Planning with uncertainty: place development of undefined becoming in south-west Sweden

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There is increasing awareness in the planning community of the need for planning methods that can work with the complex and uncertain issues that characterise contemporary planning contexts. Through a case study of *platsutveckling* [place development] in south-west Sweden, this paper explores the potential of a post-structuralist planning perspective as one way forward in approaching uncertainty and complexity in planning. *Platsutveckling* is an approach to place development planning in the context of regional development, implemented by the Swedish regional government Västra Götalandsregionen (VGR). Place development initiatives in VGR incorporate a participatory approach, actively involving local stakeholders to develop target place visions. The *platsutveckling* process also has characteristics of structuralist planning methods, with a strong emphasis on goal setting. The case is used to argue that a mindset shift is required in order to move forward with planning with uncertainty. Conceptualising uncertainty-as-opportunity, the paper applies a post-structuralist planning perspective to the case study to consider how planning could respond in contexts with high levels of self-organisation. The paper concludes with a discussion of the potential of a post-structuralist approach in complex and uncertain planning contexts.

Keywords: place development; uncertainty; post-structuralism; Sweden

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Introduction: Uncertainty in planning & place development

The uncertain nature of the future is well acknowledged (Amin, 2016 [2011]; Wachs, 2016 [2013]). Across the world, complex social and environmental problems bring additional uncertainties. Despite its ubiquity, responses to uncertainty differ – from calls for better tools to respond to uncertainty (Matejova & Briggs, 2021) to a need for better integration of uncertain outcomes in decision making (Winkler, 2016). In rational planning cultures that have a linear approach to plan implementation, uncertainty is generally treated as something to be managed and mitigated.

This mitigation approach to uncertainty in rational planning approaches has been criticised for failing to recognise the complexity of the real world (Allmendinger, 2017). Indeed, Mintzberg (2000 [1994]) argues that a major pitfall of planning is the rigidity plans take on when they are articulated in detail, which does not allow room to respond to unexpected events that arise during implementation. Planning in this form can be inflexible, focussed on achieving predetermined goals or milestones which must be met before the next set of actions can be taken (King, 2008). Such a focus on meeting set goals and milestones can lead to other opportunities being missed (King, 2008). Similar problems are observed in risk management practice, where attempts to reduce the perceived risk of external factors can in fact impede innovation (Zwikael & Ahn, 2011).

Of course, this is not the only form of planning. For instance, more emergent forms of planning provide the opportunity to learn from the environment and adapt (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Such learning capacity is necessary in order to respond to the complexities of contemporary challenges. As Winkler (2016) points out, complexity and uncertainty go together; as complexity increases, so does uncertainty. One example of how the complexity of issues can increase is through increasing the number of stakeholders involved in decision-making. Despite the additional uncertainty this can inject into the process, there are strong arguments for the benefits of co-producing knowledge with stakeholders to reach solutions that better address the problem at hand (Winkler 2016). The importance of greater stakeholder input and more inclusive methods has received substantial attention in the planning literature, characterised particularly by the communicative planning approach which frames planning as a participative process (Allmendinger, 2017). Successful implementation of inclusive practice is no doubt challenging; some part of this has been down to the reluctance of some planning experts to relinquish control (Allmendinger, 2017). Such a focus on control has been particularly dominant in Western planning paradigms, where planners are viewed as uniquely qualified experts in the creation of place (Rauws et al., 2016). Although communicative planning approaches have shifted the emphasis towards decisions achieved through consensus, the goal-oriented, structuralist nature of these approaches means they have a limited capacity to respond to complexity (Boelens & de Roo, 2016). To move beyond these limitations, Boelens and de Roo (2016) suggest a post-structuralist planning of 'undefined becoming', in which the ultimate goal is not known beforehand and where 'uncertainty prevails' (p. 43). Contrary to structuralist or end-goal oriented planning, a post-structuralist planning perspective explicitly recognises complexity and embraces the associated uncertainty.

Despite the potential of a post-structuralist approach to planning with uncertainty, a mindset shift is required to reach a wider acceptance of uncertainty in planning. To assist with this shift, it is helpful to consider alternative ways of thinking about the future. May and Holtorf (2020a) identify two different ways of perceiving the future; as either continuous or discontinuous. Each conception carries a different attitude towards uncertainty. In a discontinuous understanding, the future is conceptualised as a break from the present; it is a distinct period of time that lacks

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continuity with present-time. This conceptualisation of the future prompts a precautionary approach, where risks are anticipated in an attempt to be controlled. Conversely, in a continuous understanding of the future, changes are gradual and seamless. This logic enables a 'proactionary' approach, where risks are accepted in order to take emerging opportunities (May & Holtorf, 2020a, p. 273). In this understanding of the future, uncertainty is not a threat but an opportunity. In fact, an uncertain future may even be preferable to a certain one, because of the opportunities it presents for change to occur (May & Holtorf, 2020b). Embracing a mindset of uncertainty-as-opportunity could be one way to open up to alternative practices such as post-structuralist planning.

Taking this mindset shift as a point of departure, this paper aims to draw on the conception of uncertainty-as-opportunity to explore the potential of a post-structuralist planning approach through a case study of *platsutveckling* [place development] in south-west Sweden. *Platsutveckling* is a Swedish term that has been used by the regional government Västra Götalandsregionen[1] (VGR) over the last ten years to refer to different kinds of planning activities in the context of sustainable regional development, often with a focus on culture as a factor in development (Björling & Ohlén, 2018). This paper examines the *platsutveckling* method developed as part of the regional *Hållbara Platser* [Sustainable Places] project that took place from 2016-2019[2]. The project aimed to develop a method of working with sustainable rural development (Björling & Ohlén, 2018), and resulted in a six-step *platsutveckling* process developed through working with eight places across the Västra Götaland region. This paper examines the implementation of the *platsutveckling* method in one of the eight places, the village of Uddebo, where some challenges were encountered during the implementation of the project. I draw on this case to examine differences between the structuralist planning approach of the regional *platsutveckling* project and autonomous citizen-led place development initiatives. In the text the Swedish term *platsutveckling* is used when referring to the VGR project, whereas place development is used as a broader term that includes citizen-led initiatives. The case is used to illustrate the complexities of planning place development, and to consider the potential of a post-structuralist planning of undefined becoming as an alternative response to these complexities. Although the challenges encountered are contextually specific to the case study examined in this paper, they nonetheless point to the broader issue of how to respond to complexity and uncertainty in planning. The significance of the findings therefore goes beyond Uddebo and can be used to increase knowledge of contexts in which a post-structuralist planning approach is a useful alternative to mainstream planning practice.

The next section of the paper provides a theoretical overview of post-structuralism in planning before using the post-structuralist planning perspective to interpret the results from the case study. The final section outlines the policy implications of this perspective by considering what a post-structuralist approach to place development might look like.

Theoretical Overview: Uncertainty & Post-Structuralist Planning

As introduced above, post-structuralism provides some important insights for how to better plan with uncertainty. The need for such alternatives is clear: as Winkler (2016) argues, contemporary social and environmental problems are highly complex, involving nonlinearity, independencies and emergent behaviour. All of these factors make outcomes difficult to

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[1] Västra Götalandsregionen is the regional political governing body for Västra Götaland in south-west Sweden. They have responsibility for regional development, culture, public transport and health care.
[2] The *Hållbara Platser* project was funded by Tillväxtverket (Swedish government agency for Economic and Regional Growth), VGR and Länsstyrelsen (Swedish County Administrative Board).

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predict in advance: they are uncertain. Salet et al. (2013) argue that there is a strong connection between uncertainty and complexity: since uncertainty is made up of interactions or components of which we either are unaware, or do not fully understand, increased complexity therefore brings greater uncertainty. Traditionally structuralist planning does not deal well with such complexity and uncertainty. Indeed, Boelens and de Roo (2016) see the growing interest in post-structuralist perspectives as a response to the limitations of the typically goal-oriented processes of both technocratic and participatory structuralist planning methods. Post-structuralist perspectives provide an important alternative planning approach: by focusing on 'processes of becoming'; post-structuralist planning shifts the focus from predefined end goals to processes of change (Boonstra & Rauws, 2021, p. 309), and is therefore better equipped to respond to the uncertain outcomes of contemporary planning challenges.

To understand further how a post-structuralist planning approach can assist with the complex and uncertain characteristics of contemporary planning problems, it is necessary to delve deeper into post-structuralism and complexity theory. In post-structuralism, meaning is multiple and relational; rather than set ideals of what a 'good' or 'sustainable' society should look like, such notions remain open for discussion (Boelens & de Roo, 2016, p. 44). This is a crucial way in which post-structuralist perspectives differ from structuralist planning approaches, which are driven by predefined notions of a 'better' society (Boelens & de Roo, 2016, p. 52). Instead, post-structuralist planning seeks to go beyond the traditional realm of governments and planning bodies and see how a wider range of actors can shape the planning process (Boelens & de Roo, 2016).

In setting out this perspective, post-structuralist planning draws from complexity theory. In complexity theory, multiple alternative futures are considered possible; the future that actually materialises is determined by social action (Byrne, 2003). In embracing multiple futures, the focus of planning activity within a post-structuralist mindset moves from planning content and processes, to the conditions in which planning activity takes place (Boelens & de Roo, 2016). These conditions include considering the specific location, institutional contexts, and constellation of actors involved to identify opportunities for shaping future outcomes (Boelens & de Roo, 2016). In a post-structuralist planning approach there is therefore a larger range of future possibilities and room for stakeholders to play a greater role in determining the outcome than in traditionally structuralist planning. Providing a greater role for stakeholders can be especially important where there is a high level of citizen engagement, such as in instances of self-organisation where spontaneous unplanned activity by individuals without common goals manifests in spatial change (Rauws, 2016). As an autonomous and emergent activity, the outcomes of self-organisation are difficult to predict and tend to fall outside traditionally structuralist planning processes. However, self-organisation should not be considered the 'opposite' of planning (Rauws et al., 2016, p. 5); rather, alternative planning approaches are required. In this instance, a post-structuralist perspective that is open to the participation of a wider range of actors provides an important way forward.

The case study of *platsutveckling* below includes encounters with self-organisation, complexity and uncertainty. A post-structuralist planning perspective provides a way to make sense of the case and forms a basis for proposing alternatives for practice that could better navigate these factors. As such, the remainder of this paper draws on a post-structuralist planning perspective in examining the case study of *platsutveckling* explored below.

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Methodology

Methods and materials

For this case study of *platsutveckling* in Uddebo, a qualitative methodology was chosen because of its utility in addressing the complexity of practice-based situations (Ragin, 1987; Flyvberg, 2006). The primary mode of data collection was in-depth semi-structured interviews with citizens in Uddebo: of these sixteen were permanent residents, with the remaining interview a joint conversation with volunteers from *Världshuset*, a collaborative volunteer-based organisation in the village. Respondents were accessed through a combination of direct contact with individuals involved in citizen-led initiatives in the village and interview snowballing, where further contacts were gained by asking interviewees to suggest further participants. A summary of interviews undertaken is included in Appendix 1. Unless otherwise indicated, the interviews took place in English and in person during two field visits from April – May 2021. Not all respondents took part in the regional *platsutveckling* project, and only respondent R13 held a formal role in the *platsutveckling* project as the local process leader. The intention of the interviews was to access a broader sense of how initiatives and activities operate in Uddebo beyond the regional *platsutveckling* and provide a basis for reflecting on alternative place development processes. In addition, a series of informal conversations were held with a VGR representative from the cultural development administration involved with the *Hållbara Platser* project to access the practitioner perspective. These conversations were facilitated through a secondment which took place from April-June 2020[3].

Participation in the secondment also shaped the selection of Uddebo as a case study. Uddebo was one of four sites selected by VGR when the *Hållbara Platser* project was developed, and there was already a strong suite of citizen-led initiatives in the village before the *platsutveckling* project began. Although the other seven sites participating in the project encountered greater or lesser levels of success with their *platsutveckling* projects, during the secondment it became clear that in Uddebo they had encountered some challenges different to the rest. The differences between the VGR and citizen-led approach in Uddebo pointed to a wider planning issue of the interaction between stakeholders and practitioners, and presented a clear need to further explore the reasons for the divergence in approach to place development. Due to the high level and diversity of citizen involvement in the village, the case of Uddebo cannot be taken as a representative case of place development in Västra Götaland. However, the complexity of place development in Uddebo means that the village can be understood as an 'extreme case', which Flyvberg (2006, p. 229) argues can often provide more information than typical cases when selecting sites to study. Understood as such, Uddebo provides an excellent lens through which to examine the complexity of place development and discuss alternative perspectives on planning with uncertainty.

The interview material outlined above is complemented in this study by an analysis of VGR project and strategy documents connected to the *Hållbara Platser* project and regional development more generally. Access to these documents was facilitated through the secondment. The documents are in Swedish; aspects of the translation to English were checked during the secondment. Six documents were analysed, presented in Appendix 2. The analysis sought to understand how *platsutveckling* fits into and was shaped by the wider priorities of VGR. Using the qualitative analysis software *Atlas.ti*, key terms related to culture-

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[3] During April-June 2020 the author was hosted for a secondment with *Västarvet*, part of the VGR administration for cultural development. The purpose of the secondment was to be introduced to the way the administration works with *platsutveckling*. *Västarvet* merged with *Kultur i Väst* to form the new VGR administrative body for cultural development on January 1 2020.

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led development prominent across the different texts were identified and used to understand the evolution of cultural development strategies in the region. These provided a wider context for the framing of *platsutveckling* within the regional strategy for culture as a priority area for societal and business development. The knowledge overview *Hållbar Platsutveckling: Kunskapsöversikt Västra Götaland* (Björling & Ohlen, 2018) produced as part of the *Hållbara Platser* project was also a key text in understanding the VGR perspective on *platsutveckling*. The understanding gained from these texts and secondment forms the basis for the VGR perspective on *platsutveckling* discussed below.

Case study selection: Platsutveckling in Västra Götalandsregionen

The *platsutveckling* method developed by VGR during the *Hållbara Platser* project drew from existing planning and place making methods to develop a six-step process composed of two phases: a first phase focused on gathering information about the site and developing preliminary ideas, and a second phase focused on the development of a consensual place vision and an action plan for achieving it. The development of a target place image in each site was a major goal of the *Hållbara Platser* project. During the *platsutveckling*, support in the form of funds and advisory staff was provided from VGR but the emphasis remained on the local community to set the agenda and develop a future vision that met local needs. The intention was that the process would be community-led, and that the community would take responsibility for implementing the place vision into the future.

As a project-based initiative carried out within a limited time period, the *platsutveckling* differs from normal planning processes in Sweden. In Sweden, the municipality holds much of the planning power through the local level *detaljplan* [detailed plan]. These plans are valid until a new one is made to replace it; as this is costly in time and resources local plans can remain in place for many years before being updated. The generally top-down nature of the planning system provides opportunities for stakeholders to engage through the consultation phase of making a detailed plan. However, as this paper deals with a regional project-based planning initiative, no more will be said on municipal planning here.

Uddebo: background context

Uddebo is located in Tranemo municipality in the south east of Västra Götaland (see Figure 1). Once a centre for textile production, industry declined from the 1960s, and by the 1990s Uddebo had acquired a negative reputation, with many houses empty and in disrepair. Things began to change after 2009 with the inauguration of *Gula Huset*, a cultural organisation housed in a nineteenth century warehouse building that had been scheduled for demolition. Following this first initiative, interest in the village grew, and many new people moved to Uddebo, facilitated through a non-for-profit real estate brokerage operated by one of the residents to connect new owners with empty houses. There are now a plethora of self-organised initiatives taking place in the village, ranging from *Gula Huset* (which houses the village "free shop" and flea market) to *Väveriet* (the old textile factory repurposed as studio space and a bakery). The population of Uddebo has increased to about four hundred and fifty residents, two hundred of these being newcomers to the village since the early 2000s. In general, Uddebo has experienced an increase in population since the early 2000s and has one of the higher rates of population growth in the municipality (Statistikmyndigheten SCB 2021). The village remains home to a number of residents who were employed at the industrial textile factory which closed in 2012, but it has also attracted many newcomers from various parts of Sweden and beyond. As such the village has an unusual population composition compared to other settlements of a similar size in the region.
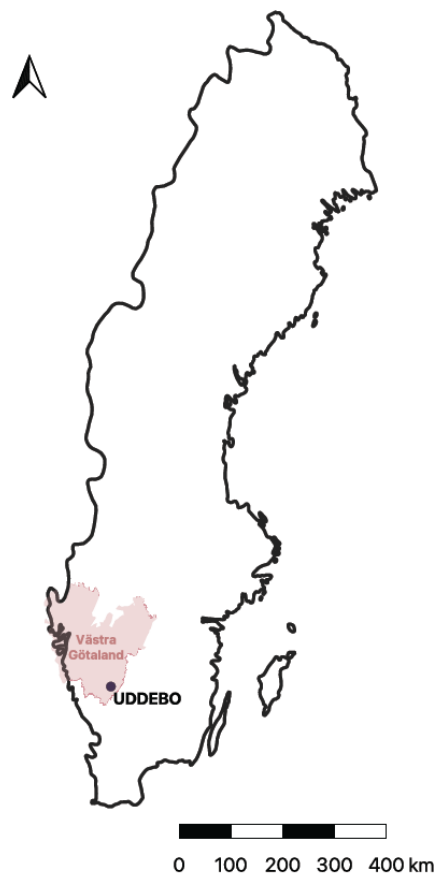
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Figure 1*: Location of Uddebo in Västra Götaland, south-west Sweden.*

Results

From the start of the study, it was clear that there was a mismatch between the process set out by the VGR *platsutveckling* project and citizen-led place development initiatives already happening in Uddebo. As outlined above, the *platsutveckling* process developed by VGR is explicitly goal-oriented: it centres around supporting community members to develop a target place image or desired future vision for their place. This agreed place vision functions as an overall goal to be achieved by the platsutveckling: it is designed to act as the focus point for action, to unite the community and to drive the process forward. In this way the *platsutveckling* process can be understood as a form of consensus-based planning. However, whilst the process facilitates community input in defining the vision, once defined the process focusses on the achievement of this predefined end state. This is clear in the second-last step of the *platsutveckling* process which involves committing to concrete goals and outlining a set of activities for how to achieve the target place vision. Such an approach is in line with a linear planning approach and remains within a structural framework that provides limited space for alternative processes and multiple interests (Boelens & de Roo 2016). This approach posed some challenges for the highly diverse range of individuals involved in a wide range of self-organised place development initiatives happening in Uddebo.

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The challenges encountered during the *platsutveckling* project in Uddebo stemmed from a number of factors. One factor was a difference in how goal-oriented action was understood. Whilst the *platsutveckling* project asked for commitment to fixed goals to achieve a single, agreed future vision, this contrasted with what I found to be the emergent and shifting nature of citizen-led initiatives in Uddebo. Of the seventeen community members interviewed, three were explicitly against setting concrete future goals. For instance, *R1* expressed that in Uddebo, 'we have been really certain … that we don't want to have a goal'[4]. *R15* considered the action of defining visions and goals as 'counterproductive', and a process disconnected from reality, which creates 'a top-down perspective'. Indeed, the imperative to agree to a common goal in the form of a target place image was considered to have negative effects in Uddebo: as *R13* expressed, 'in Uddebo since there's so many…when we tried [to form a common goal] that's when [there] also starts [to be] friction because all of a sudden everyone has to agree on a common goal and everyone here doesn't have a common goal … everyone here doesn't want to have a common goal either'.

This is not to say that there is no goal setting in Uddebo: seven respondents expressed that they thought it was okay that different people and groups had their own goals in Uddebo and several interviewees formulated their own thoughts or wishes about the future of the village. This shows that there is not an unwillingness to work towards achieving future states; the issue was rather that a single place vision did not fit with the plurality of smaller interests and initiatives already occurring within the village. In contrast to the structured, single vision of the *platsutveckling* which sought to smooth over different interests through a process of consensus, the diversity of interests in Uddebo are instead considered positive elements that make the village an interesting place to live. This attitude is reflected in the words of *R14b*:

> 'people are different and want to do different stuff so I think for me that's one … reason to live in Uddebo … it's a lot of different people, some of them lived here their whole lives and some of them came recently and everyone comes from different backgrounds, some have different point[s] of view and … that's I think something that makes it possible to last as a community.'

Others expressed that they felt it was okay to 'say if you don't agree...you [can] have a discussion…then you maybe more understand why they want to do it and…you don't have to end up…thinking the same about it anyway' (*R11*). *R10* considered that there 'could be different goals and different people working for them'. It is apparent that the complexity of goals, activities and perspectives within the village, whilst encountered as a barrier to the consensus-based and goal-oriented platsutveckling, is in fact embraced by the villagers themselves and is considered an important part of life in Uddebo.

Furthermore, differences in ideas and goals in Uddebo is in fact seen as explicitly positive. Almost all interviewees expressed the importance of difference and diversity as a strength of the village. A number of these responses reflected on the fact that sameness 'gets a bit boring' whereas 'if you have differences…it gives more…air to breathe like…[it] makes it more … beautiful when [there's] differences' (*R9*). *R2* expressed a similar perspective, reflecting that 'if it's a very homogenous group…I think it becomes less interesting'. From this it is clear that Uddebo citizens and VGR hold different perspectives regarding consensus and diversity. Whilst the *platsutveckling* project aimed to achieve consensus on a future place vision for Uddebo, this was at odds with the value the residents placed on diversity and the freedom to define their own future visions; such a perspective clash is a core reason for the

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[4] All quotes from interviews have been edited to remove the hesitations, filler words etc. to improve the comprehensibility of the text. The essence and meaning of the quotes has been preserved.

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difficulties encountered during the project. However, when the lack of consensus in Uddebo is interpreted in a more positive light, a different perspective emerges. From this viewpoint the mix of people and initiatives in the village in fact forms a strong attraction point for the residents and is considered a core part in making Uddebo a good place to live.

The value of diversity in Uddebo is not limited to the fact that it makes the village an interesting place to live. Indeed, diversity is understood as an important factor in enabling the various initiatives to happen. *R13* expressed that when 'people can be who they want, say what they want, and no one is like, putting restrictions on thoughts views and ideas…that's when you get this creative melting pot'. These perspectives are very much in contrast to the *platsutveckling* project which focused on meetings and structured goal setting to achieve consensus. Indeed, from the perspective of VGR, the residents in Uddebo appeared disorganised, with the lack of consensus interpreted as a challenge to overcome.

Although diversity undoubtably has a positive connotation in Uddebo, it is also important to recognise that this meant activities in the village were less connected to each other. R5 characterised the different activities happening in Uddebo as 'small islands of engagement'. This was not seen as 'necessarily good or bad' but rather 'a movement that's happened because it's growing and it's hard to try to have one project for first ten people, then forty people, then eighty people'. The high diversity of initiatives in Uddebo was also described by *R4*, as 'a bit scattered', yet with the potential for transformation.

There is a further element of diversity in Uddebo that posed a challenge for the *platsutveckling* project. The high number of subcommunities within the village means that there are many different ideas about the place identity of Uddebo. This was problematic for the agreement of a common place vision or identity in the *platsutveckling* project. Throughout the fieldwork period, a number of respondents expressed a reluctance to align with a single common vision, even outside of the *platsutveckling* project. One example of this was the identity of Uddebo as an eco-village. The eco-village identity was perceived by some to be how Uddebo was predominantly perceived by outsiders. Although such a place identity was considered appropriate by some respondents, others strongly rejected it. A key part of the issue with a single identity was the sense that in such a circumstance, the freedom to do different things and think in different ways could be restricted. *R14b* for instance expressed that 'the strength of Uddebo or any village is that it doesn't have an agenda, that it doesn't have a contract that you sign, or you have to be like this or you have to think like this'. *R15* expressed a similar opinion, noting that 'a strength of Uddebo was that it was not…a value driven, utopia driven place…I would never ever have moved to one of these…eco villages where people try to define…a utopia and then they go there and then things tend to start to collide when people realise that their individual ideals do not match'. Recognising the importance of having space for these perspectives could be one reason why *R1* expressed that 'that's…the thing with Uddebo, I don't think we should define it'.

A final difference between the regional *platsutveckling* project and the Uddebo residents was a different perspective on change and future uncertainty. Whilst the VGR *platsutveckling* sought to minimise future uncertainty by setting out concrete visions and goals for the future, in Uddebo, there was a higher acceptance of future uncertainty. This became clear through the emphasis on openness. For instance, when asked what the most important factor for developing places, *R1* replied:

> 'Openness to things you don't know about, like to give a key to young people that you don't know, and to say ok, you can try to do this…you need to change it, you need to be okay with changing it, so give keys and be open to the changes that will come.'

This openness of Uddebo was perceived as an important element by the respondents. R6 noted that 'you just move out to this village and you can join whatever…it's very open, open-minded in some way, I like that. They…don't judge so much here, you can do whatever'. This sense of openness to future possibilities also underlies the feeling that the village is a safe place where residents are free to 'be themselves' (*R13*). As *R11* expressed 'I think it's okay to do a lot of things but of course…it's also a safe place so we take care of that'; *R11* felt this sense of safety is upheld collectively by the villagers.

The openness to trying new things is also a result of the opportunities present in the village. Not only is the village a safe place to be different, but there 'are…so many more opportunities because there is a lot of land, people have spaces, people…live very cheaply here…people have a lot of time in compared to the city…and a lot of things can happen' (*R2*). This environment of opportunity is an important part of enabling new initiatives – for instance, *R2* noted that 'many ideas … which maybe sometimes have been...growing in the city…now can flourish'. This sense of opportunity was expressed as a low threshold for trying new things: for *R10*, 'I would really like to keep this feeling of…that low threshold…making it easy to do things here and to live here as well'. This low threshold is also due to the low cost of living. For *R1*, 'it's really simple to live cheap in Uddebo because we are sharing so much'. This low cost of living means 'the barrier to do something is lower here' and 'you have so many things that makes it easier for you to try out your idea' (*R1*).

With a low barrier to trying out new ideas comes an acceptance of future change and uncertainty. May and Holtorf (2020b) argue that it is the uncertain future that provides the opportunity for creativity and transformation. This is seen in Uddebo where the opportunity aspect of uncertainty is fully embraced; the constant presence of change is recognised, even when the outcome of that change is uncertain. Indeed, this ongoing state of change or transformation is a key part of the fabric of Uddebo – in justifying why they don't have a single goal, *R1* argued that this is 'why Uddebo is still interesting for people, that's why we are still developing'. The uncertainty of an unfixed future is what brings life to Uddebo. By not having a single vision to achieve, people are 'okay with changing it', they are open to opportunity and transformation. Indeed, there is a preference for organic transformation over planned development – for *R6*, 'I like when it's organic in some way like...things happen because some people just love to do some things...that feels good when it is like that'. This mindset creates a dynamic environment in which change is not directed at reaching a predefined end point, but rather is an inherent part of society – it enables Uddebo to continue to be 'interesting' by continuing to transform in response to its environment.

This openness to change is matched with an openness to not knowing the future. As *R13* expressed, 'I think we have to be okay with not knowing because if you want to formalise, plan and know everything I think we lose a lot of the possibilities and a lot of traction like with being fast, being able, being available when change happens'. This acceptance of the unknown also includes an awareness of the way external factors influence the future of Uddebo. When discussing the gentrification brought on by the influx of new residents, *R1* acknowledged that 'everything that happens will affect the community', tracing the development of Uddebo from a small group that worked on everything together to 'hundred[s] of voices'. The increase in the population and diversity of the village has resulted in a transformation of the social fabric, with *R1* stating 'I don't think that there's any...need of trying to do as we did it before'. From this it

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is clear that change is considered as natural as the way people grow and change over time, and 'Uddebo is a part of that' (*R1*).

Discussion: Interpreting Uddebo through a post-structuralist lens

It is evident from the above results that the linear, goal-oriented and consensus-based *platsutveckling* project administrated by VGR was not a good fit for the highly diverse and emergent nature of citizen-led initiatives in Uddebo. Although it would be possible to cast this simply as a lack of organisation on the part of the residents, something much more interesting emerges when we look closer and start to unpick how and why these initiatives are happening in the village. For this, a post-structuralist perspective on processes of becoming is useful. Indeed, by seeing the initiatives in Uddebo as ongoing, unplanned processes, it is possible to set out what a 'planning of undefined becoming' (Boelens & de Roo, 2016, p. 43) could look like in the village in contrast to the single vision approach of the regional *platsutveckling*. As explored above, the initiatives in Uddebo fit a post-structuralist planning of undefined becoming because of the reluctance to commit to common goals or a single outcome in advance. Instead, the emphasis rests on providing space for a diversity of goals and interests in the village.

In understanding the difference between the place development processes of VGR and Uddebo citizens, a difference in the way goal setting is conceptualised becomes clear. For instance, although adamant about not having specific goals for Uddebo, *R1* identified a degree of commonality on a wider scale, acknowledging that 'we have a common goal if we would say that we want to make Uddebo a good place for families and people to live at'. This differs from the *platsutveckling* place vision because it is fairly fuzzy and undefined, providing space for diverse interests. Such a statement implies there is scope for some level of agreement about the future of the village: the problem with the *platsutveckling* process was that it explicitly required consensus and the setting out of concrete goals to achieve the target place vision. These different attitudes about the future are reflected in the *platsutveckling* place vision that was eventually decided for Uddebo: titled '*Kan man göra så?*' – [Can you do it like this?], it provided space for experimentation and different ways of working in the village. Rather than a cohesive set of activities to achieve this vision, as intended by the *platsutveckling*, the activities that actually took place during the project included the creation of a village newsletter *Uddebo bladet*, the creation of *Småhusbyn* (the tiny house village), and an ecological food store. This proliferation of activities was undertaken by different groups in the village and therefore lacked the central organisation looked for in the *platsutveckling* project.

It is also possible to understand how the individual goals held by Uddebo residents differ from the *platsutveckling* goal structure. They are more open ended, and, coming from individuals, more flexible to change. Unlike the *platsutveckling* goals, which are placed within a structured framework within which success of the goals is measured, these low level Uddebo goals can be interpreted within a wider frame of emergence. Such fuzzy and individual level goals do not disrupt the overall focus on process but work within it. For instance, *R1* recognises that her vision for Uddebo to become more self-sufficient depends largely on the interests and focus of the other residents – she understands that it is unlikely to happen whilst residents with young families focus on their children but sees a potential opportunity when those children are older. These goals can be seen as emergent as they respond to opportunities as they arise in the environment, rather than being milestones to achieve as required by an external process.

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Another difference is the attitude towards future initiatives. In Uddebo, uncertainty prevails. As *R1* explained, 'you can't say from year to year what is the focus and what people want to interact with', and every time 'somebody stop[s] doing some initiative, somebody else is creating a new one'. Although this attitude is incompatible with a goal-oriented planning mindset, uncertainty need not be seen in a negative light. In fact, *R13* considered this dynamism as something that made the village more resilient, because the initiatives taking place are not reliant on a single driven individual. Focussing on the opportunity facilitated by the uncertain quality of the Uddebo initiatives, it is possible to set out an alternative planning role for VGR inspired by a post-structuralist planning mindset of undefined becoming.

Alternatives to platsutveckling: place development of undefined becoming

As noted earlier in the paper, VGR has a long-term orientation towards planning, which is at odds with the emergent nature of initiatives taking place in Uddebo. Indeed, VGR staff found the lack of organisation and goal setting a challenge in implementing the *platsutveckling* project in Uddebo, with the high diversity of individual voices and interests perceived as a major reason for the lack of a future goal setting and allocation of responsibility. Not only was this divide between goal setting and emergence a major challenge for the *platsutveckling* project, but it carries further implications: without a commitment to long-term goals, VGR is less likely to provide funding support for future initiatives. It is clear there is a gap in understanding between initiatives that emerge in Uddebo without a formal process, and the more structured approach of VGR in meeting its strategic priorities. As Boelens and de Roo (2016) note, conventional planning strategies remain 'usually focussed on strategies for managing complexity, tackling non-linearities and reducing the impact of multiplicities and uncertainties' (p. 59). In this light it is clear that for places like Uddebo an alternative planning perspective is required.

The following section considers how VGR could incorporate an alternative planning perspective that embraces the mindset of uncertainty-as-opportunity in Uddebo. In discussing such an alternative, it should be remembered that Uddebo is unusual in its high level of self-organisation, and that the more structured *platsutveckling* process can be effective in other contexts. Nonetheless, the case of Uddebo provides an important opportunity to discuss what planning alternatives may be appropriate when working with highly engaged citizen groups.
One planning alternative that could be appropriate in contexts such as Uddebo is the 'co-evolutionary planning of undefined becoming' suggested by Boelens and de Roo (2016, p. 60), where the focus shifts from content and process to planning conditions. In a co-evolutionary planning mindset, planning is considered only one of the forces at play, and accepts that 'planning processes unfold in time, without a clear beginning or at least without a clear and definite end' (Boelens & de Roo, 2016, p. 48). This could be effective in allowing space for ongoing emergence and change in the initiatives undertaken by Uddebo citizens.

In considering how to apply such a post-structuralist planning framework to place development strategies in Västra Götaland, a number of factors could be considered. Firstly, by shifting a focus to the micro scale of the village it becomes possible to see diversity as a strength rather than a barrier to successful place development. This is possible through embracing multiple perspectives and actors involved in the local context. As Balducci et al. (2011) note, a post-structuralist approach aims to 'open-up' the planning process and 'explore possible advantages of working with multiple, interacting actors' (p. 491). Such a perspective provides an opportunity to reinterpret the high diversity of individual voices in Uddebo not as a barrier or as disorganisation but as a way to enable 'flexible, adaptive futures' (Balducci et al., 2011,

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p. 491). In this perspective, high levels of diversity and difference provide a stimulating environment in which creativity thrives.

Part of recognising diversity could involve a balancing of different needs. An awareness of different needs is already held by residents in Uddebo. For *R9,* part of recognising that 'we're all different and we're always going to be different' includes acknowledging 'we have different needs'. A similar sentiment was expressed by *R17,* who in presenting her thoughts about the kind of planning processes that she would like to see noted that 'from an outside perspective it's difficult to know what this place needs' and argued that projects need to 'see the different needs'. Paying attention to the differing needs of actors and groups is a way to better understand the micro scale and also work with a better awareness of the impact of any interventions. Such an approach might also be more positively received by the residents, as suggested by *R17* who wanted to see more 'listening and mapping' rather than 'instrumentalising and kind of trying to control or steer in a certain direction'.

In addition, VGR could recognise the interest and capacity of actors to engage with initiatives independently of a formal process. The potential is clear in the responses from residents in Uddebo who pointed to initiatives taking place independently from the municipality. For instance, *R11* described how 'things can happen if you want, you can create it, you can always ask people if they want to join and do something together'. This was the case for the *Småfolketspark* [Little peoples' park] in Uddebo which was created by residents, so the village children would have a place to play, which was otherwise lacking in the village. In general, there is a strong sense of taking action in Uddebo independently of formal processes: for *R1,* 'all the things that we [have] been doing these three years [we] could do without *platsutveckling* projects'.

VGR place development planners could also look for shared interests. Throughout the interviews, a number of frequent concerns were raised. *R17* for instance considered that 'it would work really well to make some kind of plan when it comes to some things…I mean what we all have in common is … housing and gentrification'. Here the respondent was picking up on wider factors affecting the village and casting them as points of shared concern. *R13* also mentioned the traffic problem, noting that 'sometimes we joked about the only common idea that everyone here can agree around and can work for is trying to get the traffic down for the village'. The issues of traffic and housing were picked up by VGR during the *platsutveckling* process. However, rather than flagging them as issues for everyone on the village to agree on, an alternative might be to recognise that not all actors in the village will have the same perspective on how these issues should be approached.

The identification of shared interests could also take advantage of existing opportunities for and interest in collaboration with other actors. A number of respondents expressed a desire for greater collaboration with other actors in Uddebo, including *R4*'s characterisation of Uddebo as a 'pot that is slowly bubbling', expressing that greater collaboration and sharing of knowledge between groups 'would really make it cook'. *R17* also considered that more opportunities to meet and discuss common interests in the village would be productive. This should not be interpreted as a desire for consensus, as *R17* expressed a strong desire for autonomy, but rather an opportunity to be transparent about different perspectives and issues in the village. The underlying interest in connection points from the residents' perspective are examples of the opportunities a post-structuralist inspired place development planner could pick up on and cultivate where appropriate.

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A final element of a post-structuralist planning approach would be to move away from goal-oriented processes to embrace uncertainty-as-opportunity and focus on supporting conditions for initiatives to organically unfold in Uddebo. This could involve moving away from formal processes and meetings. As *R13* noted, 'what I noticed was that when someone started to get too formalised and inviting [people] to meetings then people would stop coming to the meetings because they thought that…I don't want to go there because…I will get the formal role and that will kill the idea of why I wanted to be engaged…I think people here…want to you know meet, do stuff without being formalise[d]'. Finding other, less formal ways of working in this context becomes an important way to engage with the actors in the village. Recognising informal ways of working also fits in with the post-structuralist planning focus on the conditions of planning rather than on particular visions or processes. Focusing on conditions conducive to place development could include recognising the different interests and needs in Uddebo. Furthermore, recognising that Uddebo is always in a state of change and transformation, and embracing the uncertainty of what will happen in its future would help support an environment of openness and opportunity in the village which enables creative initiatives to blossom.

In sum, in this context of high citizen-led place development activity, there is a clear need for alternatives to the linear, goal and consensus based *platsutveckling* process implemented by VGR. As the case of Uddebo illustrates, in a highly diverse and emergent context a linear planning process that seeks to implement predefined goals is not effective, leading to frustration on the part of both citizens and VGR staff. The final section of this paper goes beyond the case study of Uddebo to make broader conclusions about the potential for a post-structuralist place development of undefined becoming in contexts of high self-organisation.

Conclusion

Although the case of Uddebo describes a scenario in just one village, the implications of the case are much broader. Perhaps the biggest learning from this case study is how changing the response to uncertainty can open up new opportunities to incorporate different planning methods. Instead of linear place development processes that can get stuck when met with diverse and emergent citizen-led initiatives, a post-structuralist planning approach could provide a more effective way of engaging with these complexities through a focus on process rather than predetermined goals or outcomes. In such instances, a mindset of uncertainty-as-opportunity can support existing self-organisation and open up opportunities for change and transformation from within the place. In this way, post-structuralist planning can better recognise and respond to activities that are already in place without imposing formalised processes or predefined goals.

In discussing a post-structuralist approach of undefined becoming, it is important to recognise that this is not the only possible solution or that it is always appropriate (Boelens & de Roo, 2016); indeed, this paper does not advocate for a wholesale application of a post-structuralist perspective to all planning contexts. Even within place development, it should be recognised that no two places are the same, and the planning approach should be adjusted to ensure a fit with the local context. Nonetheless, this paper has shown that alternate planning approaches such as a post-structuralist planning of undefined becoming should be recognised as part of a toolkit of viable alternatives for working with places, especially those with high levels of self-organisation, and in complex and uncertain contexts. In these instances, it may be worth opening up to uncertainty and taking the risk of undesired outcomes in order to seize beneficial opportunities.

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Appendix 1: Summary of interviews undertaken

RESPONDENT #	NOTES
R1	Resident [two interviews - online & in person]
R2	Resident [two interviews - online & in person]
R3	Resident
R4	Resident
R5	Resident
R6	Resident
R7	Resident
R8	Resident [interview in Swedish]
R9	Resident
R10	Resident
R11	Resident
R12a; R12b	Volunteers Världshuset [joint interview]
R13	Resident
R14a; R14b	Residents [joint interview]
R15	Resident [phone interview]
R16	Resident
R17	Resident

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Appendix 2: VGR documents analysed

DOCUMENT	AUTHOR	DOCUMENT TYPE
Faktor X (2007)	Ottosson, A. & Öhrström, B.	Report on a pilot project for culture as a factor in development
Kulturella och kreativa näringar i Västra Götaland - Handlingsprogram 2014-2016 (n.d.)	VGR	Action program for culture and creative industries in VGR
Västra Götalandsregionens program för kulturella och kreativa näringar 2018-2020 (2018)	VGR	Action program for culture and creative industries in VGR
Västra Götalands Regionala Kulturplan 2016-2019 (n.d.)	VGR	Regional Cultural Strategy
Kulturstrategi Västra Götaland och regional kulturplan 2020-2023 (2019)	VGR	Regional Cultural Strategy
Platsutveckling i Västra Götaland – Så jobbar vi gemensamt att stödka platsutveckling (unpublished)	Västarvet	Summary document reporting on *platsutveckling*