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"Better ugly and nice than pretty and boring": Sustainable neighbourhood developments in peri-urban environments

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The concept of sustainable neighbourhood development (SND) is constantly gaining traction among planners and policymakers. Initially emerging in the 1990s as flagship projects in a few northern European cities, SND has started to be mobilised into new, more peripheral contexts. In this study, the concept's translation and coordination to peri-urban environments are analysed based on an in-depth case study of Jakobsdalen, a new SND in a medium-sized Swedish city. Drawing on theories of policy mobility, the study uncovers significant challenges in mobilising the current policy discourse of SND to peri-urban environments. By contextually articulating, texturising, retrosembling, and situating the project, the study shows that SND initiatives in peri-urban environments risk being implemented without adequately addressing and managing critical concerns in the situated context, highlighting tensions between economic viability and existing socioecological resources. For SND to become a strategic policy discourse for sustainable urban development in multiple contexts, the study highlights the importance of having a contextual approach, recognising that different contexts present different needs, challenges and potentials.

Keywords: sustainable neighbourhood development, sustainable urban development, policy mobility, peri-urban, Sweden

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Introduction

Over the past decades, there has been an exponential growth in sustainable neighbourhood development (SND) (Tanguy et al., 2020). SNDs are new urban districts designed and planned with policies inspired by environmental, social and economic sustainability (Grazieschi et al., 2020). In Sweden, SND has historically been a metropolitan phenomenon (Metzger & Olsson, 2013) with flagships such as Western Harbour in Malmö and Hammarby Sjöstad in Stockholm, and recent projects like The Royal Seaport in Stockholm, Masthuggskajen in Gothenburg, and Vallastaden in Linköping (Listerborn, 2017; Medved, 2016). Flagships are high-profile urban development projects that are influential and catalytic for urban development through "the tentative exploration and development of /…/ concepts" (Smyth, 2005, p. 5). While such projects have defined geographies, their influence is intended to extend beyond their geographical boundaries (Smyth, 2005). In the past decade, SND has begun to expand into new, more peripheral contexts. With new contextual settings, new aspects become relevant for sustainable urban development (SUD) (Hodson & Marvin, 2014), which raises concerns over mobilising policy discourses which are misfitted in relation to other contexts (Isenhour et al., 2015).

Situated in a critical research tradition on SUD (Isenhour et al., 2015; Keil & Whitehead, 2012; Krueger, 2023; Krueger et al., 2019; Krueger & Gibbs, 2007), the study aims to uncover some of the ramifications of mobilising a policy discourse of SND to peri-urban environments and deepen the understanding of contextual concerns in relation to mobilised policy discourses by focusing on the translation and coordination (McFarlane, 2011) of SND to peri-urban contexts from a policy mobility perspective (McCann & Ward, 2011). Analysing how mobilised conceptualisations of urban development are translated and coordinated can uncover power structures that promote, frame, and shape certain policy discourses, as well as uncover the underlying imaginaries on which they are conceptualised (McFarlane, 2011).

Previously, the peri-urban has mainly been characterised by the urban-rural threshold (Sahana et al., 2023). Now, this characterisation has begun to be replaced with a more complex conception, where peri-urban also refers to other relational aspects that distinguish some urban environments as peripheral (Keil, 2017; Sieverts, 2003; Vindigni et al., 2021; Woltjer, 2014). Although there are no universal characteristics of peri-urban environments (Allen, 2003; Iaquinta & Drescher, 2000), this concept is commonly used to describe a contemporary urban landscape in a constant state of transformation (Funtowicz & Ravetz, 1993) of an ambiguous in-betweenness (Allen, 2003; Sieverts, 2003), where traditional forms of urbanisation have merged with unplanned urban, suburban, and post-suburban processes (Keil, 2017). These peri-urban processes are characterised by rapid land-use changes, often involving sprawling developments of low-density housing and commercial infrastructure, as well as socio-cultural transitions in which existing populations adopt a more urban lifestyle or new populations migrate to the area (Shaw et al., 2020). Some claim that these rapid developments of peri-urbanisation are the most common form of development today, globally (Keil, 2017; Sahana et al., 2023; Shaw et al., 2020).

The in-betweenness in peri-urban environments has been recognised for its dynamic nature that has the potential to foster new urban practices (Easterling, 2021; Schröder et al., 2018; Torres, 2016), which is part of a long tradition of acknowledging the transformative capacity in peripheral environments (e.g., Amin et al., 2017; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Hillier, 2017; Madanipour, 2003, 2015; Sennett, 2018). However, peri-urban environments have not been treated as a central aspect in the discourse on SUD, and the peri-urban environment's potential for SUD remains relatively underexplored (Geneletti et al., 2017; La Rosa et al., 2017; Vindigni et al., 2021) as well as explorations of what challenges these environments present for SUD.

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To study these challenges, this paper focuses on the mobilisation of SND to peri-urban environments as a means of mobilising a policy discourse on SUD by asking: What are the contextual and strategic challenges and ramifications of mobilising a policy discourse of SND to peri-urban contexts?

To answer the question, the study empirically examines SND from a local planning perspective by covering the planning of Jakobsdalen, an SND in the Swedish city of Borlänge that has been put under various forms of peripheralisation. The empirical material is presented as a place-based story guided by four analytical tactics proposed by Ernstson and Sörlin (2019) for grounding research on urban development by articulating, texturising, retrosembling, and situating urban development in relation to its context. The empirical material is used to analyse contextual concerns and ramifications of mobilising SND to peri-urban contexts based on McFarlane's (2011) framework for critically conceptualising urban policy mobilities, focusing on their contextual translation and coordination.

The study's contribution is twofold. First, it investigates and highlights contextual concerns of SND in peri-urban environments. Second, it analyses these concerns to deepen the understanding of mobilising policy discourse to new contexts in order to propose improvements for the planning and policymaking of SND in peri-urban environments.

The article is structured as follows: After the introduction, it reviews previous empirical research on SND and outlines the theoretical framework of policy mobility. It then presents the empirical and analytical methodology applied in the case study, followed by the findings. The article concludes with a discussion of the broader implications of these findings for understanding strategic and contextual concerns of SND in peri-urban environments.

Sustainable neighbourhood development

Searle and Darchen (2018) claim that much of the SUD literature either focuses on the theory of SUD without giving a practical understanding of its implementation or focuses on solutions without contextualising them. However, some studies attempt to bridge this gap by presenting the concepts, norms, processes, programmes, and practices of SUD as place-based stories (e.g., Isenhour et al., 2015; Krueger et al., 2019; Hodson & Marvin, 2014). By closely studying actual cases of SUD, Krueger and Gibbs (2007) earlier disclosed how SUD had become subject to other, and sometimes contradictory, interests, uncovering a complex, contested, and paradoxical practice that often results in unsustainable developments.

While much has been written about SUD, less attention has been given specifically to SNDs. However, like findings in research on SUD (Krueger et al., 2007, 2019), SNDs have been shown to have a fragmented and contingent character arising from being interpreted and translated to various challenges, opportunities, and stakeholder interests within specific contexts (e.g., de Jong et al., 2015; Hamdan et al., 2021; Tanguy et al., 2020; Holden et al., 2015). With the contextual interpretations of SNDs, all dimensions of SUD are challenging to deliver with SNDs (de Jong et al., 2015), even though it is often stipulated that SND projects are supposed to deliver broadly on multiple SUD aspects (Tanguy et al., 2020). SND projects have, for example, been shown to overlook their impact on other places, ignore the needs of the most vulnerable citizens and fail to make use of existing resources (Luederitz et al., 2013) while also failing to mobilise enough resources and knowledge to be able to address SUD aspects broadly (Winston, 2010).

From empirical studies on SNDs in Freiburg, Germany, Mössner (2016) claims that SNDs are political processes reflecting the institutional, political, cultural and social context of their implementation and concludes that SND typologies, therefore, cannot be replicated from one

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context to another without being translated to their new contextual setting. Temenos and McCann (2012) come to a similar conclusion in their study of SUD in Whistler, Canada. In their study, they found that local SUD initiatives always have some imported elements that support certain discourses that frame problems and policies in specific ways. From a policy mobility perspective, they claim that SUD has mainly become a powerful political vehicle for mobilising certain policies and translating them into various contexts.

Drawing on a policy mobility perspective, Adscheid and Schmitt (2018, 2021) identify in their studies of various SUD projects in Sweden that some contexts have become central for the conceptualisation of SUD due to a practice focused on flagship projects. With many early examples of SNDs, Sweden stands out for actually implementing SUD policies in the situated context of people's everyday lives (Baker & Eckerberg, 2007; Bibri, 2020). This has made Sweden an international role model for SUD (Beatley, 1999, 2012; Holgersen & Hult, 2021; Hult, 2017; Wells, 2014) and contributed to establishing SND as a standard model for SUD not only in Sweden but also internationally (Kyvelou et al., 2012; Medved, 2016). With the establishment of SND as a model for SUD, there has been a revitalisation in neighbourhood planning (Choguill, 2008; Rohe, 2009; Sharifi, 2016), where the neighbourhood has become the "frontline in the battle for sustainability" (Choguill, 2008, p. 42).

The Swedish focus on flagship projects has been criticised for turning SUD into a practice mainly directed towards a wealthy population living in attractive locations (Bibri, 2020; Bradley et al., 2016; Hodson & Marvin, 2010; Krueger et al., 2019; Krueger & Gibbs, 2007; Metzger & Olsson, 2013). The logic behind developing flagships is to bring out innovative solutions that can be scaled out to a broader context with fewer resources (Bottero et al., 2019). However, there is little insight into what these flagships have brought to other contexts. There is some coverage of how SND has been used for brownfield redevelopments and neighbourhood regeneration in metropolitan regions (Bunce, 2018; Curran & Hamilton, 2017; Rey et al., 2022), but there is not enough insight into how SND has been translated to more peripheral regions, and whether the experiences from the flagship projects are applicable to those contexts (La Rosa et al., 2017; Vindigni et al., 2021).

Since the early flagship projects, SND has been a dynamic and contingent concept, acquiring various conceptualisations that have shifted based on what is considered important in the geographical context at the time (de Jong et al., 2015; Grazieschi et al., 2020; Moroke et al., 2019). Despite this recognition, SND has more recently been criticised as being an overly rigid policy discourse that tends to narrow the scope of sustainability, promotes top-down approaches, and fails to address context-specific challenges (Grazieschi et al., 2020; Sharifi et al., 2021). Drawing on insights from the literature on challenge-driven policy (Mazzucato et al., 2020; Molica et al., 2025), mission-oriented policies (Fastenrath et al., 2023; Uyarra et al., 2025) and transformative innovation policy (Diercks et al., 2019; Fagerberg, 2018; Haddad et al., 2022; Ramirez et al., 2024), this has become a general criticism towards SUD and other similar sustainable innovation policy discourses (Coenen et al., 2012; Coenen et al., 2015; Uyarra et al., 2025). This critique has argued for more place-based approaches that can pluralise and democratise innovation and policymaking processes by contextualising the policy discourses to their situated context (Borén & Schmitt, 2022; McCann & Soete, 2020; Walker, 2024; Weck et al., 2022).

Policy mobility

Policymaking for urban development is a material and imaginative process to make sense of complex urban phenomena and give meaning to places (Healey, 2007) by creating stories or translating preexisting stories (Healey, 1993) into strategies, measures, and decisions for urban development. The resulting policies are expressions of all relations involved in making

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them (Healey, 1993; Sandercock, 2003). In times of urbanisation on a planetary scale, more than ever, there are ideas, assumptions, and narratives about urban policymaking circulating and impacting urban developments in very different contexts (Brenner, 2019; Robinson, 2015, 2006). While urban policymaking has a relationality stretching beyond the situated context, it is also a process grounded in local contexts, with policies being translated to fit local practices, beliefs, and discourses (McFarlane, 2011; Robinson, 2006). This dynamic and contingent process of being both mobile and fixed (McCann & Ward, 2011) makes it challenging to predict how policies will be translated to the situated context and what their full effects will be as implemented measures (Rydin, 2010).

All urban policies are, to some degree, intentionally made to transform a context to achieve a predetermined strategic effect. The effect of urban policies depends on their transformative capacity, based on how well they are contextually reconfigured or how well the contexts are reconfigured to them (Ureta, 2015). To understand the policies' transformative capacity, both situated knowledge and a more general understanding of their reconfiguring potential are needed (Rydin, 2010). However, making and circulating urban policies is never just a transfer of impartial knowledge but often a messy and non-linear process encompassing many different interests, which makes it rather difficult to understand all that goes into urban policies (Healey, 2007; Ureta, 2015).

The literature on urban policymaking and policy mobility has made a considerable contribution to understanding relational processes of making and circulating urban policies (McCann & Ward, 2011) by analysing how policy discourses are translated and coordinated to different contexts. Translation refers to relational processes of producing local sociomaterial transformations of mobilised policies. Translations are not strict diffusions of hegemonic policy discourses to new contexts but rather mutations of discursive objects, like artefacts, models and concepts, enabling them to travel between contexts. Coordination refers to the infrastructures, all those objects, structures and institutions that manage, organise and facilitate this mobilisation (Amin et al., 2017; McFarlane, 2011; Peck & Theodore, 2010). Policies are not mobilised as complete packages, unpacked as replicas. Instead, they travel in bits and pieces, as selective discourses already in transformation when they are mobilised between different contexts (Peck & Theodore, 2010), as constantly evolving policies that need to be coordinated in order to get local translations. If these translations and coordinations do not coincide with established processes, the mobilisation of policy discourses can become a means to reconfigure the infrastructure of these processes, especially on a local level (Rydin, 2010).

Studies on urban policy mobility are not only comparative studies, seeking to identify the same conceptualisations of urban development in multiple contexts, but also studies of the ramifications of translating and coordinating them to various contexts (Ernstson & Sörlin, 2019). With interest in SND as a situated practice, theories of urban policy mobilities have been operationalised in this study as a theoretical framework for analysing how SND is contextually translated and coordinated when mobilised to a peri-urban environment. The contextualisation of SND is presented as a place-based story guided by four interlinked and overlapping analytical tactics that Ernstson and Sörlin (2019) propose for grounding research on urban development:

- Articulating — analysing and assembling sociomaterial practices that give meaning to urban developments.
- Texturising — acknowledging and giving attention to local, experiential, and peripheral aspects of urban developments.

- Retrosembling — embedding urban developments in historically specific practices and contexts.
- Situating — taking the contexts of urban developments seriously for what they may offer to theory.

Method

The study was conducted as a case study (Yin, 2018) of the planning of Jakobsdalen, a new SND in Borlänge, Sweden. When presented as place-based stories, case studies of SUDs can convey experiences that may be relevant to other SUDs (Krueger et al., 2019).

Figure 1. Borlänge's geographic location in Dalarna and Sweden. Map by Mikael Andersson

Case

Borlänge is an industrial city located in Dalarna, Sweden (Figure 1), within the historic mining region of Bergslagen. With a population of 52,000 (SCB, 2021), it slightly exceeds the threshold for being classified as a medium-sized town in Sweden (Sveriges Kommuner och Regioner, 2023). Together with its neighbouring town Falun, Borlänge serves as a regional centre in an otherwise predominantly rural region with the second-lowest innovation capacity in the country (RegLab, 2021). According to the dissimilarity index, Borlänge also has the highest level of socio-spatial segregation in Sweden (Dagens Samhälle, 2023), which is expressed as both ethnic and socioeconomic segregation (Region Dalarna, 2020). Like many industrial cities, Borlänge is often unfavourably portrayed in the media as unsafe, crime-ridden, and unattractive—especially its western parts, which often come to symbolise the city as a whole (Greider, 2022). All this contributes to ongoing processes of peripheralisation, especially

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in western Borlänge where Jakobsdalen is situated (Figure 2), with its pronounced segregation and peri-urban characteristics.
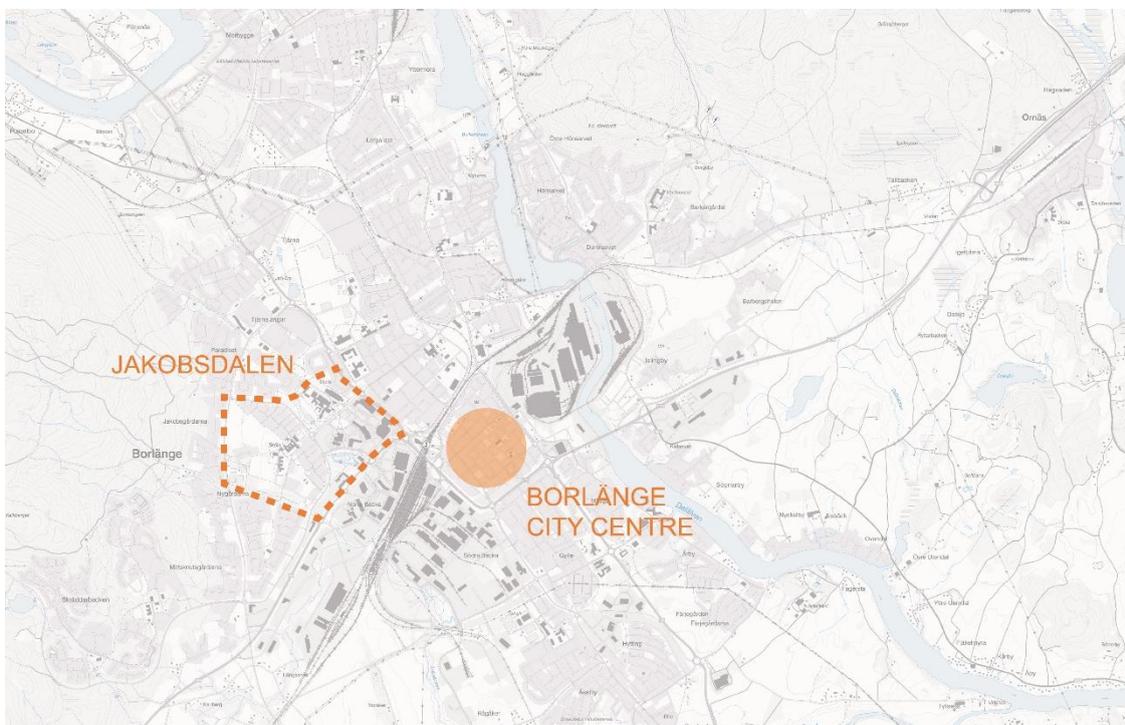

***Figure 2.** Jakobsdalens's geographic location in Borlänge. Map by Lantmäteriet modified by Mikael Andersson*

The Jakobsdalen project is an example of a critical and paradigmatic case (Flyvbjerg, 2001) that is of strategic importance to understand SND as a post-suburbanisation process of transforming and gentrifying peri-urban environments to mitigate grand societal challenges by portraying these environments as being in decay (Despotovic & Thörn, 2015; Keil, 2017; Smith, 1996).

Material

Empirical material for the study was collected over two years between late 2019 and early 2022. It involved participant observation and semi-structured interviews, complemented by a review of relevant planning documents for the case (Table 1). The reviewed documents were also used to situate SND in a longer tradition of mobilising policy discourses to peri-urban environments by retrosembling Jakobsdalen within its historical context.

***Table 1.** Analysed documents*

Year	Document
2001	A century of land use planning: examples from the 1890s–1990s (Borlänge kommun, 2001)
2011	Planning Programme for Jakobsgårdarna (Borlänge kommun, 2011)
2014	Comprehensive Plan FalunBorlänge (Borlänge kommun & Falun kommun, 2014)
2017	Planning Programme Jakobsgårdarna (Borlänge kommun, 2017)
2017	Strategic Plan 2016–2019 (Borlänge kommun, 2018)
2021	Environmental Strategy 2021–2030, (Borlänge kommun, 2021)

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Participant observation was conducted during "How do we build the sustainable cities of the future", a workshop in late 2019 attended by local stakeholders interested in urban development, and during "Wholesome Jakobsdalen", a six-part workshop series in 2020 with the project organisation for the Jakobsdalen project (Table 2). For the study, the observations provided a general understanding of how the project and its context were discussed. As such, they helped identify some of the project's main challenges and underlying perceptions of the context. To document the observations, notes were taken of what had been said and discussed during the workshops.

Table 2. *Events for participant observations*

Workshop	Date	Title, location, organiser and participants
WS1	25.10.2019	"How do we build the sustainable cities of the future?" at Dalarna Science Park, Borlänge. Organised by Borlänge Municipality with an open invitation. The workshop was attended by various stakeholders, including local officials, politicians, property developers, and researchers.
WS2.1	10.02.2020	"Wholesome Jakobsdalen" – workshop series with six digital meetings on Teams. Organised by the University of Dalarna, with an invitation to the project organisation for the Jakobsdalen project. The workshop was attended by representatives from the local planning office, the local development office, the local public real estate company, the local public housing company, the local public energy company and the county administrative board.
WS2.2	15.05.2020	
WS2.3	25.05.2020	
WS2.4	05.06.2020	
WS2.5	23.06.2020	
WS2.6	24.08.2020	

While observations can reveal how practices and discourses unfold in their natural settings, interviews allow for the exploration of aspects that are not openly expressed by offering individuals the opportunity to make comments and reflections (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011). For the study, interviews were conducted digitally in 2021 and 2022 with ten participants from ogranisations involved into the project (Table 3), using a semi-structured approach (Kvale et al., 2014). For the case study, the questions were formulated based on insights from the observations of the workshops, relating to some of the discussions that had been brought up. For documentation, the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Table 3. *Interviews*

Respondent	Date	Organisation
R1	15.04.2021	The local planning office in Borlänge
R2	03.05.2021	Byggdialog Dalarna, an interest group for the building sector in Dalarna
R3	22.06.2021	Hushagen, the public real estate company in Borlänge
R4	24.06.2021	The local planning office in Borlänge
R5	09.09.2021	The local government in Borlänge
R6	13.09.2021	Borlänge Energi, the public energy company in Borlänge
R7	04.11.2021	The local development office in Borlänge
R8	12.11.2021	Tunabyggen, the public housing company in Borlänge
R9	17.11.2021	The local environmental office in Borlänge
R10	26.0.6.2022	Tunabyggen, the public housing company in Borlänge

All empirical material was triangulated and thematically analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify and interpret contextual and strategic challenges and ramifications guided by the analytical tactics that Erntsson and Sörlin (2019) propose for grounding research on urban development and thereafter compiled as a place-based story.

Jakobsdalen, a place-based story of a peri-urban SND

Prelude

During the workshop "How do we make the sustainable cities of the future?" held in October 2019, the project manager for Jakobsdalen presented it as a joint project that "we" should all carry out together by articulating it with statements from a we-perspective: "How do we define sustainability?", "How do we attract investors?", "How do we overcome old habits?", "We need to mitigate climate change", "We need to break segregation", "We want to be attractive", "We want sustainable innovations", and "We want to be at the forefront". Because of its growing population, Borlänge had the potential to succeed with this joint ambition, according to the project manager. She ended by declaring that "Borlänge is a bold city willing to take risks and responsibilities in order to build a better world", which she claimed all of us agreed on (WS1).

Mitigating segregation with sustainable urban development

The workshop was an attempt to get a new start on the project, which had begun several years earlier but had stalled on multiple occasions. The project was initially a commission given to the local planning office in 2013–2014 to mitigate socio-spatial segregation in the western parts of Borlänge. In the planning office, they began initiating projects that could address segregation. One project was to densify the neighbourhood Jakobsgårdarna by building on a land reserve, which they thought would give the neighbourhood a new narrative that could replace the neighbourhood's current reputation (R8).

The planning office made a proposal for a new development with a socio-ecological focus. In 2017, the local government presented a planning programme with a visionary objective to transform Western Borlänge into an SND designed for people to coexist in a mixed and modern environment, planned in cross-sectoral collaboration. The overall aim was to become a role model for how to work with SUD within these contexts. The layout was described as a mixed block-structure plan with a variety of shapes and directions that created an engaging streetscape with easy orientation and good connectivity (Figure 3). The programme claimed the neighbourhood would become socially diversified by arranging a variety of housing typologies with different tenure forms around shared courtyards (Borlänge kommun, 2017).

Figure 3. *The plan for the development of Jakobsgårdarna from the planning programme. Illustration by Sweco Architects. Public domain of Borlänge kommun.*

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While finishing the programme, it was stipulated that addressing socio-spatial segregation requires more than a sole focus on Jakobsgårdarna. Improved connectivity in and to the neighbourhood was identified as an essential aspect, which required structural measures on a larger scale (Borlänge Kommun, 2017). Consequently, a decision was made to expand and reformulate the project to include the adjacent office park, Framtidsdalen, and unify them into a new SND called Jakobsdalen (Figure 4).

Figure 4. *Jakobsdalen, with the existing neighbourhoods Jakobsgårdarna and Framtidsdalen. Photo by Google Maps modified by Mikael Andersson*

Prioritising new housing developments

Despite recognising the need to expand the project, housing development on the land reserve remained the project's sole focus. However, by reformulating the project from a development of Jakobsgårdan to the development of Jakobsdalen led to the existing neighbourhood of Jakobsgårdana being dissociated from the project and uncertainty about the project's spatial boundaries and objectives. People involved in the project gave different and contradictory explanations for the reformulation. Some meant it was necessary for improving internal and external connectivity (R4; R8), others saw it as a measure to address critical issues outside Jakobsgårdarna (R1; R6; R9), while some just thought it added more variety to the project (R5; R10). Prioritising housing on the land reserve was also addressed as an outcome to making the project more manageable and less complex, with some believing the spatial and conceptual expansion would involve more stakeholders and increased complexity that would challenge the implementation:

> We want to move forward and start to build on the land reserve (...) I believe the project has become too complicated with all the discussions. With a bigger project, more stakeholders will be involved, which leads to even more discussions. (R10)

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The increased complexity was used to justify a narrow project focus and to avoid discussing plans for the entire project site (R3).

The project organisation described the land reserve as a valuable asset for the area's transformation but expressed concern that it might not be appropriately used (R1; R9). While the municipality had identified the site as a land reserve for land use development, the county administrative board had classified it as agricultural land (Borlänge kommun & Falun kommun, 2014). Despite critiques regarding building on agricultural land, there was a clear consensus within the project organisation to use the site for new housing:

> We have a piece of unused land in the city that is classified as agricultural land even though it is not suitable for farming. (R1)

The priority of housing development on the land reserve led to deprioritising the project's initial intention to mitigate the existing segregation in the area. The project organisation claimed they lacked a strategic and structural approach to managing the existing environment and wished they had a plan for the whole area's structural development (WS2.6), even though no efforts were made to develop one.

> We have identified the social situation within the existing housing stock. We recognise it as a challenge, but no action has been taken. The main priority is on the new parts. (R7)

The project organisation discussed strategies to identify and leverage the potential of the existing neighbourhood and improve internal and external connectivity. Suggestions included focusing on the intersection of new and existing stock and requiring property developers to undertake rebuilding projects in exchange for securing new housing allocations (WS2.2). There were high expectations that such measures could help counter segregation and turn Jakobsdalen into a destination attracting people from outside (R2; R5; R6; R8), although some remained more sceptical about the project's potential:

> The land reserve has the potential to become truly amazing. However, there is this barrier that nobody seems to address. (…) How do we overcome it and create an attractive environment with housing that people are willing to buy or pay marketable rent for? (R3)

Struggling with attraction

Apart from socio-spatial segregation, the project organisation found the main challenge to be the low interest in investing in Borlänge, especially in its western parts:

> It is a challenge to know where to begin as we need resources from external stakeholders willing to invest in a project like this. (R6)

Several project members meant that Borlänge had favourable conditions for investors but thought it was challenging to communicate them outwards (WS2.2). Local politicians had ordered officials to seek inspiration outside the municipality to adapt to Borlänge, with the intention of finding solutions to existing problems, exploring what others consider to be problems worth solving, and getting proposals on how they could be framed for investors (R5). With inspiration from Vallastaden in Linköping (Figure 5), one approach was to offer different plot sizes for various building typologies and tenure forms that would appeal to a large variety of investors (R1; R2; R8). However, finding investors satisfied with small construction rights was challenging (R1; R8):

> Our conditions in smaller cities differ from larger cities that receive bigger interest. (R5)

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Figure 5. Vallastaden in Linköping. Photo courtesy Okidoki Arkitekter

Due to the low interest from property developers, the municipality experimented with ways to achieve variation without relying on external stakeholders. For instance, the public housing corporation tested new business ventures through private-public partnerships together with a contractor, which enabled them to both develop and construct housing cooperatives solely within the public organisation (Figure 6). This approach is unusual for Swedish public housing corporations, which primarily focus on managing and developing rentals properties. However, they encountered difficulties selling the units and eventually changed the tenure form to rentals, something one project member pointed out as evidence of the area's low attractiveness (R3).

Figure 6. Pavilion advertising housing cooperatives in Jakobsdalen developed by the public housing corporation. Photo courtesy Tunabyggen

Promoting Jakobsdalen

To promote the project, the project organisation was eager to communicate it outwards. However, they adopted a restrictive approach to avoid communicating something that might undermine their trust. The project's internal and external credibility was claimed to depend on

their ability to deliver on communicated promises, and local politicians mandated that any communication carrying a risk of later retraction should be strictly avoided (WS2.2). Some thought it was a disadvantage, making it difficult to attract investors (WS2.5). However, some in the project organisation attended events to promote Borlänge, and at these events, they discovered there was little knowledge of Borlänge and its investment potential:

> When we ran into old acquaintants who sat on the board of large real estate companies, they were unaware of Borlänge's location (…) It made us realise we needed to go out and promote ourselves. (R5)

A discussed strategy to generate interest was to promote the neighbourhood as an *innovation arena* with "testbeds" for new urban practices:

> The motivation for establishing an innovation arena is to make Jakobsdalen so interesting that it will attract investors wanting to know what is happening in Dalarna, where nothing ever happens. (R5)

However, some were worried that not enough effort was made to set Jakobsdalen apart from other developments, claiming it could not be traditionally executed if the intention was to become innovative (R2; R3; R7; R8). One thought they lacked approaches to stimulate innovations, arguing there was an underlying strive for consensus that undermined enough variety to generate new ideas or new stakeholders:

> Borlänge fails to keep up with the outside world (...) and fails to attract stakeholders that contribute to progress. (R8)

The general opinion was that property developers needed to be invited early and offered advantages to get motivated (R1; R5; WS2.3). Moreover, it was also claimed that investors needed to know what was expected of them and what they could get in return, with one claiming they had responsibilities to deliver something to investors if they wanted their involvement (R2). Most project members wanted to establish dialogues with multiple property developers to bring out different perspectives and competencies, seeing it as a valuable source for development (WS2). However, just small efforts were made to set up dialogues or collaborations with external investors.

Setting objectives to the market

In relation to setting expectations for investors, one member of the project organisation believed they had to make the project's sustainable objectives more well-defined and stressed the importance of setting objectives that will be well-received by property developers and economically feasible in relation to local conditions (R10). Some in the project organisation wished they had made a joint conception of sustainability together with the market, with objectives that both found feasible (R1). Otherwise, some were worried that property developers would only interpret objectives to suit their own interests:

> If we approach big property developers late in the process, I think they will try to modify the project to fit their reality. Then it would have been more beneficial to involve them early and get their input in return for a guaranteed plot. (R3)

According to one in the project organisation, a small town like Borlänge has no incentive to set high sustainability objectives for property developers (R4). However, the project organisation still wanted to push the market by setting ambitious objectives, with one emphasising they needed '*to be cocky*' (R1). Considering the required amount of planning, another member believed that being ambitious and wanting to do everything right from the

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start would lead to passivity (R10). This member proposed a more modest approach of not striving for perfection but only for good enough and then successively progressing, arguing that some action is better than nothing.

One claimed Borlänge was good at establishing objectives and policies but weak in implementing them:

> We state in our strategic plans that we shall become one of Sweden's leading sustainable municipalities. We have high ambitions. Thus, it is crucial that we also demonstrate that. (R7)

According to one project member, sustainability efforts in Borlänge depend on a few highly engaged individuals who struggle to involve those who are less committed (R9). Therefore, the project organisation was concerned with integrating all sustainability objectives as clearly defined measures into all of the project's plans and programmes to prevent them from becoming mere policies without practical implementation (WS2.1). However, several noted that social sustainability objectives were particularly difficult to formulate as concrete measures, which they considered troubling (R1; R3: R7).

Prioritising other parts

Attractiveness is a central aspect of the Jakobsdalen project. In the planning programme, it is stated: "Jakobsdalen shall become an attractive place — a modern, socially and ecologically sustainable neighbourhood designed for people to meet, communicate, and play in a varied living environment" (Borlänge kommun, 2017, p.1). All project members considered it an appropriate goal, yet some were unsure what "attractive" truly meant, especially contextually (R3; R5; R8). Several could not answer what kind of environment they envisioned for Jakobsdalen, with one suggesting they should look at other neighbourhoods to find Jakobsdalen's character (R5). However, one member argued that continuing to develop unsustainable environments was not attractive (R9), while another claimed the actual interest in sustainable urban development was low (R3).

> The project lost momentum due to attractiveness (...) concern about segregation, the reputation and so on (...) There were doubts if urban development was viable in Jakobsgårdarna (…) For politicians, it is easier to focus on areas (…) they know attract people. (R8)

Figure 7. *Housing in Jakobsgårdarna. Photo by Mikael Andersson*

Some claimed the perceived lack of attractiveness in Borlänge's western parts (Figure 7) had led the municipality to ignore its own guidelines to prioritise densification in central locations and instead focus on the development of single-family housing outside the city:

> Politicians are pushing for housing development in more attractive locations (…) preferably in locations with "tällbergsläge" to mitigate that high-income earners are more likely to settle in Falun than Borlänge. (R9)

The term *tällbergsläge* refers to locations that embody the picturesque characteristics of Dalarna.

Many in the project organisation meant densification of Borlänge's central parts should be their top priority (R4; R5; R9), but claimed that attention shifts to developing single-family housing at lakeside locations when investors get involved (R8; R9). One project member was concerned about deviating from their priority scheme, arguing that the current socio-economic status and lack of attractiveness of western Borlänge made Jakobsdalen a very relevant project from a sustainability perspective, claiming all other prioritisation was short-minded thinking among politicians based on what currently was considered attractive (R9). However, another project member argued that getting those who work in Borlänge also to become taxpayers is enough to prioritise development at more attractive locations (R5).

Questioning attractiveness

> The story of Borlänge and Jakobsgårdarna's attractiveness has changed over time. However, what once made it attractive still exists. (R8)

The portrayal of western Borlänge as unattractive does not reflect personal opinions within the project organisation, with most members acknowledging that a place's attraction is a cultural and temporal condition that changes over time. One claimed the current interpretation of western Borlänge was disadvantageous, arguing they needed new narratives by becoming more inclusive of people living there now (R2).

> All parts of Borlänge are actually segregated from each other (…) Jakobsgårdarna is actually not less integrated than some other parts. (R3)

At the regional level, Borlänge is a large city with great variety that has proved to be resilient to changing circumstances, according to the project organisation. One meant that Borlänge is and has always been a city in transformation and is not a dying industrial town stuck in nostalgia like all other cities in the region:

> Borlänge has some exceptional qualities (...) It is not true that Borlänge is ugly. The city is dynamic and has many qualities (…) We are always willing to try new things, and we are not afraid to fail. (R5)

"Borlänge is ugly" refers to the city being named Sweden's ugliest city in a widely publicised online poll (Arkitekturupproret, 2018), which provoked local reactions, questioning the very notion of ugliness and criticising labelling a city in such terms. In response, the municipality embraced the slogan: "Better ugly and nice than pretty and boring". (Figure 8)

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Figure 8. *Billboard driving into Borlänge stating "Better ugly and nice than pretty and boring". Photo courtesy Borlänge kommun*

Speculating on market interest

Interest in land use development has grown significantly in Borlänge. In the past, the municipality allocated land directly to interested investors. Now, developers are invited to bid and compete for land allocation, which the project organisation saw as a vital complement to detailed development plans in order to both protect municipal interests and initiate collaboration with the market (R1; R4; R7). The project organisation said they wanted to have a flexible and innovative approach to allocating land (WS2.2), aiming to test various models in partnership with the market, stressing that they had no interest in over-regulating or producing rigid plans that left no room for market influence:

> I believe it is dangerous to isolate ourselves (…) and assume we know everything. Our interaction with the market is very crucial. (R1)

Interested property developers have asked to be more involved, which is a changed attitude, according to the project organisation. Historically, they have requested completed plans before showing interest (R1). However, one claimed that the planning culture in Borlänge does not support this collaborative approach, believing the municipality worked too much with the plans before involving any external stakeholders (R2).

The project organisation claimed to know what the market thought about different issues, giving examples of policies they knew property developers would reject (R3). One member speculated that property developers probably would have been more receptive if they had been asked to give input (R1). Furthermore, some within the project organisation believed they needed to become more innovative and take bigger risks to attract property developers who were not solely driven by profit but also interested in being at the forefront of urban development (R1; R2; R5).

The discussion was mainly on collaborations with the market, with little focus on public participation. Some members were dissatisfied with their current methods for public dialogue, with one describing them as:

> dialogues where grumpy old men come and look at plans posted on the wall. (R2)

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Attempts had been made to reach out to other groups and involve residents by setting up a temporary planning office in the existing neighbourhood of Jakobsgårdarna. One in the project organisation said it had little impact on engaging people but thought it had symbolic value (R8).

Losing momentum

The project organisation had studied how other municipalities organised similar projects, identifying that there were a lot of overlapping competencies and processes that could be streamlined. A project manager was appointed to maintain momentum and ensure a resource-efficient organisation. However, when the project manager resigned, the project was moved to the planning office, which led to a slowdown and uncertainty about ownership, with some claiming that the public housing corporation had taken over the project (R3; R10).

Some were worried that the project organisation would mishandle the project and not "capture the market" (WS2.3, R2). The project had difficulties securing financing because local investors were sceptical of its viability, which one member of the project organisation feared might spread to other investors:

> It is poison if word gets out (…) There is no room for scepticism. We must eliminate all risks and uncertainties for investors and communicate clearly that we are serious about the project. Otherwise, we will face problems with financing. (WS2.3)

The person believed that investors expected higher financial returns in exchange for taking significant risks, something the person believed the project could not accommodate. Another agreed, arguing that investors do not necessarily expect large returns, but said that the project organisation needed to demonstrate greater confidence in the project's viability to counteract investor scepticism (R3).

Furthermore, some members of the project organisation felt that the project had failed to meet the politicians' vision. One member expressed discomfort with the project's progress, believing that the politicians had expected more (R3). Following the 2022 elections, the relationship between officials and politicians in Borlänge shifted, according to another member of the organisation (R1). Historically, the Social Democrats had held a near-majority in the municipality, which, according to one member, provided political stability and made it easier to carry out large-scale projects. However, the current political climate was seen as more uncertain and fragmented, complicating the implementation of bigger developments (R8). In addition, one member believed that politicians were primarily focused on housing development and lacked an interest in broader urban development issues (R9).

This shift in political orientation, combined with internal organisational changes, led to a loss of momentum. Ultimately, the Jakobsdalen project was scaled down into a more conventional housing development, focused primarily on building new housing on the undeveloped land reserve.

Epilogue

The Jakobsdalen project is not the first initiative for rapid restructuring of Western Borlänge based on the mobilisation of a major transformative policy agenda. In the '60s and '70s, there were large-scale housing developments, part of the national public housing programme "The Million Homes Programme" (Borlänge kommun, 2001). In the '80s, Framtidsdalen was developed as a part of "Bergslagspaketet", which was one of several national support packages directed towards regions affected by the postindustrial transformation (Prop. 1987/88:64). In the late '80s and early '90s, the large-scale shopping mall Kupolen (Figure 9)

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was rapidly developed, also as a postindustrial strategy to boost the local economy (Borlänge kommun, 2001; Eklund, 2008).

Figure 9. Kupolen. Photo by Mikael Andersson

However, already in the early '90s, the rapid and unplanned development of western Borlänge was criticised (Borlänge kommun, 2001). A new design for the site was proposed to transform the fragmented environment into a neighbourhood with an "urban character" based on a traditional grid structure plan (Arken Arkitekter, 2022). The proposal was never implemented, but it influenced a new street structure when Framtidsdalen was a test site for a national research project on mixed traffic in urban environments (Swedish Transport Administration, 2008).

Analytical discussion

The articulation of the Jakobsdalen project underscores that SND is not a simple and rational practice. Instead, it reveals a rather messy process articulating many competing, conflictual, and contradictory interests. That was observed by Campbell (1996) 30 years ago and is still supported in the literature on actual practices of SUD (Hodson & Marvin, 2014; Isenhour et al., 2015; Krueger et al., 2019). For Jakobsdalen, this is most notable in the relation between the main objective to mitigate socio-spatial segregation and making Jakobsdalen attractive for financial investments. As the findings reveal, market adaptation is the prioritised interest, showing that SUD often leads to a privileging of economic interests (Hodson & Marvin, 2014).

Texturising the planning of Jakobsdalen makes it possible to identify these different interests and their relational dimensions, uncovering complex power dynamics both within local planning institutions and in relation to other stakeholders who are either ignored or influential in how SND projects are translated and coordinated. It highlights how SUD cannot be understood in isolation from existing power structures within the situated context (Krueger et al., 2019). The findings exemplify this in how assumptions about the market are central to the articulation of Jakobsdalen while the residents' intrestets are largely disregarded. It demonstrates that the governance of SUD tends to produce limited participation in a predominantly top-down structure (Hodson & Marvin, 2014) based on perceived expectations instead of actual dialogues (Isenhour et al., 2015). This texturising also reveals that SND is an integral part of other narratives that influence how SND is articulated in its situated reality, influenced by both local and external histories and norms (Krueger et al., 2019). The findings

illustrate this in how various normative conceptions of attractiveness influence Jakobsdalen's articulation both as a project and place.

Despite attempts to transform and innovate practices through SND, the findings reveal that SND upholds established approaches. Contextually situating SND shows how SND is both divergent and convergent, aiming to innovate urban development while simultaneously becoming translated and coordinated to established conditions and approaches within the situated context (Holden et al., 2015). The findings highlight this dynamic and the tension it brings in relation to concerns that the project's context may undermine innovation and transformation, making Jakobsdalen like all other developments. The findings also show how the context influences how SUD objectives are interpreted to become meaningful within the situated context and, thereby, reveal how the dynamic between the situated context and SND can become innovative and transformative both for the context and the SND policy discourse. From situating SND, we can get a better understanding of the translation and coordination of SND and how it adapts and changes to meet specific needs and interests within different contexts. As such, it works as an approach for exploring SUD both as a universal policy discourse and a specific local practice (Isenhour et al., 2015).

Contextual challenge of mobilising SND to peri-urban environments

The findings expose some significant challenges of mobilising a policy discourse of SND to peri-urban contexts, like how SND takes inspiration from other projects and tries to translate its characteristics to local conditions. It reveals that conceptualisations of SND are mobilised from the circulation of flagship projects (Adscheid & Schmitt, 2018; Temenos & McCann, 2012), and based on the findings, the problem of mobilising these conceptualisations to address contextual concerns seems to be one of the primary challenges for SND in peri-urban environments.

The problems of translating and coordinating SND to contextual concerns in peri-urban environments prevent it from becoming a solution to these concerns. Not being able to address and mitigate underlying societal problems shows a gap between the actual practice of SND and the stipulated objective of SUD to become a solution to grand societal challenges (Tanguy et al., 2020), which the findings demonstrate in the difficulty to address and mitigate socio-spatial segregation. Moreover, the findings show there are challenges in conceptualising SND as concrete and viable measures and objectives relevant to peri-urban environments. This illustrates that SUD can be challenging to translate if it does not relate to specific contexts and practices (de Jong et al., 2015).

The translations and coordination of SND are influenced by different interests and perspectives among stakeholders at various points in time, leading to a range of uncoordinated interpretations (de Jong et al., 2015). The findings demonstrate this in the challenge of keeping the initial agenda of mitigating socio-spatial segregation. Furthermore, the findings also show that SND is competing for engagement and investments with other developments based on what is perceived to be most viable and attractive, illustrating how SUD is constrained by market logic (Krueger & Gibbs, 2007). As the findings highlight, there is a challenge to attract investors to peri-urban environments, which poses a disadvantage for SND in peri-urban environments.

The findings show that SNDs in peri-urban environments are coordinated to become viable and attractive for investment by framing contextual challenges as less complex or important, which is illustrated by the focus on new housing development and the disengagement with the existing housing in Jakobsgårdarna. Ramification is a decontextualisation of SND in peri-urban environments that prioritises new development in favour of existing developments, even

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though the existing environment is recognised as valuable. This illustrates how SUD may result in the underuse of existing resources (Rydin, 2010) and gentrification that displaces existing residents and activities to make room for others (Curran & Hamilton, 2017).

It is revealed that the ambitious and complex objectives of SUD may be challenging for local authorities in peri-urban environments to coordinate and translate to the context, which the project organisation demonstrates in its concern about setting adequate sustainability requirements on property developers in relation to the local market, as well as their difficulty in visualising what an SND may be in the situated context. It underscores the challenge of conceptualising SUD beyond its normative conception within its traditional context (Mössner, 2016).

The findings also reveal that SND may be a struggle to translate to the complexity of peri-urban environments, which is evident in the difficulty of addressing existing issues, making use of available resources, and involving stakeholders already present in the area. The ramification is that much of this complexity is coordinated to be bypassed, reflecting that SUD often leads to a simplification of complex environmental, economic, and social issues (Krueger et al., 2019) and the exclusion of external perspectives that may complicate the process (Mössner, 2016).

How SUD is mobilised within its context depends on institutional arrangements (Rydin, 2010). Based on the findings, the coordination of SND in peri-urban environments does not coincide with established local arrangements. As the findings reveal, ramification is a fragile coordination leading to unstructured and ambiguous management that actively avoids complexity, uncertainty and external pressure, which is expressed in the project organisation's approach to pragmatically "get things done" by favouring short-term solutions and processes that can easily be planned and implemented in already established arrangements together with already known stakeholders.

SUD is generally discussed in terms of new and innovative practices (Krueger et al., 2019) in broad multistakeholder collaborations (Isenhour et al., 2015; Rydin, 2010), which the findings prove can be challenging to translate and coordinate in peri-urban environments based on difficulties in mobilising stakeholders. However, as the findings reveal, this situation may lead to an exploratory approach, seeking new ways to attain similar outcomes without relying on external inputs, which is illustrated by the experimentation with new business ventures for public housing.

Based on the findings, the mobilisation of an SND policy discourse may also contribute to the peripheralisation of peri-urban environments by reinforcing the notion that these environments have less suitable preconditions for implementing SUD policies compared to other places, even though local planning institutions question this conception. This demonstrates that mobilising policy discourses leads to comparisons between places (McCann & Ward, 2011) and shows that mobilising SUD policies risks further marginalising contexts that are already peripheralised (Mössner, 2016).

Furthermore, the retrosembling of the Jakobsdalen project reveals that SUD is not a historically unique process of mobilising transformative policy discourses to achieve large-scale and strategic transformations across multiple contexts. Jakobsdalen serves as a prime example of how peri-urban environments have experienced rapid developments and transformations through the mobilisation of multiple urban policy discourses (Woltjer, 2014), which reveals a practice of layering policy discourses upon one another in peri-urban environments to create environments in constant strategic transformation in order to implement the planning paradigm of the time (Keil, 2017; Sieverts, 2003).

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Conclusion

By retrosembling the historical development of the Jakobsdalen project' site and articulating its reassembeling as a SND, this paper exemplifies how peri-urban environments are continuously reshaped through the layering of mobilised policy discourses. From situating processes of SND in peri-urban environments, Jakobsdalen illustrates the struggle of mobilising a policy discourse of SND to peri-urban environments and the trade-offs that are made to translate and coordinate it to peri-urban contexts. The texturising of these translations and coordinations in Jakobsdalen exemplifies how these challenges and trade-offs relate to a lack of attraction, interest and perceived value for the existing context of peri-urban environments.

By contextually situating SND in peri-urban environments, Jakobsdalen illustrates how unfamiliar conditions for the SND policy discourse challenge its implementation, revealing the discourse's shortcomings in adapting to diverse contexts and complexities. Furthermore, texturising the complexities of Jakobsdalen, both as a project and a site, highlights how the lack of experience in approaching SND within peri-urban conditions leads to hesitation in setting ambitious objectives and difficulties in maintaining momentum. It also reveals that the translation and coordination of SND to peri-urban environments is contextually contingent, responding to various local aspects and relational connections. Moreover, texturising the project also shows that the process in itself is contingent and constantly changes due to both local and relational changes, where changes within the planning process and its organisations impact how SNDs are translated and coordinated.

In summary, SND in peri-urban environments is in practice mobilised without addressing many complex and critical challenges of SUD, especially those relating to contextual concerns. SND is, therefore, at risk of only becoming a selective incorporation of SUD policies aligned to some selective interests while failing to manage other critical and strategic aspects. In the study, it is identified that SND in peri-urban environments may be mobilised to become viable and attractive for investments by neglecting other local interests, which may lead to a decontextualisation of SUD.

These conclusions can be seen as a reflection of the unique characteristics of peri-urban enviornment's rapid, unplanned, and often ambiguous developments, and are therefore likely applicable to other peri-urban settings and to the mobilisation of SND in similar contexts. For SND to become a strategic policy discourse for SUD in multiple contexts, we suggest it is crucial to have a contextual and pluralistic approach, incorporating situated knowledge and recognising that different contexts present different needs, challenges and potential for SUD. By empirically demonstrating strategic and contextual concerns of mobilising SND in peri-urban environments, we have shown the importance of a policy mobility perspective, which means acknowledging that policy discourses will be contextually translated and coordinated but also acknowledging they are contingent and need to be iteratively transformed based on new local experiences. We conclude that employing a policy mobility perspective on the policy discourse of SND can potentially provide a radically different perspective on how future SND is planned and circulated as a policy discourse of SUD.

With a more comprehensive representation that includes broader contextual diversity and experiences from various types of places, the policy discourse of SND has the potential to evolve into a practice that strategically addresses different contextual needs, challenges, and potentials for SUD. However, a contextual approach can also potentially limit the practice to an inward perspective, undermining the interdependency between different places and scales, which consequently can lead to overlooking issues that are displaced or causing problems in

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other contexts. It is, therefore, crucial to acknowledge the interdependence between different locales and scales when mobilising SND.

However, the findings reveal that local authorities in peri-urban environments may struggle to coordinate these relational complexities and multilevel collaborations, which shows that a uniform governance arrangement is not strategic for mobilising SNDs to different contextual and institutional conditions. Instead, it suggests a form of governance that is able to coordinate interests in relation to concerns within the situated context while taking concerns in other contexts into account.

Finally, the findings show that coordinating SUD as a project supports short-term and ad hoc solutions, which impedes SUD from becoming a strategic policy discourse with long-term effects. Instead of framing SUD as an SND project, we believe there is a need for a more adaptive and flexible approach that supports long-term collaboration and non-linear, complex processes for managing contextual contingencies over more extended periods.

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