 000 trees, and that more than 1 million trees are already planted in China. Different means, different cost, different opportunities but ambitions and inspiring. The variety of entrepreneurial systems related to urban green spaces was very inspiring. It seems like the ability to actually think in economic and business terms is also important for the long term success of such initiatives.

How the group's understanding of an integrated solution changed over the course of the workshop

The term Integrated Solutions got a new twist during the day, as it changed from Chris' initial definition of being a combination of Social (S), Green (G) and Digital solutions (D), to becoming a combination of Entrepreneurship (E), Social and Green solutions, where digital solutions may play a vital part.

Group 3

Summary of the group's design

Group 3 was tasked with developing a solution to Mike and Dave's solar energy storage concerns. They would like to see a local green area to provide for battery storage of solar energy for their entire street, as well as support urban agriculture, biodiversity conservation and social activities for their gay community, in addition to the engagement of different industry sectors and multiple citizen groups. The group developed a Lego model to visualise how Mike and Dave's concerns could be addressed. Rather than hiding battery storage of solar energy, the group proposed to expose it, make it visible and change the way citizens view infrastructure and create new understandings of space. They designed an energy tower with a large light on the top to explain where the power is coming from, how it is being produced and how it is being used. Around the tower is a café and visitor centre which uses the stored power and communicates how it is being used to customers. The power is also sold to other community projects, including an on-site commercial banana farm, community food gardens, ornamental gardens and biodiversity gardens. Digital currency would be used to link all these industries together to make flows of connections visible between the different producers. For example, Mike and Dave are being paid for the energy they sell to the centre which is translated into a crypto-currency then used to support trade among the diverse industries in the urban nature area. This financial process could be expanded to other areas, thereby creating a whole closed-loop and sustainable economy. Also, the urban nature would have ornamental gardens for aesthetics and native gardens to support biodiversity.



Points of inspiration

The group acknowledged that we need to combine formal and informal networks to develop transformative power in community initiatives. The bee is a terrific metaphor for such networks. However, how to avoid new forms of exclusion resulting from new social enterprises needs further investigation. The circular economy is more than exchanges between people using traditional currencies. Processes like block chain have the potential to create more accountability and trust in the value sharing system. These economic and social contracts are often ignored in urban nature management. Inputs from technology and small business may help. There is a lot of potential to showcase (rather than hide) new forms of co-existence or co-location among energy generation, agriculture and biodiversity conservation, but we need passionate people and visionary (and bold) organisations to demonstrate such integrated solutions.

How the group's understanding of an integrated solution changed over the course of the workshop

The group's understanding of an integrated solution changed from the definition that Chris initially provided on the integration of digital, social and nature solutions to one that also considered multi-level networks and partnerships between government, NGOs and enterprises. The need for regenerative or circular economies (e.g., how to develop new forms of currency that enable different communities to share in the profits of the new integrated solution) and strategies for promoting pro-social and pro-environmental behaviours were also discussed in relation to the needs of Mike and Dave.

Group 4

Summary of the group's design

Group four was tasked to develop an integrated solution to the concerns of Paula, a highly active teenager who competes in triathlons and gymnastics and participates in team sports like netball and football. She is concerned that existing green spaces in Malmö have a lack of sports training facilities to support the interests of local residents. This group developed a LEGO model visualizing an integrated solution regarding the use of urban green space, which meets the needs of teenagers practicing sports as well as the needs of other local residents interested in growing food. Thus, the scenario foresees a triathlon path that goes across urban green and blue areas and is as long as that it reaches the rural areas at the outskirts of Malmö. The green and blue areas are open spaces used other stakeholders as is the rafting team, fisherman and swimmers (blue), but also residents growing food (green). The scenario also is meant to convey the idea of multi-functionality and for instance the green area being used by the teenagers for sport is also a place where these later engage, together with others, in growing food.



Points of inspiration

During the course of the whole event the presentations given from the practitioners / social entrepreneurs were particularly inspiring. In our group we have talked about what drives them and how they manage to work strategically towards an activity that is innovative, successful and above all that creates employment.

How the group's understanding of an integrated solution changed over the course of the workshop

We have not addressed the question of how perception of the integrated solutions changed, but at the end of the activity when asked to discuss what each of us understands as integrated solutions we come to realized that there were different interpretations within our group of this term. Having this talk at the very beginning of the LEGO scenario activity would have been perhaps more useful than having it at the end.

Next Steps and Contacts

Researchers who attended the 25th January workshop met the next day to discuss how to translate some of the key insights from the workshop into research concepts. Researchers we will be in contact with attendees as these concepts are developed. For any questions concerning next steps please contact Christopher Raymond at: christopher.raymond@slu.se

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