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Meaningful participation from the participants' perspective

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Meaningful participation from the participants' perspective

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Abstract

This thesis explores what meaningful and worthwhile participation is from the participant's perspective. The context is an urban densification project in Sweden. The findings show that participation is a purposeful activity and that participation needs to be relevant to people's purpose for participating to be meaningful and worthwhile. An interest in or concern over an issue is to begin with a purpose *to* participate. This study also found that people pursue different purposes *when* they participate. Four different but synergetic purposes *when* participating were identified these were; to have a *constructive dialogue*, to have a *constructive influence*, to *oversee the process* and *intrinsic motivations* to participate. Two common threads running through several of these four were to understand the project and decisions better and that active participation is motivated by its constructive potential. Based on these insights, and the participant's reflections, four guidelines for implementing meaningful and worthwhile participation in practice were suggested. Meaningful and worthwhile participation should be grounded in a *respectful relationship*; the interaction needs to be *receptive and responsive*, the agenda and information should be *relevant*. Lastly the process would be *resourceful* to make the most of the participants' expertise and allow them to participate in efficient and selective ways. It was suggested that *proactive transparency* of the planning process including the dialogue process itself can enable people to understand the process. This in combination with a variety of *constructive opportunities* for more active participants would be way to create a resourceful and flexible process: People are quite selective with how they invest their efforts and this suggests a pragmatic, rather than idealistic approach towards participation. The consequences of this are discussed.

Focus groups were the main method for data collection and the analytic approach was a grounded thematic analysis.

Keywords: public participation, citizen dialogue, urban planning.

Table of contents

1 Introduction.....	6
1.1 Background.....	7
1.2 Problem formulation.....	10
1.2.1 Aim and research questions.....	10
1.3 Structure of the thesis.....	11
1.4 Literature review.....	11
1.4.1 Theoretical discussion overview.....	11
1.4.2 Participant’s perspectives in empirical studies.....	12
1.4.3 Contributions of this research.....	13
1.5 Ulleråker urban development project.....	13
2 Methodology and method.....	15
2.1.1 Generic qualitative research.....	15
2.2 Methods.....	16
2.2.1 Sampling and participants.....	16
2.2.2 Focus groups.....	17
2.2.3 Thematic analysis.....	18
2.2.4 Reliability and validity.....	19
2.2.5 Ethical considerations.....	20
3 Results.....	21
3.1 Views on the urban development project and participation.....	21
3.1.1 Views of the Ulleråker project and Uppsala municipality.....	21
3.1.2 Views of participation in urban panning.....	22
3.1.3 Motivations for participating.....	23
3.1.4 Views on the Ulleråker participation process.....	23
3.2 Meaningful and worthwhile participation.....	25
3.2.1 Meaningful and worthwhile participation is relevant.....	25
3.2.2 Purposes when participating.....	26
3.2.3 Enabling factors for meaningful and worthwhile participation.....	28
4 Analysis.....	33
4.1 Defining meaningful and worthwhile participation.....	33
4.2 Meaningful and worthwhile participation in practice.....	35
4.2.1 Respectful relationship.....	35
4.2.2 Receptive and responsive.....	36
4.2.3 Relevant content.....	37
4.2.4 Resourceful process.....	37
5 Discussion.....	40
6 Conclusion.....	45
6.1 Contributions, limitations and future research.....	46
References.....	48

List of figures and tables

Figure 1. SKL Citizen Dialogue Stairs. Castell (2012).	8
Figure 2. Problem definition and influence matrix. Adapted from Westin, Hellquist & Calderon (2016).	9
Table 1. Guidelines for meaningful and worthwhile participation.	46

1 Introduction

In Sweden many urban areas are experiencing housing shortages. There is currently a building boom sweeping the country to combat this situation and the favoured development strategy is densification (Wingren, 2016). Densification is promoted as the more sustainable way for cities to grow since it limits urban sprawl. Jobs and service is brought closer to where people live and this may reduce the use of cars for transportation. But it is not without its problems. Green space and recreational areas may be lost and excessive densification can result in urban environments that are noisy, shady and windy, with poor air quality (Wingren, 2016). Considering the possible consequences, it is not surprising that when densification takes place in residential areas it often causes a conflict of interest with the locals already living there. Citizen dialogue and participation is promoted as a way of handling such conflicts (SKL, 2015).

Public participation has become a political buzzword and international agencies; governments and the academic literature tout it as a generally good thing (Castell, 2012). Involving people in decisions that affect them may contribute towards more legit, just and efficient governance (Fung, 2006) and increase social and political capital (Innes & Booher, 2000). Although there are positive examples living up to the expectations (Innes & Booher, 2000), implementing participation in practice is often difficult (Castell, 2012). Many times the experience is disappointing; processes are seen as tokenism and met with scepticism (Parker & Murray, 2012). Some argue that participation may be misused to legitimise decisions already made (Silver, Scott & Kazepov, 2010).

In the context of urban planning involving people in shaping their environment is seen as a way of addressing the failings of traditional planning and “the mismanagement of the physical environment” which has contributed to social and economic problems (Sanoff, 2006, p. 66). There are a few benefits. Public participation can inform decisions so that outcomes reflect people’s actual needs better (Churchman, 2012). Interaction between participants may contribute towards more creative insights and problem solving (Sanoff, 2006). And inviting the community at an early stage of planning can create a sense of ownership of the projects; there is evidence that this increases the acceptance of development and reduces so called NIMBYism (Manzo & Perkins, 2006, Vestbro, 2012). NIMBYism, is sometimes seen as selfishness, but is often a sign of place attachment, e.g. emotional bonds to a physical place. Place attachment correlates positively with a strong sense of community, engagement and participation. By working *with* the community and respecting local values, this engagement can become an asset (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). For these creative benefits and feelings of ownership to be possible, arguably more active forms of participation are required; something more than the stereotypical town hall meeting, with top-down information from the government to the governed.

Sweden has a strong top-down modernist tradition when it comes to urban planning where the views of ordinary people were not seen as particularly valuable for some time (Vestbro, 2012). Nowadays there is talk about public participation but a mindset, where planners and architects would prefer that laymen respect their competence remains. In Swedish cities the

expert opinion usually prevails (Vestbro, 2012). Since there is a well established gap between what experts and laymen like when it comes to urban environments (Sternudd, 2007; Steffner, 2009); the logical inference is that what is built today in Sweden does not reflect the preferences of the average person. As was suggested by a recent news article; maybe people should not be blamed for NIMBYism, rather blame the buildings (Gustafsson, 2017). Improving the communication and understanding between the experts making our cities and the people living in them is arguably important then (Steffner, 2009).

Presently the minimal legal requirement for participation in Swedish urban planning projects could at best be described as consultation (Vestbro, 2012). It often involves ready planning proposals being presented and by this time the potential for influence is minimal. Attempting to reject the plans is often the only option and the process is frequently disappointing (Vestbro, 2012). According to many typologies of participation consultation would not even be considered participation (Cornwall, 2008). There have been progressive examples of real influence in Sweden in “reverse-planning-processes”; where participants are involved early. Despite the success of these; attempts to standardise early participation has been met with resistance. Some claim the representational democracy provides sufficient influence and see more participation as expensive and time consuming (Vestbro, 2012). Nevertheless, many municipalities across Sweden claim to have an ambition to involve citizens more actively, and are drafting policies on public participation to do so (Castell, 2012). More ambitious participation processes may require time and resources on behalf of the municipality; but it also depends on a deeper commitment from the citizens. It cannot be expected that citizens will invest their time in active participation, if they do not believe that it will be meaningful, and that they will continue to do so if it is not worthwhile. Therefore if the aim is not just for citizens to participate, but to participate more; understanding what meaningful and worthwhile participation processes are from their perspective is essential. According to Vestbro (2012, p. 14) “Public interest in environmental and public planning issues is growing, and citizens are prepared to engage in such matters if conditions are favourable” the aim of this thesis is to explore what these favourable conditions might mean to the participants.

A large and ongoing densification project in the suburb of Ulleråker in the city of Uppsala, Sweden served as the empirical context for this purpose. Views of people who had experience of, or a potential interest in taking part in participation in relation to this project were consulted to share their ideas about participation. While doing an internship at the council I became familiar with this particular case and this experience informed the direction of the research. Some of the ideas leading to the problem definition are described in the next section.

1.1 Background

Public participation has become politically correct and there are many normative theories, reflective of the ‘communicative or collaborative turn’ (Castell, 2012), prescribing how participation should be done (Cornwall, 2008). Some of these aspire for ideals such as self-mobilisation and would require a substantial overhaul of the representative political system (Castell, 2012). Not to mention transformation of the citizens themselves who need to become empowered to make their own decisions and act for themselves (Cornwall, 2008). Considering the complexity of decisions making in modern society, the more pragmatic view regards participation in direct democracy as a complement to the representative system. There is then a need to consider the “amounts and kinds of appropriate participation in governance” to deliver more desirable outcomes in different situations (Fung, 2006, p.66).

The reality of fitting direct democracy into existing political systems, has resulted in a multitude of ways of ‘doing participation’ and the term has become quite ambiguous

(Cornwall, 2008). A number of typologies have been proposed to classify different ways of practicing participation. These typically portray more influence and transformative aims, where participation is seen as goal in itself, as better and more genuine (Cornwall, 2008). Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation is one of the most cited typologies. It depicts eight rungs grouped into non-participation; where participation is used for manipulative purposes, tokenism; which involves information and opportunity for people to raise their voice but without real influence, and citizen power; where there is varying degrees of power sharing, with the top rung being citizen's control. The Swedish association of local authorities and regions, SKL, has produced a revised version of Arnstein's ladder, where the top citizen-power levels and the two non-participation levels are excluded (Figure 1). The five remaining, and to some extent redefined, levels are information, consultation, dialogue, involvement and delegation (Castell, 2012). Arnstein's ladder was "designed to be provocative" (1969) and in her conception what is left of the SKL version would all be considered degrees of tokenism. She described participation without sharing of power as "an empty and frustrating process" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216). However the SKL ladder is intended to be a practical tool for governments in a representative democracy. Notably it is depicted as a set of stairs, rather than a ladder. The intention is to show that all steps can serve a purpose, and may be relevant in different situations (Castell, 2012).

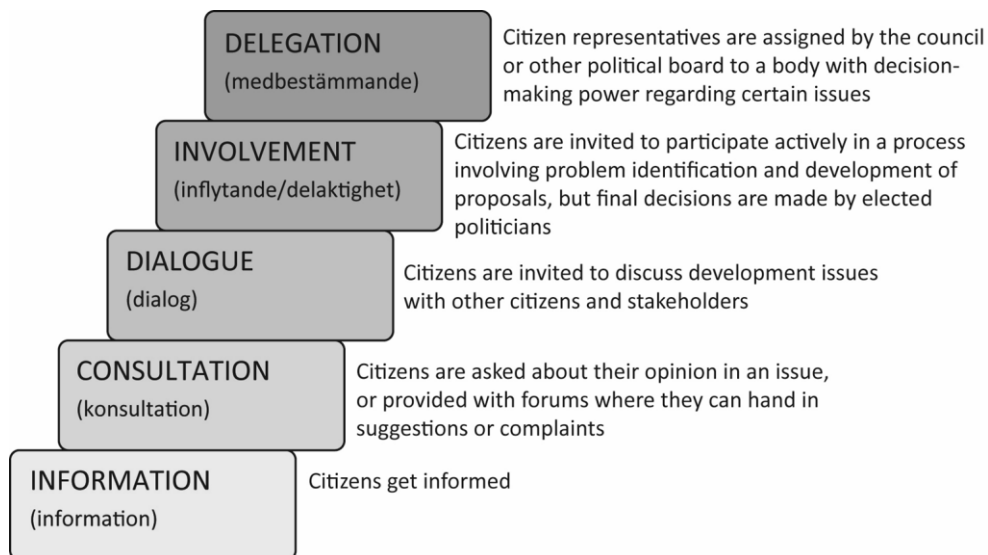


Figure 1: SKL Citizen Dialogue Stairs (Castell, 2012)

Many municipalities in Sweden include the SKL stairs in policy and guidelines on participation (Castell, 2012). Uppsala, where this research was based, is one municipality who will issue such guidelines in the near future. An aim with the Uppsala guidelines is to increase engagement in participation and they state that citizen dialogue¹ should be something more than just information about decisions already made. It does not however mean direct democracy; rather it supplements the representative democracy, where politicians make decisions. This includes decisions about dialogue itself, even though the initiative may come from others. In order not to disappoint participants it should always be clear what can be influenced "if the question is cannot be influenced then information

¹ Citizen dialogue is the generic term used for different forms of participation in Sweden.

should be used instead of dialogue” (Personal communication², Oct 30, 2016). The control over the agenda or *what* dialogue is about rests with the municipality.

Reflecting on these guidelines a possible consequence is that they may result in a rather constrained and careful approach to dialogue. Since it would arguably be difficult to predict the outcomes of dialogue about more complex issues; and hence what the potential for influence actually could be beforehand. Castell (2012, p. 7) states that to public officials “well-defined and concrete projects are preferable for dialogue processes, rather than complex and large scopes with many uncertainties”. This also reflects my own observation while doing an internship at the municipality. Westin, Hellquist and Calderon (2016) suggest that allowing people to raise the issues that concerns them yet being able to handle the possible outcomes of dialogue is an important but challenging balance to strike. To consider this balance they devised a matrix (Figure 2) where the two axels are *problem definition*; narrow to wide, and *room for influence*; large to small (Westin, et al., 2016). For example, allowing people to vote decisively on blue or green paint for a house could be considered a dialogue with a narrow problem definition but large room for influence.

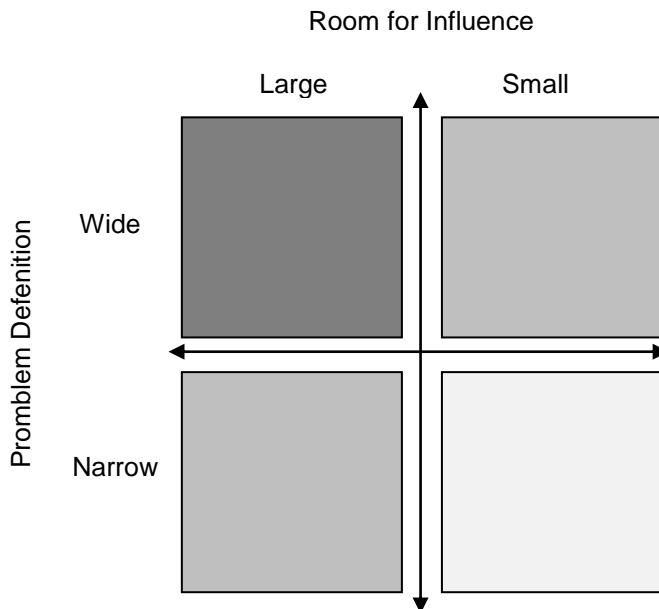


Figure 2: Problem definition and influence matrix. Adapted from Westin, et al. (2016)

There can be challenges with dialogue in all four quadrants of the matrix; such as possible conflicts amongst participants and issues of legitimacy when the room for influence is large. The required resources and complexity of handling input when the problem definition is wide, or avoiding disappointment when the room for influence is small (Westin, et al., 2016). And as mentioned a narrow problem definition limits what can be discussed. The what of dialogue is important “there is a significant difference in getting influence over the choice of paint colour and taking part in the planning that identify repainting as a good priority” (Castell, 2012, p. 7). Cornwall (2008) makes a similar argument and adds that such initiatives may be used in *the name* of involvement, hinting that it could be for manipulative reasons.

When participation processes have to fit into a representational democracy, problem definition and the room for influence will necessarily be restricted to some degree. Given

² The researcher became familiar with the coming document as part of internship. It is expected to be publicly available in the near future. The guidelines are for participation in general not just in relation to urban planning.

these restrictions how dialogue can nevertheless be meaningful and worthwhile served as one of the discussion points when exploring this problem with respondents.

1.2 Problem formulation

Uppsala municipality claims to have an ambition to provide opportunities for participation. One example is found in the planning program for the Ulleråker urban development project where they state an intention to “invite to active dialogue about the development of Ulleråker” (Uppsala Kommun, 2016, p.65). So far the process has included some additional activities not mandated by the minimum consultation requirement for Swedish urban development projects. An example is small table discussions between citizens and planners about specific places in the future project. There is also an invitation to take part in an expert council at a later stage for interested citizens “who want to get engaged in the development of Ulleråker” (Uppsala Kommun, 2017, p.3).

The municipality is also issuing new guidelines on how, according to their perspective, citizen’s dialogue should be implemented. A purpose with these guidelines is to design participation processes that are clear and where there is always room for influence and this should be identified in a political decision before inviting to dialogue. The intention is to avoid disappointment and frustration, improve trust in the process and encourage more engagement by creating the right expectations. Something not taken into consideration in the guidelines is what the citizen’s expectations of participation actually are; what would encourage their engagement? More transparent processes for the sake of avoiding disappointment may indeed help people do exactly that, avoid disappointing participation. It is however questionable how it would necessarily result in more engagement, unless this transparency also reveals something that people see as meaningful to take part in. People do things for a reason (Bengtson & Hertting, 2014) so expecting them to participate unless they believe it will be worthwhile appears unreasonable. If an aim is to engage people in more active forms of participation; understanding their perspective on what would make such a commitment meaningful becomes essential. Scholars have identified that the participants themselves is an area of research that requires more attention (Lowndes, Pratchett & Stoker, 2006; Parker & Murray, 2012; Gustafson & Hertting, 2016).

The urban development in Ulleråker is an ongoing project where a public participation process was already under way. There is also an ambition to invite people to take part more actively in expert councils. This provided an opportunity to explore experiences, expectations and ideas about participation; from the perspective of people who had taken part in this process already or who may have an interest in doing so in the future.

The purpose of this qualitative research is to explore what meaningful and worthwhile public participation is from the perspective of people who have had or may have an interest in taking part in participation in relation to the Ulleråker urban planning project.

1.2.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of the study is twofold. The first is to contribute towards the academic discussion on public participation; by increasing the understanding of what meaningful and worthwhile participation is from the participant’s perspective. The second aim was motivated by developing insights that can be of practical relevance in future dialogue processes in this ongoing urban development project. These aims are reflected in the two research questions.

RQ1: From the participants’ perspective, what defines meaningful and worthwhile participation in the context of the Ulleråker urban development project?

RQ2: How can the participants' views inform practitioners who wish to implement meaningful and worthwhile participatory processes in this or similar contexts?

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured as follows. A short summary of previous research focusing on the participant's perspectives is presented in the literature review. Followed by an overview of the Ulleråker urban development project. The analytical approach and methods are then explained in the methodology section. The findings are presented in two parts. A largely descriptive account of the empirical data is organised around themes in the results section. While in the analysis patterns in the data are identified to provide answers to the research questions, grounded in the data. The findings are then discussed in relation to relevant literature before concluding with a summary of the contributions, their limitations and suggestions for future research.

1.4 Literature review

This section presents a short overview on the theoretical discussion on public participation, followed by a summary of other empirical studies focusing on participant's perspective. The literature review is internationally brief. The intention is to situate the contributions of this thesis in relation to previous studies. But not to develop a theoretical framework for interpreting the findings due to the inductive research approach.

1.4.1 Theoretical discussion overview

In the academic discussion on participation the normative and ideal form of participation has been a frequently debated topic. The focus has been on procedure rather than substance and the "*How* gets more attention than *what*" (Silver, et al., 2010, p. 462). The two main perspectives in this debate are on the one hand the ideal of *deliberative democracy* which is about "seeking consensus through deliberation, decision making and collective action for the public good"; and on the other hand *radical pluralist democracy* whose proponents "maintain that democracy is about political contestation, clashes of interest and control over governance itself" (Silver, et al., 2010, p. 457).

Deliberative democracy, and related ideas such as collaborative and communicative planning, is often associated with Habermas's ideal speech situation. The idea is that communicative processes with the "qualities of comprehensibility, sincerity, legitimacy and truth, as well other qualities, such as openness, inclusivity, reflexivity and creativity" (Healey, 2003, p. 210) can help people solve problems in better ways. Through such discussions people may find common ground and be able to reach consensus (Innes & Booher, 2000). The focus is not only on outcomes however; transformative process outcomes are equally important. It is thought that participation is empowering and "shapes participants' sense of themselves" (Healey, 2003, p. 107) and that this in turn may build social and intellectual capital and civic capacity in society (Innes & Booher; 2000). The idealistic aim of these theories is often self-mobilisation and decentralisation of government where people are empowered to make their own decisions (Innes & Booher, 2000; Sanoff, 2006; Cornwall, 2008). Despite these aspirations the deliberative ideal has been criticised for being elitist. The argument is that privileging calm and rational arguments creates a bias towards the more articulate in society. In addition these processes may be used by those in power to defuse popular protests and social movements. Radical pluralists see conflict as productive and creative and as a way of contesting power and domination (Silver, et al., 2010).

A third view of participation is pragmatic and focused on what instrumental outcomes participation can contribute towards. The goal is to combine lay and professional knowledge to address societal problems in more innovative ways (Gustafson & Hertting, 2016). It is based on the realisation that the complexity of modern society means that participation works best in synergy with representative democracy (Fung, 2006). Rather than focusing on what the idealistic form of participation is; it is about finding the optimal form of participation for pursuing a specific purpose. Some formats may be more suitable for holding governments accountable and ensuring legit decisions, others are better for efficient and innovative problem solving (Fung, 2006).

1.4.2 Participant's perspectives in empirical studies

The idea that the participants have something to contribute is a general and rather central idea behind public participation. It is therefore somewhat surprising, paradoxical even, to find that there is not extensive research focusing on the participants perspectives (Lowndes, et al., 2006; Parker & Murray, 2012; Gustafson & Hertting, 2016). However there are some examples. The articles reviewed here appear to fall into two groups; those focusing primarily on evaluating processes from the perspective of the participants and those looking more at the participants themselves and their motivations for taking part.

Four articles focusing on process are reviewed. Two of these included views from both participants and practitioners. Common themes for satisfactory processes across all four studies were; the importance of two-way dialogue; a potential to influence decisions and the need for information. Conrad, et al. (p. 769) states that the dialogue needs to be a “transparent two-way process of exchange” while Stewart and Sinclair (2007) adds that it needs to involve discussion, debate and collaboration to enable people to understand different viewpoints. The absence of influence on decisions is a frequent reason for disappointment across all studies. The decision making process needs to be transparent. People want to understand how decisions are made. Also how different alternatives are considered and what can be addressed and what cannot (Dalton, 2006; Grant & Curtis, 2004; Stewart & Sinclair, 2007). Information is important. It needs to be accessible and adapted to different needs (Conrad, et al., 2011; Dalton, 2006). Participants also need enough time to read it and it needs to be substantial enough to enable proper discussions about the issues (Grant & Curtis, 2004; Stewart & Sinclair, 2007). Other themes found in several but not all studies are about creating clear expectations of both the purpose and scope of the process (Conrad, et al., 2011; Grant & Curtis, 2004; Stewart & Sinclair, 2007). The process needs to start at an early stage of the project and the sponsoring agency needs to show a genuine commitment to participation (Conrad, et al., 2011; Dalton, 2006; Stewart & Sinclair, 2007). A variety of methods are also needed to suit different people and situations (Conrad, et al., 2011; Dalton, 2006; Stewart & Sinclair, 2007).

Lowndes, et al., (2001) looks at motivations to participate and finds that issues “that matter” and initiatives that sound interesting motivates people to take part. Participation is often a reactive activity against decisions experienced as negative. Some also claim that they participate in the interest of the community. The study included people with little engagement in local politics and also focused on reasons for not participating. These relate to a lack of trust for authorities, assuming it makes little difference and unawareness of opportunities. But often it just isn't a personal priority. Participation is something that sounds good but is hard in reality. Many both rely and trust more committed individuals to represent their interests (Lowndes, et al., 2001). Parker & Murray (2012) focused on these more committed members of the public. Specific personal concerns and reactive motives were found amongst these participants too. They were however primarily motivated by improving community outcomes. On the one hand, there was an external focus and giving the community a voice and strengthening relations with the Local Authority to ensure instrumental outcomes. But there was also an internal focus on improving relations within the community and ensuring that a variety of different community interests were addressed.

Gustafson and Hertting (2016) also found how community based motives, which they included in their common good category of motives, look different depending on if they are viewed from the inside or the outside "the common good motives were "common" when regarded from inside the neighbourhood, but from the outside they constituted a collectively organized group interest" (p. 13). This study focused on motivations to participate in an urban renewal programme in Sweden and apart from the common good motive, self-interest and wanting to contribute with professional competence were other reasons to participate. Gustafson & Hertting (2016) considered these as expressions of the different theoretical ideas about participation discussed in the previous section (1.4.1). Self-interest reflects the radical pluralist, or what Gustafson & Hertting (2016) call the interest-based logic; contributing with competence the pragmatic, or what they call the functional logic; and common good motives the deliberative logic.

Several of these studies reported on many negative experiences with participation there were however some positive examples too. A couple of programmes appeared to be quite ambitious offering some real influence and resulted in some positive experiences (Parker & Murray, 2012; Gustafson & Hertting, 2016). Lowndes, et al. (2001) and Dalton (2006) found that intangible outcomes of participation such as learning and strengthening of social relations are evaluated as positive terms. However Parker & Murray (2012) concluded that even the more committed members of the community should not be taken for granted, they need to see "some form of commitment that their efforts will be listened to or acted upon in order for them to commit and spend time on such involvement" (p. 16).

1.4.3 Contributions of this research

The empirical context of the studies in the previous section (1.4.2) was natural resource management (Dalton, 2006; Grant & Curtis, 2004; Stewart & Sinclair, 2007), community-led planning (Lowndes, et al., 2001; Parker & Murray, 2012) and neighbourhood renewal programmes (Gustafson & Hertting, 2016). Conrad, et al. (2011) looked at land-use and environmental planning in Malta; but there appears to be a lack of empirical studies focusing on the participant's perspectives in urban planning specifically.

The contribution of this study is to focus on a different empirical context. Because it is a relatively under researched topic (Gustafson & Hertting, 2016) an explorative methodology will be used. This includes an inductive approach, without a predefined analytic framework. This will be explained in the next section (2). Though there are theoretical frameworks for evaluating participation processes another view is that such criteria should be derived from the participants themselves (Conrad, et al., 2011). The latter is the view taken here and the aim is to make the most of the participant's creative potential in defining what meaningful participation means. The timing of the project is suitable for this purpose because the locals in Ulleråker can expect more opportunities to participate in the near future. Therefore the focus will not just be on retrospectively reflecting the process that has been but also to ask how people would like to participate. The Ulleråker urban development project is introduced next.

1.5 Ulleråker urban development project

Uppsala is Sweden's fourth largest city and is growing fast (Lindqvist, 2015). The favoured development strategy in the municipality is densification (Lindström, 2017) and the largest development project is located in the suburb of Ulleråker. Currently about 1800 residents live in Ulleråker. The area is characterised by open blocks of apartment housing spread amongst parkland and forest where three hundred year old pine trees grow. The proposed plan is to build 7000 homes for over 15000 people by 2030. So the residents there will experience quite a dramatic change in the future. The plans are considered high density by Swedish standards (Tankesmedjan Grön stad, 2015). With many closed blocks and

courtyards, and up to 14 storey high-rises, the development will bring a new type of urban character to Uppsala. Which has until recently had more of a town, rather than city feel.

The proposal has received much attention in the local media. Primarily because the area is right above the groundwater reservoir supplying the city with drinking water meaning development there is problematic (Köhler, et al., 2015). But also because of the density of the development (Sjöberg, 2015). When the municipality bought the land from the county council it was the largest property deal in Sweden (Sveriges Radio, 2015). Some speculate that they paid too much, without properly investigating the constraints for building over the ground water (Nilsson, 2015). In order to still recoup the costs the same square meters now have to be squeezed into the small area where building is less of a risk to the water (Berglund, 2015).

The public consultation process had so far consisted of five meetings about the Ulleråker plans and one survey. The first meeting was held in January 2015 when the zoning plans for Ulleråker and the planning program; which describes the municipality's vision and goals for the development, were presented. At the same time a short survey³ was distributed in the larger area covered by the detailed comprehensive plan. Plans were revised from 8000 homes initially to 7000. Another meeting was held to inform about the updates to the plans in March 2016. In May and August 2016 detailed zoning plans for the first two parts to be built within the larger development were presented at two meetings. One area around a future park and one around a town square. The two previous meetings had been typical information meetings but at these last two meetings the municipality also held group discussions around small tables⁴. The municipality also held a meeting with students at a high school. In addition a sixth local meeting was held in December 2016. This was about the detailed comprehensive plan that Ulleråker is a part of. When this research was carried out the Ulleråker plans were still awaiting approval. Assuming they are approved the locals in the area can expect additional possibilities to participate since the development will continue for at least 15 years.

The focus of this study was this development project. Familiarity with this case informed the research focus and the empirical context for recruiting participants. It may therefore be tempting to think of it as a case study. A participatory process can be the case in a case study. The aim is then to triangulate evidence and investigate the process from different angles (Yin, 2013). This was not the purpose of this study. People's experiences were useful as a departure point for understanding what meaningful and worthwhile participation is. However the study should not be considered an evaluation of this process. This would have required different methods and evidence from additional sources.

³ Five multiple choice questions: High or low houses? How do you travel? How many bridges over the river? How do we create jobs in the area? Why do you want to live in the area? 1 free suggestion: What is on the postcard? (Uppsala Kommun, 2015)

⁴ Topics discussed: What are you happy to hear? What is important? What do you wonder about? How does it feel to be in the town square? What is here? Who is here? What do you do here? (Uppsala Kommun, 2017b)

2 Methodology and method

The purpose of this research was to explore people's perspectives on what meaningful and worthwhile participation is. A qualitative approach was selected, because it is suitable for gaining in-depth understandings of how people define and experience complex social phenomenon (Ritchie, et al., 2003).

In addition qualitative research is flexible, both during the data collection phase and during analysis. This makes it possible to identify "emergent categories and theories from the data rather than imposing a priori categories and ideas" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 4). The research aimed to explore and be open to the respondents own ideas and thereby develop new insights in relation to the topic rather than to test a predefined theoretical framework. The flexibility and inductive potential of qualitative methods was therefore essential.

2.1.1 *Generic qualitative research*

Qualitative research is an umbrella term and there are a number of well established methodologies for conducting qualitative research; such as ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory (Ritchie, et al., 2003). However the combination of the research purpose, the researcher's philosophical position and the practical constraints of a master thesis resulted in neither of these being a perfect fit for this study. Therefore this research cannot claim full adherence to either of the established methodologies and can best be described as generic qualitative research. Generic qualitative research is a term for research that does not follow one of the established methodologies (Caelli, Ray & Mill, 2003).

As will be explained in the next section (2.2), data collection and analysis was approached in an open, explorative and highly inductive manner. In this sense the methodological approach was inspired by grounded theory. GT is considered a data-driven approach where themes and eventually theory "emerges" from the data rather than by "forcing" them through a predefined theoretical framework (Dick, 2006). Literature is also approached in an explorative manner "as it becomes relevant" (Dick, 2006). GT requires theoretical sampling; an iterative process where new data is sought out to test emergent theory until concepts are saturated. Saturation means that more data does not add any new properties to the concepts (Dick, 2006). Due to practical limitations in terms of time and availability of participants this was not a realistic goal for this thesis. So although the inductive ideals of GT were adopted as the general attitude towards data and literature, the result is not a grounded *theory*. The contribution of this study can best be described as grounded *thematic analysis* since this was the analytic approach adopted. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that GT is often used in a "lite" mode, where essentially it is a thematic analysis. In these instances it is better to adopt "a 'named and claimed' *thematic analysis*" (p. 81) rather than pretend that you are doing GT when you are not doing it properly.

Generic qualitative research is by many considered an inferior way of doing research (Caelli, et al., 2003). However some suggest that eclectic borrowing from different

traditions can be strength (Ritchie, et al., 2003). And that it is a suitable approach for descriptive and explorative research where the aim is to understand an experience or event (Caelli, et al., 2003). Caelli, Ray and Mill (2003) argue that generic researchers should be transparent about their approach to enable others to assess the credibility of the findings. For this purpose; the researchers theoretical positioning; methodology and methods; the analytic approach and strategies used to enhance rigor must be clearly articulated.

Theoretical positioning is about making clear the “motives, presumptions and personal history” (Caelli, et al., 2003, p. 5) that brought the researcher to study a particular topic; since this is never a naive choice. A summary is presented here: having studied environmental psychology I assume that the environments we live in affects our well-being and therefore that it is important to allow people to influence the places where they live. In regards to participation my view is that in modern society it is a practical impossibility for any one person to participate in all decision that affects us and that this necessitates pragmatism when one chooses how to participate.

Methodological clarity means being transparent about the researcher’s epistemological and ontological position (Caelli, et al., 2003). The philosophical standpoint taken here is that of realism which maintains that there exists an external reality independent of our beliefs and understandings of it and that our knowledge refers to this reality rather constructs it (Ritchie, et al., 2003). Though such knowledge is imperfect and incomplete the assumption is nevertheless that not all accounts are equally valid (Danermark, Ekstrom & Jakobsen, 2001). Researchers aspire to be as neutral as possible while also being reflexive of their own biases and the impossibility of being completely objectivity (Ritchie, et al., 2003). Realism maintains that mental events, such as motivations, beliefs and values are a part of reality, and cause behaviour, and that the social and physical context has a causal influence on mental events (Maxwell, 2012) This is relevant considering the purpose of this research; which assumes that different types of processes will cause people to evaluate participation in different ways, and that how they view these processes will affect their motivation to participate. Interpretative inquiry is a process aimed at understanding other people’s perspectives relating to this reality, rather than constructing multiples realities (Ritchie, et al., 2003). The accuracy of this understanding will in part depend on the methods, including the analytic approach and strategies used to enhance rigor. This will be elaborated on in the following sections (2.2).

2.2 Methods

2.2.1 *Sampling and participants*

Purposive sampling is when units of analysis, such as people, are selected because they have certain characteristics or experiences relevant for investigate a particular phenomenon (Ritchie, et al., 2003). The timing of the Ulleråker process provided an opportunity to sample people who already had some experience with participation but could also expect possibilities to participate more. Though the experience of the process in Ulleråker was useful for discussing this topic, evaluation of this process was not the intended focus. Therefore steps were also taken to include people who might be interested in taking part in participation there in the future.

Local participants were recruited in a few different ways. The municipality provided a contact list with 160 emails to people who had taken part in meetings (n=9 participated). An invite to take part was posted in a local facebook group for the Ulleråker area with 350 members (n=4). Notes were also put up in bus shelters and local notice boards (n=0). To include more varied perspectives, opportunistic sampling strategies (Ritchie, et al., 2003) were used to talk with people who had not volunteered. The researcher visited a local play group (n=4) and a monthly social event, organised by a local housing association (n=3).

Since the municipality views the dialogue process as open to others than locals, attempts were also made to recruit people who might have an interest in the development from other parts of Uppsala. Invites were posted in two facebook groups where urban development in Uppsala was discussed, these were YIMBY-Uppsala who looks very favourably on densification (n=0) and Uppsalas-Arkitekturuppror who wants to see more beautiful cities (n=3). Due to a couple of cancelations an invite was posted late during the requirement process in a large general interest group for Uppsala on facebook (n=1). One email respondent was part of the pensioners planning group in Uppsala⁵ and invited the researcher to meet with this group (n=5); this is sometimes called snowball sampling (Ritchie, et al., 2003). In summary;

- In total 29 people participated, 10 women and 19 men.
- Ages were: 20-30 1 person; 30-40 4 people⁶; 40-50 8 people; 50-65 4 people; 65+ 12 people⁷.
- A majority were professionals with higher education or retired professionals.
- 18 were locals, 3 people were from nearby areas, 8 people lived elsewhere.
- Out of the local volunteers all except one had been to at least one meeting, many had been to several meetings or even all.
- Some of the non-volunteers and non-locals had taken part in meetings in Ulleråker or other participation processes. A couple did not have any experience of participation at all.

2.2.2 Focus groups

Focus groups are useful for adding a creative element to the conversation by allowing people to build on each other's ideas. This can be particularly useful when discussing conceptual topics and solutions to problems (Ritchie, et al., 2003). The intention was not just to reflect on experiences of participation but also to explore what meaningful and worthwhile participation *could be* like. Due to this reason focus groups were selected as the primary research method. When invited, people were however given the option to take part in interviews if they preferred.

Typically focus groups consisting of 6-8 people are recommended. However smaller groups and even triads and dyads can be useful for covering topics more in-depth and allowing everyone enough time to talk yet stimulate discussions (Ritchie, et al., 2003). The intention was to cover the topic in some depth so the aim was 4-5 people per group. However due to availability the groups had to be arranged to be smaller and one group became a dyad due to a cancellation. The reflection is that this did not make much difference, even in the dyad, because the participants were very interested in the topic. The only session where it was difficult to maintain the conversation was the playgroup where a couple of people had very little interest in the topic. This session was more like a group interview, where the researcher steered the conversation. The eight sessions for data collection were as follows:

- 4 volunteer groups: 3, 4, 4 and 2 people in each. 1.5 – 2 hrs each.
- 1 semi-structured interview, due to availability. 1 hour.

⁵ UPS Stadsplanegruppen is a consultation body who reviews building plans to protect pensioner's interests. They had a lot of experience with the building process (UPS, n.d.).

⁶ A couple of people interviewed in the playgroup preferred not to give their details but they have been estimated to belong to this age group.

⁷ Including the 5 people from UPS.

- Arkitekturuppror group: 3 people were interviewed separately since none of them had been to the Ulleråker meetings and this allowed the discussion topics to be adapted somewhat. 1.5 hours.
- Playgroup, 4 people. 45 mins.
- Housing association , 3 people joined in the discussion, though others listened. 1 hour.
- Pensioners planning group: 5 people. 1.5 hours.

Permission to record was asked at the beginning of each interview or focus group. A short introduction was given to the topic. The focus group format was explained; people were encouraged to discuss amongst themselves rather than wait for questions.

Ritchie, et al. (2003) recommends structuring the group sessions with easier topics first; such as broad questions to open up the topic and questions about own experiences. While leaving more complex or abstract topics for later before ending with a summary. They also suggest hypothetical examples of circumstances, called vignettes, as a way of bringing some specificity to such topics. Since one possibility for future participation was to take part in something akin to place-making⁸ in relation to the future town square, this served as one such example. What different combinations of influence and problem definitions (Figure 2) could mean was also used as a way of focusing the discussion on different formats that participation can take. Topics were approached with broad and open questions. Discussion themes⁹ were as follows:

- Views of participation in urban planning to open up the topic: Is it important? Why do you participate?
- Experiences of participation: From the Ulleråker project or otherwise if they had other experiences or what they have heard and read about it.
- Place-making in relation to the town square: would they be interested in taking part? Why or why not?
- Dialogue with narrow problem definition and high level of influence and the opposite: Explained what this type of dialogue could be. Asked if and how such situations can be meaningful and worthwhile.
- Summary: What would you like to tell the municipality to make dialogue more meaningful and worthwhile?
- Spontaneous themes: People also brought up spontaneous topics and these mainly related to their views on the development project.

2.2.3 *Thematic analysis*

All data was recorded and transcribed in full. Thematic analysis does not require the level of detail that for example conversation analysis does. What is important is that "the transcript retains the information you need, from the verbal account, and in a way which is 'true' to its original nature" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). This was the convention followed.

Thematic analysis, TA, is a flexible method for analysing themes and patterns in qualitative data to produce "a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). One benefit is that TA can be adapted to suit different methodological

⁸ Placemaking is a popular concept in urban planning and can loosely be defined as "a process that is part of urban design that makes places liveable and meaningful" (Cilliers & Timmermans, 2014)

⁹ One other theme was also discussed which related to a research question which has since been dropped due to space limitations and this concerned how they would see it if other citizens were given more influence, if they themselves did not take part.

approaches. However this requires that the researcher is clear about what particular form of TA is used by making a few choices explicit. The first is the methodological orientation and this has already been explained as being a realist orientation. In this case TA is used to report "experiences, meanings and the reality of participants" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). The next choice involves whether to produce a rich description of the whole data set or a detailed account of certain aspects. This study adopted the former option. The aim was to reflect a broad range of views. This necessarily results in less depth. Themes central to the topic meaningful and worthwhile participation have been reported in somewhat more detail. While themes seen as potentially explanatory, but not constitutive of the main topic, have been painted with a broader brush.

The next choice is whether to use a bottom-up or top-down approach. The bottom-up approach is inductive and data-driven, and there are similarities with GT. In this mode TA is used without a predefined coding frame. Due to the explorative purpose of this research it was important to allow the participants accounts to shape the themes, and therefore the bottom-up approach was selected. The last choice is whether to do a semantic level analysis or search for latent themes¹⁰. This research aimed to stay close to the data therefore the former option was chosen. However semantic analysis should still ideally progress from description to interpretation: findings need to be theorised and an argument made in relation to the research question, and often in relation to relevant literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For clarity when presenting the findings, these steps have been separated into different chapters; results and analysis. Ritchie, et al. (2003, p. 21) suggest that "the building blocks used by researchers in arriving at their interpretations are clearly visible to the reader". So to summarise the type of analysis done was a *realist, inductive, semantic thematic analysis of the whole data set*.

Based on Braun & Clarke (2006) a summary of the six steps involved in TA is presented. First, *familiarisation with the data*, by actively reading it several times, transcribing the data is another way to become familiar with it. Second, *coding* involves identifying meaningful segments of data and labelling it. Third, the codes are *organised into themes*, by looking at relationships between them and if they can be organised into hierarchies. Fourth, *reviewing themes*, this involves two phases checking themes for internal homogeneity, meaning that each theme works by itself, and external heterogeneity, making sure that they work together. At the end of this stage the whole data set should be read again and the thematic map should "work" and "fit" the data set as a whole. Fifth, *defining and naming themes*, is about defining what the essence of each theme is, the story it tells and how it relates to your research question. And sixth is *writing the report*. Braun & Clarke (2006) suggest that this is an iterative process.

In the current analysis a step was added where codes were checked for internal consistency before incorporating a new data set. So that after each transcript was coded all codes were checked to see that they worked before adding the next transcript. This is called the constant comparative method (Silverman, 2015). Coding resulted in 69 codes, and many of these also had assigned properties. By iterating between step 4 and 5 themes were organised and prioritized in terms of how they related to the research focus. Dedoose coding software was used to code and organise the data. Mindmup mind mapping software was used to create the thematic map and consider relationships between themes.

2.2.4 Reliability and validity

Silverman (2015) explains reliability as the "stability of the findings" (p. 83). This firstly relates to making the research process and theoretical assumptions transparent as this chapter has aimed to. Secondly it is about producing low-interference descriptors, by being rigorous in terms of how data was collected and analysed. Recording and transcribing data is

¹⁰ Latent themes consider structures and meanings beyond what is articulated in the data.

one way to address this. Silverman (2015) also recommends that data is coded by more than one researcher, for inter-rater reliability. Since this study was conducted by just one person this option was not available. This could be considered a limitation since the thematic analysis comes to rely on just one person's interpretation.

Validity is about the "truthfulness of the findings" (Silverman, 2015 p. 83). Some strategies recommended by Silverman (2015) for improving validity include the constant comparative method, comprehensive data treatment and deviant case analysis. Comparison of themes is a central element of TA, and in this study an additional stage of constant comparison was added at the coding stage. TA also involves "giving full and equal attention to each data item" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89) and an aim is to "consider variation (and even contradiction) in the account that is produced" (p. 95). These strategies were used during analysis and when reporting the results and corresponds to the aforementioned recommendations by Silverman (2015).

Silverman (2015) argues that through purposive and theoretically informed sampling strategies such as seeking out deviant cases it can be possible for qualitative studies to make claims that the results produced are:

"meaningful beyond the particular cases, individuals, or sites studied and specify precisely why they are significant, to whom, and to which institutions and processes the findings can be generalized" (Silverman, 2015, p. 72)

The sampling procedure can be considered a weak point of this study. Demographically the sample was quite homogenous and it mainly relied on volunteers. Since these participants agreed to participate in a study about participation in order to help a student; it appears reasonable to believe that their interest in this topic may not be representative for the broader population. Therefore the contexts to which these results can be generalised are quite limited. To reduce the temptation to infer what the commonality of these views might be; linguistic quantifiers have mostly been left out in the presentation of the results. Outlier views or near consensus views have been pointed out for clarity.

2.2.5 Ethical considerations

One concern when inviting participants and doing the field work was that the researcher had done an internship at the municipality. A motivation for doing this research was the possibility of contributing insights that may be of value to the future of this process. The municipality had expressed interest in learning about the results; however they were not making any claims that this would result in changes to the process. Therefore it was important to make very clear that this was a student project so as not to give people any false expectations of what may come out of it.

3 Results

In this section the respondent's views are organized around themes resulting from inductively coding the empirical data. Each theme is a summary of common views, or the range of views, where the input on a topic was diverse. This is a largely descriptive account, with patterns amongst themes analyzed in the next section (4). Since the small sample is unsuitable for statistical generalizations, linguistic quantifiers have largely been left out. Outlier views, and near consensus views have been pointed out for clarity. Citations have been translated from Swedish to English by the researcher, leaving out crutch words.

The first group of themes (3.1) describes views of the Ulleråker project and participation more generally. The core topic of the thesis, meaningful and worthwhile participation, is explored in the second group of themes (3.2).

3.1 Views on the urban development project and participation

This section is indented as a short overview to provide insights into why certain factors may have been emphasized as particularly important for participation to feel meaningful and worthwhile by these respondents. The themes provide a brief description of *views of the Ulleråker project and Uppsala municipality's handling of the project*, followed by *views of participation in urban planning, motivations for participating*, and *views of the Ulleråker participation process*.

3.1.1 *Views of the Ulleråker project and Uppsala municipality*

Talking about the Ulleråker project, no respondent was against the development but the general consensus was that it was an excessively large development for the small area. Some questioned the municipality's motives for insisting on such a high density project and many were concerned about future problems and consequences.

A topic brought up in most groups was that the municipality had paid too much money for the land. Some suspected that rather than taking responsibility for the loss, they were now trying to protect their reputation, by pursuing the high density vision at any cost. Some thought that these circumstances may have reduced the prospects for genuine dialogue, with input from both experts and locals being ignored for the sake of short-sighted fiscal returns.

“I think it was the biggest deal in Sweden that year... and there they tied themselves up, it had to be a certain number of flats to get the economy to add up. So the start and the preconditions for the dialogue were founded there. That is my impression, and it isn't easy to communicate a thing like this.”

Concerns about the project largely related to complex issues such as future social problems and segregation; because the vision is seen as creating poor urban environments like in other planning projects seen as failures. What was seen as a lack of attention to

feasible mobility solutions and environmental conservation by the municipality was also cause for concern. Other expressions indicated doubts over the municipality's competence; "Why don't they learn from their mistakes", "If they missed this, what else did they miss?", "It's an odd way of planning", "It's as dumb as it can be".

"Maybe they should learn from previous mistakes. I mean Gottsunda¹¹, if we take that as an example, it is not such a great example, it didn't turn out that good... then maybe you shouldn't repeat that."

"For me it's about the traffic.. and I have been to three meetings in two years and every time I say to them you have to solve it in this crossing... and it isn't even built yet.. so that will be the first catastrophe once it starts."

However a couple of people were very positive about the project and others were positive towards aspects of the project, such as better service.

"I think it's strange that there is this loud critique towards everything the municipality does because I think it's really fun when something happens"

3.1.2 *Views of participation in urban planning*

Reasons for allowing people more influence in urban planning centered around two connected themes. First incorporating more varied sources of knowledge, such as local expertise, allows decisions to be based on better ideas and arguments. Secondly, that letting people have a say when their local environment changes is just the right thing to do. Although everybody agreed that participation was positive many also reflected that local influence had to be balanced against the need to meet housing shortages.

Many expert-planned urban areas, both new and old, were seen as failures that do not reflect the environmental qualities important to people. Incorporating local expertise in the planning process is therefore seen as important. Because this practical knowledge and feeling for a place is not something a detached planner or architect can have. Collecting creative ideas from the public was also mentioned as a way to give a place more character. However one person pointed out that the provocative but logical consequence of more influence from laymen was less professionalism.

"Often it is that as a resident you have knowledge about the local area, things the politicians don't know about that... what trees are worth keeping, where the kids play there is a lot of that. If you were to choose between two things, and you don't know how things work than half the time you get it wrong."

Apart from the benefit of local knowledge, participation involving mostly locals is seen as fair and reasonable for a number of reasons; the locals are the ones losing something because it is their living environment that changes in character. And some have made a financial investment which could be at risk. In difference those who move there can choose where to move. What the character of new a development should be is by many considered a matter for the locals; both because they know their place and because it is their place changing. However ensuring that different demographics and special interest groups have their perspectives represented in relation to certain issues is recognized as important, and therefore broadening the dialogue to include non-locals could be important. Overall most seemed welcoming of outsiders participating if they wanted to contribute with good ideas. But a few would prefer that some forums are reserved for locals only.

"It is their area anyway if they want to preserve the character in their area then they have to be able to say that"

"Because isn't it the case, if you choose to move here then, then you do so because you are searching for the qualities that are in this area"

¹¹ Area in Uppsala with a reputation for being segregated.

The need to also consider the housing shortages in the city was reflected on by many. Some commented that the municipality still has an important role “in keeping it all together” and understood that the development has to move forward. A couple of people see delays to building projects as a potentially negative consequence of more citizen influence. But an alternative view was that more involvement early could help iron out problems and shorten development times in the long run. The consensus was that if people had more of a say about the quality of what is built, there would be less resistance to new housing developments. But for many the influence needs to stretch to the issues that really matter and this could include the density of the development if it is seen to have a negative impact on life-quality.

“There is a risk that when you live in an area then you got it sorted but if you come to Uppsala as a student then it’s very tricky to find a place to live”

3.1.3 Motivations for participating

Having a connection to the local area, protecting local and citizen’s interests, concern over particular issues and having a personal interest in a topic were common reasons for participating.

Most respondents agreed that you were unlikely to participate if you had no connection to an area; either living there or use it for recreation. Locally motivated purposes for participating were to contribute with local expertise and hoping to see some of the local character retained; both natural values and that the new development would fit in with the old. Some admitted that there was an element of selfishness behind the desire for preservation. But many saw it as a social responsibility too. They like where they live and want to retain some its qualities; for themselves, for people who will move there and for future generations. Some want to see that the municipality protects these interests too. That they consider long term consequences, not just short term finical interests. And that they are on the citizen’s side, and “remember who they work for”. Specific issues considered problematic and concerning, often correlating with those seen as neglected by the municipality are also a motivation for participating.

“It’s because you care a lot about your neighbourhood and that you know a lot about the local area. They should make the most of that. Us who live here should like it here... and the area has a unique quality that I hope will be preserved a little.”

“I’m not motivated, well of course there is some self-interest, but at the same time it is such a wonderful environment and I think it is a shame if you wreck it and think about all the kids who are going to be here.”

Some also have more intrinsic motivations to take part, they may have a general interest in urban planning, or in a particular topic, and think it “is fun to have dialogue”. Having an interest in a particular issue and feeling that you have something to contribute is important to feel motivated to take part more actively. A few more engaged participants would like to read up and become knowledgeable on a subject and really get involved. At the other end of the spectrum those with a low level of interest may consider filling out a survey.

“Something where you feel like you have some thoughts that could be important... I wouldn’t want to get involved in something where I feel incompetent then I could only contribute negative things.”

3.1.4 Views on the Ulleråker participation process

This brief description is intended to give an overview of people’s experience with dialogue in the Ulleråker project and their reactions to a proposal for further involvement. This history, and potential future, may have influenced what was seen as important for a satisfactory process in this study. Many problems identified here are developed more in

depth in section 3.2 to contrast with what meaningful and worthwhile participation should be like.

- Reflections on participatory experiences

Talking about the Ulleråker process, it was with a few exceptions evident that people did not consider participation in this case genuine. Many said they felt disillusioned and discouraged to participate by the experience. The general sentiment was that participation was something the municipality does because they have to; to give people the feeling that they can have an influence. But in reality it makes little difference because the important decisions are already made. The process was described as “window-dressing”, “fake” and “a joke”. Specifically people were disappointed because they felt that there was no opportunity to influence, or even have a discussion, about the issues considered most concerning. These mainly related to density and its consequences for traffic, social and environmental problems. The dialogue that did take place was restricted to topics seen as trivial relative to these concerns, such as the ornamental aspects of a square. Some said they felt “like a hostage to legitimize it all”.

“You felt like a hostage so they can say now we had dialogue, but you haven’t been able to talk about what you wanted to talk about. Just what they wanted you to talk about, so that in the next round they can say but we had dialogue.”

A few had also become suspicious that the municipality selected specific participation techniques for calculated reasons. For example that a survey had purposefully vague questions so that the municipality can interpret the findings to suit the decision they were going to make anyway. And that this survey and also brainstorming techniques in some meetings had been used to show that everybody wanted different things. This way the municipality has an excuse to do as they want because they can’t please everyone anyway. Another suspicion was that processes were intentionally long and drawn out to tire people out so that dwindling interest could be attributed to a silent approval for the plans. And that the last meeting had been badly advertised for this same reason.

“We sat like in playschool and there were post-it notes and it’s great to be a civil servant and be able to show here we have suggestions on almost everything... and a result that is all over the place you don’t have to take into consideration at all.”

A couple of people had some positive experiences; some of their ideas or comments had been added to the plans or instigated an investigation. A couple of others said they still had expectations that the municipality might listen, at least a little.

- Reactions to a proposal for future dialogue

People were asked about their interest in participating more after the decision to build had been made. A possible suggestion was to take part in place-making about the future town square and parks. Though a few people were interested in taking part many clearly considered this tokenism; given the circumstances where so many larger issues remained off the agenda. “A little bone”, “a few crumbs”, “like a child pick blue or green”, “an insult”. A few said that it could have been a valuable project, but that it was far too late when the architects had started drawing. There were too many restrictions to create the qualities you need in a place. Others had lost faith in the process or were uninspired by the potential of the place; expecting it to be shady and windy, due to the dense development, and dead like other squares in similar areas.

”P1: Tall buildings they contribute to a windy environment...it finds its way between them.

P2: It becomes a strange discussion to discuss a town square but not be able to influence the possibility of actually being there.”

3.2 Meaningful and worthwhile participation

This section describes what meaningful and worthwhile participation is according to the participants. The results are based on the respondent's ideas and suggestions as well as reflections on their participatory experience; primarily in relation to the Ulleråker process. This should not be seen as an evaluation of the Ulleråker process and how it actually was. Rather the respondent's experience of this process and for some, experiences of other processes too, serves as a reference point for reflecting on what meaningful and worthwhile participation is, and is not.

In section 3.1.3 motivations *to* participate were described. Here purposes *when* participating, specifically related to the process are the focus. That is, what do people want to do and when they participate for this activity to feel meaningful and worthwhile. Then in section 3.2.3 important characteristics for such meaningful and worthwhile processes are identified. Relevance is a theme that could be said to intersect the two. Something being seen as relevant is a primary purpose for participating and therefore discussing topics seen as relevant is an important characteristic for a process to be worthwhile. Therefore this theme will serve as the departure point.

3.2.1 Meaningful and worthwhile participation is relevant

"There is no value in influencing something that isn't meaningful to you. Then you might as well not bother." Apart from clear statements such as this, the motivation to discuss issues that matter could also be discerned from the difficulty of sticking to the topic of process when conducting the focus groups. Respondents often drifted off to talk about problems with the project at length. When asked as a final question to summarize any last advice they would give to the municipality for making participation more worthwhile; the spontaneous answer from many was to start talking about problems with the project. They were clearly interested in the *what* more than the *how*. All motivations mentioned for participating (Section 3.1.3) were in some way grounded in seeing the project or an issue with the project as relevant to some personal interest or concern. A process needs to be relevant to be seen as meaningful.

"[talking about further participation] It is possible... I don't want to be hostage here. But the question is if it isn't too late. Maybe if you could find a more overarching question then I might consider it. Infrastructure, energy maybe that could be something... the details, the decorations on a square, it's not my thing"

What is relevant is subjective, and also changing relative to the situation. People commented that what was of little interest to them may nevertheless be very interesting to others, or could be interesting at a different stage in the process. For example place-making could have been relevant before the architects started drawing. At this stage in relation to the Ulleråker project, complex issues such as density, traffic and future social problems and environmental protection were the most important to many. Describing their experience of the process many said they had missed a "long-term" and "holistic" perspective to address these problems in the dialogue. Rather the process had focused on what was described as "cosmetics" to soon. Place-making (section 3.1.4) was seen as trivial considering these unresolved problems. This highlights the importance of addressing the most concerning and relevant issues first. Discussing park benches on a square but not being allowed to talk about the shady and windy micro-climate making it unpleasant to actually sit there was not seen as relevant.

"If we can only influence, well at least you got a green house then it seems like we got it wrong... we want holistic traffic solutions. Because if we have the current one then you cannot build more than 2000 flats.. so they have to solve it, and if we cannot be part of that process... then they will build in problems."

3.2.2 Purposes when participating

Four themes relating to purposes when participating are identified; to have *constructive dialogue* the possibility for *constructive influence*, to *oversee the process* and to pursue *intrinsic motivations*. These are not either/or categories but complementary. They differ in their emphasis on a few dimensions, what the focus of change is; outcomes or understandings, how active participants are with their input and what they expect in return. As with the other themes in the results, the aim is a descriptive account closely based on the empirical data. However a more analytical level has also been necessary to make sense of these themes since they are quite abstract.

- Constructive dialogue

That “your views are taken into consideration” or “taken into account” was one of the most common answers to what makes participation worthwhile. Other comments were “The feeling that your input into the discussion is noticed” even when opinions differ.

This theme draws attention to that participating in dialogue can also be worthwhile for other reasons than to have an influence. For example to clear out ambiguities, find common ground, and respond to worries and concerns. Like a “communicative vessel” with give and take, for and against different options. It appears to be about constructing understandings and this requires two way communications. Citizens need to be able to ask questions and get answers to enable them understand the project and the reasons for decisions. Such dialogue is arguably also motivated by wanting to hold decisions maker accountable by ensuring that they have to defend their decisions. Secondly citizens should also be able to influence the understandings of decisions makers. For example educate them about what type of city they would like to live in, or what the special qualities are in an area that should be preserved.

“I am really interested in this, I have been part of a big project up in the mountains, so I see the importance of starting early to create a dialogue and clear out ambiguities, find common ground in different ways.”

“The difference with dialogue and monolog is that when you have dialogue then there is a give and take with each other ,then off course you can have different opinions.“

“That at least it’s documented it.. if there is a large majority who say that you can’t build on the ridge because we destroy the water for future generations.. then they need to have a good argument for why they still choose to blow up the ridge... that must at least be part of the dialogue otherwise it would feel strange.”

As noted (3.2.1) discussing complex issues was important to many. It was acknowledge that dialogue about these would involve uncertainty in terms of the potential to influence outcome. Reflecting on the municipality’s coming guidelines on participation and the suggestion to stick to information instead of dialogue, unless room for influence can be identified was not seen as a solution to avoid disappointment by many. A few people commented that restricting dialogue this way may result in people expressing themselves in less constructive ways. Rather it was important to find ways to have dialogue about the issues that really concern people even without a room for influence identified. These views suggest that for some constructive dialogue about something relevant can be more meaningful than sure influence about something seen as trivial. Something many would reject participating in at all.

“There has to be dialogue... citizens have to be able to ask questions and have an answer, and they have to be able answer these difficult questions too.”

- Constructive influence

The most frequently mentioned motivation for participating is the possibility “to have an influence”. The potential to do so is essential for process to be considered worthwhile for

some. As mentioned in the previous theme some were accepting of participating in dialogue when the room for influence is ambiguous. Others were however supportive of the municipality's guidelines of sticking to information in that situation.

"Yes but then you should not open it up, if already from the start there is noting that can be influenced, that is just tricking, and creating false expectations."

It was recognised that many interests have to be balanced when developing Ulleråker. But considering what many claimed was a very strong local consensus against the high density development, some said that the municipality should be responsive and consider a compromise to "moderate something experienced as extreme". Another said it should be possible "that the municipality can take a step back and say they are wrong".

Reducing the size of the development was certainly one form of influence many were hoping for in relation to the Ulleråker project. However people also mentioned other perhaps more constructive forms of influence that could make participation worthwhile. Influence could also mean to influence the basis for decisions. One example was to have an extra investigation or evaluation made about some issue. Being part of solving problems, such as better mobility solutions, is also seen as worthwhile participation. Other suggestions for constructive forms of influence were to be able to give feedback on preliminary plans or designs before they are too fixed, and see them change. For a smaller group to be able to discuss a concrete project, such as architecture or a space, with the experts who design it and see evidence of the ideas taking shape. To be able to vote on different options relating to something relevant. A more progressive suggestion was to bypass the middle-man, e.g. the building companies, and enable people to form building co-ops; to really give them a possibility to influence how they live.

"There are several assessments that I have initiated based on my knowledge about this area... and then, that the municipality makes an effort and presents this in the plans... extra work for them...then it's worth taking part in dialogue".

"It could be fun once there is a suggestion from architects of the square that the citizens can have a look and... can see a long time before that this is what it looks like and then they can ask, what are your suggestions on this?"

"To be able to influence something concrete and see some form of results that you've been listened to."

- **Oversee the process**

An important dimension of participation for many is to be able to oversee the process and staying up-to-date with the project. Some attend meetings more to get information than to have a say. People also stay informed by reading documents and talking to neighbours. This purpose shares similarities with the constructive dialogue theme; it is also about understanding decisions that affect you. However people are less active with their input and choose to withhold further action, unless motivated to do otherwise. For some there is an element of preparedness to act involved. While others choose not to be more active because they do not think there is any point, decisions are already made; or because they do not feel they can contribute constructively; or because it is a low priority.

"It is also a lot about information and know about what's happening. It is just as much about that when I go to the meetings. To hear what they are planning and how they are thinking. And if something is completely crazy than, well you imagine anyway, that maybe you could have an influence."

"I haven't been but I have read material at home and I have been informed by neighbours."

Though overseeing the process often appears to be a less involved way of participating. This was also suggested as a task for an active group, such as a citizen expert council. A purpose for them would be to oversee that results from dialogue are not forgotten, that they

are actually taken into account in decision-making. This is clearly a more active form of involvement yet it is still about overseeing the process; presumably further action and input would be withheld, as long as the municipality acts accordingly.

“It’s easy that politicians, they have these big meetings with us residents.. and then they close the door and say we do a bit as we want with it. And then there is no value in it, you want to get behind these suggestions we have made, and sort of see that they listen all the way.”

Some suggestions people had for making it easier to stay informed was email subscriptions to plans and newsletters. Plans regularly updated on the internet “to be able to see them taking shape” rather than presented when it is too late to react. And that the dialogue process itself was well documented, including the feedback. In part as service for those who do not attend, but also to be able to check up on its correctness.

“A letter in the post box now we have started this discussion about this area and you can see the plans take shape on the homepage. That you can see the work taking shape so that you don’t have to come at the end now you have thought about it all wrong.”

- Intrinsic motivations

A few people talk about more intrinsic motivations for participating. For some the possibility of contributing expertise and ideas, being creative, taking part and learning about something interesting can be important and fun in itself. The potential of seeing change for the effort is motivating, but it appears as though there is somewhat less of an emphasis on outcome and more on the opportunity to take part because it is interesting.

“I think it would be fun. I think it is interesting to take part... it is interesting to just be able to come with suggestions.”

“I think you have to leave questions open even if you have no right to influence, that you can come with ideas... like I think there should be solar panels on the roofs instead of football fields... I have no right to influence the builders...but it is important for me to be able to say that, in case they didn’t think of it. “

Some form of feedback about how collected ideas are used was said to be appreciated, also when participating for this purpose. However there appeared to be less emphasis on the quality of those answers. They seemed to serve as an acknowledgement, in difference in constructive dialogue answers are about building understandings.

“That there is a summary where the ideas are brought up, than I think you feel like they listen.”

3.2.3 *Enabling factors for meaningful and worthwhile participation*

Three preconditions for enabling meaningful and worthwhile participation are identified; *clear and strategic process, honest information with substance and responsive interaction*. Or in other words; how to plan it, what to talk about, and how to talk. These themes are based on what people said was dissatisfactory with participation in the Ulleråker process, as well as some suggestions for improvements.

- Clear and strategic process

To enable more constructive dialogue and influence a strategic process is needed. People want the right issues to be addressed at the right time, in the right way. In addition clarity about what to expect from the process is important so that people can themselves be strategic with their participation. Suitable methods can enable more efficient participation, both for the citizens and the municipality.

“Start early” and “it’s too late” were frequent comments about the Ulleråker process. Some expressed that dialogue needs to begin before extensive resources are invested in the project and the creative possibilities and plans are fixed; before “architects and engineers are allowed near the drawing board”. The order in which issues are addressed is important.

Many clearly felt that the logic should move from the large and complex to the details. Some suggest a staged process with two phases; one before and one after the decision to build, and there needs to be dialogue in both. A few people thought that a constructive starting-point would be to talk about what qualities to preserve and develop in an area. Others said that early dialogue is about building confidence in the project, and in the solutions to complex problems like infrastructure. The details of the physical spaces and how it looks can be left for a second stage. Comments on participating in place-making (section 3.1.4) made it clear that the first phase sets the conditions for the second; both in terms of trust in the process as and the potential of the place to inspire.

“I think it is already here or even here [points around the map for the whole area] that’s when you want to get input from those who live in the area. When you get to this point then it is too moulded, the preconditions are too fixed.”

“A lot of focus has been on number of flats..when residents hear 8000 flats, well it sounds like a crazy amount... but if the focus of the discussion had rather been, ok we will build a lot how can we do this the best way, what places needs to be preserved what do you want back when we build... Then maybe it would have been easier for people to get engaged.”

“I think in the next phase when it is about the facades and the design of the town square, then I think if the first dialogue has worked then there would be a potential for the next dialogue to work. Then if you can have some concrete suggestions on what type of facades...”

Clarity about what to expect from the participation process was seen as important, in relation to both purpose and the topic. Participants want to be able to be selective with how they invest their efforts; is it just information or will there be dialogue? Some want to know what opportunity there is for influence while others may value constructive dialogue without knowing this. More clearly defined agendas; so participants can read up on a topic beforehand, and to enable more focused constructive discussions was seen as positive by a few. On the other hand, people also want an opportunity to influence the overall agenda; it is important to them that the most concerning issues can be addressed *somewhere*. So it seems clarity needs to be balanced with some flexibility.

“If they have clear guidelines so you know what we can discuss, then you can use that energy and the engagement in a more constructive way.”

“It would have been good if in this zoning plan meeting we had talked about house heights and in the next meeting you could have talked about benches. But they steered that away.”

It was acknowledged that worthwhile participation requires resources; both the participants and the municipalities. So as one person said about participation “not more but smarter”. Suggestions about methods focused on more efficient and constructive formats; utilizing the internet a lot more for easier access, as well as existing social networks such as the housing associations in the area. Others commented that large scale meetings had reduced the quality of dialogue and that these were not constructive. Some suggestions favored more qualitative approaches; smaller working groups for active participants, or storytelling and door-knocking in the area to really talk to people.

“If they had worked more by coming out to the residential area, maybe some form of theme day on a Saturday in the area, but it is a matter of resources.. but I think you would have got a bit more quality, if you had worked at a smaller scale...it would have been a better way to engage people.”

“I am critical of this format of dialogue. That it has been in these big chunks, with so many people. They have spoilt the quality.”

“That you use webinars... if you have an information meeting you shouldn’t really need to go to a meeting place.”

- Honest information with substance

Relevant and factual information was clearly an important factor for participation to be meaningful, and was something that many felt had been lacking in the Ulleråker process. The complaints related to the quality and trustworthiness of what was communicated, which failed to build confidence in the project and facilitate constructive dialogue.

Reflecting on the Ulleråker project people said they would have liked more information with “substance” such as clear strategies for solving the traffic problem, for protecting the ground water and the local environment from the impacts of so many future residents. The experience was that things were done in the wrong order. It was seen as important that thorough investigations into risks and consequences were communicated to support the project; before presenting fixed maps and pictures of houses. Such factual information is seen as important to reduce concerns and ease worries. People wanted to see forecasts, figures and solutions for how traffic and mobility problems would actually work. One person said that when he asked a couple of civil servants about this, they had agreed that there weren’t actually any solutions. Others commented that the social impact assessment was done too late to be considered in the plans. And that although the environmental impact assessment identified natural values to protect; it had not been made evident how this was reflected in the plans.

“You can’t discuss citizen dialogue without connecting it to the contents itself, is there some substances in what you are going to inform about. For example is there a clear strategy for how to solve the water issue and the traffic.. and this hasn’t been included in the dialogue.”

“All the preconditions for building right and proper in a good way, that has to form the basis for the dialogue.”

Adequate information is needed to build confidence in the project and the municipality’s competence. But it is also about building the participants competence and understandings so they can take part in constructive dialogue. Some more active participants want to read up in advance and become knowledgeable so they can contribute to the discussion at a more equal footing with the experts “let us be professional”. Another comment was that important long documents need to be summarised and presented in shorter and more easily accessible formats.

“I have been thinking about dialogue and for me dialogue means that you are two parties who are about evenly matched, so that you can talk on roughly the same level. Otherwise you easily get run over. Dialogue means you have to give a lot of information to the one you are going to have dialogue with. Maybe you haven’t always been given the information you need to talk.”

“...information as well, that you can get an understanding of the processes and what is behind it why you have done like you have done.”

Apart from information being inadequate some were suspicious it may be intentionally skewed; this included the aforementioned sun-studies being purposely sparse. A couple of people were suspicious that the number of flats had been marginally reduced after the initial proposal; to make it look like the municipality had listened, but that they were now instead larger and the total built area was the same. Use of sales waffle was something that a few people pointed out as disrespectful, dishonest and undemocratic “there should be a political decision against it” said one. A specific example was the use of trams to make the vision look charming even though there was no decision to finance this infrastructure. Another was how they made it look like they were saving a strip of forest, even though it was just a few trees. Others were less clear with this critique but used typical sales pitch jargon from the vision in cynical statements.

“In Rosendal¹² they built very densely...They call it city pulse, to think that anyone would buy that, it’s insulting... it shows there is no honesty in the dialogue.. just empty words.”

- Receptive and responsive interaction

Interaction is what makes constructive dialogue possible. Listening and allowing questions is important, but many focused on the need for answers and feedback.

Many felt disappointed with the Ulleråker process because there did not seem to be an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the complex issues that concerned them. Listening is the starting-point and some commented that some civil servants, and especially politicians, had been defensive rather than receptive to critique. People who tried to ask questions about how the traffic issues would work felt brushed off or even scoffed at. Just listening is not enough and a common view was that answers and feedback was in short supply during the Ulleråker process; “it’s like shouting in the dessert, and nobody answers”. Another who had tried to ask about traffic solutions at several different meetings said “it is like a new question every time”.

“I wasn’t at the first meeting, but I have neighbours who were there, apparently it was all pretty upset there. Nobody was allowed to ask questions, it was forbidden to ask questions, it didn’t seem like a good meeting that one.”

“My experience, this whole journey, is that it has been a bit low on the feedback, concretising, plus minus with the views that have been put forth. I think it would have been good for the process.”

The type of answers people want should like other information be honest and have substance and should enable people to understand the decisions and the project better. It involves explanations and motivations for why one option was chosen over another. What facts and considerations were the decisions based on and how things are going to work. If there are no answers right away honesty was seen as a better response than defensiveness; but there needs to be feedback later.

“That if you get critique, that you answer it and explain the specific issues, how you have thought and why. To what extent you have tried to accommodate the question... how it will work. Then perhaps you get a better understanding for some questions you have been very strongly against before.”

In terms of feedback proper documentation of the results from dialogue was seen as a first step “what is not on paper does not exist” was one comment. Another said that the need for documentation and feedback should be thought of already at the meeting. Beehives at ten tables using sticky-notes, without an ending summary of the most important points made proper feedback difficult; because nobody really knew what was said. Documentation does not however count as feedback. Quality feedback makes it clear how views are taken into account, how input is used and valued and answers questions and concerns. Personal correspondence is not however needed. People rather see questions and suggestions grouped in themes and answered publicly for everyone’s benefit. Including the results from the dialogue, alongside statements from other official referral bodies in the decision making process was seen as a way of giving recognition to the participation process.

“That you get feedback on what you say I think is important... that they say well that was good that you pointed that out or we will have to think about that, and no that is not possible... Because of this reason... so you feel like they read it.”

“You don’t have give feedback in print. Just on the web is ok for those who are interested. But do it a bit easier and more convenient and shorter response times I think that’s important.”

¹² Recently developed neighbouring area in Uppsala.

”A lot of the critique has been about the same things and that could probably have been lumped together in categories... and then answer concretely how they have thought about the question”

4 Analysis

In this section, patterns in the grounded thematic analysis described in the results (3) are interpreted to answer the first research question *RQ1: From the participants' perspective, what defines meaningful and worthwhile participation process, in the context of the Ulleråker urban development project?* Insights developed by answering question one are then combined with additional empirical data relevant for answering the second question *RQ2: How can the participants' views inform practitioners who wish to implement meaningful and worthwhile participatory processes in this or similar contexts?* A few recommendations are developed and applied to the Ulleråker process as an example.

The intention here is to provide answers to the research questions grounded in the data. References to literature are briefly identified in this analysis as they become relevant; as is recommended in a grounded approach (Dick, 2006). The findings will then be critically discussed in relation to literature in the discussion.

4.1 Defining meaningful and worthwhile participation

Participation is a purposeful activity. Taking part in participation is meaningful and worthwhile to the extent that it provides an opportunity to pursue a relevant purpose. Based on the results it appears that people are to begin with motivated by different purposes *to* participate. They are also motivated by different purposes *when* participating. The complex combination of these has implications for what exactly meaningful and worthwhile participation is to someone.

The results suggested that the motivation *to* participate is to begin with guided by some form of concern or interest in an issue, in combination with the types of motivations that Gustafson and Hertting (2016) identified as self-interest, knowledge contribution and common or community good. These themes could also be discerned in this study. Additional motivations may relate to how the person views participation within the democratic society, that is, what participation is for. People primarily saw participation as a way of basing decisions on more sources of knowledge for better outcomes but also as way to defending local values, while acknowledging that different interests had to be balanced. This appears to reflect what Gustafson and Hertting (2016) identified as the functional logic, the interest-based logic and collaborative logic of participation respectively.

The subjective interest in the issue, whether seen as a problem or an opportunity, seems quite central. Indeed there is no data from this case to support that people participated without having some form of interest or concern in relation to the project. Therefore something being relevant is to begin with a motivation *to* participate, and engaging in something relevant is a purpose *when* participating. So relevance seems to be a first criterion for meaningful participation. Since people have different, and changing, interests and concerns what is relevant, and hence what meaningful participation is, is subjective and situational. In relation to the Ulleråker project most people were concerned about complex issues. This made it evident that for participation to be relevant to them dialogue with a

wide problem definition (Figure 2) must be made possible; even if the room for influence is ambiguous or appears limited. Understanding the purposes people pursue while participating can shed light on how such participation can nonetheless be meaningful.

Based on the results motivations relating to four purposes when participating were identified. All four are change oriented but vary in what the change focuses on; changing understandings, of yourself, others or both, or changing outcomes. In addition whether the participant want to actively add input or not and what they expect in return. These are complementary, and participatory activity will likely be guided by a combination of these at any one time. To summarise:

- **Constructive dialogue** is about contributing with knowledge about relevant issues and for this to be valued and asking probing questions and get substantial answers back to really understand decisions.
- **Constructive influence** is the possibility of constructively shaping or changing the outcome of something seen as relevant, seeking compromise, influencing the basis for decisions, being given options.
- **Oversee the process** is also about understanding the decisions that affect you and keeping an eye on the decisions makers, while withholding input. An element of preparedness to act if motivated may be present.
- **Intrinsic motivations** are about contributing and taking part. The possibility of change, including own understandings, is motivating but there is less demands on returns. Yet some acknowledgement is appreciated.

In relation to dialogue with a wide problem definition, but low level of influence (Westin, et al., 2016), constructive dialogue can still serve a purpose by at a minimum clearing out ambiguities. And perhaps in turn influence the basis for decisions, such as instigating an extra assessment or better solution to a problem. The potential for this type of influence is presumably difficult to foresee in advance.

Two common threads running through these purposes appear to be about greater transparency in planning and decision making (constructive dialogue and oversee process) and having opportunities for constructively influencing understandings and outcomes (constructive dialogue, constructive influence and intrinsic motivations). In turn these bear resemblance to different views of participation within democratic society. That people want to see motivations for decisions and dig deep into their reasons seems to indicate that this is not only motivated by wanting to understand an issue. But arguably also about revealing whose interests decision makers represent and hold them accountable. This appears to correspond to the interest-based logic. Secondly wanting opportunities to contribute constructively seems relevant from the functional logic; which is about solving collective problems by including local competence (Gustafson and Hertting, 2016). The collaborative logic is also evident in the type of interaction required for constructive dialogue.

Influence is certainly very important for participation to be worthwhile; yet substantial sharing of the responsibility of governance is not emphasised. Many see an important role for the municipality in holding it all together. The type of relationship that participants seem to seek could perhaps be described as a respectful partnership. The way that people would like to be spoken to; with honesty and in factual terms, and for their local expertise to be valued, indicate that they want to be seen as a respected partner. That many would like local values and knowledge to inform the project from the start indicates that they want to feel included in the project. At the same time they are expecting the government to do the heavy lifting; provide information do the investigations required and their part of the bargain. So the goal with meaningful and worthwhile participation from the participant's point of view does not appear to be to take over governance. Rather it is about ensuring that

the municipality remembers who they work for and does their job well; so that decisions are well-motivated and well-informed.

People are selective with their participation, especially if it involves more active commitments, and will only invest their time if the process seems meaningful and relevant. What is meaningful to participate in will depend on their level of interest in the issue, feeling able to contribute or not and being able and willing to prioritize time. Therefore it should be expected that this will change from person to person and situation to situation. And that a lot of the time the ideal form of participation will be to keep an eye on that the government, and perhaps more active participants, are protecting your interests. According to some normative ideals about participation this is not even participation (Cornwall, 2008). But it should be expected; based to social dilemma theory most people will choose to be “free-riders” (Woogd, 2001). At the other end of the spectrum meaningful participation can involve reading up on a topic to become knowledgeable and be able to really contribute; *and* be given an opportunity to do so constructively.

In conclusion, there is no one size fits all solution when it comes to meaningful and worthwhile participation because it is subjective and situational. For this reason it is important to understand the purposes that motivate people *to* participate and also the purposes that motivate them *when* they participate. The results suggest a few guiding ideas for implementing meaningful and worthwhile participation. Such participation needs to be based on a respectful relationship. It needs to be relevant to people’s concerns and interests. Strategies and interaction should enable active participants to contribute constructively. Transparency of the planning and decision making process is needed to enable both active and less active participants to understand the project.

4.2 Meaningful and worthwhile participation in practice

To develop a few guidelines for what meaningful and worthwhile participation could mean in practice; insights from answering the first research question are elaborated on using the empirical results. Primarily the themes relating to enabling factors for meaningful participation (Section 3.2.3). People’s experiences of Ulleråker are analyzed based on the guidelines and suggestions are applied to the case.

The guidelines are synergetic and build on each other. A *respectful relationship* can be seen as a starting point. The interaction needs to be *receptive* and *responsive* and it needs to have *relevant content*. A *resourceful process* makes the most of the participant’s expertise in an efficient way.

4.2.1 *Respectful relationship*

Participation assumes a relationship between the government and the governed. How this relationship is defined will have ripple effects on the interaction and the potential for meaningful and worthwhile participation. Some questions to consider are; how are the citizens viewed? Are they customers who should be sold, or even tricked into buying a vision? Or are they a partner, whom the municipality has to collaborate with to build genuine confidence in the project? Second, what is the function of participation? Is it giving a feeling that you can take part, almost like charity, or is local and practical expertise and values respected as something essential for a good outcome? As was identified in the previous section (4.1) meaningful and worthwhile participation is according to the participants, built on a respectful partnership; where the municipality works together with the citizens to achieve well informed outcomes. This requires a transparent and honest relationship where problems are confronted not covered up, and where local and practical expertise is included as starting point of the process not an afterthought.

Applied to the Ulleråker process: The planning program states that “...the goal is to invite to dialogue and participation and the possibility to influence within the boundaries of the municipalities vision” (Uppsala Kommun, 2016, p.16). This indicates that the vision belongs to the municipality and is imposed on to the community; rather than being based on a partnership that respects local values. This relationship appears unsuitable for genuine dialogue according to the above definition. Addressing some of the problems experienced in the process requires rethinking this relationship. Comments indicated that the interaction taking place, the topics discussed, and the information conveyed was not seen as respectful to people’s concerns.

If the relationship was grounded in a respectful partnership the natural order of things would have been to include the local community early so that their values could have been reflected in the vision; it would have been their vision too. This relationship would have consequences for how the interaction and the process looks and this will be elaborated below.

4.2.2 *Receptive and responsive*

Being receptive is a diagnostic tool for understanding what is relevant to people and why. Respondents were clear that listening does not do anything on its own; the twin function is responsiveness. Being receptive is about understanding the participants, being responsive is about letting the participants understand the project, process and decisions. And importantly letting people know how their views are valued and considered.

Receptiveness grounded in a respectful partnership means wanting to learn from the participant and actually take their ideas on board. See their knowledge as valuable for solving problems and defining better solutions. It is about allowing for feedback from the participants and questions; including difficult questions. It is being open rather than defensive, and importantly prepared to question own assumptions.

By being receptive the response can be adapted to the nature of people’s concerns or interests. The different purposes when participating are useful to consider here. Sometimes recognition can be sufficient; but if people are worried or have questions than answers are required to clear out ambiguities and build confidence. The response should make planning and decision making transparent. Answers should be revealing, explanatory and supported by relevant evidence so that people can really understand what motivates them. Receptiveness and responsiveness is essential in personal interactions but it is also about sensitivity towards the general mood in a community. Flexibility in the process can allow adaptation to this mood, as a form of broad response.

Quantitative or qualitative, remote or face-to-face methods can be used to “listen”, bearing in mind their limitations. The same applies to responses which can be in the form of feedback; the preference is to publicise outcomes from dialogue as much as possible for the benefit of all. Properly documenting input from participation it is a first step, and important; but for it to be considered feedback it needs to add something new.

Applied to the Ulleråker process: A survey could be seen as a form of listening and one was distributed in the larger area covered by the detailed comprehensive plan where Ulleråker is located. It was however conducted as the same time as the plans were presented, so it did not inform the project from the start. Some minor changes were seen in the revised plans according to the respondents, but they felt the results from the survey were ignored on important points; there was little flexibility at this stage. Also the survey covered very general topics so it was not a method for really understanding what the local qualities are in Ulleråker.

If receptiveness was grounded in a respectful partnership listening would require that the survey was combined with more qualitative methods suitable for a deeper understanding. Importantly this would need to be done before plans and visions are drawn up. Doing so it would have been noticed that preserving what locals felt were good qualities in the area was

a common motivation to participate. This place attachment would have been considered an asset in the planning process. The purpose with listening would then have been to learn about what local characteristics and qualities to build the future project around; and the response would have been to include these as much as possible in the vision.

Another complaint in relation to the Ulleråker process was that difficult questions about complex problems were brushed off or were met with defensiveness. A receptive process would have permitted difficult questions. It would then have responded with suitable answers and feedback. Being receptive it would have been noticed that in Ulleråker many were concerned about the same issues; the consequences of high density, and the feasibility of the mobility solutions. Responding to this community mood could involve an extra meeting where the participants are allowed to set the agenda; so that the dialogue is focused on *their* concerns. By permitting questions in advance factual explanations for clearing out ambiguities can be prepared. The dialogue should be documented and published for those who cannot attend. Outstanding questions should be followed up with feedback. By being receptive the municipality would also have noticed that many would like to take part and contribute towards finding more practical solutions to these problems.

4.2.3 *Relevant content*

As identified (3.2.1) something being seen as relevant is a purpose *to* participate and relevant issues being on the agenda is a significant factor for participation to be meaningful. The other guidelines are to some extent about maximising the potential for relevance. A respectful relationship means that relevance, substance and honesty needs to permeate the information communicated and the interaction as a whole. Receptiveness is about understanding what is relevant. Responses should be relevant. As will be described next (4.2.4) a resourceful process is about timing participation to make it more relevant.

The importance of relevance made it evident that restricting participation to issues with a narrow problem definition is not a way to avoid disappointment; if what actually concerns people are complex problems. Constructive dialogue about issues with a wide problem definition but limited influence could be meaningful; at a minimum to clear out ambiguities. Until this has been done it appears difficult to foresee what the opportunities for influence really are. Preferences for this type of dialogue do however vary. This makes it necessary to be clear about both the topic and the purpose; including being clear about the unclear.

Applied to the Ulleråker process: Providing forums for dialogue about relevant issues was already identified (4.2.2) as a way of responding to communal concerns in Ulleråker. This section largely elaborated on the reasons for doing so. Responding is the *how*, what can be added here is about the *what*; about the quality of the information since this was something that many were disappointed with. It appears that participants want the warts-and-all-project and clearly this hinges on a respectful relationship. Rather than investing resources in pre-packaged glossy vision; the focus should be on providing and summarising factual information and evidence and make this easily accessible. It's about allowing people to really understand the foundations of the project, and doing so at a very early stage. The large issues first appears to be the preference.

4.2.4 *Resourceful process*

Although constructive dialogue can be meaningful having an influence should by no means be underestimated as something that makes participation worthwhile. The potential to influence something relevant, and to do so constructively, hinges to a great extent on the process. A resourceful process is smart and strategic and uses both the participant's and the municipality's resources effectively; while maximising the potential for constructive influence. This assumes that the project is grounded in a respectful partnership where this is

indeed a goal. The main strategies are to start early, before too many resources are invested in a project and possibilities are fixed; to do things in the right order; and to utilise a smart combination of methods, bearing in mind that there are trade-offs between breadth and depth (Cornwall, 2008; May, 2007).

Since participants are selective about how they take part a resourceful process allows them to invest their energy in ways that is meaningful to them and also for the outcome of the project. Here the two common threads identified in the purposes when participating can be useful to consider; the need to oversee the process, for the sake of accountability and to be able to react, preferably in time. Secondly, that what makes active participation rewarding is its constructive potential. Therefore a strategy could be to maximise the opportunities to pursue these two purposes. The guiding principles could be thought of as *proactive transparency*: letting more or less active participants see what is in the pipeline and understand decisions and process, including the participatory process itself. With options to add input in low effort ways or get more active if motivated. And secondly a variety of *constructive opportunities*: for more active participation. These varied opportunities to take part are ideally framed around specific but relevant issues. This may enable more focused discussions and lets participants take part and become knowledgeable about topics that interest them. It can be expected that more active formats will attract relatively few participants since different people have different interests; and the higher the level of engagement the fewer are willing to make the effort (May, 2007). However this can also be an advantage if the aim is constructive discussions; collaborative theories of participation usually prescribe face-to-face interaction where everyone has an opportunity to talk (Innes & Booher, 2000; Silver, et al., 2010). It was acknowledged that meaningful participation requires time and resources. Modern communication options were suggested to make both active and less active forms of participation accessible and efficient. While allowing resources to be allocated to the more qualitative and constructive formats. Existing social networks can also be used to make participation more efficient.

Applied to the Ulleråker process: The participatory process in Ulleråker started too late according to many, after the plans were fixed. This meant that the opportunities for influence were restricted to issues considered trivial relative to people's concerns. There were also doubts over the feasibility of the project and what facts the solutions were based on. Many would have liked to be involved in solving these issues and also in defining the character of the development; to preserve some of the local character.

Based on this and a combination of suggestions from the results; a process could have two phases one before the plans are drawn and one after. The first phase is about building confidence in the foundations of the project and to develop a vision based on a respectful partnership. The task of the municipality is to do as much groundwork as possible into risks and constraints, present a suggestion for a feasible number of flats, but no plans, and answer questions. To the municipality this early dialogue is part of the groundwork, where they learn from the local expertise and include them in constructing the vision. To discuss something complex, and as of yet abstract, it was suggested that early dialogue is framed around principles and qualities; what should be preserved and what should be developed. Framing complexity around principles is an established way of making such discussions manageable "simplicity without reduction" (Robèrt, et al., 2004). The goal is a vision that combines the principles the municipality considers essential but where there is room to include the qualities that are most important to the community.

Utilizing existing social networks in the area was suggested as a way to engage people at an early stage. By combining the principles of proactive transparency and constructive opportunities at each stage of the process it may be possible to balance a need for breadth with quality. Participants suggested that if the first phase has worked well the plans and the vision will hopefully be acceptable to a majority. Then there should be a good opportunity for dialogue about specific physical places such as the town square in a second phase of the

process, after the plans are drawn. In this later stage clearly defined projects were suggested as a focus for the dialogue, where participants can see concrete changes take shape. The problem in Ulleråker was that the locals were not invited to the first phase and hence the project lacked the qualities needed to inspire in this second. "Today's process establishes the preconditions that shape later processes" (Webler & Tuler, 2002, p. 186) both in terms of trust in the process and in this case the potential of the place. Inviting people to an early dialogue around factual information and rough ideas does require a fundamentally different relationship than selling a pre-packaged vision. So the first thing to consider is this respectful relationship.

5 Discussion

This thesis asked what meaningful and worthwhile participation means to members of the public who have participated, or may want to participate, in relation to the Ulleråker urban development project. The aim was to identify favourable conditions for increasing engagement in public participation processes in this or similar contexts. In this section the findings, and primarily the consequences for implementing them, will be discussed from a broader perspective and related to relevant literature.

The findings show that people are motivated by different purposes *to* participate. Though some have suggested that people may participate for normative reasons (Parker & Murray, 2012), in this study this purpose to participate always related to the project being seen as relevant in some way. The motivation is driven by some combination of self-interest and social or community responsibility. Exactly why and how people want to participate is also shaped by how they relate to the relevant issue. Is it an interesting opportunity or a concerning problem or both? Do they feel like they have knowledge to contribute with? What is the level of priority? Four somewhat different but synergetic purposes *when* participating were identified; that is what people want to do when they participate. These were to have a *constructive dialogue*; to have a *constructive influence*; to *oversee the process* and to take part because of *intrinsic motivations*. Two common threads appeared to be running through several of these. Firstly understanding the project, the planning process and the motivations behind the decisions better was a common concern. Secondly active involvement is motivated by the constructive potential to influence outcomes and understandings. To be meaningful and worthwhile a process should be designed to maximise the opportunities for pursuing these two purposes.

Based on the results of the study four guidelines for participation processes were suggested. Meaningful participation should be grounded in a *respectful relationship*. The interaction needs be *receptive and responsive*. The agenda and the exchange of information should be *relevant* to people's interests and concerns. The process should be smart and *resourceful*; designed to make the most of the participant's knowledge and expertise. Such a process would be *proactively transparent* and provide a variety of *constructive opportunities*. To a large extent the contents of these guidelines overlap with findings from previous research focusing on the participants perceives on participation. For example, the importance of two-way dialogue, a potential to influence and the need for quality information (Conrad, et al., 2011; Dalton, 2006; Grant & Curtis, 2004; Stewart & Sinclair, 2007). In addition transparent decision making and clarity about how input from participation is used, and explanations of why it cannot be included, is important (Dalton, 2006; Stewart & Sinclair, 2007; Grant & Curtis, 2004; Parker & Murray, 2012). Lowndes, et al., (2006) writes that a lack of response like this is one of the main deterrents when it comes to participation. This corresponds to the sentiment expressed in the current study:

“For people to participate they have to believe that they are going to be listened to and, if not always agreed with, at least convinced that their view has been taken into account. The ‘responded to’ factor is simultaneously the most obvious but also the most difficult factor in

enhancing public participation. But it is also the factor most open to influence by public policy makers.” (Lowndes, et al., 2006, p. 289)

Additional replicated results were that “issues that matter” and or are “worthwhile” motivates people to take part (Lowndes, et al., 2001; Parker & Murray, 2012); the importance of starting participation early (Conrad, et al., 2011; Stewart & Sinclair, 2007); using a variety of mixed methods and formats (Conrad, et al., 2011; Dalton, 2006; Stewart & Sinclair, 2007) and clarity about the purpose of the process (Conrad, et al., 2011; Dalton, 2006; Stewart & Sinclair, 2007).

The results indicate that people would like to see interaction of a type that conforms to the communicative and collaborative ideals of participation. To describe such dialogue Innes & Booher (2000; 2014) use phrases like sincere and authentic; accurate and comprehensible; all parties are equally informed and equally listened to; deliberation shapes understandings and enables participants to rethink their positions. However more idealistic notions; like self-mobilization and major restructuring of the democratic system are not mentioned as necessary for participation to be meaningful. Cornwall (2008, p. 272) writes that if “empowerment” boils down to “do-it-yourself” it may “fail to match with citizens’ expectations of the obligations that the state has to them”. In this study people appear to view participation in rather pragmatic terms. Firstly their view of participation within the democratic system most closely conforms to the pragmatic theories where participation “operates in synergy with representation and administration to yield more desirable practices and outcomes of collective decision making and action” (Fung, 2006, p. 66). It is about utilising citizens’ knowledge and expertise to solve problems in better ways (Gustafson and Hertting, 2016) and holding decision makers accountable so they do *their* job well (Silver, et al., 2010). Though a major overhaul of the tasks of government and governed does not appear to be necessary. The results suggest that the relationship between the two does require some redefinition for meaningful participation to be possible. The preference is for a more transparent and respectful relationship. Interaction should be honest and factual. Local and practical knowledge and values should be respected as integral to a successful outcome.

Pragmatism also relates to how people want to participate. They are selective with how they invest their time; especially if it involves more active commitments. Cornwall (2006, p. 281) suggests that “clarity through specificity” is important, to spell “out what exactly people are being enjoined to participate in, for what purpose..”. This study suggests that this should not however be seen as reason to avoid dialogue about more complex issues with a wider problem definition; where presumably it can be difficult to identify the exact room for influence beforehand. Getting straight and honest answers about the most concerning issues can be more meaningful than sure influence about something considered trivial. However not all are equally interested in participation with this type of ambiguity. In these situations being *clear about the unclear* may be a way forward.

The findings imply that all steps of the SKL ladder (Figure 2) could have their place in a process. In modern society people can only participate in a fraction of the many decisions that affects them (Woogd, 2001). We will necessarily be spectators, or ignorant, of most decisions most of the time. It could be argued that staying informed *is* an active form of participation; it just isn’t active in terms of *adding* input. It can serve an important function by keeping government accountable (Silver, et al, 2010). Information should therefore not be seen as a lesser form of participation (Cornwall, 2008). Accessible quality information; that helps people understand the project and reasons for decisions is something that deserves attention, according to this study and others before it. In addition informing proactively about the development of a project can enable people to get involved before plans are too fixed to change. The constructive potential is arguably important for more active participation to be worthwhile.

There are a number of trade-offs to consider when it comes to more active involvement. Although inclusive and collaborative participation might be a normative ideal (Healey,

2003), in reality there is necessary trade-off between breadth and representativeness on the one hand and depth, quality and efficiency on the other (Cornwall, 2008; Fung, 2006). Having a deep and wide dialogue would be logistical nightmare; rather than aiming for the impossibility of “full participation” a more pragmatic strategy is “optimal participation” where breadth and depth is balanced to suit the purpose at hand (Cornwall, 2008). Respondents in this study suggested that using the internet more can make both active and less active forms of participation more accessible. However the potential for creative problem solutions will benefit from face-to-face dialogue (Silver, et al., 2010; Innes & Booher, 2000) and require a higher “level of investment, knowledge, and commitment required of participants” (Fung, 2006, p. 69). Since only a few people are willing to make such commitments, a consequence is that more qualitative engagements often result in a less representative sample (Fung, 2006; May 2007). May (2007) suggest too think of it as a triangle of engagement where the principle is the higher the level of engagement the fewer are willing to participate. As indicated by the current study and others before it (Lowndes, et al., 2000; Parker & Murray, 2012), prioritized interests or concerns are a motivation to participate, especially in more active formats. Unsurprisingly then those that are inclined to get involved often do have special interests and stronger views (Fung, 2006). Some studies also suggest that some people are “natural joiners” and more inclined to get involved in community affairs (Lowndes, et al., 2000; Parker & Murray, 2012, May, 2007). These committed people, who likely were over-represented in the current study, are often motivated by doing something for the community (Gustafson and Hertting, 2016; Parker & Murray, 2012) but are often branded as “the usual suspects”. May (2007) argues that this results in a catch-22. Where government want ordinary people to get involved but if you show interest then “you must be ‘extraordinary’ and therefore they needn’t listen to you.” (p. 69). It is important to consider how to balance this trade-off between depth and representativeness. This study indicated that the creative and constructive potential in more qualitative formats are important for participation to feel meaningful for those who want to be more actively involved. Not to mention useful for producing innovative and effective solutions to problems (Fung, 2016). Lowndes, et al., (2006) suggest that engagement and activism should not be feared but encouraged.

One approach to this trade-off between depth and breadth is to make the dialogue process itself transparent. This way less active participants can monitor the more active ones (Silver, et al., 2010) or add input in easy ways. Actively seeking out a more representative sample may also work when needed (May, 2007). A rather different alternative is to not see the trade-off as a problem but embrace it. As Fung (2006) argues the principal argument for public participation is that the representative democracy is somehow deficient. As a complement to the representative democracy, presumably one benefit with participatory democracy is exactly that it is not representative. There is a possibility for the minority and the specific to win occasionally. This is arguably important when it comes to urban development. Where top-down planning by the representatives have resulted in so called placelessness spreading across the world; erasing the unique and special (Kellert, 2012). Placelessness often results in alienation and weakening of community bonds. Considering the strong affective attachments people feel towards their place and its special characteristics (Manzo & Perkins, 2006), as was evident in this study, it is not surprising that expert planned developments are so frequently met with resistance. There is evidence that working *with* communities does reduce so called NIMBYism (Vestbro, 2012; Sanoff, 2006; Manzo & Perkins, 2006). Usually the key to success in these examples is starting early and showing sensitivity and respect for local values and expertise to create a sense of ownership of the project. According to the participants in this study, this is what meaningful and worthwhile participation looks like. It can be expected that in the early stage of such a process those who have a stronger attachments to their place will be more likely to get involved. A question to consider is, when is this a benefit and when is it not. Perhaps by aiming for optimal participation at various stages both the unique and the

representative can be heard. The principles of proactive transparency and varied constructive opportunities may enable flexible participation to suit different preferences; this study made clear that how people want to participate is subjective and situational. Lowndes et al., (2006, p. 283) writes:

“In a democratic system the participation of all (all of the time) is not required; rather its defining characteristic is its openness to all. The value of openness does not require or assume large-scale and continuous direct participation. It rests its case on the richness of democratic practice and the availability of options for extending participation. These options should operate without making overwhelming time demands”

This discussion has made a case for a pragmatic rather than idealistic approach to participation because the results indicate that this would be the more feasible way to make meaningful and worthwhile participation possible. Fung (2006, p. 74) writes about pragmatic views of participation:

“Their appeal does not lie primarily in shifting sovereignty from politicians and other political professionals to a mass of deliberating citizens (Pitkin and Shumer 1982). Less still does their attractiveness reside in their potential to educate, socialize, train, or otherwise render the mass of citizens fit for democracy. Instead, these cases mobilize citizens to address pressing deficits in more conventional, less participatory governance arrangements.”

A question is if a more pragmatic approach focusing more on instrumental outcomes and less on the intangible benefits, with an aim of optimal participation rather than full inclusion, would result in a widening of social injustice and exclusion. It is of course beyond the scope of this thesis to answer this question. However Fung (2006) writes that the best way to ensure that less privileged segments of society are represented, or even over represented at the table is to focus on the issues that especially concerns them. While Cornwall (2008) claims that the most outcome focused processes can be equally transformative, as those where participation is seen as an end in itself. Another curious assumption in normative ideals of participation is that if the processes worked well then most people would want to participate; the active choice not to participate is hardly recognised (Cornwall 2008; Lowndes, et al., 2001). But for many people participation is a low priority, they rather rely on more active participants, or the government, to represent their interests (Lowndes, et al., 2001). The same principle applies to both more or less privileged segments of society (May, 2007; Fung, 2006; Parker & Murray, 2012). This is what social dilemma theory would predict; indeed the most rational choice when it comes to participation is stay informed and “free-ride” on others efforts (Woogd, 2001). Now this may seem like a distant discussion to the topic of the thesis. However the Uppsala guidelines (Personal communication, Oct 30, 2016) have an aim to adapt participation processes so that they are equally accessible to everyone. The question is if such an inclusionary ideal is compatible with meaningful and worthwhile participation. Is there a risk that by aiming to please everyone you end up pleasing no one? If inclusionary, rather than optimal participation, is seen as the primary goal; this would have to rest on some sort of assumption that people *need* participation. But is it also possible that non-participants can feel more empowered by enjoying the fruits of others participation? Perhaps an inclusionary goal is compatible with an instrumental goal, but if not priorities have to be made and questions like this have to be considered. Fung (2006) suggest different ways off combining breadth and depth depending on what the primary goal is; more just and more legit decisions or effective problem solving, there is usually a trade-off.

A logical inference based on social dilemma theory seems to be that the broadest participation would be achieved by allowing people to have a constructive influence and broadcasting the results widely *and* these results being displeasing to many. Since people do not always act in some narrow self-interested way, but also pursue altruistic, utilitarian and normative goals (Bengtsson & Hertting, 2014; Parker & Murray, 2012) some people would join in the first instance and more would do so when they see that it is worthwhile.

Upon seeing the displeasing results the many rational “free-riders” would become “losers” (Woogd, 2001) and may also choose to participate reactively. Unless of course others with similar interests participate reactively then the rational choice becomes to free-ride again. The general point is that full participation is a very idealistic goal and that aiming for optimal and outcome focused participation seems like a more realistic way to make meaningful and worthwhile participation possible for those who do want to take part.

6 Conclusion

Uppsala Municipality are issuing new guidelines on participation (Personal communication, Oct 30, 2016). They want to communicate clear expectations when inviting to citizen dialogue. Transparency of the process and creating the right expectations is seen as a way to increase engagement in citizen dialogue. The departure point of this study was that to increase engagement it is also important to understand what expectations participants actually have. This thesis explored the participant's perspective on what meaningful and worthwhile participation means to members of the public who have participated, or may want to participate, in relation to the Ulleråker urban development project.

The conclusion is that participation is a purposeful activity and meaningful and worthwhile participation needs to be relevant to the purpose for participating. People are to begin with motivated by a purpose *to* participate and this relates to some issue being seen as interesting or concerning. It is therefore essential that relevant issues are on the agenda. People are also motivated by different purposes *when* they participate. These were to have a *constructive dialogue*, to have a *constructive influence*, to *oversee the process* and participating for *intrinsically motivated* reasons. Two common threads running through these were a concern with understanding the project and the basis and motivations for decisions. Those who want to take part more actively are motivated by the constructive potential of taking part in dialogue. People are pragmatic and selective with how they invest their efforts and will only make active commitments if the conditions seem favourable and relevant. A consequence is that a more transparent process may 'help' to discourage people from taking part in a disappointing process; but will not result in more engagement unless the transparency also reveals something people see as meaningful and worthwhile to participate in.

In relation to the Ulleråker project many people were motivated by contributing with local expertise. They were clearly attached to their place and would like to see some of the character preserved. In addition they were concerned about number complex problems with the future project. A satisfactory process would have seen this place attachment as an asset and invited people early to define some of the principles that should guide the future project. A satisfactory process would also have allowed the most concerning issues on the agenda; and answered these difficult questions with factual and straight honest answers designed to build confidence and clear out ambiguities. Such a process may also have capitalized on the local expertise to find better solutions to some of these problems.

Based on these insights four guidelines for designing meaningful and worthwhile participation were developed: *Respectful relationship*, *Receptive and Responsive*, *Relevant Content*, *Resourceful Process*. These are presented in table 1.

<p>Respectful Relationship:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honest and transparent. • Respecting local competence and values as an integral part of the project. • Allow locals a sense of ownership of the project. • A respectful partnership: more partner, less customer. • The relationship lays the foundations for the rest of the process. 	<p>Receptive and Responsive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow for questions, also difficult questions. • Be receptive to what is relevant to people and why people are concerned or interested. • Be open to learning from participants. • Answers and feedback; there is little point in listening otherwise. • Answers and feedback should make the planning process and decisions making transparent. • Feedback needs to make clear how input was used, or why it was not. • Publicise feedback for all to see. • Document the process properly. • Allow for feedback both ways.
<p>Relevant Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be sure to address the most relevant issues somewhere. • Be <i>clear about the unclear</i> to make dialogue with minimal or ambiguous room for influence possible. • Information and answers needs to be honest and relevant. • Focus on making factual and important documents accessible for people with different levels of interest. 	<p>Resourceful process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider a process that combines <i>proactive transparency</i> and varied <i>constructive opportunities</i> for optimal participation. • Make the process clear what questions can be addressed where. Balance clarity with some flexibility to respond to concerns. • Invite people early before drawing any plans. • Build confidence in the foundation of the project before moving on to the specifics. • Frame early dialogue around qualities or principles to make the complex and abstract more manageable. • Combine quantitative and qualitative methods.

Table 1 Guidelines for meaningful and worthwhile participation

6.1 Contributions, limitations and future research

The contribution of this thesis was to highlight some of the purposes people pursue when they participate. Understanding these may help to design more meaningful and worthwhile processes. The sample was small and homogenous and not representative for the larger population. However the study did replicate many findings from previous research focusing on the participant's perspectives on participation. It would however be useful to study a very different demographic sample.

People are quite pragmatic with their participation. They want to really understand the planning process and active participants want flexible opportunities to contribute. It was suggested that proactive transparency in combination with a variety of constructive opportunities was a way to create a flexible process. The feasible way to do this, according to the participants own suggestions, is to utilize modern technology as much as possible; so that the human resources can be invested in more qualitative engagements. This seems to warrant research into how to best utilize the internet for public participation.

Finally a short reflection on the methodology; this thesis produced a grounded thematic analysis. Theoretical sampling was not available so it should not be considered a theory. Using a theoretically informed framework during analysis may have illuminated certain aspects of the data in more depth. However the reflection is that the grounded approach

“worked” in the sense that I found something I was not actually looking for; and this relates to the purposes *when* participating.

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