



Cultivating Connections: Exploring the Impact of Community Gardens on Social Cohesion

In a Socio-economic Disadvantaged
Neighbourhood in Sweden

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Cultivating Connections: Exploring the Impact of Community Garden on Social Cohesion

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Abstract

The study delves into the interplay between the social dynamics of the community garden space and broader socio-political forces, exploring how these factors mold practices and interactions within the community garden, thereby influencing social cohesion. Despite the apparent segregation, Tensta Garden serves as a catalyst, inspiring residents to construct relationships, actively participate, and cultivate connections and shared experiences.

The research underscores that, although minoritized communities may grapple with substantial negative consequences arising from socio-spatial exclusion from mainstream Swedish society, their neighbourhood is often perceived as a secure haven. Through everyday activities, residents mobilize to promote social cohesion and nurture a profound sense of belonging.

However, it's crucial to recognize that while community gardens have their merits, they cannot be seen as a panacea for addressing issues like unequal access to social networks. Instead, they should be viewed as an integral component of a more comprehensive strategy that commences at the grassroots level within communities. This approach acknowledges that significant change could begin within communities and does not downplay segregation. Rather, it recognizes that segregation is rooted in structural inequalities, discrimination, and political decisions.

Despite the challenges posed by the physical segregation of minorities, neighbourhoods dominated by minority populations can serve as safe spaces for them, drive positive change, and ultimately contribute to progress. In essence, these areas have the potential to benefit segregated populations, emphasizing the need for a multifaceted approach to address complex societal issues.

Keywords: Social Cohesion, Social Capital, Community Garden, Socio-economic neighbourhoods, Segregation.

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Introduction



1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, urban areas have witnessed a surge in social inequality and marginalization, leading to significant societal challenges (Wacquant & Slater 2021). This inequality, driven by the uneven distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges, has deepened social divisions and resulted in socioeconomic disparities and limited social mobility. Neighbourhood decline is a stark illustration of this trend (Wacquant & Slater 2021) showcasing the gradual deterioration of neighbourhoods marked by declining property values, increased crime rates, deteriorating infrastructure, and decreased resident quality of life. Economic downturns, social disinvestment, urban planning deficiencies, and insufficient community resources, have all played a role in this decline. Additionally, the isolation of marginalized communities has fuelled socio-economic divisions, as observed in cities like Stockholm (Wacquant & Slater 2021; Harsman 2006).

The escalating inequalities in European cities can be traced to a significant shift toward market-oriented urban development, disrupting the historical balance between private economic interests and collective social responsibilities (Cassiers & Kesteloot 2012). This departure from a socially responsible approach to urban development to a more market-driven, individualistic focus, fosters growing inequalities within cities (Schierup & Ålund 2011). These disparities manifest in various ways, such as unaffordable housing, privatization of public spaces, commercialization of public services and eroding the sense of collective ownership of public resources, reduced access to social services, education disparities, and exacerbated income inequality.

Consequently, factors contributing to the deterioration of social cohesion and the sense of belonging in cities have emerged, encompassing, residential segregation, discrimination, and the fragmentation of public spaces (Thörn & Thörn 2017; Cassiers & Kesteloot 2012; Norman 2004). In Swedish cities, marginalized communities are encountering obstacles that hinder their access to the advantages and benefits offered by the welfare state. These challenges may involve difficulties in accessing social services, educational opportunities, and other welfare-related benefits, which raises concerns about Sweden's dedication to social equality. Consequently, it suggests that ethnic and socioeconomic disparities within urban regions are becoming increasingly evident (Thörn & Thörn 2017).

The lack of investment in marginalized and segregated areas creates a multifaceted problem, exacerbating economic disparities, limiting access to essential services, and

resulting in social disconnection. The absence of safe, welcoming public spaces intensifies the isolation and fragmentation experienced by marginalized communities.

As prior research indicates, urban agriculture, particularly urban community gardens, offers significant social advantages by providing access to spaces and opportunities for social networks, fostering fresh social bonds, and strengthening existing ones (Glover 2004; Alaimo et al. 2010). Moreover, urban farms and gardening areas are seen as potential promoters of integration and cohesion in diverse multicultural environments (Ilieva et al. 2022).

In line with this, this thesis focuses on exploring the relationship between urban community gardens and social cohesion, examining their role in fostering social capital and nurturing a sense of belonging within disadvantaged neighbourhoods. It specifically explores how practices within urban community gardens, coupled with the established social networks, can enhance social cohesion and address issues of segregation and inequality within these neighbourhoods.

It's crucial to highlight that while segregation and marginalization are distinct concepts, there exists some overlap between them. Marginalized communities undergo social, economic, or political exclusion, often rooted in factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status. Significantly, this exclusion isn't necessarily characterized by physical separation. On the contrary, segregated communities experience physical isolation from the broader society. This separation may result from historical, systemic, or intentional factors, including laws, policies, or societal norms leading to the physical separation of different racial or ethnic groups. In cases of socio-economically disadvantaged areas, a blend of marginalized and segregated communities can be observed. People of similar backgrounds often reside in the same area, but they are also pushed to the margins of society, limiting their access to resources, opportunities, and social inclusion.

Correspondingly, the study aims to enhance our understanding of urban community gardens and their impact on social sustainability principles, particularly social cohesion, and social capital, within a socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhood. It investigates how people develop relationships and networks within this context, exploring how collective practices and individual experiences contribute to social cohesion and a sense of belonging to the broader community. Centered on an urban garden in Tensta, Stockholm City, the research also assesses how Tensta's location and socio-economic profile impact the participants' experiences and influence the effectiveness of the community garden in promoting social cohesion.

This study, conducted in Stockholm City, contributes to the existing research by examining unique contextual factors specific to this location and its residents. Stockholm City has been chosen as the research context due to the specific challenges facing contemporary Sweden, including the impact of neoliberalism and exclusionary politics on the welfare state and the marginalization of certain groups, particularly immigrants and ethnic minorities (Schierup & Ålund 2011).

The study adopts a theoretical framework that combines practice and social capital theories within the context of community gardens. Choosing practice theory holds significant merit due to its emphasis on embodied practices, recognizing that social life is shaped not only by individual beliefs and intentions but also by the practical activities and routines individuals engage in (Reckwitz 2002). Practice theory focuses on understanding how things truly function in gardens, delving into the actualities of practices rather than just theoretical plans. This emphasis allows for more detailed insights into claims about community gardens. Moreover, applying a practice lens to study community gardens aids in exploring how the physical and social characteristics of the garden space, along with broader socio-political dynamics, influence the practices and interactions within the community.

Simultaneously, incorporating the concept of social capital, with its three functions: bonding, bridging, and linking, assists in comprehending how social relationships are forged and how they contribute value in terms of resources, capital, networks, knowledge, skills, and more. This integrated approach explores how gardening activities contribute to the development of social capital, subsequently impacting social cohesion and community attachment. The study delves into how gardeners build social networks, collaborate, share resources, and cultivate a sense of belonging, considering the relationship between these social connections, community attachment, and the physical environment of the garden and its surrounding neighbourhood.

An interpretative methodology is employed, focusing on comprehending the subjective meanings individuals attribute to their experiences. It follows an abductive approach, incorporating elements of both inductive and deductive methods in its design. Inductively, the research utilizes qualitative techniques, including semi-structured interviews with stakeholders involved in the development of the community garden, project staff, and users, allowing participants to freely express their experiences and perspectives. The gathered data are then analysed to drive specific observations or data points, contributing to an inductive approach. Deductively, the research aims to test specific hypotheses derived from prior literature, which suggest that engagement in community garden activities and practices has the potential to cultivate social networks and is perceived as a means to promote integration and cohesion (Glover 2004; Alaimo et al. 2010; Ilieva et al. 2022). The hypothesis posits that participation in Tensta's community garden leads to increased social connections and a stronger sense of belonging among participants. This hypothesis will be tested through qualitative methods such as interviews and observations, gathering data to either support or refute the formulated hypotheses.

This study aims to provide insights into how the implementation of urban community gardens affects social cohesion in a socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhood in practice. It enables new understandings of the possibilities and limitations brought by urban community gardens concerning social cohesion in the

context of disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Sweden, specifically focusing on the case of Tensta.

1.1 Problem Formulation

The study of a community garden in a socio-economic disadvantaged neighbourhood in Sweden is driven by the intricate interplay of socio-spatial and socio-economic conditions shaping the lives of residents in these areas. Like many other countries, Sweden grapples with urban challenges stemming from urbanization, migration, and socio-economic segregation (Stockholm 2018). These challenges often manifest at the neighbourhood level, leading to the formation of stigmatized communities or marginalized neighbourhoods. These areas may experience isolation, limited access to resources, and reduced social cohesion (Musterd & Andersson 2006).

Socio-spatially disadvantaged neighbourhoods often encounter both physical and social isolation. It's crucial to recognize that physical and social isolation in these neighbourhoods has a cumulative impact on residents; they are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. For instance, physical isolation can restrict residents' access to quality education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, limiting their social and economic prospects. Social isolation can exacerbate physical isolation, as residents may lack the social connections needed to advocate for improved infrastructure or public services. Consequently, residents in these areas may feel detached from the broader city fabric, intensifying a sense of exclusion, as evident in the case of Tensta (Interpeace 2014). There's a prevailing perception among Tensta's residents that state authorities and politicians neglect their needs when formulating policies, leading to a sense of unequal treatment compared to neighbouring areas like Spånga (Interpeace 2014). The physical environment itself is impacted by disinvestment and neglect, contributing to a deteriorating living environment (Participant 1).

Simultaneously, socio-economic challenges deepen the vulnerabilities of these neighbourhoods. High unemployment rates, low income levels, and limited educational opportunities can perpetuate cycles of poverty and limit residents' access to quality services and amenities (Musterd & Andersson 2006). The absence of social mobility prospects can create feelings of hopelessness and further isolate communities.

Community gardens offer a unique response to these complex socio-spatial and socio-economic challenges. They provide spaces where residents can engage in collective practices, cultivate food, and participate in shared activities (Duchemin et al. 2009). These gardens become platforms for social interactions, skill-sharing, and building social networks. By participating in gardening activities, residents can access freshly produced food, engage in physical exercise, and experience the therapeutic benefits of connecting with nature. These gardens have the potential to counteract the

negative effects of isolation by fostering a sense of community, facilitating social interactions, and promoting well-being (Firth et al. 2011).

In this research context, exploring the Tensta community garden in a socio-economic disadvantaged neighbourhood becomes an avenue to understand how these spaces address the intertwined challenges of isolation, limited resources, and economic disparities. By studying the relationship between the community garden and participants' well-being, practices, and social networks, the research seeks to uncover pathways for positive change within these neighbourhoods. Ultimately, the study of community gardens in such contexts offers insights into how they can serve as catalysts for transformation, resilience, and socially sustainable development within vulnerable urban areas.

1.2 Aim and Research Questions

The study investigates the relationship between community gardens and the cultivation of social networks, community attachment, and overall well-being. It explores how collectively engaged practices within these gardens foster social bonds among community garden members and contribute to the development of social capital and a sense of belonging to the community, translating individual experiences and benefits within the garden into broader community-level outcomes, particularly in terms of social cohesion and community belonging. Derived from prior literature, the study aims to test the hypothesis that participation in community gardens plays a role in fostering social cohesion. The formulated hypothesis suggests that engaging in Tensta's community garden enhances social connections and strengthens participants' sense of belonging, a claim that will be empirically examined to assess its validity. The research questions that will operationalize the objective are as follows:

RQ1: How do individual experiences within Tensta's community garden, alongside collective practices, contribute to broader community-level outcomes related to social cohesion and a sense of belonging?

RG2: How do the location and socio-economic profile of Tensta's neighbourhood impact the participants' experiences and influence the effectiveness of the community garden in fostering social cohesion?

1.3 Research Process

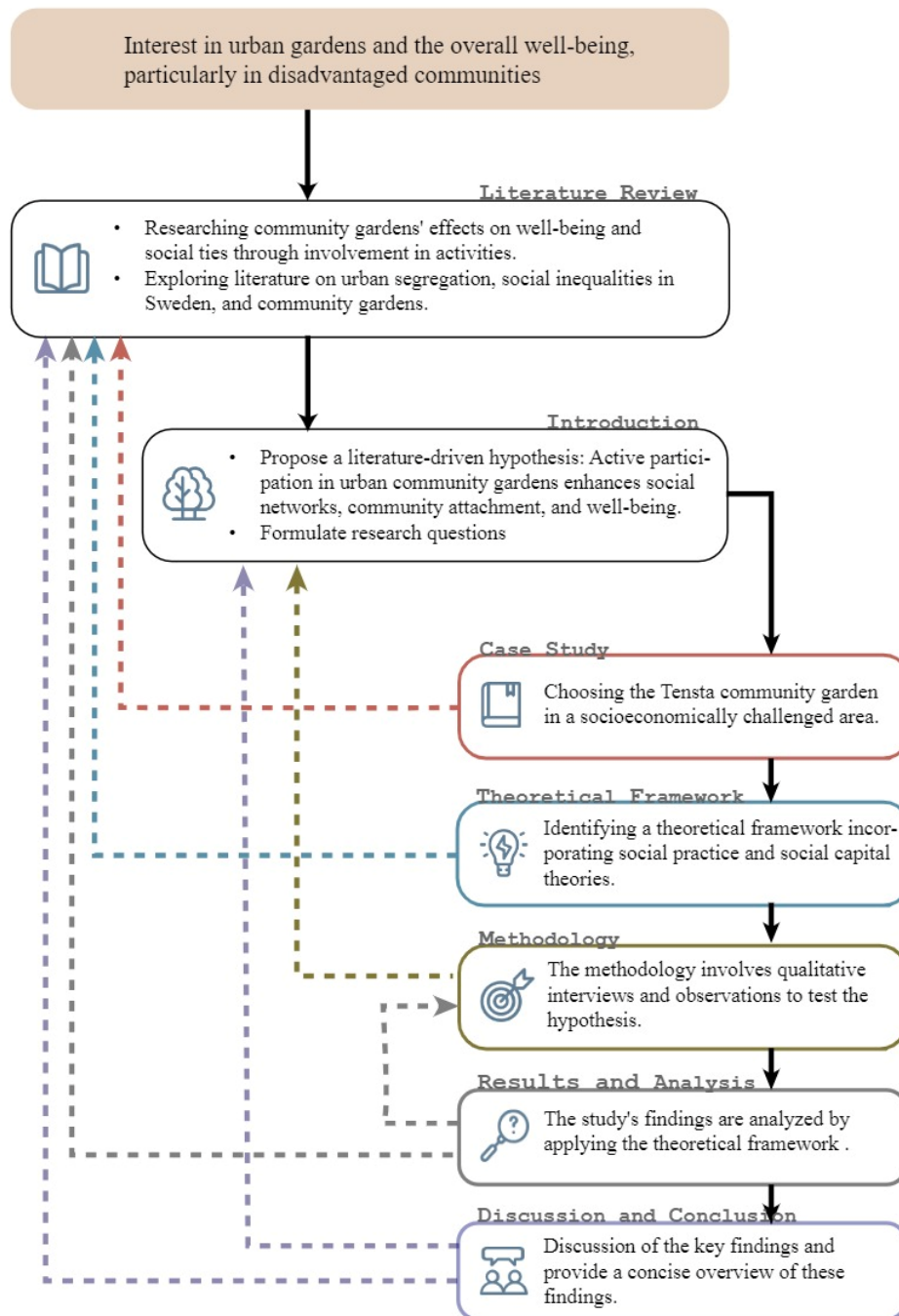


Figure 1. The diagram illustrates the iterative research process, where data collection, theory development, empirical investigation, and analysis inform each other. It starts with an interest in urban gardening and well-being and progresses through a literature review, hypothesis and research questions formulation, case study selection, methodology determination, iterative data analysis, and hypothesis testing. The illustration is created by the author.

My research journey unfolded in a non-linear manner, driven by a curiosity about urban gardening and well-being rather than a preconceived agenda. The exploration began with a review of the literature on community gardens, focusing on how participation in collective practices within the garden contributes to the development of social networks, community attachment, and overall well-being. The literature also delved into the role of these gardens in enhancing social cohesion and a sense of belonging, particularly in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and minority-dominant communities.

This exploration led to the formulation of a hypothesis that participation in community gardens has positive impacts on social cohesion and a sense of belonging, which I aimed to test through my research questions.

To further strengthen this hypothesis, I delved into literature on urban segregation and social inequalities in Sweden, specifically focusing on marginalized neighbourhoods inhabited by minorities and immigrants. Subsequently, I selected my case study: a community garden located in Tensta, a socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhood, to empirically test the hypothesis.

The research process was marked by continuous iterations, with frequent returns to the literature during the study of the case and decision-making regarding the appropriate theoretical framework and the study design. In the methodology, I revisited my hypothesis and opted for an abductive approach, employing qualitative techniques such as semi-structured interviews and observations. These were obtained through an interpretative qualitative method, allowing participants to freely share their experiences with the community garden. The gathered data underwent analysis, involving a back-and-forth process with the transcripts of interviews and observations.

In the discussion and conclusion section, I scrutinized my findings, answered the research questions, and tested the hypothesis. This phase involved revisiting the literature section to contextualize the study's outcomes within existing knowledge. The research journey was characterized by a dynamic interplay between theory and empirical investigation, reflecting an iterative and responsive approach to the evolving understanding of the research topic.



Literature Review

2. Literature Review

This chapter serves as a starting point, scrutinizing prior research and theoretical perspectives about urban agriculture and its relationship to social cohesion within the domain of urban planning. It investigates the intricate connections between these elements and examines their social implications and influence on the residents' well-being. Within this exploration, the chapter sheds light on the adverse impacts of neoliberalism and exclusionary politics on the Swedish welfare state. Additionally, it delves into the concept of community gardens, emphasizing their capacity to foster a sense of inclusion and belonging within the community.

2.1 Urban Segregation and Social Inequalities in Sweden: Challenges and Consequences

Sweden stands out among Western societies with one of the highest proportions of immigrants and residents with recent 'foreign background'. More than 20 percent of the nation's population comprises individuals of foreign descent and second-generation Swedes, with over half originating from non-European backgrounds (Schierup & Ålund 2011). Scholars, Carl-Ulrik Schierup and Aleksandra Ålund, affiliated with Linköping University, highlight the growing marginalization of immigrants within Swedish society, attributing it in part to their exclusion from the welfare state's benefits. In the same vein, Catharina Thörn, a docent in cultural studies, and Håkan Thörn a professor in sociology, both at the University of Göteborg in Sweden present a critical analysis of the increasing levels of segregation in Swedish cities, challenging the perception of Sweden as a paragon of social equality and inclusion (Thörn & Thörn 2017). This rising segregation in cities sets the stage for understanding the challenges faced by socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Even in a country renowned for social equality, such inequalities persist, affecting neighbourhoods along ethnic and socioeconomic lines.

Thörn & Thörn (2017) offer insights into the extent and nature of segregation in Swedish cities, emphasizing that nearly 40% of Stockholm's population resides in areas where at least half the residents have a foreign background. Beyond physical separation, segregation has profound societal impacts, reducing social mobility and exacerbating inequality, particularly in access to resources and opportunities (Thörn & Thörn 2017).

These consequences are particularly pronounced in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhoods, compounding their existing challenges.

The authors Thörn & Thörn (2017) challenge the notion that segregation primarily arises from minority group preferences, redirecting attention to broader systemic issues. structural inequalities, discrimination, and political decisions are identified as root causes, requiring addressing for meaningful progress in reducing segregation and associated social inequalities. These structural inequities include disparities in education, housing, employment, and resources. Cutbacks in the public sector and education reforms have led to school segregation along class and racial lines, impacting student performance and limiting progression to upper secondary school (Thörn & Thörn 2017). This suggests that the physical environment in disadvantaged neighbourhoods plays a significant role in shaping community dynamics. Education and access to services are critical components of community well-being and social cohesion.

In the study's context, these issues are crucial for understanding the challenges of segregation and marginalization in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhoods. They provide a comprehensive view of the societal dynamics that community gardens may potentially address in the pursuit of social cohesion and well-being in these communities. The study aims to explore how these gardens can contribute to mitigating the consequences of segregation and enhancing social cohesion in these neighbourhoods.

2.2 Urban Community Garden

The term "Community Garden" encompasses a diverse array of urban agricultural practices, as highlighted by Mary Beth Pudup, an American professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz (2008). It is recognized that the term has multiple facets and can be interpreted in various ways. Community gardens manifest in different forms, including the cultivation of unused spaces in neighbourhoods or the collective gardening efforts on school or prison properties, as discussed by Bassett (1979) and Lawson (2005) in Pudup's work. According to Kurtz (2001:656), community gardens serve as tangible spaces where urban residents can establish and nurture relationships with each other, nature, and their local environment. Nevertheless, there is a consensus among scholars that the term remains ambiguous and open to interpretation. Ferris et al. (2001) argue against imposing a specific and rigid definition of community gardens, as doing so may restrict and impede communal responses to the unique needs of each locality.

Pudup delves deeper into the concept of community gardens by dissecting the meaning of each constituent word and providing individual explanations. According to Pudup (2008), the term "community" can encompass various definitions, including a

group of urban residents in the same neighbourhood, individuals sharing a common religious or social background, or people with a shared interest in cultivating an urban area. Thus, the use of "community" in the context of "community gardens" does not necessarily imply the formation of strong bonds among its members. Instead, it signifies the involvement of individuals in the collective endeavor, regardless of the strength of their interpersonal connections. Regarding the concept of a "garden," Pudup argues that it can be cultivated either collectively or individually, and the produce from community gardens can serve either the participants' consumption or be sold in local markets.

My conceptualization of "community" aligns with Pudup's definition, perceiving "community" as a term encompassing individuals or residents in the same neighbourhood who share mutual interests, regardless of the strength or weakness of their ties. Regarding the concept of a "garden", I perceive that the objective of growing food in these gardens is to provide nourishment for the involved residents or the local community, rather than seeking profit through commercial sales. Moreover, individuals engage in this collaborative practice driven by social motivations or simply out of a genuine love for gardening as an activity in itself, which also holds a collective dimension. From this perspective community gardens can serve as a communal entity with shared responsibilities, where everyone involved contributes to the success and maintenance of the garden.

In addition, my interpretation of community gardens extends to include gardens where individuals may not necessarily engage in cultivation. This expanded definition acknowledges scenarios in which people participate in activities within the garden that go beyond food cultivation, such as educational initiatives.

While allotments are often distinguished from community gardens in terms of ownership, access, and the level of democratic control, as noted Ferris et al. (2001), I have chosen to broaden my definition to include allotments as one of the specific types of community gardens. This aligns with the perspective of Cepic & Dubljevic (2017), those who emphasize that despite differences, both allotments and community gardens contribute to fostering community development and well-being, incorporating urban aspects that encompass elements of sustainability and usability. Another reason to encompass allotments within my definition of community gardens is their significant relevance in the Swedish context, often denoted as "kolonilott" or "koloniträdgård."

Although the idea of community gardens is relatively new in Sweden, with their emergence gaining momentum in the 21st century (Bonow & Normark 2018), there are historical precedents of food production endeavours in and around Swedish cities. Björklund (2010) indicated that Stockholm has a diverse heritage of public gardens, including wartime and allotment gardens. Despite this historical backdrop, community gardens have recently emerged as an addition to the city's green space infrastructure, as highlighted by Bonow & Normark (2018). Within this context, the City of Stockholm aligns with a global trend observed in numerous other cities, involving the introduction

of new approaches to urban gardening, including community-based and locally managed gardening initiatives within public green areas (Bergame et al. 2022).

With these considerations in mind, for the purposes of this paper, a community garden can be defined as a plot of land within an urban setting where a group of residents from the same neighbourhood gather either to collectively cultivate the land or engage in other communal activities.

2.2.1 Addressing Socio-economic Inequalities and Social Cohesion

Recent scholarly discussions have sparked critical inquiries into the role of community gardens in addressing socio-economic disparities in segregated and disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Duchemin et al. (2009), for instance, argue that urban agriculture can impact various aspects of people's well-being, potentially improving living conditions in financially disadvantaged neighbourhoods, both in developed and developing countries. In a parallel vein, studies in the review of literature on the socio-cultural benefits of urban agriculture have emphasized the significance of community gardens in facilitating the integration of marginalized individuals, including refugees, ethnic minorities, and those dealing with mental health issues, into their respective local communities across multiple cities in the UK (lieva et al. 2022).

Similarly, researchers Alisa Koroļova, and Sandra Treija from Riga Technical University, Latvia, conducted a study on community gardens in different European cities, including one located in Malmö, Sweden (Seved neighbourhood), that is listed as a particularly vulnerable area (Polisen 2021). Their study emphasizes that these spaces have broader societal implications beyond mere vegetable cultivation. Whereas the focus extends to societal concerns, health, education, and urban revitalization, all of which can benefit from urban community gardens. They suggest that regardless of location and form, community gardens play a significant role in promoting social integration in such neighbourhoods, fostering cross-generational and cross-cultural interaction, and enhancing overall human well-being (Koroļova & Treija 2018).

Furthermore, Horst et al. (2017) highlight that urban community gardens serve as platforms for cultural learning and exchange, enabling immigrants, to utilize urban agriculture as a means to establish connections and share cultural insights related to farming and cooking traditions. Similarly, Studies conducted in California's San Francisco Bay Area highlight the social benefits of these gardens, emphasizing the formation of new social connections and the reinforcement of existing ties among gardeners and the wider community. Particularly, community gardens act as cultural anchors for immigrants, aiding in the preservation of their cultural knowledge and traditions. This establishes a sense of cultural identity and continuity in a new cultural

context, strengthening social and cultural bonds and promoting a shared narrative within the community (Diekmann et al. 2020).

Consequently, this highlights the promising role of community gardens in fostering a variety of essential skills, especially crucial within disadvantaged communities, encompassing social and political abilities. As individuals learn effective communication, conflict resolution, and engagement with local authorities, they gain the ability to understand and participate in local politics. This empowers them to speak up for their community's needs and make a positive impact on their environment, which helps strengthen their social connections. In addition, community garden involvement can nurture critical perspectives in individuals from segregated neighbourhoods. It may trigger a deeper comprehension of the underlying causes of segregation and disparities in resource access. This could make them more informed and active citizens who are more likely to work for positive changes in their local community and even at the broader social and political levels.

Community garden and social cohesion

Based on the previously mentioned studies, community gardens are often lauded as valuable tools that can promote social cohesion and community bonding, allowing individuals from diverse backgrounds to come together over a shared interest in a space outside of their homes and workplaces (Glover et al. 2005; Koroļova & Treija 2018). Similarly, Duchemin et al. (2009) argue that urban agriculture initiatives play a vital role in fostering a sense of belonging and facilitating knowledge exchange within the garden community and the broader society. These benefits are particularly emphasized for individuals facing social exclusion or representing minority groups (Duchemin et al. 2009). Furthermore, it is claimed that education is often at the core of urban community gardening projects, aimed at promoting social development among disadvantaged populations (Duchemin et al. 2009). Moreover, participation in these gardens has been linked to increased political awareness, partly due to the social interactions and knowledge exchange they facilitate (Horst et al. 2017). It has been observed that active engagement in urban community gardens correlates with a rise in the number of voters in democratic elections. Urban community gardens are considered mediums for propagating democratic values, and their participation fosters feelings of responsibility toward society, leading to reduced littering and criminal activities (Horst et al. 2017; Glover et al. 2005).

The Dutch researcher Esther Veen references various studies highlighting the role of community gardens as essential gathering spaces that foster social interaction and unity. These gardens, often seen as "Great good places," are known for bringing diverse age groups together, promoting democratic values, and providing recreational opportunities. These aspects contribute to the growth of friendships, mutual understanding, and tolerance. Notably, community garden participants often collaborate closely, addressing shared concerns and solving problems together (Veen

2015:23). These discussions reflect the core values of community participation, inclusivity, and cooperation. By involving multiple stakeholders in the decision-making process, community gardens have the potential to foster a sense of ownership and shared responsibility among the participants.

I concur with Veen (2015) in pointing out that the link between community gardens and social cohesion is often assumed rather than proven, and frequently simplified without recognizing its complexities. This places community gardens under high pressure to deliver specific outcomes. Without a demonstration of the conditions or mechanisms that underpin the link between social cohesion and community gardening, it becomes unlikely that these gardens can live up to these high expectations.

Although community gardens offer the potential to promote social cohesion and address socio-economic challenges, a thorough assessment of their efficacy and possible constraints is imperative to gain a more nuanced understanding of their role in advancing sustainable and inclusive communities.



Theoretical Framework

3. Theoretical Framework

The section initiates by introducing social cohesion and presenting my interpretation of the concept. It further delves into discussions on social practice and social capital theories, emphasizing their significance in comprehending the relationship between community gardens and the establishment of social networks. The section concludes by introducing an analytical framework that utilizes social capital theory to evaluate the strength of social networks within the community garden and the subsequent impact on social cohesion.

3.1 Social Cohesion

3.1.1 Social Cohesion in Urban Stockholm: A Foucauldian Perspective

As discussed earlier, Sweden is often lauded for its robust emphasis on social welfare and inclusivity. However, akin to many major European cities, the city of Stockholm contends with heightened spatialized social inequalities and segregation (Cassiers & Kesteloot 2012; Harsman 2006). which significantly impacts social cohesion within urban areas.

Within the context of creating a socially cohesive city, Cassiers & Kesteloot (2012:1914) delve into the crucial question of whether segregation is perceived as a challenge or a problem necessitating policy intervention. The authors present arguments that either support or at least acknowledge the existence of segregation, suggesting that it can facilitate the development of survival strategies within segregated environments. According to these arguments, segregation is perceived as a moderating force in society, providing a protective environment for newcomers, and enabling self-organization among individuals with similar backgrounds. This perspective highlights the potential benefits of spatial concentration, which fosters a sense of community and mutual support among residents.

This viewpoint resonates with the Foucauldian tradition, as highlighted by Cassiers & Kesteloot (2012), suggesting that segregation can paradoxically empower marginalized communities. In this viewpoint, segregation prompts these communities to unite and collaborate, finding strength and agency in their shared experiences and

challenges. This contrasts with the conventional Habermasian approach, which tends to view segregation as inevitably leading to conflicts and social fragmentation. However, Cassiers & Kesteloot (2012) advocate for a nuanced understanding of social cohesion, recognizing the complexities inherent in navigating diverse social landscapes.

In examining the connection between social cohesion and a community garden in a socio-economic and segregated neighbourhood, the Foucauldian approach emerges as a valuable theoretical lens. This perspective focuses on unraveling the intricacies of power dynamics within the garden space, shedding light on how individuals facing marginalization navigate and challenge prevailing power structures. The Foucauldian lens will explore the agency exercised by marginalized residents, their resistance against dominant narratives, and the empowerment cultivated within the garden setting.

3.1.2 Unravelling Social Cohesion: A Theoretical Exploration in the Context of Community Gardens

But what precisely defines the term "social cohesion"? And does it hold significance in Swedish political discussions? The term "social cohesion" or "social sammanhållning" in Swedish lacks widespread usage, with related terms like "integration" being more prevalent, while the former is notably absent from the political agenda (Stigendal 2010). The concept itself poses challenges, with diverse definitions across scholars. Some emphasize societal divisions like economic, social, and cultural disparities (Manca 2014), while others highlight the significance of social capital, relationships, networks, and civil society involvement (Kearns & Forrest 2000). For instance, Anna Rita Manca, an Italian researcher at the European Commission, identifies social cohesion's primary dimensions as a sense of belonging to a community and relationships among its members, stemming from a democratic initiative for social and economic sustainability (Manca 2014). In the meanwhile, Kearns & Forrest (2000) underscore the importance of social capital and social networks, identifying elements that contribute to social cohesion. These elements encompass 1) The existence of common values and civic culture; 2) The maintenance of social order and control; 3) The promotion of social solidarity and the reduction of wealth disparities; 4) The presence of social networks and social capital, as well as the importance of 5) Place attachment and identity.

Besides these differing perspectives, Antonsich (2010) emphasizes belonging in social cohesion discussions, stressing the need for individuals to express their identity and feel valued in their community. A sense of belonging involves aligning personal emotions with socio-spatial inclusion and exclusion factors, influencing interpersonal connections (Antonsich 2010). This approach considers autobiographical, relational, cultural, economic, and legal factors as crucial elements for establishing a socially cohesive and inclusive society. Collectively, these factors can guide someone towards

a meaningful and fulfilling life. In addition, the author points out that the lack of a sense of belonging to a place doesn't necessarily mean being excluded, as is often thought by scholars. Instead, not feeling connected to a place can lead to feelings of loneliness, isolation, alienation, and being out of place, which can result in issues related to motivation and mental well-being. Nonetheless, this doesn't imply that a sense of place-belongingness exists independently of power dynamics and how socio-spatial inclusion and exclusion are practiced and discussed.

Taking these perspectives into account, in my conceptualization, social cohesion pertains to how individuals perceive their connections and interactions within society, viewed from both individual and community levels. At the individual level, it involves interpersonal connections and the well-being of individuals within a social system, contributing to their sense of identity, purpose, and security within the larger social framework. Hence, at the Individual level, social cohesion involves improving the well-being of every individual within the social structure. This means ensuring that individuals feel a sense of belonging, emotional support, and a space for personal growth.

While at the Community level, the focus shifts to the collective cohesion of the community, promoting diversity, reducing disparities, and addressing broader social issues. This inclusivity helps reduce societal disparities and gaps, ensuring no one is excluded or marginalized based on their background, identity, or characteristics. In my interpretation of community-level social cohesion, there is a focus on addressing not just individual requirements but also larger societal goals. This includes promoting concepts such as social justice, equitable sharing of resources, diversity, and conflict resolution (see Figure 2).

I believe it is crucial to consider both individual and community levels when exploring social cohesion within a community garden. If we solely focus on the community level, we might observe the collective activities and interactions within the garden but overlook the personal experiences and feelings of each participant. For example, we might miss the sense of belonging and purpose that an individual feels when tending to their plants or interacting with fellow gardeners. Conversely, if we solely concentrate on the individual level, we might overlook how these personal experiences contribute to the overall cohesion and functioning of the community garden. For instance, we might not fully grasp how individual connections and well-being contribute to the overall sense of unity and shared purpose within the garden. By considering both levels we can gain a deeper understanding of how social cohesion operates within the context of the community garden. This holistic approach allows us to recognize the importance of both personal connections and collective engagement in fostering a cohesive and inclusive environment within the garden.

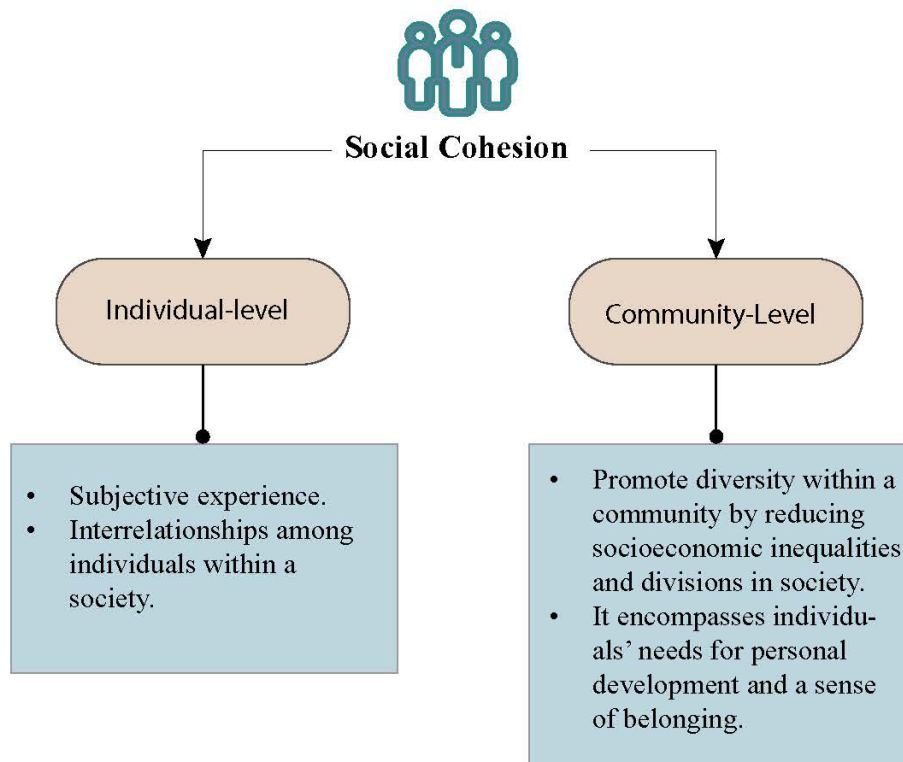


Figure 2. Conceptualization of social cohesion in this thesis focuses on individuals' perceptions of their connections within society at both individual and community levels. Influenced by collective definitions by Manca (2014), Kearns & Forrest (2000), and Antonsich (2010). The illustration is created by the author.

Nevertheless, measuring social cohesion poses a challenge due to its multifaceted nature and the question of which elements should be considered and how they contribute collectively (Veen 2015). To tackle this complexity, I have decided to narrow down my focus to one specific aspect of social cohesion among the five identified earlier by Kearns & Forrest (2000), which is: social networks and social capital (see Figure 3).

The rationale for selecting Kearns & Forrest's framework stems from its well-established and comprehensive theoretical foundation, which aligns with the key elements that I have identified as crucial in understanding social cohesion within a community garden. This framework delves into interpersonal relationships on an individual level while also exploring societal disparities, trust, reciprocity, and shared resources that shape community cohesion on a broader scale. Furthermore, Kearns & Forrest's framework was developed in the context of urban studies, making it directly applicable to community gardens situated within urban settings. This relevance ensures that their concepts can effectively analyse the dynamics of Tensta's community garden and its impact on social cohesion within a socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhood. By focusing on social networks and social capital as integral aspects of

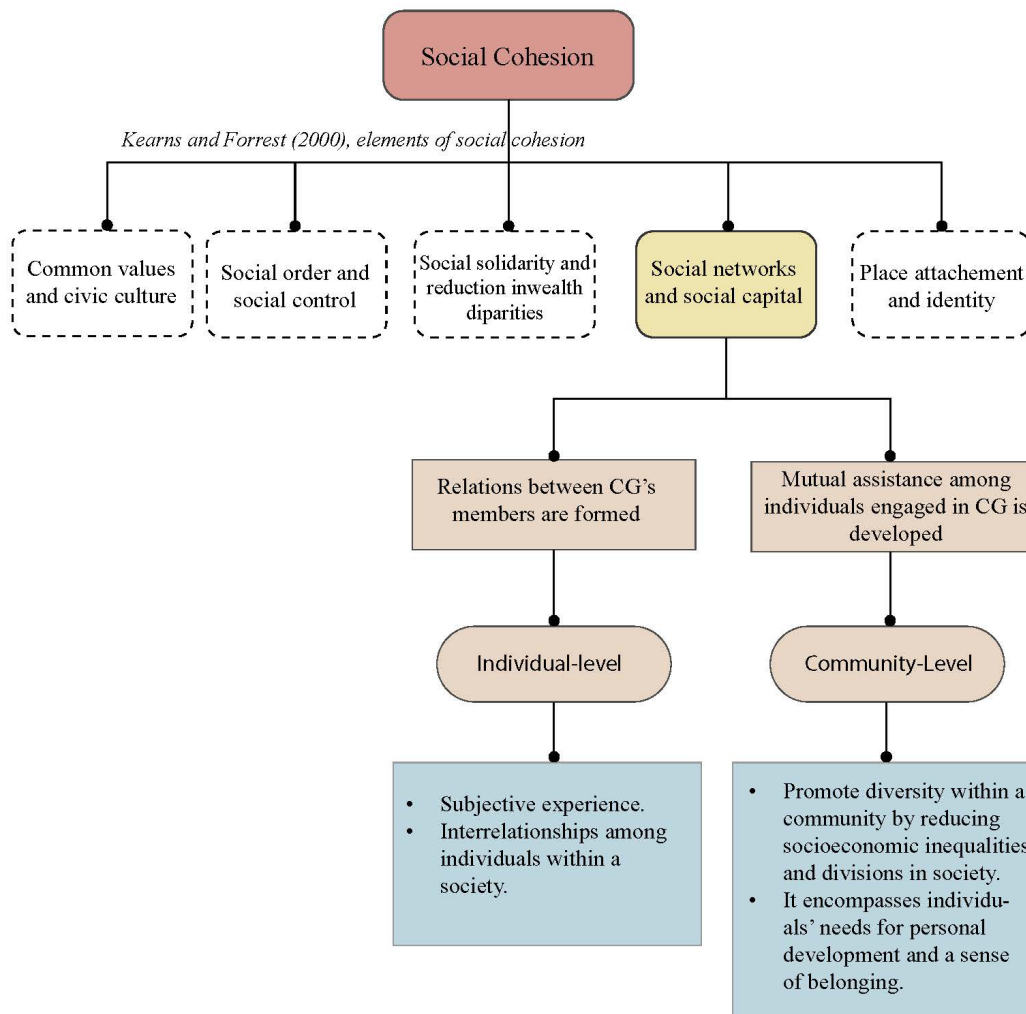


Figure 3. Operationalizing social cohesion in this thesis involves a focused exploration of one aspect among the five identified by Kearns & Forrest (2000): social networks and social capital. This is further delineated into two sub-elements: 1) Relationships between community gardeners, addressing the individual level, and 2) Mutual assistance among individuals engaged in the community garden, addressing the community level. The illustration is created by the author.

social cohesion and acknowledging these elements as essential within the broader concept, we can explore their interconnectedness and their influence on other factors within Kearns & Forrest's framework such as common values, civic culture, and place attachment within the context of Tensta's community garden.

This exploration is guided by the hypothesis supported by Bolt and Torrance (2005), as cited in (Veen 2015). According to this hypothesis, if community gardens exhibit a positive or negative influence on a particular aspect of social cohesion, it's logical to assume that they would similarly impact overall social cohesion. This implies that by concentrating on measuring one aspect of social cohesion, such as social networks and social capital in this case, there may be no need for a separate measurement of the sense

of belonging. It can be assumed that if a community garden's influence on participants' social networks is found to be positive or negative, the same effect would likely extend to their sense of belonging to the community.

By focusing on social networks, this thesis delves into how individuals connect within a community. The emphasis on social networks and social capital directs attention primarily to how individuals relate to one another within the community garden itself, examining their sense of belonging within this community rather than investigating how the garden influences their belonging to larger social entities such as the neighbourhood, city, or country. The attachment to a broader social system depends on various factors and cannot be solely attributed to a community garden. Attachment to one's neighbourhood, for instance, can be influenced by factors such as the quality of one's home, relationships with neighbours, and the presence of good schools; a community garden represents just one element among many.

Another reason for focusing on relationships between garden participants is to keep the research confined to the garden itself. Consequently, the study does not explore how gardens influence individuals' feelings about being part of larger social groups like the neighbourhood, city, or country. For these reasons, studying how individuals within the garden connect with each other serves as a sensible starting point for exploring how community gardens contribute to enhancing people's sense of connection.

To operationalize the element of "social contacts or social networks and social capital," I divided it into two sub-elements: 1) Relationships between community gardeners and 2) Mutual assistance among individuals engaged in community gardens. This approach draws inspiration from previous researchers who have explored similar concepts, as noted by Veen (2015:20) in her study. These studies offer valuable insights into the significance of social networks, social capital, and community involvement within neighbourhood settings. By drawing upon these previous works, the current approach seeks to build upon and expand our understanding of the intricate relationships and implications associated with these concepts (see Figure 3).

Accordingly, my conceptualization acknowledges the multidimensional nature of this concept and highlights its implications at both individual and community levels. It highlights the importance of establishing interpersonal connections and promoting collective well-being. This approach recognizes the complex interplay between individual experiences, societal structures, and the pursuit of a harmonious and inclusive social fabric. While complete harmony may be unattainable, the pursuit of it can lead to significant improvements in social cohesion, cooperation, and mutual understanding within communities and societies. It's about continually working towards building more inclusive, equitable, and respectful environments where individuals feel valued, heard, and empowered to contribute positively to society.

3.2 Practices in Community Gardens and Practice Theory

Practice theory serves as a sociological framework that focuses on understanding social phenomena through the lens of practice. It emphasizes the idea that social life is constituted and maintained through the actions and activities of individuals and groups. The theory perceives practices as more than just a collection of individual behaviors; they are seen as socially constructed, habitual, and routinized activities that have meaning and significance within a particular social and cultural context (Reckwitz 2002). It scrutinizes how practices are molded by social norms, conventions, and collective understandings, and their role in perpetuating and reshaping social structures and institutions (Reckwitz 2002). Various scholars have made significant contributions to this field, including Pierre Bourdieu, and Anthony Giddens, anthropologists like Ortner, and more recent theorists like Theodore Schatzki, Andreas Reckwitz, and Elizabeth Shove.

However, what distinguishes Bourdieu from other theorists is that he was primarily an empiricist. He developed and continually refined his theoretical concepts based on his empirical research, which comes with both advantages and disadvantages inherent to this type of theoretical production. Therefore, Bourdieu should not be primarily perceived as a theorist but rather as a cultural sociologist who systematically fuelled theoretical discourse through his empirical investigations (Joas & Knöbl 2009).

Pierre Bourdieu's "Outline of a Theory of Practice" introduces the concept of habitus, which refers to the ingrained patterns of behaviour, thought, and perception shaped by an individual's past experiences and social context (Bourdieu 1977). Within the realm of Practice Theory, as articulated by Bourdieu, the emphasis is on investigating the contextual dimensions of events that structuralist theories may not fully address. This theory posits that social structures are not only influenced by abstract forces but are also deeply molded by the actions of individuals, with habitus serving as a key mediator (Bourdieu 1977). In the context of a community garden, participants' habits and dispositions, influenced by their socio-economic backgrounds and past experiences, could play a significant role in their involvement with the garden and interactions with fellow participants. This theoretical framework facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the social dynamics within the community garden, elucidating how participants' shared practices and interactions contribute to the development of social cohesion.

Hence, the emphasis on practices in the analysis stems from the acknowledgment that social cohesion is not merely an abstract or static concept; rather, it is a dynamic process evolving through the everyday actions, interactions, and shared activities of individuals within a community. The focus on practices offers as well a more detailed and tangible perspective for comprehending how social cohesion is formed and sustained. By directing attention towards practices and engagements, the analysis can

pinpoint specific initiatives, events, or individuals that play crucial roles in bringing people together, fostering trust, and fostering a sense of belonging.

Moreover, adopting a human-centered approach through a focus on practices draws attention to the lived experiences of individuals within the community. It underscores the agency of community members, acknowledging their active roles in shaping the social dynamics of the community garden.

Therefore, I have utilized the practice theory as an overarching method to investigate the establishment and evolution of social networks and collective practices within a community garden. Through the observation and analysis of activities within this setting, we can identify the individual experiences that encompass shared practices, routines, and interactions among members. It aids as well in understanding the informal norms and shared behaviours that shape interactions within the community garden, encompassing aspects such as gardening techniques, communication methods, and spatial utilization. In addition, practice theory acknowledges the role of material elements in shaping practices, involving considerations of physical elements like tools, garden layout, and resource sharing in the formation of social connections.

Therefore, studying community gardens through the lens of practice theory facilitates exploration into how the physical and social characteristics of the garden space, as well as broader socio-political dynamics, influence the practices and interactions within the community, and how they contribute to or hinder social cohesion.

3.3 Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory posits that social networks, relationships, and social structures hold inherent value, providing individuals and communities with resources, opportunities, and support. It focuses on the idea that social connections and interactions contribute to the development of social capital, yielding various benefits and outcomes (Claridge 2018).

Originating from distinct perspectives, three key theorists—Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam—contributed to the initial development of social capital theory. Bourdieu delved into the cultural and symbolic dimensions, Coleman emphasized individual and economic aspects, while Putnam explored the civic and collective facets of social capital (Claridge 2018). Despite these varied approaches, all theorists recognized the pivotal role of social capital in promoting individual and societal well-being. This interdisciplinary nature of social capital theory showcases its multifaceted character and diverse applications across different contexts.

To enhance understanding and assess social capital metrics, scholars have identified various functions, commonly categorized as bonding, bridging, and linking types

(Claridge 2018). These functions will serve as an analytical framework for evaluating the potential of community gardens to enhance social capital and foster social cohesion.

Bonding social capital: Encompasses strong ties among individuals sharing similar characteristics or backgrounds, fostering identity, trust, and support within close-knit groups (Claridge 2018).

Bridging social capital: Involves connections and relationships between individuals or groups from diverse social backgrounds or communities, promoting interaction, cooperation, and resource sharing, leading to increased social integration and diversity (Claridge 2018).

Linking social capital: Relates to connections between individuals or groups with unequal power or status, such as relationships between community members and institutions, organizations, or influential individuals, facilitating access to resources, opportunities, and support from influential entities or individuals (Claridge 2018).

By employing the concept of social capital, along with its three functions, in the context of community gardens, the study can investigate how shared values and social connections are formed and utilized to derive value in terms of access to resources, networks, knowledge, skills, and emotional support. This approach can assess the development of social capital within community gardens and its influence on the sense of belonging and social cohesion among members. Additionally, it facilitates an exploration of how shared values and connections contribute to a supportive and cooperative community environment.

In summary, the application of social capital theory in the study of community gardens and social cohesion provides a framework to analyse the formation of social networks, shared practices, and their impact on belonging and social cohesion. Concepts such as bonding, bridging, and linking social capital offer insights into the dynamics within community gardens and their role in building social cohesion.

3.4 Integrating the Theories of Social Practice and Social Capital and Their Practical Implementation Within My Study

In this thesis, my focus is on examining a community garden as a social setting, with the specific aim of testing a hypothesis, suggesting that participation in Tensta's community garden enhances social connections and strengthens the sense of belonging among participants. The study explores the establishment and development of social networks and collective practices at an individual level and their impact on broader community-level outcomes, influencing social cohesion and a sense of belonging among participants. Additionally, it investigates how the location and socioeconomic profile of the community garden affect participants' experiences and the garden's

effectiveness in promoting social cohesion. Consequently, I suggest incorporating social practice and capital theories into the investigation of community gardens and their influence on social cohesion. This approach is designed to offer a nuanced comprehension of the inherent dynamics and mechanisms, especially within disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The integration of these two theories is beneficial for several reasons. Firstly, it provides a contextualized understanding, as practice theory delves into the activities and tangible practices within the community garden, revealing how residents engage with the space. Simultaneously, social capital theory sheds light on intangible aspects such as social relationships, trust, and networks, thereby contextualizing the neighbourhood's social dynamics.

Furthermore, practice theory demonstrates how community members participate in shared activities, and how the disadvantaged circumstances of the neighbourhood, along with their socioeconomic backgrounds and previous experiences, influence their engagement with the garden and social connections with other participants. Meanwhile, social capital theory highlights how these social connections serve as resources.

Therefore, the integration of practice theory and social capital theory enhances the study's depth and applicability, providing a more holistic understanding of the mechanisms influencing social cohesion and a sense of belonging in these specific contexts.

Moving forward, I will introduce a conceptual framework designed to address research questions and explore the connection between practices in a community garden in a socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhood and the development of social cohesion and a sense of belonging. As previously mentioned, my focus on social cohesion centers around examining social networks and social capital, which I have subdivided into two categories: 1) Relationships among community garden members at the individual level and 2) Mutual assistance and support demonstrated by engaged members addressing the community level.

In this context, my utilization of practice theory serves as a foundational framework for comprehending community gardens as arenas for social practices and for understanding how the practices in the garden are influenced by participants' socioeconomic backgrounds and previous experiences. During the empirical phase of my investigation, I delve into the two dimensions of social cohesion by unraveling how individuals establish connections and mutual support through practices. The empirical results will be examined through the lens of the social capital framework, aiding in comprehending how diverse practices establish relationships not only among individuals but also with the environment and the broader community, despite the disadvantaged circumstances of the neighbourhood, and how they facilitate mutual assistance. The distinct forms of capital can be seen as manifestations of different relationships. This investigation seeks to demonstrate how people's actions illustrate the formation of these distinct social dynamics. Additionally, it aims to evaluate how a

range of practices impacts social capital and cultivates a sense of belonging through shared values and meanings (see Figure 4).

Therefore, the concept of social practices acts as an overarching framework emphasizing the importance of shared routines and behaviors within community gardens. It also takes into account the neighbourhood challenges and past experiences that underlie participants' engagement with the garden and their social interactions with others. While social capital theory emphasizes the social networks and resources that arise from these practices. Together, these perspectives provide a more holistic comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which community gardens impact social cohesion, exploring how participation in community gardens gives rise to diverse forms of social capital, contributing to a nuanced comprehension of how individuals establish connections with both people and place.

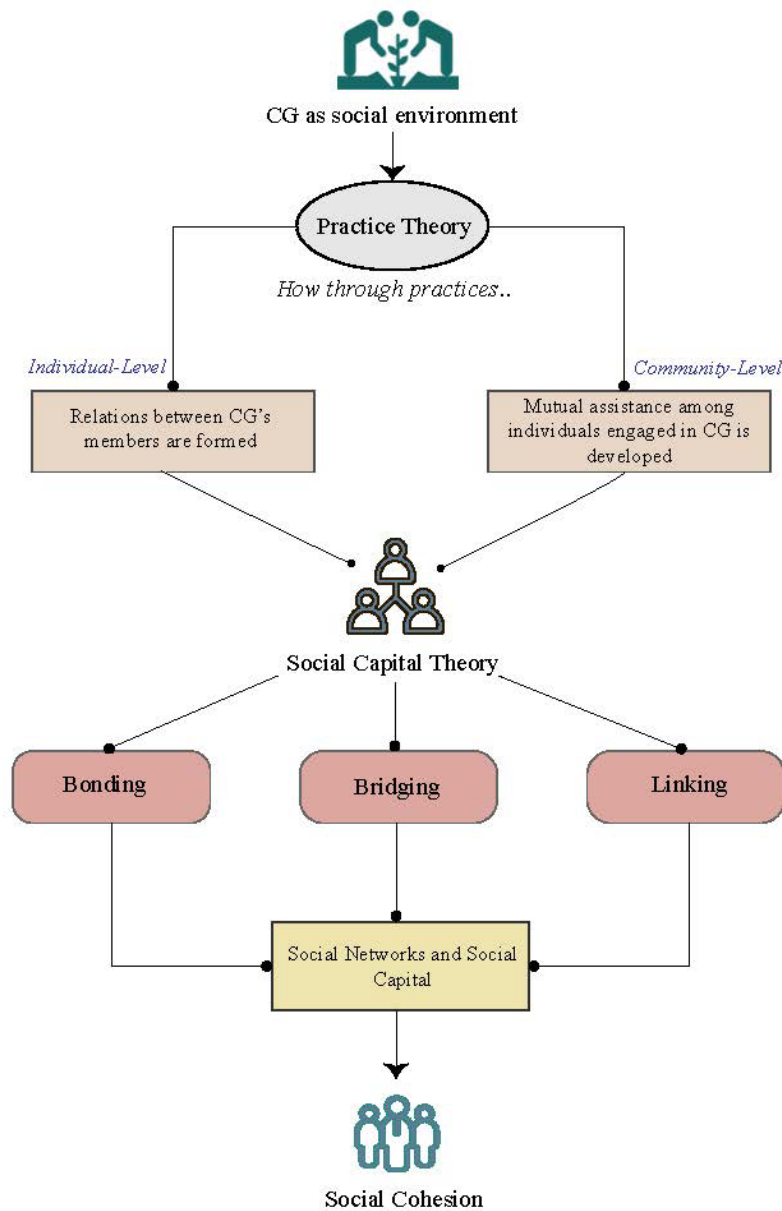


Figure 4. The theoretical framework combines practice and social capital theories to explore how participation in community gardens cultivates diverse forms of social capital, facilitating participants' connections with both individuals and their surroundings. It investigates how these connections contribute to enhancing social cohesion and fostering a sense of belonging within the community garden context. The illustration is created by the author.



Methodology



4. Methodology

In this section, the study design is presented, which involves the employment of a qualitative research approach, that encompasses all research stages, including the selection of case and participants, data collection, processing, and analysis. It introduces as well the positionality of the researcher. The section concludes with a critical reflection on the methods employed and the limitations of the study.

4.1 Qualitative Research

Defining qualitative research has been a long-standing challenge for scholars and researchers. According to Patton (2015), Merriam (2002), and Maxwell (2005, 2013), qualitative research fundamentally explores the lives, behaviors, emotions, and perspectives of individuals (Billups 2023). Integrating these definitions, it becomes evident that qualitative research unveils the significance individuals attribute to their experiences through close interactions, in-depth conversations, and multifaceted interpretations.

This qualitative research study will adopt an abductive approach or a mixed methods design, blending aspects of both inductive and deductive methodologies.

Inductively, the study utilizes qualitative methods, including interviews and observations, to allow participants to freely express their experiences and perspectives. Through these methods, specific observations and data points are gathered to develop a broader understanding, contributing to an inductive approach according to Schwandt (2015:153) as mentioned in (Billups 2023). By starting with specific observations within Tensta's community garden, such as the formation of social networks and shared practices, the research aims to develop a broader understanding of social cohesion. The analysis of these observations generates insights into the dynamics of social cohesion within the community garden and its implications for socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Deductively, the study seeks to validate particular hypotheses derived from existing literature, which suggests that participation in community gardens enhances social cohesion (Glover 2004; Alaimo et al. 2010; Ilieva et al. 2022). Building upon this literature, the research posits that engagement in Tensta's community garden correlates with heightened social ties and a heightened sense of belonging among participants.

This hypothesis will be examined using qualitative methods, including interviews and observations, to collect data that either corroborates or challenges the formulated hypotheses. Employing deductive reasoning, the study begins with overarching theories or hypotheses and subsequently evaluates them against specific observations or data (Merriam 2002).

By incorporating both inductive and deductive approaches, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social practices in the community garden and social cohesion, allowing for the exploration of emergent understandings while also testing pre-existing theories or hypotheses.

In the case of exploring the influence of community gardens on social cohesion, qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' feelings, motivations, and how they connect with each other and their environment. This approach allows me to deep dive into the intricate nuances of how individuals interact, form connections, and cultivate a sense of belonging within the specific context of Tensta's community garden. Qualitative methods like interviews and observations, can unveil the multifaceted dynamics that contribute to these outcomes. It helps in understanding the context-specific factors that shape individuals' relationships, the role of the garden in fostering connections, and the challenges faced in promoting social cohesion.

Additionally, qualitative research facilitates the exploration of unexpected or previously overlooked aspects of the community garden experience, providing a holistic view of how these spaces impact social interactions and cohesion. This approach is especially valuable in uncovering the intricate interplay of social practices, emotions, and meanings that contribute to the cohesion-building process, offering a comprehensive understanding of this complex phenomenon.

4.1.1 Positionality

A combination of personal encounters and educational background shapes my positionality. As an immigrant, I bring a different perspective to the study of community gardens and their impact on socio-economic neighbourhoods. My own journey of adapting to a new environment and culture provides me with insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by individuals in these neighbourhoods. My curiosity about segregation in Sweden and the social dynamics stems from a recognition of its potential impact on my own life. Thus, the study reflects my aspiration to delve deeper into the social macro-forces influencing my experience in the newfound Swedish environment.

The decision to focus on studying the impact of community gardens is rooted in my upbringing, influenced by my parents' deep appreciation for agriculture and planting. My mother, a professor in the agricultural faculty at Cairo University in Egypt, imparted to me the significant and positive impacts that gardening practices can have,

instilling these insights from an early age. Which encourages me to delve more into the social dimension of urban planning and design. This personal connection fuels my interest in understanding how community gardens can play a role in fostering social cohesion and addressing socio-economic disparities. On the other hand, my educational background in architecture and landscape architecture equips me with a comprehensive understanding of the built environment and its significance in shaping communities.

Therefore, my dual perspective as an immigrant and an architecture-educated researcher lends depth to my exploration of community gardens in socio-economic neighbourhoods. It allows me to bridge the gap between theoretical insights and practical implications, enhancing the credibility and relevance of my findings.

4.2 Research Process

4.2.1 Case Study Presentation

Tensta is situated within the larger Järva region and is one of its six neighbourhoods, located approximately 13 km north of central Stockholm. It falls under the district of Spånga-Tensta, which is part of Västerort (Western Suburbs) in Stockholm municipality. The district is home to around 39,000 residents as of 2016, and this number is projected to increase to 49,403 by 2040 (Stockholm 2018). Spånga-Tensta encompasses several districts, including Bromsten, Flysta, Solhem, Lunda, Sundby, and Tensta itself. Notably, the higher-income earners of Stockholm primarily reside in Bromsten, Flysta, Solhem, and Sundby (Stockholm 2018).

Historically, in the first five decades of the 19th century, the Tensta area consisted mainly of farmland that was utilized for military exercises by the army. However, Tensta's transformation into a residential area began in the early 1960s when the Swedish government initiated a massive project to build one million new housing units in response to the housing shortage across Sweden. This project, undertaken between 1965 and 1974, aimed to accommodate the growing urban population and alleviate the demand for housing (Wikipedia 2023). Tensta mainly consists of apartment buildings ranging from two to eight floors, with taller structures positioned towards Järvafältet and a gradual reduction in the number of floors towards the south. Urban planning also included well-defined traffic separation and organized building blocks. The housing fair in 2006 introduced additional elements like townhouses to the area, while the Tensta Konsthall (art gallery) emerged as a notable attraction for the entire Stockholm community (Stockholm 2018).

Over the past three decades, Tensta has experienced waves of migration and settlement, driven by affordable rents and the presence of existing immigrant communities. Initially known as a 'transitional location,' where migrants would eventually move to other areas of Stockholm upon improving their social status, Tensta

has recently shifted towards becoming a more permanent residence for its inhabitants (Andersson & Bråmås 2004).

Disadvantaged Suburbs: From Welfare to Warfare

The Swedish Police Authority has been regularly releasing lists since 2015, classifying high-risk districts every two years based on significant crime and socio-economic challenges. In each of these releases, Tensta consistently falls under the category of a 'particularly vulnerable area,' indicating severe socio-economic challenges and a notable presence of criminal elements, leading to a reduced sense of safety among residents (Polisen 2015; 2017; 2019; 2021).

However, this classification raises concerns about the portrayal of these suburban areas, contributing to a troubling and distinct trend. These neighbourhoods are labeled as inherently problematic, described using stigmatizing terms such as "anti-social and uncivilized spatiality" (Ericsson et al. 2000:28-29), with residents portrayed as "violent political subjects" (de los Reyes 2016: 164, 166) as mentioned in (Thapar-Björkert et al. 2019:141). This dehumanizing characterization becomes a basis for justifying increased policing and military involvement in these communities (Thapar-Björkert et al. 2019).

Furthermore, there is an overwhelming dominance of the police narrative in shaping public debates on policing these suburbs. This dominance is attributed to the media's uncritical reliance on a central news agency, which unquestioningly accepts and disseminates the police's perspective, resulting in a distorted portrayal of these neighbourhoods. Journalists, often lacking firsthand experiences or resident perspectives, contribute to a skewed understanding of the realities on the ground (Thapar-Björkert et al. 2019). This aligns with my empirical investigation, as some participants at Tensta Konsthall mentioned that media reports on Tensta often do not reflect reality, as journalists rely heavily on police reports, marginalizing the input of residents.

Interestingly, the authors Thapar-Björkert et al. (2019) discuss a shift in political discourse from welfare to warfare, leading to the militarization of the suburbs. This shift manifests tangibly in the presence of the military on the streets and more forceful police actions. The substitution of social services with an increased police presence, especially in racialized neighbourhoods, raises concerns about the state's priorities. This approach, legitimized under the rhetoric of needing more police officers, poses risks of increased surveillance, potential abuses of power, and a general atmosphere of insecurity for residents.

These issues collectively underscore concerns about the framing of suburban areas, the uncritical acceptance of the police narrative in media, the resultant distorted portrayal of neighbourhoods, and the tangible consequences of increased militarization. This narrative overlooks the complexities of socio-economic challenges, reinforcing stereotypes and potentially exacerbating the very issues it aims to address.

Challenges in Tensta

The community of Tensta faces intricate and multifaceted challenges, as indicated by input from local residents. Despite recognizing positive aspects, such as the potential for young inhabitants to instigate change, Tensta grapples with significant issues. A report published by the Interpeace¹ organization highlighted several of these challenges. The report emphasizes that a primary hurdle lies in the identity struggle experienced by Tensta's youth, who find themselves navigating between their immigrant parents' traditions and contemporary Swedish culture. This dual identity, compounded by the complexities of being both an immigrant and a Swede, poses considerable difficulties for many young individuals. Nonetheless, despite these identity challenges, young residents of Tensta hold a strong attachment to their district, emphasizing its multicultural and community-focused nature. Furthermore, the issue of segregation and marginalization emerged as a significant concern. The consultations uncovered a prevailing sense of exclusion from mainstream Swedish society. Residents feel neglected by state authorities, perceiving unequal treatment in comparison to neighbouring areas like Spånga. The disconnect with politicians who appear to overlook their needs in policy formulation further exacerbates this sentiment. Negative media portrayals contribute to the marginalization feeling, although Tensta's youth actively challenge these stereotypes and take pride in their neighbourhood. Another major challenge faced by Tensta is socio-economic hurdles. High unemployment rates and economic disparities contribute to increased crime rates, discouraging business investment in the area and limiting local economic prospects (Interpeace 2014).

Even though the Interpeace pilot project's findings in Tensta date back to 2014, it is evident that the challenges highlighted in the project are still relevant today. This reality is acknowledged not only by the local community but also by political figures. The Deputy Finance Mayor and leader of the Steering Group for Fokus Järva, Anders Österberg, of the Social Democrats, in an interview published by nyhetsbyrån Järva, states that "Stockholm hasn't taken responsibility for Järva." (Österberg 2023). Anders Österberg goes on to elaborate that Stockholm has not fulfilled its obligations toward Järva, pointing out issues such as pronounced overcrowding, higher unemployment rates, and lower educational achievements compared to the city's average. These factors were instrumental in the establishment of the Fokus Järva initiative. Fokus Järva is a significant endeavour by Stockholm to transform the Järva area, which houses nearly 100,000 residents, into an integral part of the city. This initiative aims to mobilize various entities including city departments, companies, and citizens.

Opposition deputy mayor Emilia Bjuggren concurs with Anders Österberg, noting that the sense of security in Järva is lower compared to other parts of the city.

¹ Interpeace is a worldwide independent organization focused on peacebuilding, known for its proven methods in conflict resolution and peace establishment. Operating in more than 20 countries across Central America, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, Interpeace supports peacebuilding initiatives. It collaborates closely with the United Nations, with its main headquarters situated in Stockholm, Sweden among other cities worldwide.

Overcrowding, particularly for families with children, is prevalent, leading to lower school results. The need for sustained commitment and comprehensive efforts to enhance living conditions, safety, and the local environment is evident (Ståhl 2022).

Socialdemokraterna emphasizes the need for a unified and comprehensive plan to address the development of Järva. Recognizing that disparities in living conditions have escalated, the assertion is that residents in different parts of the city should not experience significantly worse conditions than those in other areas. However, the report highlights that the priorities in recent years have fallen short of the comprehensive plan's ambition. Current initiatives to develop Järva have been either reduced or completely halted during the current mandate period (Ståhl 2022).

Similarly, finance commissioner Karin Wanngård (S) echoes this sentiment, speaking at a press conference in Akalla Village published on the "*Mitti Stockholm*" website (Hagström 2022). She emphasizes the longstanding neglect faced by Järva and the spread of marginalization and insecurity. Karin Wanngård underscores the urgency for politicians to adopt a holistic approach to Järva's development. She highlights the disparity in average income compared to the rest of the city, along with higher rates of overcrowding and unemployment, and lower educational attainment among students (Hagström 2022).

To confront Tensta's challenges, collaborative efforts involving the state, Stockholm municipality, and local housing companies have been undertaken. Among these initiatives, Fokus Järva was launched to effect change and elevate the area to the same standards as the rest of Stockholm as mentioned previously. Plans include constructing larger housing units, increasing funding for schools and preschools, and focusing on youth employment. Social initiatives have been promoted to bolster community support, enhance participation, and foster cohesion, ultimately contributing to positive development (Österberg 2023). Accordingly, this study explores one of the urban agriculture initiatives established in the neighbourhood as part of these collective efforts.

4.2.2 Tensta Community Garden

The emergence of the garden

This particular garden in Sweden stands out from other community gardens due to its unique nature. It does not strictly follow a top-down or bottom-up approach but rather combines elements of both. The garden is owned by the Konsthall², or art gallery at Tensta, which is a notable attraction for the entire Stockholm community (Stockholm 2018) (see Figure 5). The community garden was initiated in 2015 by Fahyma, an employee of the gallery. Fahyma began working at the Konsthall in 2012 as a receptionist, later taking on roles as an accountant, and then a teacher at the Silent University³, which collaborated with the Konsthall. Fahyma, a Syrian immigrant who has resided in Sweden for 30 years, empathizes with the challenges faced by new immigrants who arrive in Sweden as refugees without proper documentation. Despite this, they are required to learn the Swedish language to secure employment. To support immigrants and improve their lives, Fahyma proposed projects through Silent University. These projects included the language café (språkcafé), women's center (kvinno center), and citizen-to-citizen (medborgare till medborgare) initiatives.

To aid immigrants in their integration into Swedish society and foster a better understanding of the local nature and environment, Fahyma approached the Konsthall administrator with the idea of establishing a garden where language and other courses

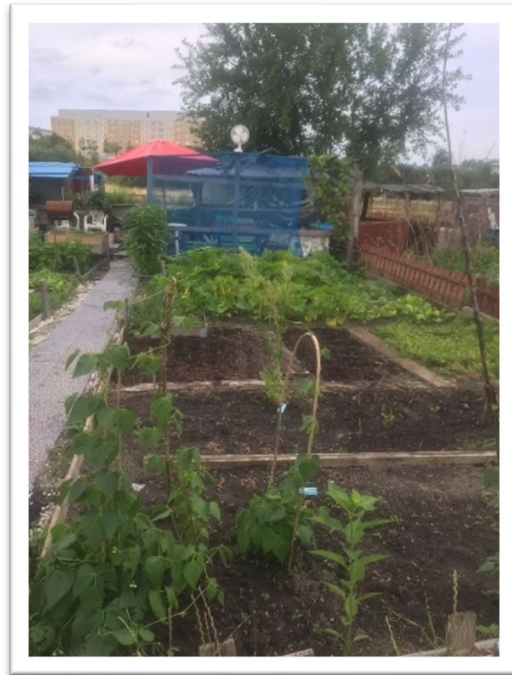


Figure 5. The garden at Tensta. Photo by Participant 1.

² Tensta Konsthall, is a contemporary art institution located in Tensta. Founded in 1998 through a grassroots effort, the art gallery has gained acclaim for its combination of a prominent program showcasing international contemporary art and a strong focus on community engagement. In addition to organizing exhibitions featuring renowned artists, the gallery acts as a platform for fostering connections among diverse groups that may not usually interact. Situated in a central former warehouse, the gallery's café has become a popular meeting place for residents of all generations in the local area (Tenstagkonsthall.se).

³ The Silent University is an alternative knowledge production and exchange platform. It is an artist-run practice, an autonomous knowledge exchange platform for refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants. Silent University aims to challenge the idea of silence as a passive state and explore the powerful potential of silence through performance, writing, and group reflection. The platform was created and initiated in 2012 by the artist Ahmet Ögut, in cooperation with many researchers (Tan 2022).

could be held (see Figures 6,7 & 8). The garden occupies an area of 110 m² and is one of 84 allotments under the jurisdiction of the Tensta municipality.



Figure 7. Gardening practices, Photo by participants



Figure 6. The garden at Tensta, Photo by the author

I chose Tensta's community garden as the setting for my study to test the hypothesis introduced earlier, that participation in a community garden enhances social connections and strengthens participants' sense of belonging. This investigation involves examining the impact of individual experiences within the garden, encompassing forged social relationships and collaborative practices, on the development of social cohesion and a sense of belonging. As well as, exploring how the disadvantaged conditions of Tensta impact participants' experiences in the community garden and influence the effectiveness of the garden in fostering social connections among residents and shaping their sense of belonging and social cohesion.



Figure 8. A participant cultivates fresh produce from a community garden. Photo by participants.

Therefore, my proposal suggests integrating practice theory and social capital theories to attain a holistic comprehension. Practice theory provides valuable insights into the interactions and dynamics among participants in community gardens, while

social capital theory highlights the networks and resources that result from these interactions.

As elaborated in the theoretical chapter, my research primarily revolves around investigating social cohesion through the lens of social practices. Specifically, I narrow down the concept of social cohesion to focus on social networks and social capital. This concept is further divided into two distinct subcategories: first, an examination of the relationships formed among members of Tensta's community garden (individual level), and second, an exploration of the mutual aid and support exchanged among active participants (community level). Consequently, my application of practice theory provides a framework for understanding the community garden as a space where social practices take place. In parallel, my empirical inquiry centers on uncovering how individuals establish connections through these practices and how the diversity of these practices influences the accumulation of social capital, all while nurturing a sense of belonging through shared values and shared meanings.

4.2.3 Participant Selection

The participants were selected through purposeful sampling, meaning that each interviewee was selected because of his or her connection to the project. To interview participants and their connection to the community garden, I first contacted Participant 1 and from her, I got to know the other interviewees.

4.2.4 Data Collection

The collection of the data is divided between reviewing literature and conducting interviews, with some additional data being gathered through on-site observation as well as published interviews of politicians and reports contributing to the dataset.

Interviewee	Nationality & Age	Place	Date	Duration
Participant 1	66, Syria	Face to face	28.04.2023	1h 30 min
Participant 2	77, Irag	Group	28.04.2023	30 min
Participant 3	72, Irag	Group	28.04.2023	30 min
Participant 4	30, Somalia	Group	28.04.2023	30 min
Participant 5	47, Lebanon	Telephone	28.04.2023	20 min
Participant 6	44, Syria	Car and Garden	28.04.2023	30 min

Table 1. List of interviewees

Interviews

A total of six semi-structured interviews were conducted, one of which was a face-to-face interview lasting for an hour and a half at the Konsthall. Another interview took place during a car ride to the garden, as the interviewee kindly offered to drive me there. Additionally, I conducted a group interview with three participants simultaneously, and the final interview was conducted over the phone. It is widely acknowledged that interviews serve as a crucial source of evidence in case study research (Merriam 2002). The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for flexibility, enabling me to adjust and include additional questions as needed. Each interview commenced with a brief introduction of myself, the thesis, and the purpose of the interview. Before recording the session, I sought consent from the interviewees and provided an opportunity for them to ask any questions. The interviews followed an interview guide, outlined in the Appendix, which was tailored to each interviewee. After the interviews, the participants were invited to share any additional thoughts. I expressed gratitude for their participation, asked for permission to contact them again, and concluded the interviews. And I was invited actually to join them the next time they are going to the garden.

All the interviews conducted in Tensta were carried out in the Arabic language, and I transcribed them into text before translating them into English, which served as the primary data source for the study. I observed that the participants felt comfortable and at ease while discussing their experiences in the community garden. The fact that they could freely express themselves in their native language was a privilege, and it created a conducive atmosphere for open dialogue. The interviews took place at the Tensta Konsthall (art gallery), which provided a warm and friendly environment. The participants were accustomed to gathering there every Friday and Sunday for the Språkcafé (language café) and enjoyed complimentary Fika (coffee and snacks).

During the interviews, I observed variations in comprehension and attitudes among the participants. In the initial interview with Participant 1, the garden's initiator, she appeared to have a good grasp of terms such as social sustainability, economics, and politics (owing to her background in political science in her home country). However, the other interviewees were not as familiar with these terms, so I avoided using technical terms like "social capital" while conversing with them. Instead, I endeavoured to comprehend, through their experiences, how social capital revealed itself in the community garden initiative.

Drawing upon the study's operationalization of social cohesion and social capital, the semi-structured interviews focused on two key aspects. Firstly, the interviews explored the formation of social connections, and the quality of these connections, such as whether individuals interacted with fellow gardeners outside of the garden and if they considered them as friends. Secondly, the interviews delved into the collective practices that participants are engaged in within the garden and their impact on the relationships among members, and if these practices and involvement with the garden

together with the established relationships influenced their connection with the surrounding garden community. Additionally, to gain insights into how people utilized the garden and the significance of cultivation and vegetables, inquiries were made regarding participants' consumption of the garden's harvest.

4.3 Data Processing and Analysis

4.3.1 Transcription

The interviews in Tensta were all conducted in Arabic, transcribed manually, and then translated into English to aid in data analysis, allowing for deeper comprehension and topic identification (Merriam, 2002).

4.3.2 Interpretative Qualitative Method for Data Analysis

Unlike other qualitative designs that might focus on capturing a lived experience, conducting an in-depth analysis of a process or event, or narrating the personal stories of individuals, interpretative qualitative research is particularly concerned with grasping the intricacies of how participants create their own understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. In this approach, the researcher delves into collective experiences and aims to explore and grasp the perspectives of the participants, as outlined by Merriam (2002). In essence, the interpretive qualitative method acknowledges that individuals don't simply react to situations or phenomena based on objective facts; rather, they engage in a complex process of interpreting and assigning significance to these experiences. By focusing on participants' constructed meanings, this method aims to uncover the underlying layers of interpretation that shape how individuals perceive and interact with the world around them.

I utilize this approach as it is particularly suited for exploring the nuances of subjective experiences, as it delves into the realm of participants' thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and values. It offers researchers a deeper understanding of the diverse perspectives that participants bring to a situation and how these perspectives contribute to their overall understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2002).

In essence, the interpretative qualitative method is a research strategy that aims to understand how participants make sense of a specific phenomenon by examining the meanings they attach to it. It shifts the focus from merely describing events to exploring the rich cognitive and emotional processes that inform participants' unique interpretations, enriching our understanding of the complexities inherent in human experience.

4.4 Reflections

Qualitative research often faces criticism for its subjectivity, suggesting that findings are influenced by researchers' personal perspectives on importance and meaning. Consequently, the reproducibility of qualitative research is questioned due to its reliance on the researcher's characteristics and biases (Bhattacharjee 2012). Throughout this study, I have aimed to maintain an open perspective, being responsive to the insights shared by interviewees. Nonetheless, complete objectivity is unattainable as my background, experiences, interests, and knowledge shape how I interpret and comprehend information. Merriam (2002) contends that researchers hold a significant role in the research process, with personal characteristics and subjectivity contributing to the realities constructed through research. This viewpoint suggests that my background, interests, and characteristics are integral and necessary factors to acknowledge, as they contribute to the research process and the resulting realities.

During my research, I have maintained a flexible approach, allowing the research to evolve organically. I entered the study with a curiosity about gardening and well-being, rather than a predetermined agenda. These interests guided the research, demonstrating how personal inclinations have shaped my study, as elaborated in the preceding section. My interactions with garden initiatives and subsequent encounters with respondents illustrate how the research took form through the development of relationships with participants. As Merriam (2002) suggests, the clarity of things is not predetermined but emerges as the study progresses. This perspective aligns with the trajectory of my research process.

Interpretative research, though valuable, comes with its own set of challenges. Firstly, as highlighted by (Bhattacharjee 2012), this approach demands more time and resources for data collection and analysis compared to positivist research. Inadequate data can lead to hasty conclusions, while an excess of data might overwhelm researchers. In my case, the constrained timeframe of this course resulted in a relatively limited amount of collected information. Despite this challenge, the data obtained was sufficient to gain valuable insights and build upon the acquired knowledge. Bhattacharjee (2012) emphasizes the importance of building trust between participants and researchers, which can be time-consuming. However, this aspect was relatively manageable for me because I share the same language and immigrant background with the participants, allowing me to establish trust more easily. Additionally, Bhattacharjee (2012) suggests that in interpretative research, researchers must skilfully understand complex social phenomena from participants' viewpoints while impartially reconciling diverse perspectives without imposing their own biases. However, it's important to note, as I mentioned earlier based on Merriam (2002), that researchers play a significant role in the research process, and their personal characteristics and subjectivity contribute to the realities constructed through research.



Results and Analysis



5. Results and Analysis

In this chapter, I scrutinize the study's findings, where I apply the analytical framework to the results, aiming to deepen our comprehension of the gathered data, enhance the theoretical foundation, and engage in critical reflection.

5.1 Practices in the Community Garden

In alignment with the theoretical framework introduced earlier, my application of practice theory goes beyond merely observing specific actions in community gardens. Instead, it aims to uncover the underlying intrinsic experiences and dynamics shaping these social practices. The primary objective of my study is to validate the formulated hypothesis: that engaging in practices within community gardens can cultivate social cohesion and a sense of belonging among participants. This is operationalized through research questions that delve into individual experiences within the garden, encompassing collective practices, the evolution of social connections, shared values, and their broader impact on community-level outcomes related to social cohesion and a sense of belonging. Additionally, the study explores the impact of the disadvantaged conditions of Tensta's location on participants' experiences within the garden and its effectiveness in promoting social cohesion. By revealing these social experiences and bonds and employing the theoretical framework (Figure 3), I aim to test the hypothesis, address the research questions, and contribute to a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics within community gardens and their role in fostering social cohesion and a sense of belonging.

To illustrate these concepts, I will present examples of observed practices within Tensta's community garden. It is imperative to recognize that while I directly observed some of these practices, my awareness of others is derived from interviews conducted with the participants. In the context of this type of garden, practices encompass a spectrum of activities and actions carried out by individuals or groups engaged in the cultivation, upkeep, and administration of the shared garden space. These practices typically entail a collective effort and collaboration among participants. Common practices in community gardens encompass food cultivation, garden maintenance, resource sharing, collective decision-making, and, notably, educational activities.

5.2 Using the Social Capital Theory to Measure and Assess the Established Social Networks

The application of social capital theory serves as a framework for analysing the social networks, relationships, and values that arise from the practices within the community garden. The examination of these evolved social networks is approached through the three functions of social capital theory: bonding, bridging, and linking.

To categorize the interview data according to bonding, bridging, and linking social capital, I employ a systematic approach. The initial step involves **1) Defining the Concepts**, where a clear understanding of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital is established. To achieve this clarity, I refer to Claridge's (2018) definitions in his comprehensive report on social capital. His clear explanations of these concepts help in accurately categorizing and analysing the data.

Moving to the next step, **2) Identifying Relevant Data**, entails reviewing the interview transcripts to pinpoint statements, anecdotes, or examples provided by participants that relate to social connections, relationships, and interactions within their community or network.

Following this, **3) Categorizing the Data** is carried out by creating distinct categories for bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. While reading through the interview transcripts, relevant segments of text are assigned to each category based on their alignment with the definitions of bonding, bridging, or linking social capital.

The process continues with **4) Comparing and Contrasting** the findings from each category. This step aims to understand the relative importance and dynamics of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital within the community garden setting. Identifying overlaps or connections between different types of social capital is crucial to exploring how they collectively contribute to social cohesion and community resilience.

Subsequently, **5) Interpreting the Results** involves making sense of the findings in the context of my research questions and considering their alignment with existing literature on social capital and community development.

Following these steps, helped in systematically categorizing and analysing the interview data according to bonding, bridging, and linking social capital.

5.2.1 The Establishment of Diverse Social Capital Relationships Among Participants Through Practices, Manifesting as Individual-Level Benefits

Bonding

As defined Claridge (2018), bonding social capital refers to strong ties among individuals who share similar characteristics or backgrounds, it fosters a sense of identity, trust, and support.

Engaging in **food cultivation** involves shared activities such as planting, tending, and harvesting crops. Participants collaboratively work towards a common goal: producing food for both themselves and the community. This shared purpose fosters a sense of unity and cooperation, establishing the groundwork for robust social bonds. Working side by side and contributing to the shared objective of growing food not only strengthens interpersonal connections but also brings a profound sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

The sense of achievement and satisfaction derived from growing and harvesting one's food creates a positive self-perception, motivating individuals to sustain their involvement in food cultivation. Community gardeners become interconnected through their shared participation in a common endeavour, forming a bond over their collective experiences and the tangible outcomes of their efforts, watching the growth and development of their plants. This sense of accomplishment not only cultivates a positive self-perception but also acts as a driving force to persist in food cultivation. As one participant aptly stated, *“It is akin to watching one's own child grow.”*

The individual benefits of food cultivation in the studied community garden extend beyond bonding social capital. Participants gain access to fresh food, experience cost savings, and enjoy improved health and well-being. Engaging in food cultivation promotes physical activity and outdoor exposure, contributing to overall health and well-being. The connection between gardening and exercise is evident, as activities like digging, planting, watering, and weeding involve low-impact exercise (McManus 2023). These dimensions were intentionally embraced by the founder of Tensta's community garden, where she noted that *“My goal was to specifically help immigrants with complex backgrounds effectively integrate into the Swedish society and manage their stress levels and recover from mental health challenges”* Participant 1.

Furthermore, it could be argued that engaging in such activities fosters a feeling of connection to the locality. The act of cultivating the land and producing one's own food could instill a sense of ownership over the space, potentially leading to a stronger bond with the area. Considering the fact that a significant number of immigrants come from rural backgrounds where agriculture was a familiar way of life, Participant 1 noted that they often expressed a longing to reconnect with these practices, finding solace and familiarity in working the land. Their sentiments often

included phrases such as “*I feel at home*” and “*I am doing as I used to do in my country.*”

This notion raises the question of whether this hands-on involvement in shaping the environment cultivates not only a physical relationship with the land but also an emotional attachment to the place. By actively participating in the transformation and sustenance of the space, individuals develop a heightened sense of belonging and investment in the community. The shared experiences within the community garden contribute to a heightened sense of belonging and investment in the community, further reinforcing the bonding social capital among participants.

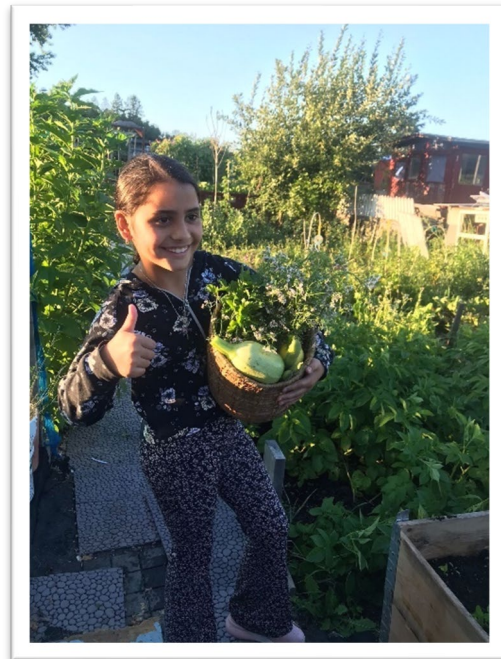
Bridging

Involves connections and relationships between individuals or groups from different social backgrounds or diverse communities. Bridging social capital facilitates interaction, cooperation, and sharing of resources and information across different social groups, leading to increased social integration and diversity (Claridge 2018).

Bridging social capital manifests in the connections forged between community garden participants and the broader community. This is evident in collaborative interactions that unite individual efforts, such as engaging in **garden maintenance**. This involvement not only provides participants with individual benefits, including physical exercise, stress relief, skill development, and social interaction but also offers aesthetic satisfaction. Engaging in garden maintenance enables individuals to take pride in their contributions and the collective effort to maintain an appealing and welcoming community garden. The garden's beauty not only brings a sense of satisfaction and joy to the gardeners themselves but also enhances the experience for visitors. Collaborative efforts in garden maintenance encompass tasks like painting the fence, plowing the garden, and involving children in planting as mentioned by the participants (see Figures 9&10).

In my interaction with the participants, a participant proudly showcased a structure they had built within the garden, emphasizing both its beauty and functional use. Another participant highlighted the collective nature of the garden's activities, underscoring the shared responsibility among all members for its upkeep. Participant 3 gives an example where a practice or a routine is established within the community garden to ensure regular watering. He said “*To ensure regular watering of the garden, we keep the garden’s key in a known place accessible to all participants. When it's time to water the garden, one of us simply takes the key without needing to communicate verbally. It has become an unspoken rule among us, a practice carried out with love and trust.*” They create a system where anyone can take the initiative to water the garden without the need for explicit communication. This practice reflects a sense of shared responsibility and trust among the participants and highlights the importance of informal norms and practices in community settings like the garden.

It demonstrates how collaborative efforts and a sense of trust can emerge naturally among participants, leading to the effective management and maintenance of shared spaces.



Figures 9 & 10. Participating in communal activities and projects within the community garden fosters a sense of belonging and pride in children's contributions, thereby enhancing bridging social capital within the community. Photos by Participants.

This inclusivity is evident in various tasks, ranging from painting the fence to plowing the garden at the season's outset, and even involving children in planting specific areas, a demonstration of how the garden's aesthetic charm is a product of the shared efforts of the participants.

Sharing resources in the community garden also contributes to bridging social capital, offering individual benefits such as access to a variety of plants and seeds. Participants bring seeds from their home country to plant in the garden and engage in a seed exchange with their neighbouring gardeners. One participant expressed pride, stating, "*We introduced Mulukhiyah from Syria to our neighbours, as they were unfamiliar with this type of edible plant.*" Hence, community gardeners have the opportunity to access a diverse range of plants and seeds that they may not have otherwise been able to obtain. This allows for experimentation with different plant varieties and cultivars, expanding the options available for cultivation and adding variety to their garden plots. This practice of sharing resources in community gardens offers significant cost reductions for individuals. Participants have the opportunity to borrow or exchange tools, equipment, and gardening supplies, resulting in not only financial savings but also fostering knowledge exchange, social connections, environmental sustainability, and

increased productivity. These collaborative practices in resource sharing and garden maintenance highlight the bridging social capital that extends beyond the community garden to connect participants with the broader community.

Additionally, the garden plays a pivotal role in facilitating connections between individuals from diverse backgrounds and countries, who share neighbouring allotments. Participants expressed that the garden provides them with the opportunity to interact, greet one another, and engage in the sharing of tools and garden produce. Participant 1 asserted that they were forced to talk in Swedish to the neighbours which was a good practical lesson. Notably, they also engage in friendly competition, challenging each other to showcase their gardening skills. During an interview, a participant shared an anecdote, he said: " *I met a fellow gardener from a neighbouring plot and discovered that we actually lived in the same building, despite being previously unfamiliar with each other. This chance encounter led to a blossoming friendship as we began visiting each other's gardens and exchanging our respective harvests*". The garden serves as a dynamic space that not only cultivates plants but also cultivates connections and fosters a sense of community among its participants.

However, the examination of the bridging function of social capital theory within the Tensta community garden posed challenges due to the lack of diversity among participants. Most of the participants shared a similar background, belonging to the "språk cafe" and sharing the same language and culture. This homogeneity presented limitations in exploring the potential bridging effects of social capital theory. The concentration of individuals with a similar (low) social profile in segregated areas can impede upward social mobility (Cassiers & Kesteloot 2012). This suggests that individuals residing in segregated areas may encounter fewer opportunities compared to individuals with similar social characteristics in different contexts (Cassiers & Kesteloot 2012). This lack of diversity within the Tensta community may restrict individuals' access to resources and opportunities beyond their immediate social circles, which can hinder their ability to transcend the constraints imposed by their current social profile and may perpetuate social inequalities.

Bonding and Bridging Social Capital

The participatory **decision-making** process in the community garden reflects bonding and bridging social capital. Participants collaboratively make decisions, empowering individuals, fostering a sense of ownership, and promoting skill development.

In the context of social capital principles, the collaborative decision-making process in community gardens cultivates meaningful relationships and provides various individual benefits. Participants are empowered to actively contribute to the garden's management and development, fostering a sense of ownership and pride. This engagement leads individuals to feel invested in decision-making, taking responsibility for the outcomes and instilling a belief that their voices and opinions hold significance. The participatory nature of collective decision-making also serves as a platform for skill

development and learning opportunities. Involvement exposes individuals to diverse perspectives, ideas, and approaches, enhancing communication and negotiation skills through discussions, brainstorming sessions, and collaborative problem-solving. Moreover, it facilitates learning from others' experiences and expertise, contributing to personal growth and expanding individual knowledge.

In interviews at Tensta's Garden, participants unanimously expressed a commitment to making decisions collectively, encompassing aspects such as plant selection, planting schedules, and coordinating garden work. However, a participant highlighted the presence of a more relaxed form of democracy, where decisions were made by those present during discussions, potentially sidelining absent members. Additionally, she argued that *"power becomes concentrated with people who are more knowledgeable and take more responsibility."* Despite this observation, some participants appreciated this approach, describing it as a *"loose and flexible"* policy. This statement presents a nuanced perspective on decision-making processes, recognizing the possible oversight of absent members in a loose form of democracy. While this approach offers flexibility and streamlines decision-making, there are reservations regarding inclusivity and the representation of diverse perspectives. In theory, the exclusion of absent members might be seen as compromising democratic ideals of community engagement and equal participation. However, in practice, this concern is mitigated within the garden context due to the strong bonds and trust among participants. The robust relationships among participants effectively address and overcome potential drawbacks associated with excluding absent members.

Linking

Relates to connections and relationships between individuals or groups with unequal power or status, such as relationships between community members and institutions, organizations, or influential individuals. Linking social capital can provide access to resources, opportunities, and support from those in positions of authority or influence (Claridge 2018).

Exploring this aspect proved to be challenging during my investigation. However, during our visit to the garden, Participant 1 showed me her neighbour's allotment, who works as an ambassador at the Iraqi embassy, highlighting the positive relationship they had established through their involvement in the garden. Additionally, the participant mentioned

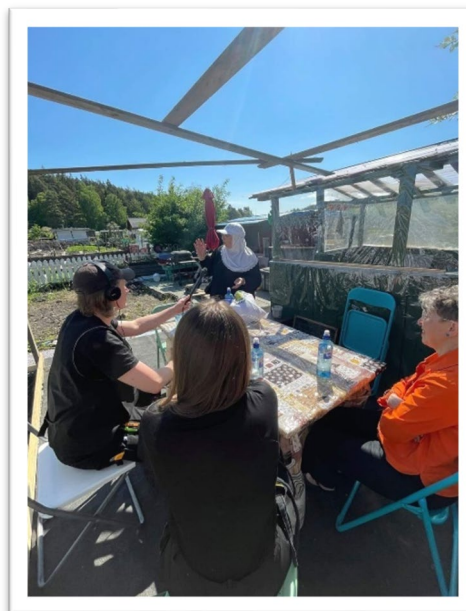


Figure 11. Engaging in communal activities within the garden facilitated connections beyond the community, exemplifying the manifestation of Linking Social Capital. Photo by participant

that the garden provided an opportunity for them to become members of an agriculture club “Peppar och Pumpa” which facilitated connections outside of their community. They organized parties, events, and activities such as drawing, cooking, and communal meals, often inviting officials to participate (see Figure 11).

The participant also utilized the artistic expertise of Sandi Hilal, who had previously exhibited her artwork at the Konsthall, to decorate and design the cottage in the garden, creating an atmosphere reminiscent of Al-Madafeh/Living Room.



Figures 12 & 13. The images showcase the cultivation of linking social capital through a dual focus on language education and environmental engagement. Participants gain skills and knowledge that can connect them to broader opportunities and social networks in the larger societal context. Photos by Participants.

Hilal's project embraces the notion that migrants and refugees are frequently perceived as guests who are seen as outsiders in their new surroundings, leading to a power dynamic favouring the host. Hilal advocates for the concept of unconditional hospitality, enabling socio-political experiences that explore alternative modes of existence (Tan 2022).

Educational initiatives, including language courses, within the community garden, play a crucial role in facilitating the integration of immigrants into the larger community. This aligns with the community garden's initial objective of assisting immigrants in integrating into the community and developing a profound connection with Sweden's natural environment. Overcoming language barriers was crucial for immigrant integration, as some individuals had been residing in Sweden for around 20 years but still faced challenges with the language. To address this, they attended

language cafes, known as "språk cafe," where the initiator facilitated Swedish language learning.

Recognizing the value of combining language education with nature, the initiator decided to conduct language courses within the community garden. This approach encouraged participants to engage in conversations with their neighbours in Swedish while exploring fruits and plants, fostering their educational growth and ultimately facilitating integration. The inclusive nature of the initiative extended to children, who actively participated alongside their parents by planting and learning in the garden (see Figures 12&13).

Besides the social relations that the participants gained from engaging in the educational activities in the community garden, they were offered individual benefits such as skill development, problem-solving abilities, improved health and well-being, environmental awareness, social interaction, personal empowerment, and a lifelong passion for learning. These benefits contribute to the overall personal growth, satisfaction, and enjoyment of individuals involved in educational initiatives within the community garden setting. The dual focus on language education and environmental engagement illustrates how linking social capital is cultivated, providing participants with skills and knowledge that could possibly extend beyond the community garden and link them to broader opportunities and social networks in the larger societal context.

5.2.2 Examining Mutual Assistance Among Participants and the Development of Diverse Social Capital Ties for Communal-Level Benefits

By conducting thorough observations, interviews, and analysing data, I have garnered valuable insights into the emergence of various social capital relationships in the context of community garden practices. Furthermore, I have developed an understanding of how mutual assistance thrives among the participants. It is essential to recognize the interdependence of community benefits, acknowledging that these often evolve as a natural extension or outcome of the individual benefits derived from diverse community garden activities.

Bonding

Mutual assistance among participants in the examined community garden is developed through various practices and interactions. Empirical investigation reveals that **knowledge sharing** is a key avenue, wherein community garden members exchange their expertise, experiences, and gardening knowledge. They guide planting techniques, pest control, composting, and other aspects of gardening. **Collaborative** work is another manifestation of mutual assistance, with participants coming together to tackle tasks such as soil preparation, planting, weeding, watering, and harvesting. Through

this collaborative effort, participants efficiently distribute the workload, offer support, and accomplish tasks more effectively.

In addressing challenges or issues within the garden, participants engage in **collective problem-solving**. They collaborate and pool their efforts to find solutions, discussing strategies to combat pests, diseases, or other garden-related problems. A common challenge highlighted by Participant 1, unanimously acknowledged by all interviewees, is the impact of fluctuating weather conditions in Stockholm City on maintaining a consistent connection with the garden throughout the year. This shared understanding underscores participants' awareness of external factors that can influence the success and productivity of the garden.

Through collective problem-solving, participants leverage their collective knowledge, experiences, and perspectives to overcome challenges and find effective solutions. This collaborative approach enhances the sense of community and fosters a culture of shared responsibility and mutual support within the garden. As an illustration, in response to the challenge of inconsistent garden visits due to rainy days, a proactive suggestion emerged from a participant, proposing the construction of a shelter or protective structure within the garden premises. This proposal resonated with other participants, demonstrating a collective recognition of the issue and a desire to find practical solutions. The idea's emergence underscores participants' active engagement, commitment to overcoming obstacles, and their sense of ownership and investment in the community garden. Rather than passively accepting the limitations imposed by rainy weather, they proactively explored ways to adapt their practices and sustain their involvement, showcasing agency, and problem-solving capabilities in the face of challenges.

Bridging

In the face of soaring food prices, the provision of locally cultivated produce emerges as a significant advantage. A participant emphasizes the substantial yield of the garden and the generous distribution of surplus harvest to those who may not directly participate in the community garden activities. The provision of fresh food resonates deeply at a time when the cost of groceries is skyrocketing. The economic strain caused by high food prices is experienced by many, particularly vulnerable and low-income populations. Thus, access to a diverse range of freshly cultivated produce from the garden carries significance beyond individual nutrition. It serves as a form of community resilience against the challenges posed by fluctuating food costs and limited access to affordable, healthy options.

Moreover, the act of distributing surplus crops serves as a demonstration of the garden's function as a hub for generosity and collaboration. It goes beyond mere cultivation, evolving into a practice that instills a sense of shared responsibility and care for the larger community. The act of giving, even when resources are limited, reinforces the notion that Tensta's community garden is more than just a space for individual

gardening; it transforms into a platform embodying collective care and social interconnectedness.

In this context, the Tensta garden becomes a manifestation of community solidarity. The benefits of the fresh food produced extend beyond the immediate participants, reaching out to the broader community. The surplus harvest, distributed generously, acts as a form of collective goodwill. This contributes significantly to strengthening the bonds among garden participants and, by extension, the broader community, acting as a bridge between the garden and the external community. The impact of the garden transcends its physical boundaries, assuming a role in nurturing social cohesion and addressing pressing socio-economic challenges.

This illustrates how the shared practice of cultivating and distributing food becomes a powerful tool for building social capital for communal benefits. It not only addresses immediate nutritional needs but also fosters a sense of unity, mutual support, and shared responsibility.

Linking

The case of Tensta's garden showcases the profound impact of community engagement, extending its influence beyond the immediate community boundaries (see figure 14). This specific example emphasizes the potential of grassroots initiatives not only to tackle socio-economic challenges but also to redefine traditional notions of belonging and inclusion. The participants'



Figure 14. Local authorities join an activity at the Tensta community garden, showcasing the power of linking social capital in fostering community connections. Photo by a participant.

diverse experiences underscore the vital role of cultivating spaces that go beyond physical landscapes. These spaces act as nurturing grounds for a profound sense of community, trust, and shared purpose.

In essence, the dynamics of mutual assistance thrive within the community garden through various social interactions. Casual conversations, shared gardening stories, and exchanging food recipes contribute to building relationships. This interconnectedness establishes a supportive network, fostering an environment where individuals comfortably seek and offer help, thereby building trust and reciprocity among community garden members. However, it is crucial to recognize that the existence of social benefits doesn't automatically translate into improved social cohesion. Contextual factors, such as segregation and socio-economic vulnerability, play a

pivotal role in shaping how personal and community resources are harnessed and utilized. While these factors contribute to creating a sense of belonging, their impact is nuanced and context-dependent. Nonetheless, fostering this sense of belonging remains a valuable foundation for efforts aimed at enhancing social cohesion within the community.

5.3 Roots of connection: Stories of community and belonging in Tensta's community garden

During my visit and interviews, I observed the presence of strong social ties among the community members. The atmosphere was intimate and conversational, resembling more of a friendly chat than formal interviews. Both the interviewees and the staff at the Konsthall warmly invited me to FIKA (a Swedish tradition of having coffee and pastries) during our conversations. The interviewees openly shared their personal stories, discussing their experiences in the garden and the psychological and social support they received from the participants and the Konsthall. That reflects a sense of close connection and camaraderie and indicates a level of trust and support within the community.

One interviewee expressed *"I find joy in simply sitting among these people, observing and talking to them, even if no words are exchanged."* This individual, a former well-known artist who had to leave her profession due to panic disorder, shared how gardening and the garden community significantly helped her cope with her illness. She incorporated her drawing expertise into the language learning workshops conducted at the garden, expressing, *"Drawing is my passion, engaging in this activity amidst the natural surroundings of the garden assists me in coping with my illness."* The interviewee's participation in the community garden activities reflects her agency in creating and engaging in practices that hold personal significance for her, such as drawing and interacting with others, emphasizes that practices are not isolated actions but are embedded within social contexts and shaped by cultural norms, values, and social structures according to the practice theory. She also emphasized her strong attachment to Tensta, considering it her home and resisting relocation elsewhere. This can be understood within the framework of practice theory as the cultivation of a sense of place-based identity and belonging through repeated engagement in community practices. Her emotional connection to the neighbourhood and the garden community illustrates how social practices contribute to the formation of social bonds and the creation of a shared sense of belonging.

Another interviewee, who has already left Tensta, expressed deep sadness and longing for the community and friends he left behind, *"I had to leave Tensta due to a lack of available apartments, but I feel deeply saddened and am determined to return to Tensta at any cost."* Despite spending a relatively short time in Sweden (5 years), he

felt a strong sense of connection and belonging in Tensta. This participant, an agricultural engineer with experience in farming in Lebanon, contributed his knowledge to the garden, assisting with planting, cultivation, and decision-making. Gardening had a positive impact on him physically, mentally, and socially, allowing him to forge new friendships. However, he made it clear that his desire to return to Tensta was not solely due to the garden itself but rather the unique social ties that had formed within the community. The interviewee's experiences exemplify the principles of practice theory by highlighting the role of routine activities, knowledge exchange, and social interactions in shaping identity, fostering social bonds, and creating a sense of belonging within the community garden setting in Tensta.

A third participant, residing in Sweden for 22 years, credited his involvement in the garden to the initiator. All the participants agreed that this initiator played a pivotal role in bringing them together around meaningful and valuable endeavours. According to this interviewee, she actively engaged them in the garden, shared its produce, advocated for their interests with officials, and provided support. He also revealed that throughout his time in Sweden, he had never considered joining a garden until this participant initiated this project. This underscores the transformative potential of community practices, whereas the participant's decision to participate in the garden reflects how the introduction of a new practice by the initiator created opportunities for engagement and participation that were previously unexplored or overlooked.

When I requested a visit to the garden, Participant 1 promptly called a friend with a car to drive us there, as it was a rainy day. I was impressed by the immediate response to her request, as her friend arrived within 10 minutes. I took the chance and talked to him as well during our journey and at the garden itself. This participant proudly showed me the structures he and other garden members had built together to provide shelter during rainy summer days and protect their picnics. Both Participant 1 and her friend (Participant 5) introduced me to neighbouring garden owners, exchanging greetings and friendly interactions. Participant 5 mentioned that the garden reminded him of his rural upbringing in Syria, where he used to cultivate and grow food. However, he asserted that gardening requires a non-employed man/woman as it involves a significant amount of work and time consumption.

These instances highlight the robust social bonds within the community, indicative of strong bonding social capital. The participants' openness in sharing personal stories, including struggles with mental health, reflects a high level of trust and support within the community. Additionally, the emotional support received from both fellow participants and the Konsthall further strengthens this bonding social capital. The expressions of joy, coping with illness, and a profound attachment to Tensta, even to the extent of resisting relocation, illustrate a deep emotional connection and a sense of belonging, characteristic of bonding social capital and attachment to the community.

Moreover, the positive impact of gardening on mental, physical, and social well-being underscores how collective activities bridge individual experiences, fostering the formation of new friendships and connections.

The initiator of the community garden emerges as a central figure in uniting participants. Her actions, including involvement in the garden, advocacy for participants' interests, and the provision of support, exemplify linking social capital by connecting the community to shared initiatives and external resources. This demonstrates the initiator's role in fostering collaborative relationships and linking the community to broader networks.

Drawing from Pierre Bourdieu's Practice Theory, which asserts that social structures are shaped by individual actions, particularly habitus—defined as ingrained behaviour patterns shaped by past experiences and social context—this study explores how participants' experiences and practices, influenced by their habitus, play a crucial role in generating social capital and networks within Tensta's community garden. In this context, participants often share similar backgrounds and experiences, mirroring their habitus. This shared foundation influences their interactions and serves as the groundwork for the formation of social networks. Additionally, shared practices within the garden, such as specific gardening techniques or traditions, are shaped by habitus. For instance, participants with a habitus rooted in rural upbringing may naturally gravitate toward similar gardening practices, fostering connections based on shared values. Similarly, the participant with past experiences and expertise in artistic work is drawn to practices within the community garden that resonate with her background, illustrating how habitus influences individual engagement and participation in communal activities.

Moreover, most of the participants share similar communication styles, a reflection of their habitus, and are more likely to engage effectively with each other. This effective communication facilitates the development of social networks characterized by interpersonal relationships and mutual support. These networks, nurtured by habitus and shared experiences, contribute significantly to fostering a sense of belonging and cohesion among participants within the community garden.

5.4 The Role of Tensta's Community Garden as a Catalyst for Cohesion in a Segregated Landscape

The location and socio-economic profile of Tensta's neighbourhood have a profound impact on the effectiveness of the community garden in fostering stronger connections among the garden's participants. This can be attributed to the fact that Tensta is not fully integrated into the city and experiences a certain degree of segregation (Venkatesamoorthy 2019; Polisen 2023; Interpeace 2014), which in turn encourages its citizens to support and assist one another. This observation aligns with the Foucauldian

perspective, which asserts that segregation can serve as an avenue for empowerment (Cassiers & Kesteloot 2012). The Foucauldian tradition posits that segregation can paradoxically serve as an empowering mechanism. In this view, segregation prompts marginalized communities to unite and collaborate, finding strength and agency in their shared experiences and challenges. This notion proposes that social cohesion is not solely a product of harmonious agreement but rather an ongoing process characterized by the negotiation of diverse and sometimes conflicting viewpoints that arise from contrasting perspectives on the role of segregation in society. This Foucauldian perspective challenges the conventional Habermasian approach, which tends to view segregation as a detrimental factor that impedes the functioning of a cohesive society (Cassiers & Kesteloot 2012).

In my analysis, I interpreted the Foucauldian perspective as a grassroots approach to addressing segregation. This perspective involves starting from within the community itself and working upward to attain social cohesion. It emphasizes the importance of understanding and transforming the everyday practices and power dynamics that contribute to segregation at the local level. On the other hand, I saw the Habermasian approach as a top-down strategy for dealing with segregation. This approach originates from a higher, more centralized level and relies on rational and institutional methods to promote social cohesion. It places greater emphasis on formal structures, policies, and deliberative processes to address societal divisions. It's crucial to recognize that these two approaches offer different lenses through which to analyse and tackle segregation. Each perspective brings its unique insights and strategies to the table, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of how to address segregation in society.

In examining the dynamics within Tensta's community garden through a Foucauldian lens, I delve into the ways marginalized individuals navigate and challenge the power structures that contribute to their marginalization. This perspective helps in understanding how residents in socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods like Tensta assert agency and resist dominant narratives that perpetuate their marginalization. Within Tensta's community garden, residents engage in various activities that not only promote social cohesion but also challenge the narratives of isolation and divisiveness often associated with segregated areas. Through collaborative gardening tasks, knowledge exchange, educational events, and communal care for the garden, participants demonstrate agency and empowerment. These activities serve as acts of resistance against the prevailing power structures that contribute to their marginalization, fostering a sense of community and belonging among residents.

Moreover, the garden provides a space for residents to reclaim control over their environment and challenge the socio-spatial exclusion they may experience in mainstream Swedish society. By actively participating in the cultivation and maintenance of the garden, residents assert their right to the city and create a sense of

ownership over their neighbourhood. This sense of ownership is crucial for fostering social cohesion and nurturing a supportive community network.

However, it is crucial to highlight that while the Foucauldian lens offers valuable insights into individual agency and resistance within Tensta's community garden, there is a risk of overlooking broader structural factors contributing to social inequality and marginalization, potentially downplaying the complexity of social cohesion. While understanding how participants navigate power structures is important, it is equally essential not to ignore the systemic barriers that perpetuate their marginalization.

5.5 Validating the Hypothesis: Community Garden Participation and Social Cohesion in Tensta

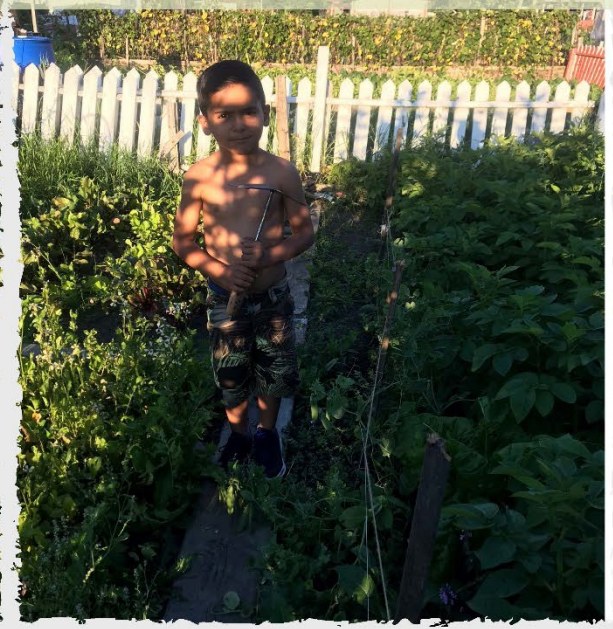
In this research, the initial assumption, drawn from previous studies (Glover 2004; Alaimo et al. 2010; Ilieva et al. 2022) suggests that engagement in the activities and practices of the community garden fosters increased social connections and a heightened sense of belonging among its participants.. This hypothesis serves as a guiding framework for the study's methodology and data collection process. Utilizing qualitative interviews and observations within the community garden setting, the hypothesis undergoes empirical testing to determine whether the observed experiences and interactions align with the anticipated outcomes.

After the data collection phase, the empirical findings are analysed and interpreted to assess their alignment with the initial hypothesis. This analysis involves scrutinizing the qualitative data obtained from interviews and observations, seeking insights that shed light on participants' experiences within the community garden.

The analysis confirms that the empirical data indeed support the hypothesis. Participants reported strengthened social connections, evidenced by increased interactions, collaborations, and exchanges within the garden. Additionally, they expressed a heightened sense of belonging, indicating a strong connection to the garden and its community.



 **Discussion and Conclusion**



6. Discussion and Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to seek a greater understanding of the relationship between participation in community gardens and the formation of social networks, community attachment, and the overall well-being within socio-economic disadvantaged neighbourhoods. It establishes a link between Tensta's socio-economic context and more extensive urban issues, such as spatialized social inequalities and segregation, illustrating how these larger-scale factors impact the community's interactions within the garden. This chapter will consequently provide a concise overview and discussion of the key findings. The chapter will conclude by offering recommendations for future research in this area.

6.1 Cultivating Connections: Exploring Social Networks, Community Belonging, and Social Cohesion in Tensta's Community Garden

Examining the interplay between the development of individual experiences and collective practices in Tensta's community garden and the fostering of social cohesion reveals a multifaceted landscape of interactions and influences. Utilizing a dual approach incorporating both practice and social capital theories, the study shed light on the development of engaged activities on the individual level, weaving them into the fabric of social bonds and shared values on the broader community level. The analysis extends to the social dimension of the garden space, taking into account broader socio-political dynamics and their implications for community practices and interactions, underscoring that social cohesion is a multifaceted, ongoing process encompassing diverse elements.

The study navigates the challenges of Stockholm's city spatialized social inequalities and segregation (Cassiers & Kesteloot 2012; Harsman 2006), especially within Tensta, classified as a "particularly vulnerable area" (Polisen 2015; 2017; 2019; 2021). While existing studies suggest that concentrated socio-economic profiles may lead to less favourable social ties and role models (Musterd & Andersson 2006), this research challenges such perspectives. Based on empirical findings, individuals in Tensta's community garden demonstrate resilience, capability, and passion in adapting to life in

a new country, even amid complex and difficult circumstances. These individuals not only demonstrate a strong commitment to success but also aspire to make positive contributions to their community, challenging the stereotype that a concentration of individuals with similar socio-economic profiles inevitably leads to unfavourable social ties and a lack of positive role models (Musterd & Andersson 2006). The diverse attitudes and aspirations observed among the individuals emphasize the complexity of dynamics within these communities, cautioning against oversimplified generalizations. Acknowledging the agency and the positive impact potential of individuals with similar socio-economic backgrounds is essential in understanding their role in community development.

Therefore, my observations align with previous concepts highlighted by (Cassiers & Kesteloot 2012:1914), emphasizing the power of social networks developed in segregated communities. It views that a dense segregated neighbourhood social network can foster a sense of community and mutual support (Cassiers & Kesteloot 2012). In this situation, having good relationships with neighbours is more important than the condition of the neighbourhood itself. It helps people deal with an unattractive environment (Forrest & Kearns 2001), echoing a Foucauldian approach that sees segregation as an empowering mechanism and as a mitigating force in society that enables self-organization and political agenda-setting (Cassiers & Kesteloot 2012).

Hence, this perspective challenges the conventional concern of conflict arising from segregation by shifting the focus. It views social cohesion not as an outcome of consensus but as an ongoing process involving the negotiation of conflicting visions. These conflicting visions encompass debates regarding the most effective approach to achieving social cohesion within disadvantaged neighbourhoods. These debates may center on whether top-down interventions imposed by external authorities or grassroots, community-led initiatives are more effective. They may also revolve around resource allocation, such as prioritizing economic development, infrastructure, social services, or community-building activities. Understanding and navigating these conflicting visions are crucial for formulating effective strategies that address the distinctive challenges of socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The study observes the role of engaged practices in Tensta's garden, noting that while they contribute to forging new relationships, these cannot be generalized. Robust bonds and bridging social networks emerge as products of shared circumstances, challenges, and difficulties, fostering a culture of mutual support. The participants' rapid and seamless access to one another underscores the depth of these connections. Additionally, the initiator's pivotal role in shaping the garden's identity and attracting participants cannot be overlooked. Her vision and efforts encourage active participation. It's worth noting that if the garden was located in a non-segregated or non-socioeconomic disadvantaged region, the results might differ significantly.

The research underlines the potential of Tensta's community garden as a vital meeting place within the neighbourhood, functioning as a microcosm where social

networks can flourish, fostering a deeper sense of community belonging, and cohesion. Beyond gardening, these spaces become platforms for collaborative efforts, breaking down initial barriers and fostering openness and social engagement. The social aspects of gardening, including shared activities, education, and harvest festivals, are integral to enhancing social cohesion, attracting avid gardeners and neighbours initially disinterested in gardening. One participant noted that during gatherings and activities in the garden, both neighbours and passersby display increased curiosity about the events. Interestingly, there was an initial sense of apprehension among community members regarding these gatherings. However, this perception changes when one participant invites them to visit the garden, leading to a noticeable shift in interactions. Now, whenever these individuals pass by the garden or encounter participants in the neighbourhood, they engage in friendly greetings and conversations. This change underscores the substantial influence of community garden activities in overcoming initial barriers and promoting openness and social engagement among residents.

While acknowledging the challenges in attracting diverse socio-economic backgrounds, the study recognizes the garden's role in fostering connections and engagement. Interviews with participants confirm that the garden's participants share many socio-cultural characteristics. However, the garden's initiator actively attempts to engage various groups of people, as discussed in Chapter 3. Despite these efforts, it remains challenging to attract residents from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. While community gardens do not intentionally exclude anyone, they often attract like-minded individuals for two main reasons: the relative lack of diversity in the neighbourhood and the garden's atmosphere, which may not resonate with everyone (Veen 2015; Bergame et al. 2022). The social fabric nurtured in Tensta's garden serves as a valuable insight into community spaces' role in promoting inclusivity and well-being, particularly in a disadvantaged neighbourhood.

Participants view the social aspects of gardening as crucial, considering the garden a neighbourhood hub that fosters connections through various gardening-related activities. Gardening is seen as a tool to enhance social cohesion, with growing and sharing food serving as ways to connect with others and build community bonds. While the primary motivation for starting or joining the garden isn't alternative food access or participation in a food movement, some participants value thoughts about healthy and local food. The garden also has the potential to educate both children and adults about food production, contributing to increased awareness. Although the community garden may not significantly impact food provisioning practices in terms of quantity, it holds relevance in promoting food consciousness. Thus, while not a direct response to the industrialized food system, certain aspects align with alternative food discourse.

Nevertheless, this study offers valuable insights into the mechanisms through which shared activities within community gardens foster connections, nurture shared identities, cultivate a sense of unity among participants, and enhance the individual experience. These findings underscore the crucial role that community spaces like

gardens play in nurturing a cohesive and inclusive social fabric, especially in disadvantaged neighbourhood. They provide spaces for both the enhancement of existing social bonds and the creation of new ones, ultimately contributing to broader community-level outcomes related to the overall social well-being of the community.

In conclusion, the interplay between the individual experiences represented in developed social connections, shared values, collectively engaged practices, and the broader community-level outcomes related to the development of social cohesion within Tensta's community garden emerges as a dynamic and multifaceted process. While not explicitly contributing to social cohesion, these elements significantly impact some participants, with pre-existing social bonds being a key factor in the garden's success. The effectiveness of community gardens in promoting social cohesion varies based on location, community demographics, and garden management, emphasizing the need for context-specific considerations.

6.2 The Operation of Social Capital and Social Networks at Individual and Community Levels in Tensta Community Garden

I emphasized earlier the significance of addressing both individual and community levels in defining social cohesion, highlighting the impact of neglecting either dimension on the comprehensive understanding of its dynamics. Considering both individual and community levels when defining social cohesion provides a comprehensive exploration of how social capital and social networks intersect at various levels.

On the individual level, social capital refers to the resources and benefits individuals gain from their social networks and relationships. Within Tensta's community garden, participants cultivate social capital through interactions with others, sharing gardening expertise, experiences, and resources, and providing emotional support. These social connections contribute to a sense of belonging, trust, and reciprocity among participants, enhancing their overall well-being and psychological comfort.

On the community level, social networks refer to the patterns of relationships and connections between groups or organizations. Within the Tensta community garden, social networks extend beyond individual interactions to encompass broader community connections. The garden serves as a platform for residents to come together, interact, and collaborate on common goals, transcending socioeconomic barriers. As participants engage in collective practices such as gardening, organizing events, and sharing cultural traditions, they develop a shared sense of identity, mutual respect, and collective ownership of the garden space. These networks extend beyond the garden's

physical boundaries, facilitating connections and interactions among residents outside of the garden setting.

Interconnected Dynamics

In addition to fostering valuable social capital bonds, engaging in garden practices offers participants various benefits, including improved communication and conflict resolution skills that extend to the broader community benefits.

The garden, with the support of its initiator and the Konsthall, becomes a platform for participants to voice their concerns to local authorities. Empowered by this engagement, they advocate for their community's needs, leading to positive changes in their environment. This active involvement not only strengthens social connections but also deepens participants' understanding of the root causes of segregation and resource disparities. The initiator highlights a positive shift, noting that authorities are finally attentive to their voices. For instance, when they requested additional lighting, the authorities approved their request, showcasing the tangible impact of their advocacy within the community.

Thus, the social capital generated at the individual level feeds into the broader social networks and cohesion at the community level. The strong bonds formed among individuals within the garden contribute to the development of robust social networks on the community level and create a foundation for a cohesive community. Simultaneously, the community-level activities reinforce and amplify the individual-level social capital, creating a symbiotic relationship.

Overall, the Tensta community garden exemplifies how social capital and social networks operate at both the individual and community levels to foster social cohesion, and strengthen community bonds, mutually influencing and reinforcing each other to foster social cohesion within a socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhood.

6.3 Community Gardens: An Array of Opportunities

This study, framed by its research questions, seeks to explore the individual experiences within the garden, encompassing collective practices and the evolution of social connections and shared values, and their impact on broader community-level outcomes related to social cohesion and sense of belonging. Additionally, it investigates how the location and socio-economic profile of Tensta's neighbourhood impact the participants' experiences and influence the effectiveness of the community garden in fostering social cohesion. Based on prior literature, the research hypothesizes that participation in community gardens has a positive impact on social cohesion and community engagement, and seeks to test this hypothesis. The findings indicate that Tensta's community garden supports this hypothesis by acting as a catalyst for fostering social cohesion and enhancing a sense of belonging within the neighbourhood. Furthermore,

the study indicates that the garden's influence extends beyond its physical boundaries, positively affecting social relations outside the garden setting. These key findings support the study's conclusions.

- 1- **Role of Community Gardens in Social Cohesion:** The study explores the individual experiences within the garden and reveals the pivotal role of collective practices in Tensta's community garden. These practices foster robust bonds and bridge social networks among participants, influencing broader community-level outcomes related to social cohesion and a sense of belonging. The garden serves as a model for collective action, addressing challenges in attracting diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Additionally, pre-existing social cohesion within the neighbourhood plays a crucial role in facilitating these outcomes.
- 2- **Empowering Communities:** The garden acts as a catalyst for uniting residents to achieve common goals, including supporting newcomers and immigrants and engaging in shared hobbies and interests. This exemplifies how the garden empowers individuals in socio-economic disadvantaged neighbourhoods to actively address their own challenges. This perspective resonates with Duchemin et al. (2009), who assert that such initiatives play a central role in fostering community bonding and enhancing social development within marginalized communities.
- 3- **Breaking the Stereotypes in Socio-economic Communities:** The study underscores the diversity of attitudes and goals within socio-economically disadvantaged communities, challenging oversimplified generalizations. Despite similar backgrounds, individuals within these communities demonstrate resilience and the ability to bring about positive changes, challenging the stereotype that a concentration of individuals with similar socioeconomic profiles inevitably leads to unfavourable social ties and a lack of positive role models (Musterd & Andersson 2006). This highlights the importance of recognizing agency and potential within these communities.
- 4- **Power of Social Networks in Segregated Communities:** The research aligns with the concept that dense, segregated neighbourhood social networks can foster a sense of community and mutual support, emphasizing social cohesion as an ongoing negotiation of conflicting visions rather than a consensus outcome.

However, it's vital to acknowledge that the degree of success a community garden can achieve in fostering social cohesion is influenced by various factors, including location, community demographics, and garden management. The presence of pre-existing social cohesion within the neighbourhood seems to play a pivotal role in the success of community gardens. Therefore, these gardens may not provide social benefits to all communities equally. Additionally, it's essential to acknowledge that certain challenges and needs in socio-economic disadvantaged neighbourhoods can

affect the outcomes of urban agriculture initiatives, as highlighted in the analysis. These initiatives, like community gardens, can address some of these challenges and contribute to the well-being of the community.

Regarding social capital, as previously discussed, it becomes evident that certain advantages derived from community gardens are not solely dependent on practices within the physical garden space itself. The bonding social ties observed among participants often existed before the garden's establishment. Consequently, it is a key factor in the successful formation of the community garden as mentioned earlier. Therefore, it's imperative not to overestimate the significance of social bonds formed within gardens. Community gardens alone, despite their merits, cannot be viewed as a panacea for addressing issues like addressing disparities in access to social networks. Instead, it can be seen as an incremental component, a part of a larger puzzle, initiated at the grassroots level within the community and evolving upwards to achieve social cohesion. This approach underscores the significance of comprehending and altering the day-to-day activities and power dynamics that play a role in local-level segregation. This perspective delves into the complex interactions and practices at the micro level that impact social cohesion. It recognizes that meaningful change could start within communities themselves, addressing the root causes of segregation from the ground up by empowering residents to take control of their environment and resources. Through active participation in garden activities and decision-making processes, individuals develop a sense of ownership and belonging within their community. This empowerment can lead to increased civic engagement, advocacy for community needs, and a collective effort to address broader issues like poverty, inequity, and marginalization.

In contrast, bridging social capital tends to emerge through interactions between neighbours' individual plots within the garden. While evaluating linking social networks posed certain challenges, it was observed that the garden's initiator played a role in nurturing this type of social capital. This is primarily because the garden attracts individuals with relatively similar socio-economic and cultural backgrounds (Bergame et al. 2022), which often limits the development of relationships between people from diverse societal strata (Veen 2015). In this context, the garden serves as a means to enhance integration into existing networks rather than achieving full integration into society, as suggested by Veen (2015). Even if individuals with different socio-economic backgrounds are drawn to the garden, these diverse groups do not inherently mix and form close bonds.

Furthermore, the study reveals that the community garden does not necessarily function as a deliberate alternative to the industrial food system. The produce from these gardens is often a minor consideration for gardeners. Instead, the primary emphasis is on traditional food-growing practices and the strengthening of social bonds within the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, sharing surplus produce from the community garden with people who may not directly participate in the community garden activities,

even in resource-constrained circumstances, illustrates the garden's role as a platform for collective care and social interconnectedness, beyond individual gardening efforts.

I want to clarify that I am not downplaying the issue of segregation or implying that it stems from the preferences of minority groups. Instead, I share the viewpoint of Thörn & Thörn (2017), who argue that segregation is a consequence of structural inequalities, discrimination, and political choices. What I am attempting to convey is that segregation can serve as a force that propels the community that emerged in the conditions of segregation towards progress, a force we can harness to enhance the living and social circumstances of marginalized and segregated populations.

The insights and deeper understanding derived from this study regarding the utilization of urban community gardens as a means to enhance social cohesion in socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods can contend to have significantly contributed to the existing body of literature in this field. Not only does it offer additional knowledge concerning urban community gardens in the specific context of socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the Stockholm city region, but it also provides a fresh perspective on the social functions of these gardens and their influence on social networks, social cohesion, and the sense of belonging within urban settings.

In conclusion, it's important to acknowledge that while enhanced social cohesion and the development of social capital are valuable outcomes, they alone cannot effectively address the root causes of inequality, marginalization, and segregation. Community gardens play a significant role in promoting social cohesion and social capital by providing spaces for community interaction, collaboration, and empowerment. However, their impact may be limited to providing immediate relief in certain aspects, such as addressing food insecurity (though not in my specific case) and enhancing well-being. Yet, community gardens alone may not be sufficient to address the systemic root causes of inequality. To comprehensively tackle these issues, community gardens need to be integrated into broader strategies that address economic, social, and environmental disparities. They should be recognized as a strategic component in the development of sustainable, inclusive, and resilient cities. This integration may involve implementing policy changes, initiating community development initiatives, and ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities beyond the confines of the garden setting. By doing so, urban community gardens can become more effective agents of positive change within their communities.

6.4 Limitations

It is crucial to address and reflect upon the limitations of this study. Firstly, one limitation stems from the relatively small number of respondents, particularly regarding the users of the community garden. Interviews were conducted with those who were

available at the språkcafé at the Konsthall, resulting in the exclusion of certain participants. Although this approach may be considered limited in terms of participant selection, it can still be argued to include key actors involved in the garden. However, it aligns with Merriam's (2002) perspective, as the study does not claim to represent an absolute or unchanging reality. Instead, through this study, social relations were established with the respondents, leading to the creation of realities that represent specific facets of the complete reality. These realities, however, remain neither definitive nor stable, an important consideration when discussing the study's limitations.

Furthermore, another notable limitation pertains to the complexity of the concept of social cohesion and the challenges associated with its assessment. Therefore, the decision to narrow down the measurement to focus solely on one aspect—social networks and social capital—within the conceptual and analytical framework has implications. The study's findings are analysed and discussed exclusively within the context of the concepts and aspects encompassed by the conceptual framework. Nevertheless, this approach aligns with the viewpoint of Bolt and Torrance (2005) as cited in (Veen 2015), who suggested that if one aspect of social cohesion exhibits an effect, the other aspects will likely follow suit, either positively or negatively.

Consequently, this study solely illustrates how a community garden influences social cohesion as defined within this study's conceptualization. However, it can be argued that the study has demonstrated the feasibility of understanding and evaluating notions of social cohesion in a specific context. This suggests that developing context-specific definitions of social cohesion may be more beneficial than attempting to establish a universal definition applicable to all situations, regardless of context. Such an approach can facilitate the evaluation and implementation of social cohesion in particular situations.

It is important to acknowledge as well the challenges of researching broad issues such as segregation and social inequality within the constraints of a master's thesis. These larger societal issues are complex and multifaceted, requiring comprehensive and in-depth analysis that may exceed the scope of a master's thesis due to limitations in resources, time, and scope. Additionally, addressing these issues effectively often involves interdisciplinary approaches, long-term studies, and access to extensive data and resources, which may not be feasible within the constraints of a master's thesis project. To tackle this challenge, I decided to focus on a specific aspect or dimension of the larger issue that is feasible to explore within the available resources and timeframe. This involved narrowing down the research scope to include only the community garden situated in a disadvantaged context, and defining clear research objectives and research questions, exploring how these disadvantaged conditions stemming from segregation and inequality impact the participants' individual experience in the community garden and its influence on the broader community-level

benefits. As well as selecting appropriate methodologies and analytical frameworks that align with the research goals.

Despite the limitations discussed above, this study contributes additional knowledge and valuable insights regarding the role of urban community gardens in fostering social cohesion in a socio-economic disadvantaged neighbourhood. Considering the findings and discussions presented throughout this study, urban community gardens can be seen as a valuable opportunity for urban planners seeking to create socially sustainable living environments for urban residents, a matter of increasing importance as cities continue to expand.

6.5 Further Studies

Proposing a potential avenue for additional exploration in the realm of urban agriculture and sustainable urban planning development within a socio-economic disadvantaged neighbourhood, it could be compelling to delve into the inter-scalar considerations when studying the impact of a community garden on social cohesion in an already segregated neighbourhood, which involves examining how the garden operates and influences social dynamics across various scales or levels. This entails considering the interactions and connections between the local level (the community garden itself), the neighbourhood level (the segregated area), and potentially even broader scales (the city, region, or larger societal context). Inter-scalar reflection ensures that the potential impact of the community garden on social cohesion is assessed not only within the garden's immediate context but also in relation to the larger neighbourhood and societal dynamics. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how the garden's effects may ripple across different scales and contribute to fostering a more inclusive and connected community.

Moreover, it would be interesting to conduct a study on the implementation of community gardens in socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods as a strategy to enhance safety and prevent/reduce criminal activities while promoting environmentally friendly habits. As Safety is an issue that is discussed constantly in the planning practice, how we see community gardens as a tool to combat this issue, especially in socio-economic disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

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Popular Science Summary

Imagine a world where gardens are not just about plants but are fertile ground for cultivating vibrant communities. This study takes us on a journey into the heart of a socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhood in Sweden, revealing how a community garden is more than just green spaces; it's a thriving ecosystem of connections, a living tapestry of social bonds, and an oasis of belonging, it is the root of social change!

In the context of Tensta, where spatial inequalities and segregation cast long shadows, this study shines a light on the power of community gardens. It connects the dots between the socio-economic landscape and the garden gate, showing how these factors influence the daily interactions of the community.

Despite the initial notion of segregation, a powerful force awakens the spirit of the community. The study explores how disadvantaged conditions can propel communities toward progress and improved living conditions, witnessing how the Tensta community garden becomes more than just a place to grow plants; it's a platform that fosters connections and resilience among its diverse inhabitants.

The study employs a combined theoretical framework of practice and social capital theories to explore the individual experiences within the garden, encompassing collective practices and the evolution of social connections, and their impact on broader community-level outcomes related to social cohesion and a sense of belonging. Additionally, it investigates how the disadvantaged conditions stemming from segregation and inequality impact the participants' experiences in the community garden and influence the effectiveness of the community garden in fostering social cohesion. Through this exploration, the study seeks to test specific hypotheses derived from prior literature, suggesting that engagement in community garden practices has the potential to cultivate social networks and serve as a means to promote integration and cohesion. Utilizing qualitative techniques like semi-structured interviews, the study explores how gardeners collaborate, share resources, build social networks, and foster a sense of belonging.

While community gardens hold immense promise for fostering social cohesion and addressing vulnerabilities, this study reminds us that critical evaluation is essential. It acknowledges that these gardens are not the sole answer to society's challenges, but they are vital pieces of the puzzle. To build a better future, we must understand and

embrace the potential and challenges of these green spaces within urban environments. Challenges such as limited space impact land allocation for green areas. Factors like habitat fragmentation, pollution, and urbanization further hinder biodiversity, affecting ecosystem resilience in urban settings. These challenges are exacerbated by financial constraints in municipal budgets, impacting the extent and quality of green areas. Addressing these challenges requires integrated planning, community engagement, and consideration of broader urban development goals to optimize the benefits of urban green spaces.

In conclusion, this study isn't just about gardens; it's about sowing the seeds of change in the very fabric of our society. Dive into this captivating journey where community gardens become symbols of resilience, empowerment, and the promise of a brighter future. As we close this chapter, we're reminded that real change begins with planting seeds; seeds of connection, seeds of empowerment, and seeds of sustainability.

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Appendix 1

Questions for members in the community garden:

General

- 1- How long have you been in Sweden? And in Tensta?
- 2- How did you get to know about the garden and how did you become involved in it?
- 3- How long have you been actively involved in Tensta's garden?
- 4- What drives your participation in the garden, and what keeps you engaged in it over time?
- 5- Alternatively, what were the factors that led to your decision to stop participating in the garden?

Community garden and place attachment

- 6- Have your interactions and involvement with the garden altered or influenced your connection with the surrounding community? If so, how?
- 7- In your opinion, what are the advantages that the garden provides to Tensta as a neighbourhood?

Community garden and social cohesion/social capital

- 8- In your opinion, have your involvement and engagement with the community garden practices yielded any personal benefits? If so, what are they?
- 9- Do you consider any of your fellow gardeners to be friends, and do you provide mutual support outside of the garden work?
- 10- What is your level of engagement with the garden? How frequently do you utilize produce from the garden, and how often do you visit it during both active gardening and off-season periods?
- 11- Have you encountered any drawbacks or challenges during your participation in the community garden?

Future

- 12- What would you wish for the future of the Tensta garden?
- 13- Finally, could you provide recommendations for additional individuals involved in the garden whom you deem relevant for me to interview as part of my study?

Questions for initiators

General

What is your role at Tensta Community Garden?

- 1- Tasks that are included in your role.
- 2- For how long have you worked in this role?

Tell me a bit about the Tensta community garden.

- 3- When was it initiated?
- 4- Who initiated the project?
- 5- What are the objectives behind the establishment of the garden?
- 6- Which actors are involved in the community garden?
- 7- How is the community garden managed? Is there an organization in charge of it?

Community garden and social aspects

- 8- In terms of social cohesion and relationships between the community members, what advantages do you believe the project has produced and can bring to Tensta?
- 9- Have you observed any signs of a positive response from the residents towards the project? Have they expressed any appreciation for it?

Community garden and place attachment

- 10- Do you think that people appreciate this place and consider it as their third place to go to (after home and workplace)?
- 11- Do you think that members became more attached to their neighbourhoods because of this project? i.e., they refused to move somewhere else.
- 12- As a resident of Tensta, how do you get access to the garden? Is it available for everyone to use?
- 13- Finally, could you provide recommendations for additional individuals involved in the garden whom you deem relevant for me to interview as part of my study?

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