Where there is a will, there is a way

Exploring the financial viability of Swedish ecovillages
Title: Where there is a will, there is a way: Exploring the financial viability of Swedish ecovillages

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Abstract

Background: The myriads of environmental and social predicaments that came together with the rise of energy consumption and global capitalism now calls for a radical paradigm shift. Though this shift has been discussed over the last few decades under the concept of “sustainable development”, it appears that the focus has merely been put on “sustaining the unsustainable”. Hence, exploring alternative sustainability paradigms and their viability appears as a necessity to navigate in the Anthropocene era.

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to explore the strategies employed by Swedish ecovillages to achieve financial viability in the context of a strong sustainability paradigm. The focus is put on understanding how these organizations manage to avoid bankruptcy without compromising their values and purpose.

Method: This thesis is qualitative in nature and is based on an interpretivist paradigm. More specifically, the researchers followed the Grounded Theory approach proposed by Strauss & Corbin to analyze their data and find a plausible theory. Therefore, the theory introduced by the authors is rooted in the primary data collected through in-depth interviews with a total of six residents from three different Swedish ecovillages.

Conclusion: The results of this research shows that the Swedish ecovillages studied achieved financial viability by channeling money from the capitalist market economy to their communal economy, while simultaneously relying on their ideology and resources to prevent this money from “leaking out”.

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“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”
- Margaret Mead

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this part is to introduce the reader to the ecovillage movement and the context in which it emerged, as well as to discuss the purpose and scope of the study.

1.1 Background

Over the last 200 years, to develop their economies, human beings have drastically increased their energy consumption. Actually, since the 19th century, with the discovery of fossil carbon and the development of technologies to use it as combustible, the world’s economy has been growing at an unprecedented rate (Hagens, 2020). This trend has continued until the present moment and has resulted in serious harm to the Earth’s life-supporting systems. In fact, according to a scientific consensus, human activities are responsible for key concerns such as climate change, environmental pollutions, extinction of species, loss of ecosystems, and depletion of natural resources (Barnosky et al, 2013). For scientists, this alarming situation implies that “it is extremely likely that Earth’s life-support systems, critical for human prosperity and existence, will be irretrievably damaged by the magnitude, global extent, and combination of these human-caused environmental stressors” (Barnosky et al, 2013).

Unfortunately, in its quest for economic development, the global capitalist system has not only polluted and depleted the natural world, but has also wreaked systematic coercion and violence to communities around the globe (Srikantia, 2016). Indeed, various studies suggest that “severe, violent and irreparable destruction of formerly thriving and sustainable cultures and communities around the globe is an inherent component of globalization” (Srikantia, 2016). Simply put, because businesses and institutions rely on available and cheap natural resources, armed violence is often used to kill and/or displace communities located on coveted resources (Downey, Bonds, & Clark, 2010). Moreover, the socio-economic development of the last decades has resulted in global cultural changes and a massive rise of individualism (Santos, Varnum, & Grossmann, 2017). Consequently, despite the persistence of some traditional values, most of the world’s population have stopped relying on communities for their survival, to the profit of the
modern market economy offered by the capitalist system in place (Inglehart & Baker, 2000).

Nevertheless, as the environmental predicaments mentioned earlier unfolds, and the fossil fuels needed to maintain global economic activities have become largely depleted (Capellán-Pérez et al., 2015), human beings may increasingly need to rely on communities to ensure their survival (Van de Vliert, 2013). Therefore, working towards the protection of traditional groups and the development of other sustainable communities appears as a necessity to secure Homo Sapiens’ survival in the Anthropocene era (Srikantia, 2016) (Miller & Hopkins, 2013). While sustainable bands are as old as mankind (Hagens, 2020), intentional communities as a way to return to nature away from globalization and consumerism appeared with the “Back-to-the-land” movement in the mid-20th century (Singh, Keitsch, & Shrestha, 2019). In Sweden, such communities started to appear in the 1970s as a counter-urbanization movement, and later as an anti-nuclear movement (Magnusson, 2018).

In 1991, the term “ecovillage” (EVI) was introduced, to find another name for the various “sustainable communities” that emerged as a reaction against the mainstream behaviour (Gaia Trust, 2020). Thusly, the concept was first defined as “a human scale, full-featured settlement, in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world, in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future” (Gilman, 1991). However, in Sweden, the National Board of Housing, Building, and Planning developed a more practical definition to help these initiatives in obtaining loans from the bank (Magnusson, 2018). Then, ecovillages were pictured as sustainable small villages with access to farming lots, eco-friendly houses, local sewage systems, and low energy consumption (Boverket, 1991).

According to Berg et al (2002), the Swedish ecovillage movement evolved over three generations, where each generation had its own goals and organizational principles. The first EVIs started in 1967 and were driven by idealistic citizens genuinely concerned about the environment, but who did not manage to develop adequate organizations or technological systems. Thereafter, the second generation of ecovillages started in the early 1990s, with entrepreneurs and politicians interested in the concept. Unfortunately,
this generation struggled due to the Swedish banking crisis, and the business nature of the projects, that failed to connect with the EVI movement. Lastly, according to the authors, the third generation emerged in 1995 and learned from the two previous generations by connecting construction firms with citizen groups. However, this generation gave rise to very few communities, as the overall movement started to lose popularity among Swedish society. According to Magnusson (2018), “between 2001 and 2007, no new EVIs were established and several existing EVIs abandoned their technical systems”.

After a period of stagnation, the Swedish ecovillage movement regained popularity around 2008, due to more climate awareness and an increase in internet usage. In fact, after having directly experienced climate change in 2008-2009, some Swedish citizens looked for alternatives, outside or on the internet (Magnusson, 2018). As a result, for Magnusson (2018), the last generation of Swedish ecovillages was thus born, led by groups of committed citizens working without the help of constructing firms. Even more than in the previous generations, these communities differ in form and organization and focus on agriculture and permaculture projects (Magnusson, 2018). Some of the established ones are Suderbyn Ecovillage, Stiftelsen Stjärnsund, and Goda Händer Ekoby, which will be explored in this study (appendix A).

1.2 Problem Discussion

Even though there is a common awareness about the critical situation of the biosphere and the increasing economic inequalities (Barnosky et al, 2013) (Jomo & Baudot, 2007), the ways to deal with these predicaments differ greatly between organizations. While some organizations still deny the challenges associated with the 21st century, others choose to work either through the weak or the strong sustainability paradigm (Landrum, 2018). Simply put, on the one hand, proponents of the weak sustainability paradigm believe that natural capital can be substituted by man-made capital, and therefore that the global capitalist economy in place is best suited to tackle the challenges facing mankind. On the other hand, as they do not believe that man-made and natural capitals are substitutable, believers in the strong sustainability paradigm argue that natural capital should be protected from human activities (Ang & Passel, 2012).
Despite the ongoing argument between these two worldviews, nations and organizations have generally embraced the weak sustainability paradigm. In fact, since the concept of sustainable development was first introduced in the Brundtland Report (1987), the goal was perceived as a “sustained development where utility or consumption is non-declining over time” (Nilsen, 2010). Thus, over the last 30 years, most sustainability efforts have been oriented towards sustaining or “greening” the economic development that “has dominated the planet for the last two centuries and has caused present social and environmental problems” (Fauré et al, 2016) (Nilsen, 2010). In other words, by hoping to reconcile economic growth with the natural world, nations and organizations have merely focused on “sustaining the unsustainable” (Fournier, 2008). As a result, despite the growing research on “sustainability transition”, it appears that the solutions getting attention are the ones in line with the weak sustainability or “green growth” paradigm. In fact, according to Lestar and Böhm (2019), “governments, corporations but also many civil society organizations often rely on technological solutions, such as carbon capture and storage, geo-engineering, electric cars, energy-smart metres, public transport systems, biofuels, to name just a few”. Thus, the concept of sustainable development has become rather one-sided and often privileges technological and regime-wide innovations over alternative organizations such as people’s agencies and grassroots innovations (Lestar & Böhm, 2019).

Consequently, because the current approach to sustainable development failed to challenge neoliberal policies and the global capitalist system, scholars argue for the need to focus on “new opportunities offered by plausible and novel futures (...) rather than on how to share burdens to ensure the continuity of the present” (Bai et al, 2016). Simply put, because “neoliberal economic and education policies have had (...) devastating consequences for economic equality, the environment, and education” (Hursh & Henderson, 2011), creating alternative futures is perceived as being vital for securing human’s wellbeing in the Anthropocene (Bai et al, 2016). Such alternatives can be found in grassroots innovations, which differ from business greening, as they are “networks of activists and organizations generating novel bottom-up solutions for sustainable development” (Seyfang & Smith, 2007). Therefore, in a time where neoliberalism has “become a hegemonic system within global capitalism” (Harvey, 2007), scholar emphasizes the importance of taking “civil society seriously and recognizes its potential
role as a driver of sustainability transitions” (Seyfang, Haxeltine, Hargreaves, & Longhurst, 2010).

Even though the importance of citizen’s responsibility was stressed when the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme stated that “in reality it is the citizen themselves who can and must decide the future development of society” (Andersson, 2002), it appears that Swedish grassroots initiatives like ecovillages are still poorly studied in the literature on “sustainability transition” (Magnusson, 2018). In fact, despite having taken the lead in criticizing the emerging consumer society and discussing alternative futures in the 1960s (Bäckstrand & Ingelstam, 1975), the global spread of neoliberalism in the late 1970s has challenged the country’s social democratic ideals (Harlow et al., 2012). As a result, since this period, Sweden has gradually adopted the neoliberal ideology according to which “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005), (Jonoug, Kiander, & Vartia, 2009) (Beach & Dovemark, 2011).

Thus, the new political ideology adopted by the Swedish government is now visible through its approach to sustainability. Indeed, according to the official website of the Swedish government, the Nordic nation does not believe in changing the status quo but rather argues that “green growth can drive transition through technical innovation rather than pose a risk” (Swedish Institute, 2020). For Stefan Löfven, current Prime Minister, “emissions need to be reduced at a speed to ensure sustainable global growth” (Swedish Institute, 2020). In other words, for the Swedish government, the wicked problem that is global climate change should not prevent any economic growth. Hence, despite having been a model of solidarism for decades, Sweden has gradually adopted neoliberal principles that hinder the emergence of alternative organizations promoting an alternative to the current economic and political system (Harlow, Berg, Barry, & Chandler, 2012). Because “neoliberalism elevates the market and profit above considerations of climate change and environmental sustainability” (Hursh & Henderson, 2011), Sweden struggles in promoting ecovillages that prioritize environmental, social, and cultural values over economic rationality (Magnusson, 2018).
As follows, the ideological controversy opposing the “green growth” paradigm with the “sustainable degrowth” worldview seems to be at the core of the different approaches to sustainability. While the Swedish government emphasizes the need to sustain economic development through a “greener” growth (Swedish Institute, 2020), for the ecovillage movement, the aim is to promote a “degrowing” society as an alternative to capitalism (Juskaite, 2019). Simply stated, on the one hand, the “green growth” discourse “rest on a belief in technological market fixes and posit that environmental sustainability can be achieved while the current economic and societal system is maintained” (Sandberg, Klockars, & Wilén, 2019), while, on the other hand, the degrowth alternative argues for a “transformations at every level of society, from international environmental policy and economic organization to civil society and individuals' consumption habits” (Sandberg, Klockars, & Wilén, 2019). So, because ecovillages work towards “an equitable downscaling of production and consumption” (Schneider, Kallis, & Martinez-Alier, 2010) their vision goes against the mainstream view of sustaining the economic growth endorsed by the Swedish government, the United Nations, and most other organizations around the globe (Sandberg, Klockars, & Wilén, 2019).

To sum up, though sustainable communities as an answer to the social and environmental predicaments have been around for several decades, the dominant growth-oriented ideology has prevented these solutions from being taken seriously (Singh, Keitsch, & Shrestha, 2019) (Hursh & Henderson, 2011). In Sweden, the liberalization of the society has further hindered the development of these citizen-led alternative organizations, to the profit of more economic growth (Ibsen, 2010) (Jonoug, Kiander, & Vartia, 2009). Thus, in a time of environmental collapse and climate emergency (Lenton, Rockstöm, Gaffney, Rahmstorf, & Richardson, 2019) (Barnosky et al, 2013), “efforts for environmental sustainability in practice and in academia should focus on degrowth rather than green growth, and the dominant paradigm of green growth should be questioned and degrowth initiatives given attention” (Sandberg, Klockars, & Wilén, 2019). Moreover, as the global economy is currently experiencing the worst economic crisis in history, the world is now heading towards unplanned degrowth, coupled with the threatening climate predicament (IMF, June 2020). Hence, retaking the statement made by Schneider et al (2010), “this may be the best (…) chance to change the economy and lifestyles in a path that will not take societies over climate, biodiversity or social cliffs”.
1.3 Purpose

In this study, the researchers will explore the strategies employed by Swedish ecovillages to achieve financial viability. Simply put, the aim is to understand how these alternative organizations manage to have sufficient funds to meet their functional requirements and fulfil their mission in the short, medium, and long-term. By explaining how these intentional communities manage to avoid bankruptcy, the researchers wish to provide a general contribution to the literature available on ecovillages, but more generally on Swedish alternative organizations and grassroots innovations. Through this exploratory research, the authors are not hoping to reach an analytical generalization, as the cases chosen are too specific. Instead, the purpose of this thesis is to propose a new and innovative way of understanding ecovillages as alternative organizations and explore their approach to financial viability in the context of a strong sustainability worldview.

1.4 Research Questions

After having read the literature existing on alternative organizations, grassroots innovations, and ecovillages, the authors have found a research gap. Indeed, it appeared that the financial viability of citizen-led alternative organizations has not been explored. Thus, the authors decided to focus on the financial side of ecovillages located within Swedish borders. As a result, their research question was formulated as follows:

*How can Swedish ecovillages achieve financial viability in the context of their paradigm?*

For the reader, this research can be interesting because it provides an innovative approach to organizational studies and sustainability transition. In fact, throughout this research, it is shown that despite the hegemonic position of the “green growth” paradigm in Sweden, several alternative organizations are working towards the “sustainable degrowth” worldview. Hence, understanding how alternative organizations can remain financially viable without compromising their paradigm and purpose appeared to the researchers as an interesting question to be explored.
1.5 Delimitations

To complete the thesis within the given time of four months, the authors decided to narrow down the scope of research. Indeed, they decided to focus on one specific type of organization in only one country. Thus, this study is delimited to alternative organizations located within Swedish national borders. More precisely, the researchers focused on the financial aspects of Swedish ecovillages, understood as being one type of alternative organization and aggregate of grassroots agents for a sustainability transition. Ultimately, the authors studied three intentional communities considered as being part of the fourth, and last, generation of Swedish ecovillages (Magnusson, 2018). This choice was motivated by the fact that the authors are Swedish residents and have some acquaintances in the local ecovillage movement, which helped in collecting qualitative data. Hence, in this study, the authors will only cover the financial aspects of three Swedish ecovillages, and try to understand how they can achieve financial viability in the context of their strong sustainability paradigm.
2. Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical background to the topic of alternative organizations, grassroots innovations, and ecovillages.

2.1 Alternative Organizations

Despite the myriads of social, ecological, and climate predicaments brought about by capitalism, this system of social organization is still predominant around the world (Ratner, 2009). Indeed, since the end of the 20th century, scholars argue that capitalism has become so powerful that it has colonized humanity’s imagination, resulting in a monoculture where no alternatives are seen as realistic or viable (Fisher, 2009) (Michaels, 2011). Thus, nowadays, the common belief follows Margaret Thatcher's famous words according to which there is no alternative. According to Parker et al. (2014), that is the reason why, after the 2008’s financial crisis, banks have been bailed out with public funds to come back to business as usual. This inability to find alternatives to the dysfunctional capitalist system has led bankers to earn “gigantic bonuses” while European governments’ leaders were placing “their economies under increased market discipline, squeezing public services, and further liberalizing labour markets” (Parker et al, 2014).

Nevertheless, because governments and organizations failed to revise their economic models after the 2008 crisis (Davis, 2009), and the conventional literature were unable to “transcend traditional models of capitalist organizations responsible for deepening inequalities and maintaining the economic crisis” (Barin Cruz, Aquino Alves, & Delbridge, 2017), literature around alternative organizations has received substantial attention from scholars. According to Barin Cruz et al (2017), “it seems that there is a movement to search for alternative ways of organizing capitalism in a more humane way, with greater attention to social, economic and environmental sustainability of organizations”. This movement can be seen in the extension of the business literature studying various organizational models such as inclusive innovation (George, McGahan, & Prabhu, 2012), hybrid organizations (Battilana & Dorado, 2010), social entrepreneurship (Dacin, Dacin, & Tracey, 2011), social business (Moingeon, Yunus, &
Lehmann-Ortega, 2010), inclusive business (Halme, Lindeman, & Linna, 2012), and pirate organizations (Durand & Vergne, 2012).

Notwithstanding the recent trend towards alternative organizing, various authors suggest that non-capitalist organizational forms have existed throughout history and persist even today (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Some examples can be found in the pirates of the eighteen century, where alternative organization were formed on the ship and pirate utopias on the land (Parker, 2009), or in the Kibbutz of Israel, which are community-owned factories incorporating features such as “socialised labour, accumulation and distribution by collective consent and the eradication of class and social inequality” (Warhurst, 1996). More contemporary forms of alternative organizations include cooperatives, ecovillages, or transition towns, and are underpinned by principles like autonomism, mutualism, socialism, degrowth, ecology, gift exchange, permaculture, and appropriate technology (Parker et al, 2014). While some of these organizations can exist alongside the hegemonic position of capitalist organizations, others embody a more radical transformation of capitalism’s underlying principles.

Thus, by essence, alternative organizations differ from the mainstream organizational structures found within capitalist societies. As such, they have in common to reject capitalism’s principles, like the primacy of profit, the belief in the free market, the division between labour and capital, and the privatisation of the means of production (Parker et al, 2014). Simply stated, all organizations providing an alternative to the mainstream and predominant organizational structures in each society can be referred to as “alternative organizations”. Frequently, according to Cheney (2014), “this means organizations that are less hierarchical, less bureaucratic, and more attuned to human and environmental needs than the well-known players in any of the three major sectors: private, public and non-profit”. Thus, alternative organizations “are politically active organizations that aim to challenge capitalism itself or, more specifically, to fight against oppressive work management or dominant ideologies” (Del Fa & Vásquez, 2019). In other words, they generally attempt “to build a new world in the context of the old” (Parker et al, 2014 b).

Though alternative organizations were initially framed as anti-capitalist, Gibson-Graham (1996) warned of the potential dangers of reducing the meaning of “alternatives”
to be merely hostile to capitalism. She argues that this approach would only reinforce the hegemonic paradigm of capitalism instead of promoting the possibility of a plurality of economies. Along the same lines, Chatterton (2010) indicates that anti-capitalist practices should not be understood as “just ‘anti-’, but also ‘post-’ and ‘despite-’ capitalism.” Indeed, she explained that “it is simultaneously against, after and within, and so participants problematise alternatives as things which have to be fought for and worked at in the here and now”. Thus, the relationship between these organisations and capitalism is confusing, since, despite strongly rejecting the dominant order, they cannot survive without it (Parker et al., 2014). Therefore, scholars “share and recognize that alternatives are not simply about being against but are also ‘in and beyond capitalism’” (Del Fa & Vásquez, 2019). Moreover, Del Fa & Vásquez (2019) argue that “being alternative is (…) a process that has to be continuously negotiated and redefined”.

To this end, according to Parker et al. (2014), alternative organizations are usually based around three principles, namely autonomy, solidarity, and responsibility. Firstly, autonomy refers to the freedom of actions as well as respect for oneself and, for some scholars, it is perceived as the principal characteristic of alternative organizations (Kokkindis, 2014) (Chatterton, 2010). Simply put, this means that all members of the organizations should have choices about how they work and should not only follow rules forcing them to act in a specific way. Secondly, solidarity is connected to values of “co-operation, communities, and equality” (Parker et al., 2014) and therefore plays a central role in overcoming hierarchies in organizational structures. In addition to individual autonomy, alternative organizations believe in the importance of the collective and everyone’s duty to others, thus being aligned with some communist, communitarian, and socialist thoughts (Parker et al., 2014 b). Finally, the principle of responsibility indicates a dedication to future generations and implies a conscious and considerate behaviour toward the environment and humankind in general. In other words, these organizations typically believe in stewarding, sustainability, accountability, development, and progress “to the conditions for our individual and collective flourishing” (Parker et al., 2014). Nevertheless, these concepts are not understood in the same way as the current economic and organisational structures which treat “people and planet as resources which can be used for short term gain by a few” (Parker et al., 2014 b).
2.2 Grassroots Innovations for Sustainability Transition

With the growing concerns related to predicaments like pollutions, biodiversity loss, climate change, and peak oil, human societies need “system-wide transformations in sociotechnical systems of provision” to secure their survival in the Anthropocene era (Seyfang & Haxeltine, 2012). Though everyone seems obligated to act towards this unavoidable sustainability transition, not everybody is pursuing it in the same way. According to Seyfang & Smith (2007), actions in the direction of sustainability are producing a wide range of social innovations, new organizational structures, and innovative technologies but operate at different scales and under different paradigms. Unfortunately, according to Fergusson and Lovell (2015), over the last decades, most initiatives trying to tackle humanity’s threatening predicaments have been unsuccessfully led through top-down approaches with governmental regulations and market-based technological innovations. As a result of this apparent failure, increasing attention is now being put on initiatives coming from the civil society (Bergman et al, 2010) (Ernston, Sörlin, & Elmqvist, 2008) (Seyfang & Haxeltine, 2012). Indeed, grassroots change agents and their aggregates, like networks, movements, and communities, are “increasingly looked to as critical agents in the transition to sustainability, helping forestall, mitigate, and adapt to environmental degradation” (Ferguson & Lovell, 2015).

Grassroots innovation can be defined as “a network of activists and organizations generating novel bottom-up solutions for sustainable development and sustainable consumption; solutions that respond to the local situation and the interest and values of the communities involved” (Seyfang & Smith, 2007). Simply put, they are sustainable sociotechnical innovations produced by civil society instead of government or company (Tang, Karhu, & Hämäläinen, 2011). The range of these bottom-up approaches to sustainability are varied but all represent social experiments of inventive technologies, principles, and organizational structures (Haxeltine & Seyfang, 2009).

According to scholars, grassroots innovations differ from conventional innovations in several ways. To begin with, they are driven by the purpose of responding to a social need as opposed to generating rents, hence being driven by an ideological commitment instead of a wish to make a profit. Then, they operate in a social context characterized by alternative social, cultural, and ethical values. Finally, they are set up in communal ownership structures and depend on grants, voluntary labour, and mutual aid (Hossain,
Thus, by opposing the mainstream business-oriented innovations and providing a viable alternative, grassroots innovations are seen as having a transformative power that can play a central role in human societies’ transition to sustainability (Leach et al, 2012).

Some of the most notable grassroots innovations can be found in the people’s science movement (Kannan, 1990)s, the community currency movement (Seyfang & Longhurst, 2013), the transition town movement (Haxeltine & Seyfang, 2009), and the ecovillage movement (Roysen & Mertens, 2019). In Europe, aggregates of grassroots agents are represented under the ECOLISE network, which promotes European’s community-led actions on sustainability and climate change (ECOLISE, 2019). Most notably, they are known for their social innovations (Bergman et al, 2010), understood as “innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need” (Mulgan, 2006). In other words, they are innovators in “the generation and implementation of new ideas about how people should organize interpersonal activities, or social interactions, to meet one or more common goals” (Mumford, 2002). For instance, ecovillages create new social practices radically opposed to the norms existing in industrial societies, like horizontal organizations, consensus decision-making, resource sharing, as well as dry toilets, composting of organic waste, and natural building (Roysen & Mertens, 2019).

According to Grabs et al (2016), the achievements of grassroots innovations happen at three levels: individual, group, and societal. Simply put, the authors argue that the success of these bottom-up approaches to sustainability depends upon “individual-level motivations, group-level interactions, and societal-level preconditions” (Grabs et al, 2016). More specifically, individual motivations are seen as the first precondition for the success of grassroots initiatives and are based upon the answer to three questions: “first, why change should occur; second, why personal action is needed; and third, how engagement should happen” (Grabs et al, 2016). Then, the group-level factors are equally important for the success of grassroots operations and can be understood through two categories; namely the group dynamic at work (trust, competencies, capabilities, shared worldview etc.) and the organizational resources (legal status, funding source etc.). Lastly, Grabs et al (2016) highlighted that grassroots innovations strongly benefit from adequate external engagement and societal framework conditions. In other words,
grassroots innovations enhance their chance of success by being part of regional or national collaborative networks and by receiving political or governance support.

To conclude, because grassroots innovations have been neglected for a long time, “it has yet to receive adequate attention from scholars, practitioners and policymakers” (Hossain, 2016). Indeed, up to this day, most researches are still focusing on market-oriented innovations, leaving only a little attention given to the sociotechnical alternatives proposed by grassroots actors and their aggregates (Hossain, 2016). Nevertheless, as top-down approaches to sustainability transition are increasingly criticised for their limited ambitions and scope (Seyfang, 2009), grassroots innovations offer another narrative to address the injustice, inequalities, and overall unsustainability of mainstream innovations (Martin, Upham, & Budd, 2015) (Seyfang & Longhurst, 2016). Simply stated, in a time characterized by various wicked problems such ‘peak oil’ and climate change, grassroots innovations offer realistic and viable solutions to tackle humanity’s unsustainable production and consumption patterns by finding ways to live satisfying lives while using fewer natural resources (North, 2010). Equally important, because of their alternative organizational structures, grassroots innovations tackle equally well the issues related to social sustainability (Smith, 2018).
2.3 Ecovillages

As mentioned earlier, since the industrial revolution, human beings have consumed natural resources and produced wastes at an unprecedented rate. Thanks to the ever-greater technological power obtained from the combustion of fossil fuels, the 20th century has been a unique period in human history but has left the current and future generations with the utmost predicaments ever known (Hagens, 2020) (Biggs et al, 2011) (Steffen et al, 2011). While a big part of the Earth’s current population is already deprived of energy, water, and food, experts predict that the future population growth, coupled with the threatening ecological and climate predicaments, will further deprive human beings of meeting their basic needs (Barnosky et al, 2013)(Steffen et al, 2011)(Levinson, 2008). Therefore, as industrial societies now bring more harms than benefits, humanity needs to take a radically different trajectory to navigate in the Anthropocene. Recently, António Guterres, the current secretary-general of the United Nations, stressed this reality by stating the following: “making peace with nature is the defining task of the 21st century. It must be the top, top priority for everyone, everywhere” (Guterres, 2020).

What the UN’s secretary-general recently called for has been advocated for several decades by environmentalists around the world, denouncing the social and environmental damages produced by industrial capitalism (Hurley, 1993). Resultingly, over the last decades, the growing concerns among citizens have given rise to various communities trying to escape industrial societies and build sustainable alternatives. This movement of “sustainable communities” started in the 1960s with the back-to-land movement, where many young people moved away from urban areas to live closer to nature and each other (Mare, 2000). The idea was “to develop the intentional communities based on consensus building and collective thinking and vision, to go back to nature away from the contemporary society of globalization and consumerism” (Singh, Keitsch, & Shrestha, 2019). More recently, these types of intentional communities took the name of “ecovillages” (Gilman, 1991). According to the latest definition, “an ecovillage is 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 social and natural environments” (Global Ecovillage Network, 2020).
Though the ecovillage movement emerged from a vision of utopian communities, it has been realized as grassroots experiments exploring concrete solutions to concrete problems (Roysen & Mertens, 2019). Some examples include “the recycling of greywater into food production, composting of waste into soil, generating power from renewable energy, and building local economies based on community resources” (de Oliveira Arend, Gallagher, & Orell, 2013). Nowadays, there are over 10,000 ecovillages around the world and all promote alternative lifestyles as an answer to the various predicaments facing mankind (Global Ecovillage Network, 2017) (Singh, Keitsch, & Shrestha, 2019). By experiencing grassroots innovations and holistically sustainable lifestyles, ecovillages try to provide solutions to the sustainability challenges faced by modern societies (Avelino & Kunze, 2009). According to Dias et al. (2017), most ecovillages have the desire to impact society by sharing and exchanging sustainable practices, acting as “models, examples, laboratories of sustainability, or demonstration sites” (Dias et al, 2017). The stress is not only put on developing sustainable communities for the wellbeing of residents, but also on using the ecovillage as an education centre for individuals to learn about a sustainable way of living (Singh, Keitsch, & Shrestha, 2019).

Thus, as Hall (2015) puts is, “with up to a half-century of empirical experimentation, ecovillages offer an evidence base that can be utilised to benefit the wider society”. In fact, over the decades, these laboratories for sustainability have experimented innovative social and technical solutions that can be of great value for the sustainability transition of modern societies (James & Lahti, 2004). More specifically, they have instituted and reinforced an alternative paradigm “as a rejection of the outmoded “dominant western worldview” in favour of one that recognizes human-ecosystem interdependence” (Van Schyndel Kasper, 2008). According to Van Schyndel Kasper (2008), “the possibility of a sustainable society depends not only on what we do, but on how we think”, and therefore moving away from the divide culture/nature “is precisely what needs to happen in order to create a sustainable society”. This line of thought seems to be well aligned with António Guterres’ statement according to which “it is time to transform humankind’s relationship with the natural world – and with each other” (Guterres, 2020). Though this paradigm shift is not guaranteed, established alternative dwellings might soon become very appealing as current lifestyles become increasingly difficult to sustain (Litfin, 2012).
Nevertheless, for some scholars, the ecovillage movement is not effective in leading the sustainability transitioning of modern societies. This is because it is seen as only a small niche, operating outside the political arena, and based on irrational spiritual values (Fotopoulos, 2000). More precisely, Fotopoulos (2000) argues that “they have no chance to create a new society and they are bound to be marginalised, absorbed or crushed by the system, unless they become integrated within a POLITICAL movement explicitly aiming to create new political and economic structures securing the equal distribution of power among citizens, in a truly democratic society.” Along the same lines, Pepper (1991) argues that “their politics of wanting to by-pass rather than confront the powerful economic vested interests that are ingrained in socio-political structures are not likely to destroy these interests.”

As Fotopoulos (2000) pointed out, unlike less peaceful and more radical movements, “the ecovillage movement and its philosophy are perfectly compatible with the present system”. Indeed, ecovillage economies are often rooted in the modern market economy and are generally dependent on it (Price et al, 2020). Nevertheless, as the wider political-economic system negatively affects these organizations by creating some limitations, they need to develop alternative economic systems to remain viable (Carter, 2015). Hence, they work on developing social capital to enhance both their economic success and their residents’ wellbeing (Hall, 2015). Additionally, sharing is an embedded philosophy in ecovillages’ culture and is used to achieve economic stability (Litfin K. T., 2014). According to Cohen (2017), ecovillages feature “fair and regenerative economies”, which are achieved by “promoting sustainable local economies, creating social enterprises, and sharing consumption”. Also, by having relations within the broader local economy, ecovillages can improve their economy and develop more efficient procedures of living sustainably beyond their frontiers (Price et al, 2020). Close social relationships and sharing are present not only inside the ecovillage’s community but expanded to the local area, enabling economic and ecologic advances to have a broader “socio-enviro-economic” influence (Boyer, 2018). Finally, as the modern market economy is changing in the direction of methods that are most visible in ecovillages (Price et al, 2020), it is possible that “community economies and market economies can coexist without the former being dominated by capitalist practices” (Schmid, 2018).
3. Methodology and Method

In the following section, the researchers describe the methodological approach chosen for the study. Firstly, the research philosophy and approach are presented. Then, a detailed discussion of the strategies employed to collect and analyze data will be provided. Finally, the trustworthiness and the ethic of the thesis will be considered.

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is “a philosophical framework that guides how scientific research should be conducted, based on people’s philosophies and their assumptions about the world and the nature of knowledge” (Hussey & Collis, 2014). Therefore, in this section, the researchers will present the epistemological and ontological assumptions chosen to conduct this study. Simply stated, ontological assumptions are concerned with the nature of reality, while epistemological assumptions deal with the creation of knowledge, and the relation between the researchers and what is being researched (Hussey & Collis, 2014). The two main research paradigms are positivism and interpretivism and represent two opposite ends of a continuum (Hussey & Collis, 2014). On the one hand, positivism assumes that a single objective reality exists and that it can be grasped through deductive reasoning, where existing theories are used to test hypotheses. On the other hand, interpretivism believes that an infinity of socially constructed realities exists and that knowledge can be captured thanks to inductive reasoning based on participants’ subjective evidence. Thus, while positivism is interested in measuring social phenomena, interpretivism aims at exploring them by using qualitative methods (Hussey & Collis, 2014).

Because this thesis aims at exploring social realities within ecovillages, the interpretivist paradigm was chosen. Indeed, the authors wish to investigate the ecovillages’ financial viability through the subjective knowledge of their residents, which is relative to particular circumstances, and hence represent only one interpretation of reality (Benoliel, 2016). More specifically, the interpretivist approach is characterized by
a relativist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology (Levers, 2013). Thus, the researchers take for granted that the “social reality is subjective because it is socially constructed”, and therefore, that “each person has his or her own sense of reality” (Hussey & Collis, 2014). Also, because they consider that objective reality can never be captured, the authors decided to interact closely with the organizations studied, knowing that the meaning of their findings will be socially constructed. Hence, the authors discard the idea of writing an objective and value-free research.

3.1.2 Research Approach

The thesis at hand is a basic research that aims at making a general contribution to the knowledge available on the economy of Swedish ecovillages as alternative organizations. Based on the philosophical paradigm presented and the purpose of the study, the researchers chose to conduct an exploratory research. Such a research aims at investigating “phenomena where there is little or no information, with a view to finding patterns or developing propositions” (Hussey & Collis, 2014), while being “based on an explicit recognition that all research is provisional; that reality is partly a social construction; that researchers are part of the reality they analyze; and that the words and categories they use to explain reality arise from their own minds and not reality” (Reiter, 2017).

Moreover, based on the authors’ interpretivist point of view and the original nature of their inquiry, they decided to follow an inductive approach. This approach allows the researchers to come up with findings that emerged from the “frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies” (Thomas, 2006). In other words, this approach includes a thorough reading of raw data to extract concepts, themes, or a model made from the researcher interpretations of raw data. (Thomas, 2006). More specifically, according to Strauss and Corbin, in an inductive analysis, “the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 2012). Hence, in this study, the researchers will ground their theory in the observations made through in-depth interviews, but also looking for connections in the relevant literature.
3.1.3 Research Design

To answer their research question, the authors chose to follow a qualitative approach to appreciate the worldview of participants and understand the reasoning behind their choices. Indeed, the ability to conduct in-depth interviews was crucial to understand their motivations, beliefs, and attitudes regarding the financial viability of the ecovillage. Hence, a quantitative approach would not have been suitable for this research.

Thus, the researchers followed a grounded theory approach, which can be defined as “the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This approach matches perfectly the purpose of the study because “as an exploratory method, grounded theory is particularly well suited for investigating social processes that have attracted little prior research attention” (Miliken, 2012). Moreover, it allows the authors to find recurring patterns among the different ecovillages studied and thus facilitate the emergence of a theory that can answer their research question. More precisely, the “evolved” grounded theory approach proposed by Strauss and Corbin (2012) was followed. The reason behind this choice lies primarily in the fact that this genre is rooted in the interpretivist paradigm, and thus is aligned with the philosophical assumptions chosen (Levers, 2013). However, this genre was also preferred as it provides clear steps to follow, which helped the researchers in analyzing their data in a consistent and trustworthy manner.

As the process of doing a grounded theory (GT) is not linear, a framework is provided below to summarize “the interplay and movement between methods and processes that underpin the generation of a GT” (Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2019).
3.2 Method

3.2.1 Primary Data

Because the research is of a qualitative nature, the authors have relied on primary data collected through in-depth interviews with a total of six residents from three ecovillages. During these interviews, the researchers invited individually each participant to discuss freely the financial aspects of their community, to understand the motivations behind the choices made. Nevertheless, the authors made sure to inform the interviewees that they were interested in understanding how their community achieves financial viability in the context of their paradigm. Every interview lasted around thirty minutes, which provided the authors with approximately three hours of primary data. The data collection aimed to identify the antecedents and factors associated with the ecovillage’s financial activity from the founders and residents’ perspective. Ultimately, trying to “discover the basic issue or problem for people in particular circumstances, and then explain the basic social process (BSP) through which they deal with that issue” (Miliken, 2012).
3.2.2 Sampling Approach

As a result of the COVID-19 health crisis, the researchers decided to avoid visiting the communities under study and hence relied on their personal network to find appropriate participants. Luckily, one of the authors knows personally some residents of Swedish ecovillages, which greatly helped in getting positive responses to the interview requests. Thus, the authors started by conducting a convenience sampling to find residents of ecovillage willing to participate in their study.

Thereafter, as shown in Figure 1, purposive and theoretical sampling were used to collect data from the selected ecovillages. Firstly, the authors purposively selected residents of these communities, based on their ability to answer the research question. Thus, they started by targeting one founder of each ecovillage, as the authors assumed that they would have the broadest knowledge and experience about the organization. Then, subsequent sampling decisions were made to gain more insights into the concept and categories that emerged from the first interviews. In this theoretical sampling, the researchers interviewed one additional long-term resident of each ecovillage to gain more understanding of the codes that emerged from the first round of interviews.

3.2.3 Semi-structured Interviews

In line with what was previously mentioned, the authors have conducted semi-structured interviews through Zoom video-calls. Having interviews through video calls allowed the authors to get a satisfying response, as non-verbal cues could be recognized. Since the essence of the phenomenon is difficult to grasp promptly, the authors have directed the conversation by asking open-ended questions to ensure that the conversation was providing them with the information needed.

All interviewees were asked if it is fine to record and conduct the interview in English. Which all agreed upon since all participants were able to express themselves in English. The authors have conducted six interviews in total and each interview ranged from 25-35 minutes long. Before the interviews, the researchers have shared their questions with the participants to build trust and ensure that they would not be surprised by their inquiries. Additionally, at the start of the interview, a short introduction was
provided to explain the aim of this research to ensure the participants do not go off-topic. Finally, all participants were informed beforehand that they could remain anonymous, but all interviewees agreed to reveal their identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of participants</th>
<th>Role of participants</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Ecovillage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Founder</td>
<td>13th of October</td>
<td>36 min</td>
<td>Suderbyn, Gotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamu</td>
<td>Administrator and Resident</td>
<td>20th of October</td>
<td>25 min</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>Founder and Resident</td>
<td>23rd of October</td>
<td>23 min</td>
<td>Stiftelsen Stjärnsund, Dalarna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenny</td>
<td>Resident</td>
<td>29th of October</td>
<td>25 min</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elin</td>
<td>Founder and Resident</td>
<td>30th of October</td>
<td>24 min</td>
<td>Goda Händer, Örebro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jens</td>
<td>Founder and Resident</td>
<td>30th of October</td>
<td>22 min</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Interviews’ participants

3.2.4 Interview Questions

The interview questions were mainly constructed to have a better understanding of how Swedish ecovillages are organizing themselves to ensure financial viability. Questions were formed to resolve the research gap addressed in the literature review. Starting the interviews, the authors have asked open-ended questions about how the ecovillage is organized, to allow participants to speak openly, which helped them grasping important details and nuances. Throughout the interviews, probing questions were used to get the participants to elaborate further on the topic discussed. This is because the authors wanted to understand concepts that were only superficially addressed by the participants, which the researchers thought to be relevant for their research topic. This allowed the researchers to intervene with the conversation when needed, to make participants clarify their thinking and speak about implicit motives that may not otherwise be identified.
3.2.5 Data Analysis

An important aspect of grounded theory is that data collection and analysis happen concurrently; a process known as “constant comparison” (Strauss & Corbin, 2012). Therefore, the data analysis begins directly after the first interview and continues that way through the research process. In other words, after each interview, the authors highlighted concepts from raw data, by identifying incidents and coding them. According to Strauss & Corbin (2012), these concepts represent the “analysts’ interpretation of the meaning expressed in the words or action of participants” and can vary in the level of abstraction.

Indeed, “concepts can range from lower-level concepts to higher-level concepts with different levels in between” (Strauss & Corbin, 2012). Simply put, the lower-level concepts, or “open codes,” refers to the codes initially given to “raw” data. Hence, these concepts are the closest to the data as they have a minimum level of abstraction. Then, higher-level concepts, or “axial codes,” refer to the main themes of the research, and are obtained by grouping the initial codes in a way that makes sense. Finally, the core category, known as “selective code,” refers to “the main theme, storyline, or process that subsumes and integrates all lower-level categories (...), encapsulates the data efficiently at the most abstract level, and is the category with the strongest explanatory power” (Madill, 2008).

![Grounded Theory Pyramid](image)

**Figure 2:** Grounded Theory Pyramid (Strauss & Corbin, 2012)
So, after each interview, the authors transcribed what has been discussed on an online document and looked for open codes. After having coded the voices of the two first participants, the authors reevaluated their interview questions. Indeed, the researchers adapted their questions based on their experience from the first round of interviews and came up with less vague inquiries for the upcoming interviews. This method was constantly done until no additional interviews were required. Ultimately, the authors had six interviews that have been analyzed individually by both of them. The open coding process was made by extracting quotations from the transcripts and finding the properties and meaning of the quotes. All these pieces of information have been written down in an excel table, and then, the authors used the properties highlighted to regroup quotations providing a similar message. Once the six interviews had been analyzed, they compared all the open codes found and assembled similar ones together. Thus, their final open codes were identified. From the six interviews, the authors came up with a total of 47 open codes. Each open code embodied a different concept that was frequently mentioned in the interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Statement</th>
<th>Properties</th>
<th>Open codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Swedish foundation which owns the land&quot;</td>
<td>Property owned by a foundation</td>
<td>Common property ownership through a foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Organized as a foundation, and there is no owner of the foundation”</td>
<td>No private ownership, foundation owned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The entire ecovillage can be put to sale on the market&quot;</td>
<td>Risks of not having common ownership</td>
<td>Common ownership reducing risks of bankruptcy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Securing this place as an ecovillage for an indefinite amount of time&quot;</td>
<td>Common ownership through foundation secures property</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;From the course leader, from people who came to the courses, and from people living in the ecovillage&quot;</td>
<td>Rents as a source of income</td>
<td>Income through rentals from visitors and residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;So, they just rent out the apartments in those houses&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;They pay regular rent&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Everybody who is coming here they pay rent&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;But we don't think that you can have this economy still growing&quot;</td>
<td>A different view of the economy</td>
<td>Ideology and alternative worldview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;So, these people need to know that they're not dependent on anything, nature gives for free”</td>
<td>Dependency on nature not on society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Example of the open coding process
Secondly, after highlighting all the open codes, the next step was to find connections between the categories to form the axial codes. In axial coding, the analysis phase takes place to construct a theory. In fact, according to Strauss and Corbin (2012), the purpose of axial coding is to relate “categories and subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions”, as to reach a practically useful theory. Thus, in the process of finding their axial codes, the researchers have listed all their open codes’ properties and analyzed the conditions which enabled them to shape these concepts, i.e. the sense in which it was introduced, from what viewpoint, the implications, etc. Additionally, the authors asked themselves questions such as how, why, when, and where, to understand the embedded context in each code and create more abstract categories. Afterwards, by understanding the conditions behind the open codes, the authors were able to group all these low-level concepts that shared the same meaning. The groups were then named to form their axial-codes. Titles of the axial-coding were named after identifying the core idea behind each group of open-codes.

Finally, the last step in the analysis of grounded theory is the selective coding. As explained by Glaser & Strauss (1967), “selective-coding is the process of integrating categories to build a theory and to refine the theory”. In this step, each category identified in the axial coding phase has been grouped into a core category that reflects the voice of every participant. More precisely, the authors grouped their eight axial codes under a more abstract category, which allowed them to formulate a theory (appendix B). Simply put, the authors created a storyline to “enhance the development, presentation, and comprehension of the outcomes” of their research (Birks, Mills, Francis, & Chapman, 2009).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Codes</th>
<th>Axial Codes</th>
<th>Selective Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reducing working hours to increase free time</td>
<td>The philosophy of ‘voluntary simplicity’ contribute to reducing expenses while increasing the amount of time available to build self-sufficiency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing consumption to reduce costs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local food production to increase self-sufficiency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing expenditure by reducing income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology and alternative worldview</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective work to increase the level of self-sufficiency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reducing spending by using local materials

Non-materialistic values to reduce expenditure

Meeting basic needs

Common property ownership through a foundation

Common ownership reducing risks of bankruptcy

Foundation for securing the ecovillage

Members have the same level of decision-making and responsibility

Spontaneous order through informal groups

Risks of not having common ownership

| Swedish ecovillages can achieve financial viability by channelling money from the capitalist market economy to their communal economy, while simultaneously relying on their ideology and resources to prevent this money from “leaking” out. |

| The common ownership of the property can ensure the subsistence of the ecovillages and the autonomous organization of their residents |

**Table 3:** Sample of the coding process

### 3.3 Trustworthiness

#### 3.3.1 Credibility

As to ensure the trustworthiness of the study at hand, the researchers have worked towards improving the credibility of the findings. Simply put, the authors made sure that “the subject of the inquiry was correctly identified and described” (Hussey & Collis, 2014). To this end, the authors did not hesitate to engage themselves in the study to obtain a depth of data. Indeed, one of the authors has spent summer 2020 living in Suderbyn Ecovillage, to directly observe the subject under study and meet people from the ecovillage movement in Sweden. The three months spent in this community allowed the author to understand the functioning and aspiration of these dwellings, and thus helped in improving the credibility of the research.

Additionally, all interviews were recorded and transcribed to increase the credibility of the research. Ultimately, the data collected, and the emerging theory, have been shared with the participants for confirmation before submitting to the university. This confirmation from participants ensured that the researchers’ findings revealed correctly the Basic Social Process behind the community’s financial viability.
3.3.2 Transferability

When thinking about the theoretical contribution of this thesis, the authors have discussed the possible generalization of their findings. Therefore, they tried to understand whether the theory that emerged from the study of Swedish ecovillages could be transferred to other ecovillages or alternative organizations around the world. According to Janice M. Morse (1994), “because the goal of qualitative research is not to produce generalizations, but rather in-depth understanding and knowledge of particular phenomena, the transferability criterion focuses on general similarities of findings under similar environmental conditions, contexts, or circumstances” (Morse, 1994). As a result, because ecovillages differ greatly from one another, the study at hand does not provide the possibility for any analytical generalization. However, since the findings of this research have been connected to the existing literature about alternative organizations and grassroots innovations, some similarities might be found in some other alternative organizations.

3.3.3 Dependability

The dependability criterion is crucial for the ethics and trustworthiness of research. In fact, according to Hussey & Collis (2014), it “focuses on whether the research processes are systematic, rigorous and well documented”. To meet this criterion, the authors have made sure to be transparent and to describe clearly the steps taken throughout the research. To be dependable, the involvement of participants is needed in the assessment of the findings and interpretation found from the gathered empirical data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). This is seen as a way to ensure that their “finding represents reality” (Tobin & Begley, 2004). In this research, the authors have recorded and transcribed all interviews to increase dependability. Additionally, they have sent the participants a draft of their thesis to validate the findings and interpretations. Furthermore, each one of the authors interpreted the data independently to subsequently triangulate the results with each other. Finally, an audit trail where the readers can examine the method, data, decisions, and results were made. Simply put, the researchers have been self-reflexive throughout the research and have documented their research process.
3.3.4 Confirmability

According to Morse (1994), confirmability means that the researcher should constantly achieve clear affirmations of what had been interpreted related to the phenomena under study. Confirmability also involves validation of the researcher's findings and interpretations from informants (Morse, 1994). As mentioned before, a draft of the thesis was sent to the relevant participants to affirm their results and interpretations and to ensure that any extrapolation was not based on the authors’ viewpoints. Confirmability, as explained by Hussey & Collis (2014), refers to a clearly described research process that is possible to validate if the findings flow from the data. To achieve confirmability of the data, audit trails, periodic confirmed informant checks and feedback sessions are done directly from relevant people (Morse, 1994).

3.4 Ethical Considerations

3.4.1 Intellectual Honesty

The idea behind intellectual honesty is to ensure that the authors’ beliefs did not influence the pursuit of the truth, despite agreeing or disagreeing with someone’s ideology (Guenin, 2005). Although intellectual honesty does not require the researcher to be unbiased. On the contrary, to avoid what Haraway (1988) calls the “god trick”, it is ethical and important to situate the researchers' knowledge to be open with biases (Guenin, 2005). For this research, though one of the authors share ecovillages’ values and beliefs, the study has been carried out in an intellectually honest manner. Simply stated, the study aims only at seeking the truth and is not in any way misleading or deceiving the readers. As for plagiarism, all information mentioned in this study has been backed up with reliable sources and all quotes have been consistently referenced. Additionally, as mentioned before, the results shown in this study have been affirmed by the participants. Though the authors have only presented the information that was relevant for answering the research question, other pieces of information outside of the study’s scope were not discarded totally but helped in the coding process.
3.4.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Before conducting the interviews, the participants were given the opportunity of anonymity and confidentiality. In other words, interviewees could choose whether their name and position will appear in the study and if the information could be traceable to the organization or individual providing it (Hussey & Collis, 2014). Because the people and organizations studied were genuinely interested in contributing to this study, they all agreed on having their name and contribution clearly stated in this thesis. This agreement has been ensured by asking participants to read the interview consent form sent in advance and to agree verbally to it during the interview (appendix C). Because the organizations under study are very specific, and the people interviewed have central roles within them, sharing their names and insights helped in fully appreciating their opinion. To ensure a safe environment where open discussion could happen, the authors started the dialogue by sharing their backgrounds and intentions with the participants, to build trust and encourage free expression.
4. Results and Interpretation

In this section, the authors present the study’s empirical results, share their interpretation, and argue for a theory that answers the research question.

4.1 Results

As explained in the section on data analysis, the authors started by going through the transcribed interviews in the search of open codes. Simply put, they have highlighted each concept or idea expressed by participants and wrote them down as codes. Afterwards, the authors have compared all the open codes that they found and grouped similar ones. After this process, they had forty-eight open codes, which reflected the main ideas expressed by the interviewees. Once the open codes were identified, the authors moved on to the axial coding phase. During this second phase, they categorized these forty-eight open codes into eight axial codes that still reflected what has been shared by participants but at a more abstract level (appendix B). This second step allowed the researchers to organize and have a deeper understanding of all the primary data collected.

To begin with, the authors have identified four open codes dealing with project grants, contribution to society, revenues, non-pecuniary benefits, time-consuming activities, and lack of interest in abstract work. The participants explained that ecovillages contribute to society, by voluntarily taking part in projects on an international or local level. In return, these ecovillages generate income from project grants. However, this type of work is perceived as time-consuming and not very attractive. Thus, the first axial code was called: “Working for Swedish and/or European institutions can bring revenues and non-pecuniary benefits, but it is perceived as little attractive by residents”.

Furthermore, the authors have assembled five codes which were centred around fees and rents. All examined ecovillages have rentals as their main source of income. As well as other types of monthly fees which are paid by the residents. Which resulted in the second axial code: “The ecovillages generate most of their revenues through monthly fees paid by residents and visitors”. Moreover, seven codes referring to charitable donations, traditional bank loans and the need for investments were highlighted. The studied
ecovillages have relied on donations or loans mainly for starting the project and maintaining the infrastructures. Hence, the third axial code was named: “The organizations rely on loans and charitable donations to buy and maintain the property”. Thereafter, the authors have found nine open codes that dealt with alternative worldviews, reducing income, reducing expenditures, growing food, and relying on the community. These codes all led to the concepts of voluntary simplicity and self-sufficiency. Indeed, all community members shared that they believe in a simpler way of living where they reduce their consumption level to reduce costs and free some time for other activities. Therefore, the third axial code was labelled: “The philosophy of ‘voluntary simplicity’ contributes to reducing expenses while increasing the amount of time available to build self-sufficiency”.

Furthermore, the authors have grouped six open codes that discussed the common ownership of the property, the risk of bankruptcy, and spontaneous order. Interviewees explained that the common ownership of property is a way used by ecovillages to secure their land for an indefinite period. This resulted in the name of the fifth axial code: “The common ownership of the property can ensure the subsistence of the ecovillages and the autonomous organization of their residents”. Additionally, seven codes were arranged that shared similar themes related to local trades, people’s skills, collectivity, local sources, and communal approach. As all ecovillages feature some kind of communal economic systems, where they use pooled resources and carry out activities collectively to reduce financial costs. As a result, the sixth axial code was identified as: “A communal economic system allows to meet residents’ needs at a lower cost”. After, the residents interviewed stressed the importance of unity, solidarity, engagement and volunteer work in the ecovillage’s financial viability. Accordingly, the seventh axial code has been written down as: “The ecovillages rely on non-commodified works to function properly”. Lastly, four open codes were grouped referring to fines, laws, and regulations. As interviewees expressed, ecovillages must be fully aware of the law and regulations to avoid financial penalties. Simply put, these fines can represent large burdens for the ecovillages’ financial situation. Thus, the last axial code was titled: “A good understanding of laws and regulations helps communities to avoid financial penalties”.

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4.2 Interpretation

4.2.1 Working for Swedish and/or European institutions can bring revenues and non-pecuniary benefits, but it is perceived as little attractive by residents

While conducting the interviews, it has appeared to the authors that some Swedish ecovillages tend to be involved in local and international projects. Indeed, two out of the three ecovillages studied, namely Suderbyn Ecovillage and Stiftelsen Stjärnsund, have been taking part in some aid or development projects over the years.

On the one hand, Suderbyn has incorporated these kinds of projects into the ecovillage’s daily life through its NGO ‘RELEARN’, which is, in Kamu’s words, “the educational arm and outreach face of Suderbyn”. As Robert explained, this NGO “focuses on international cooperation, education, applied research” and “provide some employment, income, and publicity for Suderbyn”. More precisely, the authors could read on Suderbyn’s website that it is “a non-profit NGO working locally (…) and internationally with environmental resilience, social justice, respect for human rights, democratic development, transformative education and international cooperation for sustainable development” (Suderbyn Ecovillage, 2020). Thus, as Kamu explained, the NGO contributes to the economy of the ecovillage and employ three residents from which “the salaries are paid from the profit that is made from running these projects”. Nevertheless, Kamu added that “the NGO work is not very lucrative” and Robert stressed that “there is a lack of people in Suderbyn that are willing to join and do the work of RELEARN”. Indeed, according to Robert, “most people who come to Suderbyn want to be involved in the garden or eco-building” and “not so many want to be involved in abstract project management”. Hence, Robert later disclosed that “there is probably a movement away from these externally funded projects”, which would mean that “RELEARN would have to get rid of all of its workers”.

On the other hand, in Stiftelsen Stjärnsund, the community’s participation in local or international projects is more seldom as they do not have an NGO working full-time on that. Actually, Charlotta shared the following: “from the Swedish government we would never get any help, but from the European Union, right now we don’t get any help, but now and then we can have different projects”. More specifically, Charlotta explained that “it has happened for like three times” where Stjärnsund asked for project grants from
the European Union. Soon after, Kenny disclosed that “if they chose not to do these projects, from what I’ve heard from those people, is that the process of documenting and reporting to these institutions has been more labour-intensive than the money they have gotten”. Moreover, Kenny shared that, “it is a struggle, especially in here, because Hedemora is very far behind in their views on nature. The nature is seen as a commodity and not as nature at all, so in that case, it makes all our projects harder, as it is hard to get approval and money from them”. Thus, in Stiftelsen Stjärnsund it seems that there is also a movement away from this kind of projects as it is perceived as too labour intensive and not aligned with their worldview.

Lastly, as for Goda Händer, the community does not work for Swedish or European institutions and did not appear to be interested in earning money from project grants. Indeed, as Elin stressed, “time is the biggest problem for us. Like we have kids, and having time to grow your food, to construct your house, and having time to be in the forest, its kind of hard when you have small kids”. Therefore, as Jens explained, “it is part of our vision that all members of the ecovillage should try to reduce the working time for salary”. Simply put, for this ecovillage, the focus is put on being “self-sustained within the local area” and not really about doing educational, development, or aid projects to influence the broader society. Thus, to achieve financial viability, Goda Händer’s residents made it clear that they were more interested in reducing their expenditures rather than increasing their income.

To sum up, the authors understood from participants that ecovillages can generate revenues from project grants to meet their operating costs and employ some residents while contributing to the broader society. Nevertheless, it appeared that this revenue stream is not perceived as very attractive by community members because it is time-consuming and often too abstract. Thus, it seems that ecovillages prefer to reduce the time spent on working for institutions and invest this time in some other activities, perceived as less abstract and more rewarding.
4.2.2 The ecovillages generate most of their revenues through monthly fees paid by residents and visitors

To cover the expenses relating to their activities, all the ecovillages studied were organized around the payment of monthly fees by residents and visitors. Indeed, as in many other ecovillages, “money gained from monthly contributions for rent and resident’s use of communal resources pays for utilities” (Hong & Vicdan, 2016).

In Suderbyn, Kamu explained that these payments are made through the cooperative as “everybody who is coming here pay rent, and they also pay some money for the food that they eat, which the cooperative provides.” Simply put, as Kamu stressed, people visiting or living in Suderbyn become “sort of the customers in the ecovillage”. Interestingly, Kamu disclosed that “the rental of rooms is the most lucrative business” of the cooperative. So, according to Robert, “the cooperative is very stable because its source of income is basically the people who either resides at Suderbyn or are temporarily visiting Suderbyn” Thus, everyone visiting or living in Suderbyn pays for their living expenses directly to the cooperative, that is owned by community members, and this money covers most of the costs related to running the organization. Ultimately, because Robert highlighted that “there has never been a shortage of people wanting to come to Suderbyn, and everyone is paying”, Suderbyn financial viability is ensured by the various people interested by the project.

Secondly, according to Charlotta, Stiftelsen Stjärnsund also generates most of its revenues through the rent “from the course leader, from people who came to the courses, and from people living in the ecovillage.” Additionally, she added that “we also have a hostel, so we get money from there when people come and stay overnight.” Consequently, the ecovillage’s economic viability is based on the payment of rents from community members and short-term visitors. Interestingly, as Kenny puts it, “everyone owns their own money, but we pay rent and the rent we are paying to ourselves. Because we are paying to the community that we have together, so we own money, and we pay to ourselves.” Thus, everyone passing by Stjärnsund contribute to the financial viability of the place, as they bring money earned within the modern market economy into the community.
Lastly, *Elin* explained about Goda Händer that they “*don’t have any companies and any income that comes to the ecovillage. It is only the monthly fees from the individuals living here.*” So, as *Elin* puts it, “it’s basically up to anyone to have a stable economy themselves and pay their part”. On that note, *Jens* clarified that “*each member has this responsibility, just to make clear that the ecovillage does not support anyone economically*”. Simply put, the community’s only revenues come from its residents’ rents and contributions for common purchases. Thus, in Goda Händer, according to the community’s vision statement, “every month we pay a fee to the ecovillage which covers the ecovillage’s common costs and for the accommodation one usually has” (Goda Händer Ekoby, 2018). Ultimately, the situation in Goda Händer is similar to the two other ecovillages discussed, as their financial viability depends upon the monthly fees paid by residents.

In brief, in all the ecovillages explored, the authors have understood that the main source of income comes from residents and visitor’s money that has been earned outside the ecovillage. Simply stated, everyone coming to the ecovillages are expected to pay for all their living expenses, such as accommodation, transport, energy, and food. Ultimately, people living in or passing by the ecovillages become the customers of the organizations, and their money contributes greatly to the financial viability of the places. As the authors have understood from *Robert*, this system allows the ecovillages to have a stable economy as the basic costs related to their operations are directly covered by residents.
4.2.3 The organizations rely on loans and charitable donations to buy and maintain the property

Though ecovillages aim at escaping “the old order”, they still rely on fiat money to become laboratories that “test and demonstrate new ideologies and systems” (Pitzer, 1989). In fact, “intentional communities, like all organizations, must maintain an economic base, producing income at least equal to expenses” (Pitzer et al, 2014). Hence, because ecovillages are driven by a different purpose than profit-maximization, they often need to rely on loans and donations to start their project and/or maintain it.

When the researchers interviewed Robert, one of Suderbyn’s founders, he explained that the property was originally bought with bank loans, but “from 2015, we dissolved all those loans and we owned everything”. In fact, for Robert, it was important to “free ourselves from the loans we had on the land”. Then, Kamu later added that “we haven’t relied on loans in the last couple of years at least”. Nevertheless, Kamu disclosed that Suderbyn recently took a loan from one of its members, “but that is mainly in order to address a liquidity issue because the place had experienced some tax-related problems”. Then, when it comes to donations, as Robert explained, in 2015 “the land was actually purchased through donations”, or more precisely, “we asked for a lot of donations in order to free ourselves from the loans we had on the land”. Moreover, he highlighted about the foundation owning the land that “its only income sources are those donations and any other donations that it might get”. Moreover, Kamu shared that RELEARN’s employees “pay back a portion of their income back to the NGO (...) because we’re not only a matter of making a profit, but also supporting a cause we believe in”. Ultimately, Kamu shared that these donations are “very helpful for the NGO to continue running its operations because unfortunately, this type of experimental work is not very lucrative”.

In Stifelsen Stjärnsund, Charlotta shared that “we have a loan right now, but it is not for the daily living it is more for repairing or restoring anything in the houses”. For instance, she explained the following: “We are planning to put solar panels on the roof of the house, and then we need to take a loan for that, but we don't need a loan for our daily living”. When it comes to charitable donations, Charlotta explained that they “usually don’t rely on donations” but “this year because of the coronavirus, (...) we actually got donations from private persons and from the local bank in Hedemora”.
other words, the organization’s economy is stable enough to function without loans or donations, but when renovations are needed, or an economic crisis occurs, the ecovillage can receive help from banks or private individuals.

Lastly, regarding Goda Händer, Elin explained that “we have a bank loan but actually we have managed to reduce loans quite a lot”. More specifically, Jens shared that “the entire ecovillage has like 700,000 SEK in loans in total for the moment”. Thus, taking loans from commercial banks have allowed the citizens behind the ecovillage to buy the land and start their project. Nevertheless, as for donations, Jens stated that “as founders, we had pretty much enough money to put into the project, so we did not rely on donations”. Simply stated, the personal finances of residents are stable enough to ensure the financial viability of the ecovillage without the need for donations.

To conclude, like any other organizations, the ecovillages studied relied on loans from banks or private individuals to kick start the project or simply maintain the infrastructures. Despite being of great help for these alternative organizations, loans can also be seen as a burden that they would rather avoid. Moreover, because the ecovillages studied deliberately chose to prioritize their purpose over their profits, they can benefit from charitable donations to strengthen their financial viability. Indeed, like other not-for-profit organizations, donations from individuals believing in the project can be an additional source of income for ecovillages. Nevertheless, it appeared that this source of income is somewhat marginal in the ecovillages studied, or inexistent in the case of Goda Händer.
4.2.4 The philosophy of ‘voluntary simplicity’ contributes to reducing expenses while increasing the amount of time available to build self-sufficiency

Through the interviews, the researchers have understood that voluntary simplicity is one of the core values of the ecovillages studied. It appeared that this philosophy brings several benefits, such as reducing their spending and freeing up some time to work towards self-sufficiency. Simply put, they generally chose out of a free will, “to limit expenditures on consumer goods and services, and to cultivate non-materialistic sources of satisfaction and meaning” (Etzioni, 1998). In so doing, they voluntarily reduce their income to enjoy more free time and contribute to their self-determination. Indeed, consuming less both helps in reducing their costs and increasing their time available for other things considered as more important.

For Suderbyn, this is a central aspect of the community’s identity as they embrace “increasingly higher levels of voluntary simplicity” and are “striving for self-sufficiency in food production and renewable energy, prioritizing ecological and local materials” (Suderbyn Ecovillage, 2020). In fact, as Kamu explained, residents and volunteers “develop the garden, build up the infrastructure, and maintain the place” as to reduce their expenditures and continually increase their level of self-sufficiency.

Similarly, in Goda Händer, Jens’ shared that all “members of the ecovillage should try to reduce the working time for salary” in order to “reduce income and expenses”. This means, in Jens’ words, “that you buy less stuff, you have more time to take care of the stuff you already have and can make your own stuff”. Indeed, Jens said that “it is in our vision to become more self-sufficient by growing more food” and “we have a forest where we can take down trees, take it to our own sawmill and have a wood workshop to make stuff by yourself to avoid buying stuff”. Along the same lines, Jens shared that “when we are building new houses, we use wood from our own forest, clay from our own land, and straw bales from a farmer not far away”.

Finally, speaking about Stiftelsen Stjärnsund, Kenny shared the following: “We long for comfort but we don’t need the luxuries. We need each other and we need good food, that’s what we need”. Hence, Kenny stressed the need for community members to “make their own food, compost, and make their own sustainability, to rely on themselves and the community”. Thus, in this ecovillage, the focus is put on meeting residents’ basic needs.
to reduce their need for money and implicitly reject the society they wish to change. Therefore, self-sufficiency is a high priority to be met to remain financially viable in the context of their paradigm.

Thus, for the three ecovillages explored, voluntary simplicity and self-sufficiency are of central importance to achieve financial viability. These choices allow these organizations to reduce their expenditures and their dependency on public and private institutions. Ultimately, their lifestyles are used both as a rejection of capitalism and as a viable alternative to what Bourdieu (1999) calls the “tyranny of the market”. Indeed, by living simple lives with a high degree of self-sufficiency, ecovillages prevent some of the money earned from going back to the global market economy. According to Parker et al (2014), voluntary simplicity and self-sufficiency are useful strategies that can be found in various alternative organizations, not only ecovillages.

4.2.5 The common ownership of the property can ensure the subsistence of the ecovillages and the autonomous organization of their residents

Despite having been disregarded for a long time, common ownership has recently gained unprecedented popularity in Western liberal democracies. In fact, in the new discourse on the commons, these regimes “are seen as yielding a variety of benefits, such as a communitarian ethos in the efficient use of scarce resources, or greater freedom to interact and create in new ways” (di Robilant, 2012). Simply put, according to di Robilant (2012), they have the potential to contribute to more “equality of autonomy”, understood as a “more equitable access to the material and relational means that allow individuals to be autonomous”. Among other initiatives, community land trusts have flourished by relying on common-ownership schemes, to “effectively removes the land from the speculative market and allows for less marketable uses that might benefit disadvantaged communities” (DeFilippis, Stromberg, & Williams, 2017). In this regard, ecovillages can be considered as disadvantaged communities as they work towards social, environmental, and climate justice in a world dominated by the paradigm of profit maximization.

During the data collection, the authors realized that all the ecovillages studied believe strongly in common ownership. Firstly, in Suderbyn, Robert explained that “Suderbyn
Earth-Care is a Swedish foundation which owns the land. So, we do not own it and we could not easily sell it, we could not easily change the use of the land. It is all sort of locked into this foundation”. This is, in Kamu’s words, “Suderbyn's way of securing this place as an ecovillage for an indefinite amount of time”. More precisely, Kamu highlighted that “the foundation owns the property and has a board. This board is comprised of one to two people from the cooperative, one to two people from the NGO, and one person from the community that is living here”. Thus, as Robert stressed, “the board of the foundation has the job to make sure that Suderbyn never goes bankrupt and thus never disappears”.

Secondly, in Stiftelsen Stjärnsund, the whole property is also owned by a foundation, and as Charlotta specified, “in Sweden there is no owner of a foundation, it’s only a board who take care of everything.” Just like in Suderbyn, this form of ownership ensures that the ecovillage will not go bankrupt and put to sale on the market, but, additionally, it allows the community to gain some “equality of autonomy”. Indeed, Charlotta highlighted that, “there is no need for any other form of organization” and that “inside the foundation, we can do whatever we want actually. That way it is really good”. Simply stated, in this ecovillage, residents organize themselves spontaneously through informal groups, which allows them to gain “greater freedom to interact and create in new ways” (di Robilant, 2012). Thusly, Charlotta explained that they “are working in different groups” related to specific domains. For instance, community members can pay a small fee and be a member of the workshop or the community’s ecological food shop, or the course house called “Fridhem”.

Finally, in Goda Händer the situation is slightly different because the county of Örebro refused the community to buy the land through a foundation. So, as Jens said, “the county authorities refused us to buy this as a community, so instead we had to own it as persons, which makes it difficult for us”. In fact, because the property is not commonly owned, Jens said that “it is both more expensive and more complicated to become more owners or reduce the number of owners”. Simply put, for Jens “it poses a risk for us, as it is hard to change the law, and if someone wants to leave, the entire ecovillage can be put on the market”. Ultimately, Jens concluded that “it is really bad for us and we want to avoid it, but the law is in the way for us”. Thus, Goda Händer’s residents confirmed that the common ownership of the land plays a central role in
4.2.6 A communal economic system allows to meet resident’s needs at a lower cost

Because cooperation is key to human survival, communal living as a social organization has always been employed by Homo Sapiens. Naturally, from hunter-gatherers to industrial societies, this form of organization has always provided security, solidarity, and survival for its members (Nowak, 2012). However, it is with the rise of industrial societies and global capitalism that competition has become predominant, and “made cooperative communities seem like alternatives to the norm” (Pitzer et al, 2014). Hence, by developing communal economic systems, ecovillages work towards proposing an alternative to the global capitalist economy while ensuring some security from financial predicaments. In fact, according to Hall (2015), “the communal approach with sharing can provide a good standard of living at reduced financial costs” as “a community of common pooled resources provides more stability than individual incomes.” Simply put, a communal economic system occurs when “members prefer to carry out certain activities collectively”, and when significant production and consumption activities take place within the community (Ben-Ner, 1987). Thus, through the interviews, the authors have observed that the communities explored have designed different kinds of communal economies to meet their residents’ needs without compromising their worldview or financial viability.

Firstly, Suderbyn created a cooperative, called “Suderbyn People-Care”, to deal with its residents’ basic needs collectively. As Robert pointed out, it “is owned by the people that live there” and its purpose is to “manage the rental of rooms, the food cycle, and the transport, which is mainly the cars and the bicycles”. In other words, Kamu explained that it “takes care of the practical arrangement in this place and actually runs the property from the foundation and then takes care of it, maintains it”. For instance, Kamu illustrated that “the cooperative gets from different providers ecological and vegan food and basically sells it off to the residents”. Thus, by carrying essential activities, such as accommodation, food, and transport together, the community provides comfort to its residents while ensuring an affordable price. Through this cooperative, it has been explained that Suderbyn generates sufficient revenues, as it receives monthly fees from
residents and visitors. In fact, Robert made it clear that “the cooperative economy is very stable” and that “it’s a non-profit so we have to bring at least enough money to pay for all our costs, plus we make improvements in investments with that money coming in”. Hence, the cooperative allows residents to pool some of their money to collectively purchase living essentials at a better price compared to buying everything individually.

Secondly, as mentioned earlier, in Stiftelsen Stjärnsund, the foundation enables community members to organize themselves spontaneously to meet their individual needs while ensuring the viability of the place. Thusly, Charlotta said that they “are working in different groups” related to specific domains. For instance, community members can pay a small fee and be a member of the workshop, the course house, or the community’s ecological food shop. Regarding the food shop, Charlotta highlighted that “it belongs to the members, it’s mostly members who buy there, and that means that we don’t add anything to the price.” Simply put, Charlotta explained this shop buys food and other essentials in large quantities from “the big stores”, and then members can come and buy what they need at a low price. Though these informal groups do not bring substantial revenues to the ecovillage, they allow residents to decrease their expenses and to support the communal economy by spending their money locally. In fact, according to Kenny, “the best way to keep a healthy economy locally is to keep the bucket from leaking”, so “we gain money from external services, but locally we try to keep them rotating just among us, among the community”. To this end, Kenny explained that “with our skills, we can trade for money, for food, for shelter, for whatever” and concluded that “the more people we get, the more local services we get”.

Thirdly, as for Goda Händer, Jens said that they have “kind of a shared economy” as they are “buying food together”, “do maintenance on all houses together” and “co-own cars that we use in a carpool”. As Elin explained, “the ecovillage tries to keep the cost low and make it possible” as the aim is to “be able to live cheaply in the ecovillage in the long run”. To this end, the organization relies on a communal economy to meet some of its residents’ needs at a reduced cost. For instance, Elin shared that “we buy food together, I don’t know how much we save money by this, but at least it makes it easier to buy larger quantities of organic food by ordering together.” Nevertheless, Jens later added that “to encourage a way of living that is cheaper and more sustainable”, the community decided to “reduce the amount of food that is part of this shared economy” as to “actually reduce
the amount of food that is bought from supermarkets”. Moreover, as Jens elaborated, they “have a carpool which reduces costs quite a lot” as “we are quite many that can share the cost for those cars”.

4.2.7 The ecovillages rely on non-commodified works to function properly

By translating all human interactions into monetary transactions, the capitalist market economy has “eroded the social fibre that gives shape and resilience to the experiences of individuals, families, and ultimately, the market itself” (Ciscel & Heath, 2001). Nevertheless, Urry (2000) noted that “a largely unintended effect of a highly individualized and marketized society has been the intensification of social practices which systematically ‘evade the edicts of exchange value and the logic of the market’”. Thus, scholars do not only stress that the commodification ideal of capitalism is unrealistic but, more importantly, that it is in non-commodified work that lies the seed of a post-capitalist future (Beck, 2000) (Archibugi, 2000) (Gorz, 1999). Consequently, for the last couple of decades, various scholars and radical ecologists have argued for the need to move away from a globalized market economy to operate within a non-destructive society (Herderson, 1999) (Robertson, 1991) (Dobson, 1993). Therefore, these views resonate strongly with the ecovillage movement that advocates for more localized, self-sufficient, and sustainable economies. Fortunately, these communities’ organizational structures “have distinct advantages, including a willing workforce committed to a common economic and ideological purpose.” (Pitzer et al, 2014)

In the ecovillages interviewed, the authors observed that these values are strongly present, and that non-commodified forms of works form a big part of their everyday life. This type of work includes subsistence work like cooking or gardening, non-monetized-exchange like volunteer work, or not-for-profit monetary exchanges like working for a wage in an NGO (Williams, 2005). Indeed, as Kenny (2014) observed, in intentional communities “there is a critical level of density needed to maximize the benefits of communal life. This includes having a critical mass of resident members who can participate in community life, be it through chores, serving on committees, or participation in social activities”.

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Firstly, in Suderbyn Ecovillage, Kamu disclosed that the “volunteering program is very important for Suderbyn’s economy” as “it brings in a lot of people who are enthusiastic to contribute to the place (...) and at the same time they are renting out the rooms and becoming sort of the customers in the ecovillage”. Thus, this non-monetized exchange between private persons and the ecovillage, contribute to the proper functioning of the organization while providing an opportunity for volunteers to learn about sustainable living. Similarly, not-for-profit work is very present in Suderbyn, as RELEARN currently employs three residents. As understood from Robert and Kamu, in Suderbyn, everyone is working voluntarily to contribute to the proper functioning of the community. These contributions include working in the garden or maintaining the infrastructures, as well as tasks like cooking, cleaning.

Secondly, in Stjärnsund, non-commodified work can be found when people work for the community’s maintenance and self-sufficiency, but also when they help each other out. As Kenny mentioned, community members work voluntarily “to make their own food, make their own compost, make their own sustainability” and “try to treat each other with massages and health treatments”. In other words, Kenny explained that “all of us have different knowledges, backgrounds, and abilities that are useful for each other and the community”. Moreover, the ecovillage welcomes volunteers “that want to experience this and join the community, but the living spaces are very limited right now”. Hence, because of a lack of living spaces, the organization cannot rely too much on volunteer work from visitors.

Finally, in Goda Händer, residents work together for the benefit of the community without expecting any financial compensation. Indeed, as Elin explained, “there are common workdays” where, for instance, “we do all maintenance on all houses together”. Also, Elin highlighted that “there are two neighbours who live on a farm next to ours and they cooperate with us, so they participate in the ecovillage”. Along the same lines, Elin said the following: “we grow potatoes with seven other families (...) so we work some days there and then we have potatoes for the year”. Nevertheless, Elin made it clear that they are lacking in time and “more people mean more time and more projects, and then we need less income”. Thus, the authors could see that solidarity and non-commodified work plays a role in the organization of Goda Händer and help the organization in achieving financial viability by reducing some costs.
4.2.8 A good understanding of laws and regulations helps communities to avoid financial penalties.

The ecovillages studied are grassroots innovations that prioritize social, ecological, and cultural values over economic rationality. Simply stated, because these communities are rooted in a strong sustainability worldview, they challenge the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism and the “green growth” paradigm which the Swedish government still follows. Therefore, these alternative organizations need to take into consideration that their values and ideas might not be aligned with the national laws and regulations. In fact, as issues with the authorities could cause substantial financial penalties, ecovillages should be fully aware of what are the laws and regulations that they must follow and adapt accordingly.

When discussing with Robert, he shared that Suderbyn has had problems with the Swedish tax authorities and was fined twice for not complying with the national law of cooperative. Indeed, he explained the following: “We had several tax problems with the Swedish government which (...) could have easily put the cooperative in bankruptcy, and then we would have lost the entire Suderbyn.” More specifically, Robert disclosed that “twice the tax authority has demanded 600,000 SEK in taxes and penalties for Suderbyn acting in a way that doesn’t fit the law of cooperatives.” Simply put, according to Robert, the issue was that “a lot of the things we were doing at Suderbyn did not make economic sense” and “a cooperative following the law of cooperatives of Sweden should be making everything according to proper economic sense”. He also pointed out that, originally, the local authorities “refused to allow us to create the foundation because they said that ‘it doesn’t make economic sense for you’”. Nevertheless, Robert mentioned that they “had to do this in a very roundabout way which caused the second time problem with the tax authority.” Ultimately, these fines create a big burden because, as Kamu said, it “prevents the ecovillage from investing into itself because that debt needs to be paid before any investments can be made.”

As for Goda Händer and Stiftelsen Stjärnsund, the communities did not experience any financial penalties as they were aware of what they could and could not do. For instance, unlike in Suderbyn, Goda Händer directly accepted the decision of the county and gave up the idea of creating a foundation, as to avoid any difficulties with the local authorities. In Stjärnsund, Charlotta shared that the foundation was created in 1984, and
that "the economy has been very stable during the 36 years." However, she also mentioned that "from the Swedish government would never get any help". Talking about regulations, Kenny stated that they cannot receive any building permit, or as he puts it "we're not allowed to do anything there like we are not allowed to change anything." Thus, being aware of the laws and regulations is important to avoid fines that can endanger the financial viability of the community.

Ultimately, the strong sustainability paradigm underpinning the ecovillages can often be badly perceived by local authorities operating under another worldview. This divergence in values and beliefs must be acknowledged by ecovillages to avoid any financial penalties that can endanger the organization’s financial viability. Simply put, because the Swedish government believes strongly in the possibility of a “green growth” (Swedish Institute, 2020), ecovillages must follow the laws and act in an economically rational manner. Indeed, trying to move away from the assumption of Homo economicus put forward by the orthodox economic models, might result in going against the current laws regulating society. Thus, a thorough understanding of the laws and regulations relevant to their operations is an important aspect to consider for achieving financial viability in ecovillages.
4.2.9 The community bucket theory

Swedish ecovillages can achieve financial viability by channelling money from the capitalist market economy to their communal economy, while simultaneously relying on their ideology and resources to prevent this money from “leaking” out.

Findings from the primary data revealed that all the ecovillages studied have a stable economy and achieved financial viability successfully. Despite having observed slightly different types of internal organization, these communities appeared to share a common vision and therefore employ a similar strategy to their viability. They envision the creation of a fundamentally different society, based around a localized economy as opposed to the globalized market economy. The ecovillages’ economic systems are best described by David Fleming’s (2016) concept of “Lean Economy”, which the author defines as an economy “supported by richly-developed social capital and culture, organized not around the market, but around the rediscovery of community”. Moreover, he explains that “it is based on cooperation in a slack economic and social order, building on a panarchy of social groupings, from small groups and household production through the close neighbourhood and parish to the nation” (Fleming, 2016).

Thus, by exploring three Swedish ecovillages, the researchers have discovered that they are organized in a way that allows money from the capitalist market economy to enter the communal economy, while simultaneously ensuring that most of this money stays within the community or local area. Interestingly, the focus is not on increasing the organizations’ revenues but decreasing its costs and expenditures. Hence, based on the interviews, the authors have named their grounded theory “the community bucket theory”, that Kenny described as follows: “to keep the bucket from leaking, you do services and you sell products, and you have money coming in (...) and then we pay rent into the community, and then we don’t want that money to go back out, we want to keep it local, so when we get money we want to pile up locally”.

Ultimately, this scenario does not only allow the organizations to be financially viable but also contributes to their vision of creating an alternative to the status quo. In fact, by working towards enriching their social capital and securing a higher degree of self-sufficiency, the ecovillages studied wish to demonstrate that another life is possible
outside of the current system of neoliberal capitalism. Hence, this demonstration promotes the feasibility of the strong sustainability paradigm, and the strategies employed by ecovillages can be a source of inspiration for other alternative organizations aiming to reach a higher level of sustainability without risking bankruptcy.

In brief, the researchers found that ecovillages generate sufficient revenues from grants, rents, loans, and donations to continue their activity in the short term. More importantly, these alternative organizations are focusing on decreasing their expenditures and reliance upon the modern market economy by leveraging their philosophy of voluntary simplicity, their understanding of the Swedish legal system, as well as relying on a communal approach to property and economy and a high degree of non-commodified work. This strategy of “keeping the bucket from leaking” allows the organizations to be financially viable on the medium-term, while their reliance on a rich social capital as opposed to the competitive market economy ensure their viability on the long term.

Figure 3: The Community Bucket Theory
5. Conclusion

As the social, ecological, and climate predicaments unfold globally, the need to rethink humanity’s politico-economical systems has never been as urgent (Guterres, 2020). In this context, ecovillages emerged to propose an alternative paradigm as well as a bottom-up approach to sustainability (Bergman et al, 2010). Hence, in a world dominated by neoliberal capitalism, understanding how these alternative organizations can remain financially viable appeared to be an important and understudied subject. Therefore, the researchers decided to explore how Swedish ecovillages achieve financial viability in the context of their paradigm, as to contribute to the literature on ecovillages, grassroots innovations and alternative organizations in general.

Thanks to the participation of six citizens from three different ecovillages, the authors have been able to understand the paradigm under which these organizations operate and their strategies to achieve financial viability. Thus, participants made it clear that their approaches are rooted in the strong sustainability paradigm and, as such, they generally reject the mainstream idea of “sustainable development” or “green growth”, to the profit of alternatives found in the “degrowth” movement. In other words, they wish to prove that financial viability is possible even though the organizations emphasize social and environmental concerns over economic rationality.

Through their analysis, the authors have understood that these organizations successfully leverage their worldview and various capitals to generate sufficient revenues, and, at the same time, managed to decrease their expenses and dependency over the market economy. More precisely, they have found that Swedish ecovillages achieve financial viability by channelling money from the capitalist market economy to their communal economy, while simultaneously relying on their ideology and resources to prevent this money from “leaking out”. Their main resources can be found in rich social and human capitals, but also in their ability to meet some of their needs, like food, water or shelter, without the support of private or public institutions.
6. Discussion

6.1 Theoretical Contribution

This qualitative study contributes to the existing literature on ecovillages, grassroots innovations, and alternative organizations by providing additional observations on Swedish ecovillages; especially when it comes to their financial viability. This research covers a literature gap about the financial viability of ecovillages. Thus, this paper provides new insights to these fields through a grounded theory approach, that led to the emergence of an innovative theory. Ultimately, contributing to a better understanding of the existing literature, and appreciating how Swedish ecovillages can achieve financial viability in the context of a strong sustainability paradigm.

6.2 Implications

The thesis at hand can be beneficial for current and future ecovillages, but also for other types of alternative organization. Indeed, by conveying new insights on how they can achieve financial viability in the context of a strong sustainability worldview, the authors hope that more citizens will start more alternative organizations to act upon the predicaments of our times. Furthermore, this research can be of interest for researchers in business administration, as it is a field still dominated by the orthodox view of neoclassical economics and influenced by the neoliberal ideology that hinders the development of the strong sustainability paradigm.

6.3 Limitations

The first limitation of this study can be found in the size of the sample, as the researchers studied only three ecovillages, all located within the same country. Studying more ecovillages would have been beneficial to enrich the authors’ analysis and nuance their final theory. Moreover, the fact that all the organizations studied operate in Sweden prevents their findings from being generalized to other geographical areas. This is because different locations have a different natural and legal environment, which can have a strong influence over ecovillages’ financial viability.
Then, the authors’ choice of using a grounded theory approach with an interpretivist research paradigm would be another limitation. Simply put, it implies that their findings are subjective as they are based on the socially constructed realities of participants. By focusing on exploring a few subjective realities, the researchers discarded the idea of reaching an objective truth.

Lastly, because of the COVID-19 health crisis and a lack of financial resources, the researchers could not visit all the ecovillages studied and therefore were forced to conduct virtual interviews. Because of these limitations, the authors believe that the quality of their interviews has been negatively affected, as they could have reached a better understanding of the phenomena under study by visiting the communities and discussing with their residents physically.

6.4 Future Research

The authors believe that future studies could, and should, focus on the strong sustainability paradigm within organizational studies, as well as the role of alternative organizations and grassroots initiatives in a sustainability transition.

Moreover, further research on the economic and financial aspects of ecovillages can bring additional insights onto the relation between these dwellings and the global capitalist economy. More specifically, a focus on voluntary simplicity and self-sufficiency as a strategy to achieve financial viability can bring valuable wisdom.

Finally, in this research, the authors have found that ecovillages are facing issues with the existing laws and regulations. Therefore, further studies could be done to address the relationship between ecovillages and governments to have a better understanding of the legal difficulties faced by these alternative organizations.
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8. Appendices

Appendix A - Summary of Researched Ecovillages

Suderbyn Ecovillage:
Suderbyn Ecovillage is an intentional community located in Gotland that was founded in 2008. The purpose of this place is to encourage a more sustainable way of living, in line with nature and permaculture principles. The property is commonly owned, and it accommodates around 25 international people. These individuals live together sharing common values and working cooperatively as a community. The organization strive for embracing a continuously higher level of voluntary simplicity, communal sharing, and cultural diversity. Community members aim to develop an alternative way of living and to find sustainable solutions by experimenting with structural and social systems. (Suderbyn Ecovillage, 2020)

Stiftelsen Stjärnsund:
Stiftelsen Stjärnsund was founded in 1984 with the vision of creating a “living Ecovillage” in Dalarna. To this end, they have been organized around the course house known as “Fridhem”, which is a meeting place that “welcomes people of all ages, who meet to socialize, work and be creative.” As of today, the ecovillage accommodates around 10 residents and welcomes many visitors through their hostel. The community aims to create an environment of togetherness and “to grow naturally with love and care”. Also, the organization works towards social innovations for sustainability. (Stiftelsen Stjärnsund, 2020)
Goda Händer Ekoby:

Goda Händer is an ecovillage located in Örebro which was founded in 2011 and is equally owned by four people. The community consists of around 8 residents, who live in traditional households, where they support each other by sharing resources and having similar values. However, individuals in this ecovillage are responsible for their own livelihood. The ecovillage contains small farms and fields, which enables community members to grow their own food. They aim for a sustainable way of living by focusing more on social capital such as forming relationships and developing the local economy. (Goda Händer Ekoby, 2018)

Appendix B - Coding Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Codes</th>
<th>Axial Codes</th>
<th>Selective Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revenues from education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenues through project grants from the Swedish government or the European Union</td>
<td>Working for Swedish and/or European institutions can bring revenues and non-pecuniary benefits, but is perceived as little attractive by residents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects bring employment to community members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of interest from residents in abstract project management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties with the process of obtaining project grants from the Swedish government</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents pay for their living expenses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenues from residents and visitors' rents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly membership fees as a source of income</td>
<td>The ecovillages generate most of their revenues through monthly fees paid by residents and visitors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents’ money contributes to economic stability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money from rentals used to cover operating costs</td>
<td>Banks loans to purchase the property</td>
<td>The organizations rely on loans and charitable donations to buy and maintain the property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations from a local bank</td>
<td>Donations from private individuals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members’ donation for paying off debts</td>
<td>Private loans from individuals to address liquidity issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loans for house maintenance</td>
<td>Loans for investing in community projects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing working hours to increase free time</td>
<td>Reducing consumption to reduce costs</td>
<td>The philosophy of ‘voluntary simplicity’ contribute to reducing expenses while increasing the amount of time available to build self-sufficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local food production to increase self-sufficiency</td>
<td>Reducing expenditure by reducing income</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology and alternative worldview</td>
<td>Collective work to increase the level of self-sufficiency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing spending by using local materials</td>
<td>Non-materialistic values to reduce expenditure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting basic needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common property ownership through a foundation</td>
<td>Common ownership reducing risks of bankruptcy</td>
<td>The common ownership of the property can ensure the subsistence of the ecovillages and the autonomous organization of their residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common ownership reducing risks of bankruptcy</td>
<td>Foundation for securing the ecovillage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members have the same level of decision-making and responsibility</td>
<td>Spontaneous order through informal groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risks of not having common ownership</td>
<td>Management through a communal approach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management through a communal approach</td>
<td>Carpool as a way to share costs</td>
<td>A communal economic system allows to meet resident’s needs at a reduced cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchasing collectively to reduce costs</td>
<td>Supporting the local economy by depending on the local sources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting the local economy by depending on the local sources</td>
<td>Trading skills for money or other resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trading skills for money or other resources</td>
<td>Money from cooperative is spent back on the community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money from cooperative is spent back on the community</td>
<td>Reduced costs for community residents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Swedish ecovillages can achieve financial viability by channelling money from the capitalist market economy to their communal economy, while simultaneously relying on their ideology and resources to prevent this money from “leaking” out.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voluntary work to increase self-sufficiency</th>
<th>The ecovillages rely on non-commodified works to function properly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers from projects are seen as customers and a source of income</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of space limits people to join the community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members supporting each other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging with the local community to reduce spending</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxation issues with the Swedish government</td>
<td>The good understanding of laws and regulations helps communities to avoid financial penalties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fines from the Swedish tax agency negatively affect the community's economy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding fines to ensure a stable economy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impossibility to get building permits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C - Consent Form

GDPR Thesis Study Consent Form

Required by European Union General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679

All the participants have been informed about the purpose of the interview and of our study aiming at “Exploring the financial viability of Swedish ecovillages.”

Authors:
Maxence Mauraisin – manu1703@student.ju.se
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Thesis Supervisor:
MaxMikael Björling – maxmikael.bjorling@lnu.se

Purpose of the Thesis:
The thesis is written as part of our Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration from Jönköping International Business School. The study is conducted from August 2020 to December 2020 and aims at exploring how Swedish ecovillages can achieve financial viability in the context of their paradigm.

The Interview:
The interview will be through a video call on Zoom, whereby an open conversation on the management and economy of the ecovillage will be discussed. The duration of the interview will be between 25 to 35 minutes. Your participation will provide new insights on the topic and would help us in contributing to the existing literature on the subject.

Use of the Data:
All interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The information will not be shared with anyone that is not included in the study; however, it will be saved in case it is later needed for trustworthiness reasons.

Consent Form:

By reading this form, I agree to:
- Disclose my first name in this study.
- Take a part in this study by providing my personal and honest point of view.

I agree with all of the above

Name: Robert
Date: 13th of October
GDPR Thesis Study Consent Form

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All the participants have been informed about the purpose of the interview and of our study aiming at “Exploring the financial viability of Swedish ecovillages.”

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Name: Kanu
Date: 20th of October
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Name: Charlotte
Date: 23rd of October
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study aiming at “Exploring the financial viability of Swedish ecovillages.”

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Thesis Supervisor:
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I agree with all of the above
Name: Kenny
Date: 29th of October
GDPR Thesis Study Consent Form

Required by European Union General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679

All the participants have been informed about the purpose of the interview and of our study aiming at “Exploring the financial viability of Swedish ecovillages.”

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Thesis Supervisor:
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☒ I agree with all of the above
Name: Jens
Date: 30th of October
GDPR Thesis Study Consent Form

Required by European Union General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679

All the participants have been informed about the purpose of the interview and of our study aiming at “Exploring the financial viability of Swedish ecovillages.”

**Authors:**
Maxence Mauraisin – mmana1702@student.ju.se
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**Thesis Supervisor:**
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**Name:** Elin

**Date:** 30th of October