Making a Global Framework Local
Challenges and Opportunities in Agenda 2030 Localization

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Abstract
By adopting the United Nations Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, a common path towards a sustainable world is accepted. The Agenda 2030 framework strives towards global sustainability by including all sustainability dimensions. Agenda 2030 reaches worldwide and to all authority levels. To reach the goals, implementation on the local level is central, but the process, which is called localization, is however not always simple. Since the global prerequisites and contexts vary, the implementation process will face different obstacles and challenges, yet the different nations will also see different opportunities. This study aims to examine municipality officials' views on the local implementation of the climate and environmental related goals of Agenda 2030 in order to create a deeper understanding of what makes challenges and opportunities in the process. The analysis is based on focus group interviews in three Swedish municipalities within the same county. Patterns in similar challenges and opportunities for Agenda 2030 localization are identified between the municipalities studied. A general challenge is seen in the complexity of the goals in their unity, by contrast an opportunity is seen within the own interpretation of the Agenda 2030 targets. Adopting the agenda to already existing policies are considered hard as well as the organization structure of municipalities. Yet, opportunities are seen within the local contributions to goal achievement and the use of workforce reserved for the implementation process. No general template for Agenda 2030 implementation can be identified - the process needs to be locally interpreted and adapted.

Keywords: Agenda 2030, challenges, localization, municipalities, opportunities

List of abbreviations
Agenda 2030 The 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development
MDGs Millennium Development Goals
SD Sustainable Development
SDGs Sustainable Development Goals
SKL The municipalities and county councils of Sweden
UN United Nations
UNGA The United Nations General Assembly

Introduction
In 2015, The United Nations (UN) agreed upon 17 sustainability goals that should be followed, and implemented, worldwide. These goals are referred to as Agenda 2030 and should enable global social, economic and ecological sustainability (Bexell & Jönsson, 2016; Hendriks, 2018; Morton et al, 2017; Regeringskansliet, 2018; Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018). The 17 sustainability goals are divided into 169 targets and to follow up on the goals, there are 230 global indicators. In addition to this, each country must define its own national indicators that define the national Agenda 2030 work (Bexell & Jönsson, 2016; Agenda 2030-delegationen, n.d.; SCB 2017). All countries, together, have a common responsibility in working towards the goals but the globally different preconditions and circumstances give each country various challenges and opportunities in goal achievement (Bexell & Jönsson, 2016; Gustafsson et al, 2018; Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting, 2017).

There is relative consensus among both researchers and policymakers that reaching city sustainability causes many qualitative benefits. An inclusive and sustainable city enables both equality and access to public goods in terms of services, jobs, and generous infrastructure
solutions (Kanuri et al, 2016; Regeringskansliet, 2018). Urban ecosystems are protected, conserving biodiversity and the value of properties. Plenty of green areas and public spaces are accessible, as well as affordable housing and cost-effective water, health, and education services (Kanuri et al, 2016). Regarding climate risks and changes, the systems of a sustainable city are both resilient and resistant, also, the linkages between the urban and the rural are strong, giving the potential for growth and employment (Kanuri et al, 2016).

It is stated that Agenda 2030 and UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) implementation on the local level is key for global Agenda 2030 goal achievement (Kanuri et al, 2016). The process of local implementation is called localization (Kanuri et al, 2016). In this study, the words localization and implementation are used interchangeably to describe the process of adopting Agenda 2030 on the local level. A city that has integrated the SDGs, also called the global goals, of Agenda 2030 might have increased access to collaborations, partnerships, and financial and technological resources (Kanuri et al, 2016). Development on the local level empowers all local stakeholders which makes sustainable development (SD) even more applicable to local needs and aspirations (Kanuri et al, 2016). Adapting to the local context while implementing Agenda 2030 also requires adaptation to the already existing projects and goals on the municipal and regional levels. Also, a connection between the SDGs and the local budgets is needed (Gustafsson et al, 2018; Kanuri et al, 2016; UNGA, 2015). In the cases where there is no already existing sustainability work, one must come up with new strategies for localization (Kanuri et al, 2016). Previous research identifies four important steps for a successful Agenda 2030 implementation, challenges and opportunities in these steps are investigated through focus group interviews with municipality officials. How far one has come in the Agenda 2030 implementation process varies globally (Gustafsson et al, 2018, Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018).

Sweden is highly ranked in expectations of Agenda 2030 achievement and has a long tradition of proactive work with environmental and sustainability questions (Agenda 2030-delegationen, n.d). According to the Swedish government offices, Swedes should be world leading within ecological, economic and social sustainability as well as within the implementation of Agenda 2030 (Bexell & Jönsson, 2016; Gustafsson et al, 2018; Regeringskansliet, 2018). However, although Sweden is seen as a pioneer within the Agenda 2030 implementation, it is not stated that Swedish cities are world leading in SDG localization. The European Union, through Niestroy et al (2019), presents various good practices from specialized bodies in both Denmark, Finland, Germany, and Latvia. However, according to the Swedish Agenda 2030 Delegation, a clear national direction of travel is needed which, in turn, requires good governance and long-sighted processes (Agenda 2030-delegationen, n.d).

Comparing differences and similarities in municipality officials’ views on the local implementation of Agenda 2030 can help identify what creates challenges and opportunities in global goal implementation. By comparing three Swedish municipalities one can see what actions have been central for the municipalities within the implementation. The results can later be put into the global context. Municipalities are large and important actors within Agenda 2030 implementation, however research on how to implement Agenda 2030 locally can be developed (Gustafsson et al, 2018). This study contributes to knowledge about localization by investigating SDG implementation at the municipal level.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of Agenda 2030 localization processes through analyzing challenges and opportunities in implementing goals related to ecological sustainability on a local level in three Swedish municipalities.
The research questions follow:

- What are the main challenges and opportunities as seen by municipality officials in three Swedish municipalities within the same county regarding local Agenda 2030 implementation of goals related to ecological sustainability?
- What similarities and differences can be seen within the identified challenges and opportunities in the three municipalities?
- How can the Agenda 2030 localization process be informed in general?

Disposition

This paper consists of several sections whereof the next one: previous research and theoretical perspectives present the previous research within Agenda 2030 localization. This section consists of the core of the scientific anchoring of the study and portrays the theoretical perspectives used. Through previous research, the relevance of the aim of the study and for the field is assured, also in what ways the study can contribute to immersed knowledge within local SDG implementation.

Thereafter, the chapter of materials and methodology follows where the material and research methodology used is presented. This section describes selection, scope, and limitations, definitions used in the study, the collection of empirical material in terms of focus group interviews, how the literature and background material search is done, the process and analysis of the material and the reliability and validity.

The results treat the empirical material from the perspective of the aim and research questions. This section contains collected data from interviews analyzed in relation to previous research and literature.

Through the concluding discussion the findings of the study are discussed and summarized together with general reflections of the study and recommendations for future research.

Previous research and theoretical perspectives

This section discusses previous research within the area of Agenda 2030 implementation on the local level and clarifies how this study can contribute to deepening the research of Agenda 2030 localization. In order to portray how the Agenda 2030 localization process can be informed, it is of relevance to see what challenges and opportunities have been identified within Agenda 2030 localization previously, also within other earlier global sustainability initiatives like Agenda 21 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Since the earlier initiatives are similar to Agenda 2030, parallels could be drawn to more and less successful factors, challenges, and opportunities. Even though the initiatives differ from each other in terms of scope and delimitations, earlier experiences can be useful for reflections (Gustafsson et al, 2018).

To begin with, the concept of sustainable development had its penetration with the Brundtland Commission report Our common future in 1987 (Emas, 2015). According to the report, SD is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (UNGA, 1987). The overall goal of SD is to reach a long-term balance between economics, the environment and social aspects (UNGA, 1987). The demanded interaction, as described by for example Regeringskansliet (2018) and UNGA (1987) is presented in figure 1.
To reach sustainable development, a combination of the three dimensions must be considered underlying in all decision-making processes. One can tell that this is a complex area to work with that requires both cross-sectoral, cross territorial and cross-generational integration (Emas, 2015). Decisions are made on various levels in our society; local, regional, national, and global. However, the concept of SD should be integrated on all levels. This creates challenges and opportunities in different contexts and to a various extent (Emas, 2015; Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018).

As mentioned, Agenda 2030 is not the initial framework for global sustainability actions. Agenda 21, which was the first global sustainability agenda was presented in 1992 during the United Nations Conference on Environment & Development, also called the Earth Summit (UN, 1992). The aim of Agenda 21 was to encourage sustainability work globally during the 21st century. The agenda emphasized the need for sustainable human development and proposed international sustainability laws, cooperation, and multi-stakeholder processes (UN, 1992). However, provably, the results of Agenda 21 called for a better framework since Agenda 21 was replaced by the MDGs including eight new sustainability goals, aimed to be reached by 2015 (UNGA, 2000). Compared to the present Agenda 2030, the MDGs were more directed towards the developing countries and the living conditions there (UNGA, 2000; UN, 2015). The results of the MDGs were good, and they improved living standards through various parameters in the developing countries (Fehling et al, 2013; UN, 2015). However, the implications of the MDGs were questioned and criticized for its delimitation to developing countries, and since the MDGs were not aiming globally, they automatically were restricted to just a few sustainability issues (Fehling et al, 2013). There was just one goal within the MDGs that was directed to high-income countries, develop a global partnership for development, which was not even reached (Fehling et al, 2013).

However, in 2015 Agenda 2030 and the SDGs were signed and adopted. To avoid the delimitations of the MDGs, millions of people across the world contributed with thoughts and ideas for the new agenda before it was even set and launched (UNGA, 2014). The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) (2014) presents six essentials elements that were supposed to be included in the agenda following the MDGs; Dignity, People, Prosperity, Planet, Justice, and Partnership. Agenda 2030, which is also called Transforming our world, do not exactly
treat all the elements presented by the UNGA in 2014, yet People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership are included (UNGA, 2015).

The paper of Fidélis and Pires (2009) presents what challenges and opportunities that were seen within the implementation of Agenda 21. The authors mean that a combination of political force on the local level and strong support from the central government was crucial for the implementation process. The study of Fidélis and Pires (2009) took place in Portugal where the Agenda 21 implementation was strongly dependent on voluntary, bottom-up approach initiatives. In this case, the initiatives were driven by smaller authorities where the environmental pressures were lower, but the economic and social problems were higher (Fidélis & Pires, 2009). However, this in contrast to richer countries within Europe where initiatives from central governments have been more important, or where the local authorities have more capacity and resources in terms of finance and politics (Fidélis & Pires, 2009). Fidélis and Pires (2009) present a challenge in short-term political decisions made at the local level in relation to the kind of long-term goal that sustainable development is. The local decisions can sometimes be experienced as ad hoc to interests but also poorly discussed with local community members (Fidélis & Pires, 2009). Despite this, an opportunity in the opening possibilities for a larger stakeholder and public participation in the decision making and early stages of the process is seen while implementing a framework like this (Fidélis & Pires, 2009). Another opportunity is seen within the role of regional associations of municipalities that provide resource support in terms of external finance, information, frameworks, and technical support to the local level (Fidélis & Pires, 2009). Through regional initiatives, municipalities get the possibility to interact in a way that, according to Fidélis and Pires (2009) improves intergovernmental relations. However, in the case of Portugal, a weak partnership development was seen where the local collaborations were limited. When the partnerships are weak, the process is not as efficient as it could be. This causes difficulties in sustaining long-term political engagement (Fidélis & Pires, 2009).

Fehling et al (2013) discuss prerequisites for MDG implementation and describe that the framework was hit by mixed criticism without consensus. A challenge in the process is seen where some people see limitations and challenges where others see strengths and opportunities (Fehling et al, 2013). Also, the same thing can be seen completely differently. For example, some believed the MDGs to be too ambitious, while others considered them too narrow. Fehling et al (2013) describe a contradiction where they state that the goals rather encourage quick-fix solutions than the long-term perspective they aimed for.

However, the main skepticism discussed regarding the MDGs is their way of preparation and development and how just a few countries led the agenda preparation (Fehling et al, 2013). The goals were decided by just a few countries which were all represented by developed countries. Yet, a task force with fewer participants can also be an opportunity since fewer people easier might reach consensus (Fehling et al, 2013). A general challenge in goal making is to find the balance between the complexity of development and staying concise and practicable at the same time (Fehling et al, 2013). This goes along with the general challenges seen in establishing global goals when the individual preconditions vary, the governance capabilities do not look the same worldwide (Fehling et al, 2013). Within the MDGs, concerns were raised regarding specific targets and indicators where progress is hard to measure in the countries with the worst economic conditions, where the concept of average differs from more developed countries (Fehling et al, 2013). An important part of the MDGs was the monitoring and measurement of results where local progress needs to be measured. Also here a challenge is seen in varying possibilities globally. This challenge could be overcome by measuring the pace of progress.
instead of end-targets (Fehling et al, 2013). In table 1 follows a summary of challenges and opportunities within Agenda 21 and MDG implementation from previous research.

**Table 1. Challenges and opportunities within Agenda 21 and MDG implementation based on Fehling et al (2013) and Fidélis and Pires (2009)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges:</th>
<th>Opportunities:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temporal distances in short-term local initiatives compared to long-term global goals</td>
<td>Even though partnerships sometimes are weak, large possibilities are seen in stakeholder and public participation in decision-making processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varying pre-conditions globally create various extents of the challenges. This is often a result of varying governance capabilities</td>
<td>Regional initiatives create resources and information around intergovernmental relations which facilitates local implementation processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreements around what the limitations and strengths are</td>
<td>The small amount of people in the MDG taskforce is an opportunity since fewer participants should agree upon something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreements whether the MDGs are too wide or too narrow</td>
<td>Aim for a long-term perspective, but rather act for short-term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too few countries in the MDG taskforce group made the perspectives within the scope limited</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local measurements methods and possibilities vary between countries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak partnerships and stakeholder collaborations cause short-term political commitment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compared to the MDGs, the scope of the SDGs is claimed unprecedented (UNGA, 2015). In the Agenda 2030 report it is stated that the agenda is both accepted by and applicable to all countries, taking into account different national realities, capacities, and levels of development. Respecting national policies and priorities (UNGA, 2015). The Agenda 2030 report calls the goals _universal_ with targets involving both developed and developing countries (UNGA, 2015). The UNGA (2015) explains how the work towards reaching the SDGs in Agenda 2030 regards everybody at national, regional and global levels. However, the different realities, capacities, and levels of development should be considered in the implementation where regional and sub-regional frameworks are seen as possible enablers for sustainability policies into national actions (UNGA, 2015).

National authorities are stated as essentials in the SDG achievement by their possibility to influence the legislation and budget for Agenda 2030. The influence of national government and institutions on the local and sub-regional level is also seen as favorable for reaching the SDGs on all levels. Strengthened national leadership and ownership are stressed central (UNGA, 2015). The UNGA (2015) states the importance of considering the local planning processes, legislation, strategies, and policies while implementing Agenda 2030 since it is up to each government to decide how the SDGs and their targets should be incorporated in the local agenda. Sustainable development should work in line with already ongoing processes
within the sustainability dimensions (UNGA, 2015). However, the UN states that they recognize the various availability of different models and tools globally, yet the Earth and its ecosystems are the common home of all countries (UNGA, 2015).

Kanuri et al (2016) present four central steps for implementing Agenda 2030 at the local level; *Initiate an inclusive and participatory process of SDG localization*, *Set the local SDG agenda*, *Plan for SDG implementation* and *Monitor SDG progress* presented in table 2. Nonetheless, following these implementation steps is not completely problem-free where the local governments often struggle with driving sustainability activities into action. Kanuri et al (2016) state that the constraints include for example low levels of institutional capacity, limited political and fiscal power as well as the inability to attract or be part of strong multi-stakeholder partnerships. To strengthen the local governments, governmental legislation and regulations should prioritize and encourage local governance. If the local governments should be able to deliver results seen as more sustainable, more sustainability incentives could be implemented from the national governments (Kanuri et al, 2016). In addition to this, a collaboration between local governments, civil society stakeholders, and the private sector is possible. This to develop financial solutions for sustainability actions and models that balance the sustainability dimensions (Kanuri et al, 2016). SDG localization consists of two main parts; Planning and implementing the SDGs and Monitoring SDG progress.

Table 2. The four steps of the Agenda 2030 implementation process as stated by Kanuri et al (2016).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiating actions</th>
<th>Local SDG Agenda</th>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Progress monitoring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiate an inclusive and participatory process of SDG localization. This includes raising awareness of the SDGs at the local level, setting the stage for multi stakeholder discussion and involvement, and prioritizing sustainable development through strong political leadership and integrated governance arrangements (Kanuri et al, 2016).</td>
<td>Set the local SDG agenda. SDG localization is key to ensuring that no one and no place are left behind in the development of a more sustainable future. Cities need to adapt the global SDGs into an ambitious yet realistic local agenda, through evidence-based decision-making that is backed by public support and input (Kanuri et al, 2016).</td>
<td>Plan for SDG implementation. Implementing the SDGs to be achieved by 2030 will require goal-based planning that adopts a long-term, multi-sectoral perspective, and is supported by adequate implementation capacity and financial resources, and multi-stakeholder partnerships (Kanuri et al, 2016).</td>
<td>Monitor SDG progress. Disaggregated data systems are necessary to measure local progress on SDG indicators, and to review the efficiency of program implementation. Local monitoring and evaluation (M&amp;E) systems ensure that SDG implementation remains on track, and support the development of local capacity for more responsive and accountable governance (Kanuri et al, 2016).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing the steps presented by Kanuri et al (2016) to other research, challenges and opportunities are seen within each of them. Gustafsson et al (2018) describe how some things can be seen as both a challenge and opportunity depending on the context, for example, local preconditions. A large challenge regards how to implement Agenda 2030 in the already existing municipal agenda. Most of the local actors already have local sustainability work which sometimes can be hard to converge with the SDGs. However, this challenge can be conquered through broader stakeholder collaborations between authority levels where the goals could be developed in line with each other (Gustafsson et al, 2018; Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018). Partnerships and cross-sectoral collaborations are seen as great opportunities in SDG
achievement, however, they can be hard to reach because of different stakeholder agendas (Gustafsson et al, 2018; Mulholland & Bernardo, 2017; Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018).

Whether the size of the municipality matters challenges or enables Agenda 2030 depends. A larger municipality is assumed to have more resources for implementation, while a smaller municipality is favored by its short distances between departments (Gustafsson et al, 2018).

Monitoring is an important step of the implementation process (Kanuri et al, 2016), however, the methods need to be developed. Right now, there is no formal need or method which aggravates the possibilities. The indicators, which are central in the monitoring process, are not adapted to all local contexts (Gustafsson et al, 2018).

Kanuri et al (2016) advocate the opportunities with communication within the Agenda 2030 localization process. Communication can engage citizens and increase the knowledge and awareness of the importance of Agenda 2030 – and engaged citizens are crucial for a succesfull implementation process. Also, communication is central in the monitoring step of the process where results are communicated both internal and external. Inter-sectoral communication is seen as crucial for effective SDG localization government which facilitates multi-sectoral projects and joint planning (Kanuri et al, 2016).

A large opportunity is seen in research and its way of presenting former, present and future needs in the Agenda 2030 implementation and localization process (Emas, 2015; Gustafsson et al, 2018). Table 3 presents a summary of challenges and opportunities within Agenda 2030 implementation from previous research.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges:</th>
<th>Opportunities:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Find ways to implement the framework in the already existing agenda and</td>
<td>Research – use old research results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sustainability work on both local and national level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop methods for monitoring and follow-up of the Agenda 2030</td>
<td>Partnerships - cross-sectoral policy conflicts, that however could be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>implementation process</td>
<td>overcome by broader stakeholder collaborations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy conflicts</td>
<td>Larger municipalities – resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships can be hard to arrange since sustainability agendas can vary</td>
<td>Smaller municipalities – shorter distances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and follow-up are stated central within Agenda 2030 localization; however, a challenge is seen in that there is no formal need for monitoring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The SDG indicators are not adapted to local contexts, rather they strive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>globally which aggravates goal achievement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above-mentioned aspects are relevant to consider and involve in the analysis of the empirical data collected since they are reoccurring in the scientific literature regarding Agenda 2030 localization. Previous research and theoretical perspectives are used to develop and contrast the analysis of the material which is relevant for the research question of the study.
Materials and Methodology

The methodology of this paper consists of several approaches. The material consists of interviews with municipal officials in three Swedish municipalities within the same county. Descriptions of the different parts of the method follow.

Selection, scope, and limitations

The research questions of the study can be addressed in many ways; therefore, some delimitations have been made. The focus of the study is within municipal Agenda 2030-implementation, especially regarding the sustainability goals number 7, 9, 11, 12, 13 and 15. A limitation to these six goals has been done in order to make space for deeper analysis of just a few goals. The limitations are done from the ecological perspective of municipal sustainability work. The chosen goals in their full form are presented in table 4.

Table 4. The six SDGs chosen for the study presented in their full form according to the UN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SDG</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A geographical delimitation has been made to three Swedish municipalities within the same county of which two are the largest ones and therefore important hubs for economic and societal development, and one is seen as a good learning example and first mover in the SDG localization process which makes it relevant for the aim of the study (Kanuri et al, 2016; Niestroy et al, 2019). The Swedish government is responsible for the Swedish global goal implementation. The government has picked a national Agenda 2030-delegation that is in charge of the implementation of Agenda 2030. The delegation should, in dialog with other relevant society stakeholders, present suggestions of actions. Also, the delegation aims to support information and knowledge exchange (Agenda 2030-delegationen, n.d). Strong municipal initiatives are required for Agenda 2030 goal achievement (Agenda 2030-delegationen, n.d; Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting, 2017) which makes municipalities interesting objects to study. Also, Sweden is highly ranked in expectations of Agenda 2030 goal achievement (Agenda 2030-delegationen, n.d) which makes a Swedish case applicable in this type of research.
Interviews
The aim of the practical material collection; interviews, is to identify challenges and opportunities regarding local Agenda 2030 implementation seen by municipality officials. To identify how something is interpreted, qualitative research interviews are advocated by Kvale and Brinkmann (2014).

Exploratory interviews
At the beginning of the research process, exploratory interviews were carried out for the researcher to define how to specify the aim, research question and later material collection. This was in line with suggestions from Nargundkar (2003) and Saunders et al (2016). The exploratory study is useful when the researcher wishes to clarify the understanding of a problem that can be done with interviews with, as stated by Saunders et al (2016), experts within the chosen subject. In this case, the interviewees in the exploratory studies, also experts, within local Agenda 2030 implementation were municipality officials at the environmental or development departments of the municipalities studied. The need for exploratory interviews was just considered in two of the three municipalities. This since there was not that much information of the municipal Agenda 2030 work available in two of the municipalities compared to the third one that had more public information around the Agenda 2030 implementation. In the municipality where the exploratory interview was not done, suggestions and exchange of ideas between a contact person from the municipality and the researcher have contributed to the preparation of later material collection. According to Nargundkar (2003), exploratory interviews and research usually do not lead to the final results of the study, however, it contributes to the exploration of the area of research. The exploratory interviews help to design the conclusive research in terms of investigating what factors should be included (Nargundkar, 2003). Which is also the case in this study. The methodology used in the exploratory interviews is not as rigorous as the one in the conclusive study and the sample sizes are smaller, however the exploratory interviews build up for the conclusive focus group interviews, which also is needed in this case (Nargundkar, 2003).

Focus group interviews
Later in the research process, focus group interviews were considered adequate for material collection. Since this study aimed to contribute to a better understanding of Agenda 2030 localization, municipal involvement was needed. It was emerged from the exploratory interviews that none of the three municipalities had specific taskforces working with Agenda 2030 – which otherwise was assumed to be the natural focus group in this case. However, using the various inputs and perspectives of municipality officials working with Agenda 2030, yet not always together, in focus groups is considered beneficial for the aim and research questions of the study.

Within focus group studies the researcher has the possibility of observing the interviewees discuss and interact with each other (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015) which is demanded in this case. Focus groups provide the opportunity of gaining a lot of interesting data presented in the own words of the interviewees (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015). The interviews were conducted with municipality officials from different departments within each municipality to enable answers to the research questions and thereby also reach the aim of the study. Focus groups as research technique collect data through interactions in a group around a subject chosen by the researcher (Saunders et al, 2016; Wibeck, 2010) and according to Wibeck (2010), focus group interviews are suitable in situations where actions and motivation should be explored. A focus group discussion is good when one wants to see in what ways people act, and what underlying motives there are. Also, this method is useful when one wants to see differences between
different homogenous groups (Wibeck, 2010) – which in this case are the groups representing the different municipalities. Hylander (1998) maintain the opportunities with focus group interviews and the material collected through interactions that appear between group members. Hylander (1998) states that group discussions can induce theories through exchange of ideas, which in this case is favored since the area of research is new. Focus group interviews as research method strives to collection of qualitative data from a group of people that have something in common – in this case, their view on municipal Agenda 2030 work. Specifically focusing on the discussions that appear (Hylander, 1998). The researcher aims towards the common experience of the subject studied, however new insights and viewpoints are desired (Hylander, 1998), which are factors that this paper aims to investigate. However, the advantages of focus group interviews might also imply some disadvantages. For example, very specific data conducted could be limited (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). Also, focus groups as research concept can aggravate the opinions and thoughts of the individual interviewee since the interviewee can assume that the rest of the focus group expect the opinions and views to correspond (Hylander, 1998).

In this study, the focus group interviews were semi-structured. A structured interview guide was used, but there was also space for free, unstructured, discussions. The interview guide included opening questions, introduction questions, transition questions, key questions and concluding, final questions, according to recommendations from Wibeck (2010). However, the interviewees had the possibility of adding their own comments and thoughts in addition. The interview guide (see appendix 1) consisted of a number of different themes. Its performance was formed in line with the area principle presented by Dalen (2015) where the researcher is working through different areas towards the central questions. Every theme has some key questions with follow-up questions that are developed in line with the aim and research questions of the study (Justesen & Mik-Meyer, 2011). The interview guide was designed to fit all three municipalities and the questions were formed in a way that makes them easy, in order to avoid misunderstandings. Yes and no questions were avoided in the original interview guide but have sometimes been used for complementing the answers of the interviewees as follow-up or affirmative questions. In line with Dalen (2015), leading questions have been avoided to assure and strengthen the validity of the study.

Except for the initial opening questions, the interview guide was based on two main themes where the first one consisted of the four steps of the Agenda 2030-implementation process stated by Kanuri et al (2016). These four steps were also discussed to through the result and analysis section, however not always explicitly. The second theme treated the climate and environmental related goals, number 7, 9, 11, 12, 13 and 15, where the interviewees were to rank the chosen goals within the areas of municipality prioritization and interest, opportunities for goal achievement and challenges for goal achievement. Flashcards presenting the UN sustainability goals and their targets was used to stimulate questions and discussions (Wibeck, 2010). When needed, the interviewer, which was also the leader of the focus group interview, has used non-verbal signals and communication such as nods and hand gestures towards various interviewees to involve participants that have trouble giving voice according to suggestions from Saunders et al (2016), Stewart and Shamdasani (2015), and Wibeck (2010).

Within qualitative research, a balance between the interviewees’ discussions and the usefulness of the results for future knowledge is required. One way of reaching this is to remove identifying information according to Thomson et al (2005). Therefore, the municipalities studied are de-identified. Instead of the municipality names, the pseudonyms 1, 2, and 3 are used. 1 is stated a good example while 2 and 3 are the largest municipalities in the county. The de-identification
can complicate the case-specific analysis, where the researcher might have to exclude and disregard case-specific information that could be useful for explaining, understanding and interpretation of the results (Thomson et al., 2005). However, in this case, the researcher wanted to compare the three municipalities, yet the study did not strive to present results from the specific municipalities chosen. This also explains the de-identification.

Since the municipalities are organized differently, focus groups with the exact same professional roles in each municipality are not possible nor necessary for the aim and research questions of the study. The participants are chosen based on purposive samples that are in line with the goal of the project. This means that they are relevant to the subject studied and that they all relate to it (Wibeck, 2010). The selection is done with help from contact persons from the municipality. What perspectives to be considered in the choice of interviewees varies within research (Dalen, 2015; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). In this case, the municipalities themselves got to put together the focus groups based on actors considered the most suitable for the task. Therefore, age and gender aspects could not base conclusions in this study. The focus groups varied in size between the municipalities where the one in 1 consisted of two people, the one in 2 of four and the one in 3 of three. Wibeck (2010) suggests that each focus group should include not less than four and not more than six participants which was not the case in 1 and 3. The researcher requested at least four people in each focus group but since the municipalities in this case suggested the composition of the groups themselves, the researcher accepted their suggestions.

When making the focus groups, the homogenous and heterogeneous perspectives must be considered (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015; Wibeck, 2010). In this case, one wanted to look at a group that was homogenous in the way that all the participants represented the same municipality, but heterogeneous in the way that they represented different municipal perspectives. Differences between participants enable an analysis of how people value their opinions in relation to other perspectives and thereby also develop their own ideas (Wibeck, 2010). Within the focus group methodology, the researcher strives towards the “spirit of contradiction” which is the state where the attendants feel encouraged to develop and create arguments within the discussion (Wibeck, 2010). Participating in the focus group interviews are municipality officials with titles like for example environmental strategist, developer, society planner, and environmental coordinator.

It was challenging to predict how the empirical material collected through the focus group interviews could contribute to the study since the researcher was not familiar with the interviewees and their working roles beforehand. The connections within the group varied between the municipalities which required the researcher, which in this case also was the interviewer, to adapt to the different contexts within the different municipalities. Depending on how self-going the focus group discussions were, the researcher had to either be more or less leading. Also, it was challenging to know how and where to lead the interviewees along with the interview guide and its concepts. In some cases, the interviewees developed discussions that from the beginning were not included in the interview guide but however, in the end, were considered relevant and favoring for the aim of the study. Some reflections from the different focus groups in this study are that the initial assumptions, thoughts, and expectations of the researcher might not be in line with the final results. Important perspectives appeared throughout the research process and concepts that from the beginning were assumed to be important did not always last the whole research process. Using focus groups, the researcher has to adapt to more than just one interviewee which can be time-consuming. It is important that the researcher adapt the scope of the study to the source of the empirical material; in this
case the focus groups, in order to be able to fulfill the aim which sometimes during the process was challenging. An example is the focus on the chosen goals in relation to the implementation process as a whole. All studied municipalities had a larger focus on the general concept of Agenda 2030 instead of specifically analyzing the chosen goals. The researcher thereby had to adapt to the areas possible to investigate further.

Process and analysis of the material
Both the exploratory interview and the focus group interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcribing the interviews is time-consuming, yet it creates the best ground for systematic and accurate analysis (Wibeck, 2010). In this case, the researcher has done the transcription herself which is also favorable according to Dalen (2015) who states that the transcription process is a unique chance for the researcher to get to know the data. However, it is important not to only look at the finished transcriptions, rather consider the recordings which are also the raw material (Dalen, 2015). The transcribed material is connected to notes about surrounding conditions such as information about the interviewees and non-verbal actions and communication. According to the proposal from Dalen (2015), the interviews are transcribed immediately after their implementation which enables the best possible rendering.

The study has applied an abductive approach including the interaction between deductive and inductive approaches (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). Within induction, one has an enduring entity that recurring could be studied and within deduction, one has some general ideas from which some specific consequences can be drawn and tried. Compared to these concepts, the more dynamic abductive approach is used when one should study the more unpredictable. Induction and deduction are combined (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014; Saunders et al, 2016). The researcher proceeds from empirical cases but is also using theoretical concepts for assumptions and conclusions within the empirical material (Dalen, 2015) - basically, abduction is guided by the principle of associations (Björkqvist, 2012). However, it is important that the empirical material is well processed (Dalen, 2015) which is why the material is carefully transcribed and analyzed. The researcher goes from old to new theoretical insights where new hypotheses and theories are based on new research evidence and findings (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012; Saunders et al, 2016).

The empirical material has been coded in order to identify challenges and opportunities within Agenda 2030 localization, and to see how these differ or resemble between the municipalities. During this process, the researcher looks for similarities and differences within the empirical material and bases the analysis and structure of the various similarities, differences, and concepts founded (Svensson & Starrin, 1996). The coding process stretches through different stages where the main and final goal is to reach a superordinate understanding of the material and thereby contribute to theory generation around the phenomena studied (Dalen, 2015). Dalen (2015) presents a figure of the coding process looking like this: Raw coding → Coding → Final coding → Categorization → Generalization/theorization. The same model has been used by the researcher in this study. The transcribed material was mainly coded based on the themes in the interview guide, however, new themes and concepts that were shown to be reoccurring within the interviews were also noted and thereby considered and treated through the results and discussion part. Similarities and differences that were identified in the coding were analyzed through the results and discussion part.

Since the interviewees in the focus groups and the researcher have the same non-English native language, findings from the transcribed material were translated into English. In order to reach validity of the study, the interviews had to be translated with the right interpretation (van Nes
et al, 2010) which was ensured by numerous comparatives of the transcribed material and the translations. Van Nes et al (2010) states that interpretation and understanding meanings are central in qualitative research and maintain that differences in language can generate challenges in terms of meaning loss. Quotations are considered useful in qualitative research, therefore have quotations relevant for the study been selected. To improve the readability of the quotations, minor editing has been done, however nothing meaningful were added or removed. The choice and use of quotations have been carefully done with awareness of the difference in language as recommended by van Nes et al (2010). The researcher was striving for a translation as truthful and accurate as possible where the translated quotations was checked and compared to the transcribed material in the source language (van Nes et al, 2010).

**Literature and background material search**

To build the previous research and theoretical points of departure, literature and background material search was done. The Agenda 2030 sustainability goal requirements were defined and identified. The literature consists of both grey literature such as state agency or municipality reports and scientific research in the form of articles and books. The literature search was done through scientific databases as UniSearch; the database of Linköping University, and Google Scholar. The selection of literature was, as far as possible and when seen as relevant, restricted to articles published within the last five years since the problem formulation postulates a present-day approach. Search words like "Agenda 2030", "Local Agenda 2030", "Agenda 2030 implementation" "Sustainable Development Goals", "Municipal Agenda 2030", "Municipalities SDGs" etc. in various combinations have been used.

**Reliability and validity**

The trustworthiness of the study is assured by the concepts of reliability and validity (Björkqvist, 2012; Dalen, 2015; Wibeck, 2010). The reliability depends on the internal attributes of the study, thus; do the separate questions in the study really measure the same thing? The validity, by contrast, measures the external attributes; do the study really measure what it is supposed to (Björkqvist, 2012; Dalen, 2015; Wibeck, 2010)? When measuring reliability and validity, the concepts must be properly defined and thereby operationalized in concrete questions in the interview guide or the questionnaire used which is considered in this study while formulating the interview guide for the focus group interviews. During the interviews, the interviewer has summarized the answers of the interviewees, thereafter checked with the interviewees if the summarizing was significant for what the interviewees in question meant. This to ensure the reliability. If the interviewer, instead, was trying to confirm her own thoughts and assumptions, and look for that in the interview material, the reliability would be threatened (Björkqvist, 2012). By comparing the results of the interview material to observed behaviors the validity is examined. If differences in the ways the interviewees express themselves verbally and their observed behaviors are identified, the validity of the method can lack (Björkqvist, 2012).
Results
The following section presents the analysis of the interview results of the study. The analysis is presented through three main themes; Overcoming goal complexity through own contributions; The power of adapting Agenda 2030 to local contexts; and Goal achievement through communication and knowledge spreading. The three themes treat areas like goal conflicts, use of resources, decision making, interplays, and monitoring which are all factors that are considered meaningful and significant for the aim of the study through review of the empirical material. The study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the Agenda 2030 localization process where the areas mentioned above are identified as central. In relation to the four steps if the localization process presented by Kanuri et al (2016), all of the above-mentioned factors are included in the different steps, however not always explicitly stated. Through the analysis, the interview material is continuously connected and put in relation to previous research and other literature.

Overcoming goal complexity through own contributions
The interviewees state similar things when they describe what they think about the SDGs in general. They do all agree upon the communicative opportunities that the goals offer, which is also central in the first two steps of the localization process regarding awareness rising and public support and input (Kanuri et al, 2016). An interviewee from municipality 2 describes that it is noticeable how actors nowadays want to build their activities around the SDGs and how the goals can be used and connected in actions, both within the municipality and external. Even literature describes the opportunities with the upswing and large interest in the goals. A common global sustainability framework could facilitate both visualization and organization comparison with common guidelines (Gustafsson et al, 2018).

All the interviewees have in common that they consider the goals easy to relate to, even though they might seem a bit overwhelming and difficult to grasp to begin with. Generally, the interviewees maintain that the SDGs are applicable for different stakeholders with their comprehensiveness, however one needs to immerse in the goals to define how and where to add them to different situations. Yet, the interviewees agree that the goals should be considered one unit in order to adapt the concept of Agenda 2030. When interviewees from municipality 2 discuss the ecological SDGs, they describe how many of them, together, create prerequisites for sustainable municipalities. For example, they maintain that goal number 15, Life on land, creates basal needs for a functioning society. They state that the content of this goal enables achievement in, for example, goal number 7, Renewable energy. The integratedness of the goals is also underscored by for example UNGA (2015), Morton et al (2017), and Collste et al (2017) where the last-mentioned mean that the SDGs and the ways one chose to achieve them depend on each other. To implement the goals one by one, and thereby also overlook the integrations and systematic interdependencies, is not suitable for the purpose of Agenda 2030 (Collste et al, 2017). For a long-term, credible working progress with Agenda 2030, the goals must be connected to each other (Gustafsson et al, 2018; Morton et al, 2017). An interviewee from municipality 2 states the importance of communicating this connection. Regarding the six chosen goals within ecological sustainability, the interviewees show various connections to the goals. Depending on their working profession, education, and knowledge they are more or less familiar with the significance of the various goals.

There is a consensus amongst research and the interviewees in the general challenge of the breadth and complexity of the SDGs. This is not connected to one specific step of the localization, rather the whole process. Interviewees from municipality 2 and 3 state that even
though there, generally, is a large interest in the SDGs, people are still doubtful to in what ways Agenda 2030 affects the person itself. Both among the municipality officials but also the public. An interviewee from municipality 3 means that there is a large challenge in the fact that one easily rejects the goals that do not seem to fit the personal agenda before even understanding what the goal really is about. Literature states that one of the largest challenges is the complexity of the goals (Gustafsson et al, 2018; Sefiani, 2017). An interviewee from municipality 2 means that it is easy for people to say that they are interested but to engage them in actual actions is hard. To go from words to actions.

... to go from being interested in the global goals to stating that you actually care for something, for example, the local nature. To find the things within the global goals that one likes a little extra! (Municipality 2)

Compared to 2 and 3, interviewees from municipality 1 does not specifically talk about the complexity of the SDGs as a major challenge. This can be connected to the differences in progress. The differences in progress, in turn, depends on both level of focus and priorities where a clear benefit for the implementation in 1 is based on the strong initiatives for Agenda 2030 implementation.

A contradiction between and within municipalities is noted where the goals are seen as both easy and hard to grasp. It is clear that Agenda 2030 as a whole is a very complex concept that can be seen differently in different contexts. An interviewee from municipality 2 pushes for the need of including a cluster of goals relevant for the perspective rather than talking about one specific goal which connects to the second step of the localization process where the SDGs are adopted into a realistic local agenda (Kanuri et al, 2016). This is also favored by for example Gustafsson et al (2018) and Morton et al (2017) who maintain that a broader systemized thinking is crucial when identifying connections between goals. There is a risk with being too narrow and focusing on the goals individually since synergies easily can be missed (Gustafsson et al, 2018; Morton et al, 2017).

In municipality 1, the initial actions for Agenda 2030 implementation took place in 2017 after initiatives from the local government head who wanted to investigate how the SDGs affect the municipality, and how the municipality affects the SDGs. Already here, challenges in terms of a feeling of distance and disconnection to the SDGs appeared. This is connected to the complexity of the goals where municipalities often find it hard to translate the SDGs to local praxis (Gustafsson et al, 2018; Sefiani, 2017). Also, the goals do not always reflect the conceptualized and desired local priorities (Simon et al, 2016). The way 1 overcame the feeling of disconnection was to think in terms of contributions. The same conclusions are drawn by municipality 3 that presents the concept of contributions as an enabling opportunity in SDG implementation. One presents the SDGs from local preconditions and the possible own contributions.

... We started to think "contributions", our contribution! We cannot make sure that goal number two, Zero Hunger, is reached globally, however, we can contribute by ensuring our share. A pretty easy thought that made us contextualize these global goals (Municipality 1, same conclusions can be seen within municipality 3).
Thinking in terms of the own contributions and how the goals affect and can be affected by the own municipality is stated by Sánchez Gassen et al (2018) as an opportunity in the localization process.

An interviewee from municipality 1 states that one of the main opportunities with the SDGs - and also a factor of success for the local Agenda 2030 implementation in the municipality - is to see the agenda as a framework with 17 already decided goals. The interviewee argues that success easily can be reached when the goals are used as a tool.

Everything has already been put into this, and has not become more complicated than it was the previous year! To see the opportunities is to see it as a framework. An already existing framework! It is someone else that has already thought and made the preparatory work. So the only thing that has to be done on the local level is to do the local interpretation and understand what yourself contribute with to the global goals and how you are affected by them (Municipality 1).

Except for the communicative approach and the visual attributes of Agenda 2030 as a concept, either 2 or 3 talks about the actual opportunities with using Agenda 2030 as a framework. Even though the agenda is seen as complex, interviewees from 1 maintain that a lot of resources can be spared if one takes the advantage of an already existing framework.

**Aggravating goal conflicts**

A challenge in Agenda 2030 implementation seen by all studied municipalities is the one regarding goal conflicts. One has to consider every pro and con, as well as effects in the consequence analyses. It is not only within the specific Agenda 2030 implementation process that conflicts appear, however. One of the interviewees from 2 maintains that the internal guidelines combined with various project leaders can aggravate the planning of projects. An interviewee from municipality 3 describes and problematizes the ongoing political debate regarding the goal of "zero hunger" combined with what resources to use for food production.

[...] The same land should be used to expand the industrial sector generating economic growth... (Municipality 3)

Our society and market models have caused problems and need a bit more re-thinking, according to an interviewee from municipality 3. However, the interviewee state that one still has to see how and where conflicts appear on the local level. This can be done by using an Agenda 2030 compass that the same interviewee says is under development. Because of the lack of clarity in how to implement the goals, they can sometimes seem vague in their ways of developing strategies. Goals conflicts appear, where especially consumption and production actions collide (Gustafsson et al, 2018; Hendriks, 2018). Bexell and Jönsson (2016) describe a similar conflict within Agenda 21 where environmental concerns and projects for economic growth collided and the economic dimension usually tended to be prioritized. Within the third step of the localization process, where the long-term Agenda 2030 planning is done, this has to be considered (Kanuri et al, 2016).

**The power of adapting Agenda 2030 to local contexts**

The interviewees state that the goals are easy to assimilate and recognize because of their visual attributes, however, the interviewees do also agree on the importance of the targets and indicators while applying the goals in various contexts. Yet, the interviewees jointly state that one must go from the global to the national to the local context instead of trying to reach all
169 targets as they are written in Agenda 2030, at once, which goes in line with the second step of the localization process. Instead of understanding and implementing all the targets in the same way globally, opportunities are seen in their own interpretation on the local level. The interviewees maintain that they must translate the goals and targets to what they really mean for their own municipality and its activities. Here is a consensus among both previous research and the interviewees of the study. One must make the SDGs relevant for local aspects (Gustafsson et al, 2018; Kanuri et al, 2016).

 [...] If one looks at targets and indicators and so on, I have found out that we do reach them rather well, largely. But there is a selection. We try to get a picture of the whole world through these 17 goals! How the world should work sustainably. And one has a handful of targets... (Municipality 2, similar conclusions are drawn by interviewees from 1 and 3)

Within municipality 1, the interviewees mean that the sustainability perspective of Agenda 2030 is central for the growth of the municipality. There is no contrary in municipal growth and global goal implementation which is seen as an opportunity in Agenda 2030 implementation and adaptation. This is considered favorable for the process as a whole. Since interest conflicts is one of the main challenges for Agenda 2030 localization according to literature, this is assumed as an enabling opportunity for municipality 1 (Kanuri et al, 2016; Simon et al, 2016). An interviewee from municipality 1 describes the importance of using the own, already existing resources within the municipality in order to grow sustainable which is central in the third step of the localization process where the implementation capacity in terms of resources is considered (Kanuri et al, 2016).

To interpret the goals in the local context is considered as an important opportunity in literature as well, where one must adapt to the local context while adapting the Global goals. Thus, one must see how the local existing projects connect to the implementation of Agenda 2030 (Bexell & Jönsson, 2016; Gustafsson et al, 2018; Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018; UNGA, 2015). How far the municipalities have come in the implementation process varies widely and the reasons for this also vary. First, in every focus group, the prerequisites of the municipality are stated as the main determining factor for the initiating actions of the process. The prerequisites, in this case, consist of both the organizational structure of the municipalities, political prioritizations, and knowledge amongst employees. An interviewee from municipality 1 points out the importance of identifying what must be done in the perspectives of the own prerequisites. Population, geography, and environmental challenges and other attributes differentiates municipalities from each other. Automatically, this creates varying prerequisites for sustainability work and Agenda 2030 implementation (Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018). As stated by Sánchez Gassen et al (2018) local conditions affect the way in which the 2030 Agenda is implemented.

Regarding municipalities as organizations in general, most of the interviewees agree on the challenge in the basic structures. The activities within the municipality departments vary widely. To apply a complete framework that should include everything is considered a hard, time-consuming process. However, an integrated approach where collaborations within the municipality is needed (Gustafsson et al, 2018; Simon et al, 2016). The different actors within the municipality have different interests which in turn can cause competition and conflicts regarding what to prioritize within the municipality, which thereby can aggravate the implementation process (Gustafsson et al, 2018; Simon et al, 2016). Challenges are inevitable but in order to relieve, an interviewee from municipality 2 claims the importance of the concept "good enough" within municipal work. The interviewees agree that one should not get stuck in
every obstacle and difficulty in the localization process. However, the municipal independence and variations do not have to be a challenge. This enables local adaptations and ways of implementing the SDGs in the most suitable way (Regeringskansliet, 2018), which Kanuri et al (2016) state as crucial for localization in general.

Interviewees from municipality 1 mean that there is probably no template for Agenda 2030 that suits all municipalities at once, however, one has to anchor the work politically and to the own preconditions. This connects to several steps of the localization process (Kanuri et al, 2016). Same conclusions as the ones made by the interviewees from municipality 1 are drawn by both Niestroy et al (2019) and Bernstein (2018) who state that there is no one size fits all approach to Agenda 2030 implementation, however research needs to be done in order to present good examples, knowledge, and experience.

Unexploited resources

Even though interviewees in municipality 1 underline the importance of in municipal resources, literature states the possibilities with additional external resources (Localizing the SDGs, 2018). However, in none of the municipalities, extra resources in terms of for example financial or workforce are used for Agenda 2030 implementation. Generally, interviewees from all municipalities are positive towards resource supports further in the Agenda 2030 implementation process even though the interviewees from municipality 1 mean that it has worked really well with just mainly the two of them working with the implementation in terms of trust and people within the municipality knowing who to talk to about the global goal work. However, whether external resources in various appearances should be used or not could vary between municipalities. Mulholland and Bernardo (2017) state that the needs for support differ between cities and municipalities regarding both strategies for sustainability work and actual capacities.

One of the interviewees from municipality 2 states that it is hard to have competence within all areas, all the time. It must be people collaborating which is also advocated by Kanurí et al (2016) in the third step of the localization process where partnerships are favored. Different expertise areas call for task forces including different competencies. The same is for the expertise within the different sustainability dimensions where this could be developed, especially within the economic dimension. Interviewees from municipality 3 agree that more resources in terms of the workforce would lead to easier support. It is many questions one would like more time and labor for. As stated earlier, municipality 3 calls for a broader involvement from different departments within the organization. One of the interviewees describes a challenge in people being interested in the issues, however they do not have resources in terms of time to develop. A larger engagement would simplify the process.

The interviewees from municipality 2 do not define a lack of financial resources as obstructive, rather the organizational systems. Generally, a demand for more resources seems to be on the wishlist, although it is not specifically expressed. However, all interviewees agree upon the opportunities with external financial means for further Agenda 2030 implementation. An interviewee from municipality 2 maintain that the politicians have reserved money for ecosystem services, yet they have not fully implemented how the goal regarding this, number 13, should be worked with which is an organizational question.

Hendriks (2018) explains the need for sustainability goal implementation priorities in the local budgets. Gustafsson et al (2018) state the same thing; concreating and converting the global goals into the local agenda can be challenging. Resources must be devoted to Agenda 2030
implementation in terms of both time and money in all steps of the localization (Gustafsson et al, 2018; Localizing the SDGs, 2018). In order for the global goals to be locally implemented, Agenda 2030 needs to be sufficiently funded, which requires financial strategies at all levels. Except for financial solutions, one must also create the enabling space for economic development (Localizing the SDGs, 2018). This is central in the third step of the localization process (Kanuri et al, 2016).

There is no consensus in previous research whether smaller or larger municipalities are favored the most in Agenda 2030 localization. Both Sánchez Gassen et al (2018) and Gustafsson et al (2018) describes how the process in smaller municipalities are favored by their shorter distances and closer connections and collaborations where everyone knows each other. However, Gustafsson et al (2018) also states that larger municipalities have an advantage in their large amount of resources. Also, in a smaller municipality it can be hard to prioritize the implementation of Agenda 2030 when the process has to share time and space with other projects and tasks (Gustafsson et al, 2018).

An interviewee from municipality 2, who has worked in a smaller municipality before, explains that it is easier to transform a smaller municipality because of the shorter distance between the decision makers and other levels which agrees with both Gustafsson et al (2018) and Sánchez Gassen et al (2018). Another interviewee from the same municipality expresses envy of the smaller municipalities where everyone is located close to each other and where things can be anchored with the local authority must faster and easier. In the case of 2, the departments are spread out across the whole city. Being a larger city can be positive in terms of a larger amount of resources, energy, and force. However, an interviewee from municipality 2 explains the difficulty in reaching out to all corners of the organization. The interviewee talks about the frustration of not really noticing things being done since the processes are so slow. However, being a larger group, working with the same kind of questions in different ways is seen as a strength and opportunity for the implementation process by both interviewees and literature. In some of the implementation projects, for example, Sida is seen as a resource that contributes to both material and education.

Before, when something like this got introduced, the municipality added a new post and a new person to work with the specific task. Nowadays the plan is added into the existing structures (Municipality 3).

As stated earlier, there is a challenge seen in that the implementation process have to share space and resources with other municipality aspects and commitments.

**Working group culture as success factor**

Regarding planning for and introduction of SDG implementation, interviewees from municipality 1 claim that they, and their work, have been central and crucial for the local authority. They mean that the complex and straggly world of a municipality might not always be easy to control, but that their ways of implementing the SDGs in the already existing agenda have been successful. The interviewees claim that their Agenda 2030 work has helped to gain political maturity where one understands that all municipal activities are connected. They state that their work simplifies and streamlines the governance which causes a better core business; an opportunity for Agenda 2030 localization.

All these global goals - indivisible as they are. Here I think that you and I have been significant for the politicians. To help them glue together what they are
doing in the straggly world of a municipality. Which includes anything from emergency services to social services to planning permission. It is super straggly! [...] (Municipality 1)

However, none of the municipalities have special task forces only focusing on Agenda 2030. This means that the Agenda 2030 work needs to share the space with other missions and commitments. This is seen as a challenge by the interviewees and literature, for example, Bernstein (2018). In municipality 1, it is the development department that has the task from the politicians, however, the interviewees state that the organization by nature is rather trans-sectoral which naturally involves more departments in the progress. In order for the people responsible to streamline their work, and to include as much competence as possible the activities of the municipality are involved. Also, other municipality officials such as people from the community building department and the environmental department are included in the process. In municipality 2, the sustainability department of the municipal government administration has the main Agenda 2030 implementation responsibility, which is the same as in municipality 3. Having a specific department or committee reserved for Agenda 2030 and sustainability work is favored by literature. That group can coordinate the work based on a spatial analysis that decides what SDGs should be prioritized where (Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018). All of the three municipalities have departments responsible for Agenda 2030 implementation, however the intensity and amount of resources spent within the area differs between the municipalities where the interviewees from 1 have a clearer Agenda 2030 mission from the local authority which is seen as an opportunity for the process as a whole.

The interviewees from group 1 maintain that their own personal exchange have been crucial for the Agenda 2030 localization. They say that they are humble towards both each other and the politics. Both Kanuri et al (2016) and Sánchez Gassen et al, (2018) maintain that another important factor is that the task force that is aimed for the work. The people in the group should fit together, and the people must have trust in the organization, which goes in line with the case of municipality 1. In order to reach success, the persons involved in the Agenda 2030 implementation must work with every step of the process (Kanuri et al, 2016) which requires both engagement and use of relevant tools. An interviewee from municipality 1 maintain that it is demanded more than the ability to read and understand the parts of the process.

What departments that are involved in the Agenda 2030 implementation varies between municipalities. Generally, the interviewees state that all departments should be involved in the process, however, not all are responsible for how the implementation process should be done in their own local context. One of the interviewees from municipality 1 explains the challenges in how to involve the indicators in the activities and how much one can choose what indicators one wants to raise and include. There is a challenge in how much independent experts should be able to affect stated by the interviewees. It is seen as hard to include perspectives from all activities. A challenge stated by literature is the possible difficulties in access to relevant and trustworthy data for SDG indicators and information from stakeholders assumed to have the right experience and knowledge (Gustafsson et al, 2018), also evident in this study. Trustworthy and usable material is crucial for Agenda 2030 implementation, its indicators, and monitoring (Bernstein, 2018; Niestroy et al, 2019; Patel et al, 2017; Persson et al, 2018). However, according to Persson et al (2018) the research is a bit hard to navigate because of the large inputs of information and data. Handling the large flows requires resources, knowledge, and tools which nowadays are lacking in many places (Persson et al, 2018). To conquer this challenge, the competence must be strengthened (Persson et al, 2018).
Discussing Agenda 2030 in general, all interviewees maintain that the SDGs concern the whole municipality and that all employees should work with them, even if it is explicitly demanded or not. The interviewee from municipality 3 maintains that the plan is for the SDGs has to be shown in the commitments of various councils and boards. Right now, they are within the municipal executive board but not in the others. An interviewee state that this will be a part of the implementation model that a future municipality task force to work with. Another interviewee from the same municipality explains the importance of this to be adapted into the already established structures which corresponds with the whole localization process as it is stated by Kanuri et al (2016).

Goal achievement through communication and knowledge spreading
There is a main consensus among researcher that awareness rising and knowledge spreading around the SDGs and Agenda 2030 is central for the implementation process. Mulholland and Bernardo (2017), Patel et al (2017), Bernstein (2018), and Niestroy et al (2019) are just a few of all researchers that agree upon this, and this is central in the first step of the localization process (Kanuri et al, 2016). There is also a consensus among the interviewees that all state the importance of knowledge spreading, even though both challenges and opportunities are seen within how this should be done.

All of the three municipalities are involved in the educational Sida (Swedish International Development Authority) project Glokala Sverige (Glocal Sweden), where Sida has one information day for the administrative managers in each municipality. All interviewees have great faith in the project, especially as an awareness-rising and eye-opening tool. Interviewees from municipality 3 believe that the project will lead to the implementation of a task force that will continue the local Agenda 2030 implementation. The interviewees believe that the project will be enable the localization process since knowledge spreading and awareness rising stated as central according to Kanuri et al (2016) and Sánchez Gassen et al (2018) will be promoted. However, interviewees from municipality 2 mean that the high expectations in the project could cause disillusion. Workshops and awareness campaigns are however seen as opportunities in the implementation process (Patel et al, 2017; Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018), yet one has to be prepared for that the results might not accord with the expectations.

As stated by for example Kanuri et al (2016) and Zelenev (2017), awareness rising around the SDGs for Agenda 2030-implementation is crucial. Within municipality 1, the awareness is high, however, a challenge is seen regarding spreading the awareness outwards to the public, where one works intensely within the municipality departments and towards other municipalities but is not specifically communicating and spreading the knowledge to the citizens. One of the interviewees argues for the pros with enlightenment and education but claims that it is important to have municipal anchoring to avoid questionings of their own responsibility and actions.

[…] Because if we do not do it, external problems will appear. They will attack us and the politicians, “talking goes after all, but what do you actually do yourself?”. If we were not sure that, and how, this should be included in our activities, the development, our budget... If we had not thought or done that process, then it would not have been especially easy to go out and inform about it either […] (Municipality 1).

Niestroy et al (2019) maintain that authorities should engage with key stakeholders and strengthen the Agenda 2030 communication towards the public in order to simplify the localization process. As stated by interviewees from municipality 1, it is important with
municipal and political anchoring in the actions, however public engagement is also needed. This is something that can be improved in all of the three municipalities.

Compared to municipality 1, both 2 and 3 have a wider work with external Agenda 2030 communication through various initiatives. Both interviewees from municipality 2 and 3 talk about their Global Weeks - which have as their purpose is to increase the Agenda 2030 awareness amongst citizens. Interviewees from municipality 2 presents various initiatives both internal but also external. One interviewee says that Agenda 2030 in some way permeates all events and means that they try to communicate the SDGs in all activities. They experience a large interest from other departments that want to involve in the Agenda 2030 working processes which create a favorable environment where the responsiveness is high. Municipality 3 states that they are in the first stage of the implementation processes where they aim to increase the awareness and knowledge around the SGDs and how they can be applied within their own activities. One of the interviewees calls for a broad involvement through the whole organization.

Interviewees from municipality 2 point out that they see opportunities for easier and wider implementation in the large interest for Agenda 2030, both internal within the municipality activity, but also external amongst the rest of the business sector and the public. Generally, internal requests vary between the three municipalities where municipality 1 and 2 have tight Agenda 2030-collaborations with other departments within the municipality, for example, the education sector. Interviewees from 3 say that they do not have that kind of requests at the moment but believe that if they would offer internal educational events, the interest would be high. However, they see a lack of resources for realization.

Involvement and collaboration with the local population are, by Sánchez Gassen et al (2018), seen as key factors for success in Agenda 2030 implementation. One could organize sustainability weeks and events for idea-sharing and engaging the public by using good examples and positive scenarios (Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018), which is something that both municipality 2 and 3 are doing. However, it is just not only the population as a whole that is interesting in this sense but especially the young population is seen as central for global goal achievement, therefore the involvement and participation of young people should be encouraged (Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018). Strong partnerships with schools, dialogues between politicians and students are advocated (Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018), which is mainly the case in municipality 1.

**Determining decision making**

A challenge regarding decision making according to the interviewees in 1 is the fact that some people do not understand that the municipality is a politically guided organization where the politicians make the final decisions. They maintain that it is important for people to wait for political decisions before deciding on their own. Also, the interviewees mean that one wants to anchor every decision many times, even though they have done that to a very large extent they mean that one always can do it more and better. However, Kanuri et al (2016) maintain that the SDG achievement will depend on the individual countries and the local authorities, central throughout the whole implementation process.

Within the development department of municipality 1, two officials got the responsibility to make a business intelligence from global to a local level to result in an SDG contribution suggestion. The interviewees explained that while doing the business intelligence, one started with global issues like nutritious food as a human right, how many people living in hunger and
potentially lacking food supply over time. On the national level, in Sweden, the consumer is in focus, with the high standard of living where one does not have to buy locally or by season. This combined with a sedentary lifestyle makes a bad equation that needs to be considered while implementing the SDGs in the local context. According to the interviewees, the suggestion they made was brave and they were not sure about how it should be received. However, the suggestion got accepted and adopted as governing guidance and is still used two years later. The interviewees, however, state that this stage in the process was favored by them not knowing the aim of their suggestion.

We were lucky that we did not know that this would be a draft for governing. Because now we got the chance to freebase widely from our own heads. If we knew, from the beginning, that this was going to be a draft for governing, it would probably have stressed us in another way (Municipality 1).

The department who got the SDG implementation mission went to the leaders of all municipality sectors to describe and discuss their suggestion, open for inputs. Both interviewees maintain their thoughts and suggestions as well received which favored the implementation process.

In 2018, municipality 2 adapted a sustainability policy where the municipality supports Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, however they have not yet decided to structure and base the municipality activities on this. Right now, within the sustainability department of municipality 2, they are mapping what is already done towards the SDGs. An interviewee states that they already work with the goals more or less, just not explicitly. Municipality 3 has already done this by adding the SDGs to their existent over-arching municipality goals based on connections between the SDGs and the internal goals set by the local authority. Adding Agenda 2030 and the SDGs in the local documents are seen as crucial for a successful implementation process (Bexell & Jönsson, 2016; Niestroy et al, 2019; Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018). Compared to municipality 1, neither one of the municipalities 2 or 3 has had direct starting points for SDG implementation. However, the interviewees from 2 and 3 have various initiatives for working with Agenda 2030. One interviewee from municipality 2 explains an internal network for municipality strategists where one, right now, maps the SDGs and the way they are treated within the different departments and sustainability dimensions. The network also discusses whether the goals are relevant for the municipality or not, and if, in what ways and through what indicators they can be measured.

[...] Also, we have decided if it affects us or not. Some of them are more about global aid work and then we sometimes must put the limits to "no, we do not work with this in one way or another". Somewhere one must define the own delimitations (Municipality 2).

The interviewee from municipality 2 expresses both an enabling possibility and a challenge in the need of delimitation definitions. On one hand, the delimitations can be done according to what the municipality feel comfortable working with, one the other hand one might has to exclude aspects that would have been interesting to work with. Delimitations are crucial according to several steps of the localization process (Kanuri et al, 2016).

One of the main success factors for Agenda 2030 implementation in municipality 1 is the great timing and random incidents. The interviewees explain the positive outcomes of the reciprocal
action between the development department and the municipality politicians. Even though this is not the case in 3, an interviewee from that municipality talks about the importance of timing.

_Somewhere, relations are also created. Relations that build trust. This allows us to "keep going" and work with what we are doing. Is there a reciprocal action in trust, which has nothing to do with Agenda 2030, rather regarding all questions and issues? That there are mutual respect and trust. And that is nothing one can create through organization (Municipality 1)._ 

The interviewees from municipality 1 point out the opportunity with trust. They state that this kind of implementation work should be carried out by people that function well together but also has trust in the organization. The interviewees mean that the Agenda 2030 implementation in 1 is guided by reliance.

Right now, the interviewees from 1 have a commission from the political majority to write a budget and strategic plan from the year 2020 based on Agenda 2030. The documents will also include reading instructions for the reader to interpret the text properly. The interviewees mean that the work will be far from finished when it is published – someone must take the proposal into actions and somehow show that it all contributes to unity. The politicians will reach this to the workings giving them tasks and money but requires a plan in the exchange. However, the mandate for implementation and knowledge spreading from the local authority are needed. The local contributions stand for challenges and opportunities and they discussed what services they provide in order to answer the local contributions. When this is adopted, the first formal decision is made. Hitherto, the Agenda 2030 decisions within municipality 1 have been informal even though they have arisen after each workshop, meeting etcetera.

For success one really needs to work with the process and the tools within the process. In municipality 1, the employees responsible for Agenda 2030-implementation meet the politicians and decisionmakers on a regular basis, even on other occasions than those regarding Agenda 2030. The interviewees mean that they have a formed relationship with the decision makers which has facilitated the process. Using external powers for this might have given good results, however, the take-off distance would have been longer. However, the interviewees claim that their Agenda 2030-implementation work cannot be taken over by someone else. They mean that they need to fulfill what they started which creates a challenge where one puts requirements on an organization where a lot of other things also should be treated. None of the interviewees from municipality 2 or 3 talks about the relationship and collaboration with the decision makers in the way that 1 does, anyway, none of the interviewees describe the relationship as bad.

Regarding decision making in municipality 2, an interviewee explains how the development of a new regulatory document will consider both municipality goals, but also the national environmental goals and the SDGs – corresponding with the second and third localization step (Kanuri et al, 2016). The city council has adopted a sustainability policy presented by the sustainability department. One interviewee means that the politicians have the outermost responsibility for this and that political sustainability prioritizations are central. However, the municipality officials are responsible for decision suggestions where consequences are highlighted. The politicians in municipality 1 did choose 8 prioritized areas and goals, however, this was before the general election in 2018 which, in turn, made the situation messy. The politicians were busy working with other things and forgot about the prioritized goals. Starting off with just a few goals is favored by literature and might, in this case, have been a great
opportunity for the municipality (Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018). However, instead, the employees responsible for Agenda 2030 implementation made a model including the SDGs and a local goal formulation including comments about what the goal specifically means in the local context. Own initiatives like that cannot be seen in either 2 or 3, however the trust between authority and the Agenda 2030 responsible is assumed to be favoring.

A general challenge stated by all interviewees is prioritization. An interviewee from municipality 3 explains how hard it can be to know how to prioritize when a lot of factors should be included – the question easily gets too big. As seen in municipality 1, the politicians abandoned the chosen goals because of other arrangements. Prioritization can be a challenge, but Zelenev (2017), describes the importance of the local policies to be reflected in, and adapted to, the priorities of the national decision makers. This however, demands prioritization, even though it can be seen as challenging. There is a consensus among researchers that goal prioritization is central for Agenda 2030 implementation. On the national level in Sweden, analyses are done in order to identify what goals should be prioritized according to the Swedish context (Persson et al. 2018). How the prioritization is done within the municipalities varies and the interviews show that the municipalities have worked with prioritization to various extents. Differences and similarities are shown regarding what goals the municipalities prioritize.

Interviewees from municipality 1 and 3 both state that goal number 11; Sustainable cities and communities, is the top prioritization in their municipality. Number 9; Industry, innovation and infrastructure, and 12; Responsible consumption and production, are following - but in different orders. In municipality 2, goal number 13; Climate action, is in the top, followed by 7; Affordable and clean energy and 11. Notably, interviewees from municipality 2 place 12 in the bottom. Bexell and Jönsson (2016) maintain that political priorities are crucial and decisive for Agenda 2030 implementation as well as both Kanuri et al (2016) and Mulholland and Bernardo (2017) that state that one of the biggest opportunities for Agenda 2030 implementation is to prioritize goals to develop working strategies for. Same reasoning is done by Sánchez Gassen et al (2018) and Bernstein (2018). According to Kanuri et al (2016) the priorities should be selected based on development gaps which are identified through analysis. This is not really the case in any of the municipalities since none of them have prioritized goals based on development gap analyses. Even if it is not explicitly stated that a specific action aims towards a specific goal, some of the ecological SDGs can be connected to political prioritizations. An interviewee in municipality 3 describes how they have ambitious goals regarding energy, however they are not stated to be based on the energy relevant SDG. Same regarding both ecosystem services and climate change adaptation.

Discussing the ecological SDGs there is consensus amongst the interviewees that the municipalities do not have resourcefulness regarding every action needed for goal achievement. The energy issue is reoccurring, and the interviewees discuss how much they as municipalities can affect and influence the total energy use within the area. An interviewee from municipality 3 means that all the ecological SDGs chosen for this study are seen as challenging to reach, however the interviewee means that the municipality works more actively with goals regarding society development. This is assumed to be because of the large political interest in developing the city, its infrastructure, and its systems. However, the interviewees from municipality 3 commonly questions if this is done in a sustainable manner.

As stated, the interviewees from municipality 1 see the political work of the municipality as an opportunity for Agenda 2030 implementation. They state that political anchoring is central for
good coverage. Are the ideas accepted and anchored by the politicians – and the local authority, the work can be adopted and spread both internal and external. An interviewee from municipality 1 claims that without having the politicians holding their backs, they would not have come this far in the process. Also, saying that this is a task ordered by the local government head makes people listen. An interviewee from municipality 3 says that the contact with the municipality politicians regarding the SDGs discussion has been unusually easy. The interviewee state that there has been insecurity in how to introduce Agenda 2030 in the discussions while a lot of other new things were suggested that were supposed to be negotiated between the political parties. However, the interviewee claims that this was very easy which caused a feeling that the politicians and the parties are already talking about this. The interviewees maintain that they have not found it hard to get a response.

If the politicians are not following, the Agenda 2030 work will not permeate the municipality. According to an overview in various municipalities made by one of the interviewees in municipality 1, it is mostly individual municipality officials that have been passionate about the Agenda 2030 implementation which is good, however, if the politicians do not agree the work will not reach higher in the municipal system. The reflections of the municipality 1 interviewees are in line with the ones of Bexell and Jönsson (2016) who state that key for Agenda 2030 implementation is to get mandates and resources strong enough for the process. The long-sighted approach of Agenda 2030 requires long-sighted decisions on all levels. Therefore, a general political will and ambition for Agenda 2030 implementation is crucial (Regeringskansliet, 2018).

Political interests are jointly seen as an opportunity for Agenda 2030 implementation, however, an interviewee from municipality 2 states the importance of municipality officials to also show what they see as important within the process. The interviewee claims that it is important to be a part of the process from the beginning in order to ensure the possibilities of influence and effect.

**Enabling functions of interplays**

Literature states the importance of implementing the SDGs on the regional level and explains how this can facilitate a more transparent sustainability work locally (Gustafsson et al, 2018). An interviewee from municipality 3 describes that it can be exciting to, on the national level, see how the goals are connected to each other in terms of synergies and disagreements and that this might be something that should be done on the local level as well.

In the three municipalities, internal interplays have been enabling Agenda 2030 implementation as proposed in several localization steps (Kanuri et al, 2016), however, they have been involved in external ones too with both companies and other instances such as the university, besides Glokala Sverige that was mentioned earlier. All interviewees have a positive attitude towards collaborations and interplays where they see opportunities in both knowledge and experience exchange, which is also suggested by literature (Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018). By using Agenda 2030 the other way around – seeing it as something to gather around, creates possibilities for structure and support in sustainability processes (Gustafsson et al 2018). Also, according to Mulholland and Bernardo (2017), the interplay between different levels is important for SDG implementation. The local level is dependent on incentives, expertise and strategies from national and global levels in order to move forward in the implementation process.

An interviewee from municipality 2 points out a challenge in unclarity in what the interplays shall be like and how one shall work with the goals that might not be on the everyday agenda.
for the municipality. The interviewee explains how municipalities with different sizes might be favored by different kinds of interplays. For example, a larger municipality with a larger workforce might have the possibility of joining several networks while a smaller municipality with a smaller workforce might not. Therefore, a more versatile network where one can discuss several different questions at the same time might suit a smaller municipality better.

**Striving towards monitoring - a factor of success**

None of the three municipalities have reached the fourth step in the implementation process - progress monitoring. This since the municipalities have not been working with Agenda 2030 implementation long enough. However, the interviewees in municipality 1 mean that the local authority wants proof of how the work is going through the whole organization. In municipality 1, the interviewees mean that progress monitoring can assure that the local contributions are actually worked with. One of the interviewees describes the complexity of how to prove in what ways the specific contributions are considered.

Later, these local contributions that we sign, assure, and make sure that we do - yes, later on, we have to prove it! Economical decisions about this will be taken later on. Well, how do we know if you go especially for school and the quality in school? How do we tell if we work especially with making the children in school to eat the school lunch? How do we do that? How does it show? Somewhere we have to prove it. And the only ones that can allocate money in our system are the politicians. The school as an individual can never raise the tax (Municipality 1)!

The three municipalities discuss the national monitoring indicators for Agenda 2030 implementation stated by SKL and agree upon that the indicators can be used for comparison between municipalities even though they might have their own indicators as well. Both interviewees from municipality 1 and 3 are a bit doubtful towards these indicators, mostly because of their aim towards the whole country, not with regard to the local differences. An interviewee from municipality 1 gives an example of when the indicators are not suitable for all kinds of municipalities. If the indicator, for example, should measure how many electric bikes or electric cars there are in the municipality and the municipality has very large geographical distances, then the indicator might be harder to reach than in a municipality with shorter distances.

Even though municipality 1 is not yet working with progress monitoring, they have their own indicators that enable the possibilities for monitoring, which is already done while following both public health and environmental goals. The interviewees also explain how they work with backcasting instead of forecasting within their own developing model treating action, reflection, and learning. Even though they do not express work with monitoring of the Agenda 2030 implementation specifically, they continually reflect upon how their work within different steps of the process. Persson et al (2018) suggest access to open data through a national platform in order to facilitate monitoring. Effective use of follow-up creates evidence for SDG achievement, which in turn creates people engagement (Bernstein, 2018; Zelenev, 2017). This causes a positive loop that encourage awareness-rising and the Agenda 2030 implementation as a whole (Zelenev, 2017; Patel et al 2017). The preconditions for Agenda 2030 localization in Sweden are good (Persson et al, 2018), however, there is a need for harmony between authorities, the SDGs, and the monitoring process. According to Bernstein (2018), the monitoring process is important for authorities and policy writing and this requires good and measurable data.
Concluding discussion

The following discussion ties back to the aim and research questions and reflects on the main findings of the study. The studied municipalities were homogeneous in the sense of them all belonging to the same county, however, they differed in size, the number of inhabitants, and political government. Since the municipalities were de-identified, the reader cannot follow exactly what the results were based on. Many of the prerequisites for Agenda 2030 localization, however, were based on the general concept of Agenda 2030 and the structures of Swedish organization systems which still makes the results relatable to Swedish municipalities in general, and also globally. Connections to previous research beyond the chosen municipalities show the same patterns to a large extent which also proves the reliability of the results.

This study aimed to contribute to a better understanding of Agenda 2030 localization processes through analyzing challenges and opportunities in implementing goals related to ecological sustainability on a local level in three Swedish municipalities. Through the analysis, challenges and opportunities stated by the interviewees were compared in order to find similarities and differences. Comparing challenges and opportunities in the municipalities was complicated in the sense of the three municipalities being at different stages of the implementation process. Yet, comparing actions and initiatives for localization, combined with the various backgrounds and current state is interesting for the aim of the study. Even though the municipalities are on different stages in the process, general similarities were seen within stages already reached by all municipalities. For example, the general view on Agenda 2030 is homogeneous according to the interviewees where they all maintain the complexity of the framework, yet the communicative opportunities. None of the municipalities have been working with Agenda 2030 localization long enough to reach the fourth monitoring step of the implementation process presented by Kanuri et al (2016). This gives the analysis and discussion of the study a more limited approach than initially assumed. The last research question of the study regards the ways of informing the Agenda 2030 localization process. Since the municipalities have not yet completed all four steps of the process, the question is hard to answer regarding the implementation process as a whole. However, general conclusions from the first process steps can be done. By means of previous research and from conclusions drawn on the interviewees’ expectations on the monitoring step, this question is answered.

There is a general consensus around the SDGs being complex (Gustafsson et al, 2018; Sefiani, 2017). However, the opinions between interviewees are a bit divided since the goals are seen as hard to grasp as a whole, but still very visual and educational. The same interviewees maintain both positions, something which indicates an uncertainty on how to see and implement the concept of Agenda 2030. A general reflection from the interviewees is that the goals might seem easy to apply in the beginning because of their appealing visual attributes, but then appear hard to take into action. Whether the global goals are relevant in the Swedish context is a general question from the interviewees. They all maintain that there are struggles regarding how to work with goals that do not seem to fit the problems in the Western world and their own context.

However, there is an opportunity in identifying the own contributions to the goals and through that, examine the goals from the own perspective and the own preconditions (Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018). Not seeing the relevance of the goals can cause disconnection to the concept of the framework as a whole, which in turn is assumed to slow down and complicate the implementation process.

Seeing Agenda 2030 as a unit is challenging, however an interviewee from municipality 3 describes how the goals are dependent on each other. A consensus among the interviewees and
previous research regards focusing on one or a couple of goals at a time. It is yet important not to lose the large context and scope of the agenda. Interviewees from municipality 1 maintain the opportunities for the use of Agenda 2030 as an already existing framework where the preparatory work has already been done. This is nothing that is explicitly stated in literature, yet, there is no reason to since Agenda 2030 actually is a framework that is literally made for implementation. The conclusions of the opportunities with Agenda 2030 as an already completed framework is not discussed in 2 nor 3 which could be because they have not yet discovered the possibilities with the framework – or that this is something that is implicit. However, neither do any interviewees from 2 or 3 discuss how Agenda 2030 yet has contributed to municipality gain. This is assumed to be because municipality 1 has reached further in the localization process as a whole, which in turn can be because of their political engagement in the process.

While implementing Agenda 2030, goal conflicts are inevitable. This is stated as a challenge by both interviewees, previous research on Agenda 2030 implementation and other sustainability initiatives such as Agenda 21 (Bexell & Jönsson, 2016; Gustafsson et al, 2018; Hendriks, 2018). To tackle these, municipality 3 see opportunities in locating and identifying where the conflicts appear and why. Another reflection on how to avoid goal conflicts is to have a clear vision of the own interpretation of the agenda where goals that might collide are not prioritized together. In order to implement the goals, adaptation to the local context is crucial. The study shows that this can be done in various ways and that the studied municipalities are all at different stages in the process. Adapting the goals to the local contexts is shown to be facilitated when the local authorities are engaged in the process – which is the case in municipality 1. Defining the local contexts is considered challenging by both interviewees and previous research (Gustafsson et al, 2018; Kanuri et al, 2016). This since a plan on how, and through what actions, the Agenda 2030 should be implemented in the local set-ups is required. This, in turn, requires decision making and prioritization which is seen as general enablers when they work impeccably, yet complex when not. It can be discussed what brings the courage for decision making in projects as new as Agenda 2030. It is stated that knowledge and reliable data measuring the SDG indicators are required, however this kind of data is hard to reach in the beginning of the process, before evaluation.

However, to conquer these challenges, the SDG targets and indicators through various contexts are important. All interviewees agree upon the opportunity in the own interpretation of the goals instead of trying to implement the goals in their UN stated original form. In the second step of the implementation process, where the local SDG agenda should be set, the SDGs are translated to the local context. It might be important to modify the targets according to the local context. A general conclusion regarding goal achievement is to set local interim targets in order to avoid stagnation in the process in cases where the goal as a whole is too prevailing, which is confirmed by Kanuri et al (2016). While informing the Agenda 2030 localization process local context is central.

The study shows that the possibility for localization depends on the prerequisites of the municipality. There is a consensus regarding a challenge in the basic structure of municipalities, where various activities should be prioritized and regarded. However, this prioritization is also seen as a general challenge. After suggestions from Kanuri et al (2016) the municipalities can facilitate their goal prioritization through development gap analysis – however this requires resources. Both municipality 2 and 3 have restrictions for prioritization of both energy and climate actions, however these restrictions are not based on Agenda 2030.
This study focused on six chosen SDGs treating ecological sustainability. The result showed that the knowledge around the goals differed between both municipalities and interviewees. The interviewees got to rank the ecological goals in terms of prioritization. Municipality 1 and 3 have the same goal; Sustainable cities and communities, as an absolute priority while municipality 2 place Climate action in the top. Whether the prioritizations are presented from the municipality officials’ or the decision makers point of view varies. A difference in assumptions regarding from what viewpoint the prioritizations should be discussed is seen among the interviewees. The viewpoint of 1 was noted to be naturally mutual with the politicians while the viewpoint of 2 and 3 were identified as more separated or ambiguous. It is clear that political anchoring and municipal unity is central for Agenda 2030 localization, however it can be discussed why the situation looks like it does in municipality 1 and 2. A common vision of the localization process is advocated, and the solution could be an increased understanding of the meaning of Agenda 2030 in the whole organization. In order to converge the authority prioritization with the prioritization on other levels increased knowledge and in municipal interplays are suggested.

In the beginning, the section with chosen goals was, by the researcher, assumed to be larger in the analysis. During the focus group interviews it however appeared that the municipalities had not been working with the implementation long enough to have a certain agenda for a certain kind of goals. Within the focus groups, some interviewees seemed to have stronger relations to some goals compared to others which is assumed to be because of various range of knowledge regarding different goals. As stated in the methodology, the municipalities automatically focused more on the implementation process as a whole, instead of specific goals. It is assumed that it would have been easier to draw conclusions from specific sustainability dimensions if the municipalities had come farer in the implementation process.

Previous research raises the opportunity with external resources to enable Agenda 2030 localization (Localizing the SDGs, 2018; Mulholland & Bernardo, 2017). None of the municipalities take advantage of this, however. None of the interviewees explicitly state a lack of resources, however an implicit need can be understood from the interviews. Internal and external knowledge spreading is noted to be suffering since the municipalities lack resources in terms of both personal resources, time, and money. A broader department involvement within the organization could enable more resources, however this needs to be prioritized by the local authority (Hendriks, 2018). For future steps in the localization process, the interviewees are all positive towards external resources. Why the interviewees are uninterested in external resources at the moment could be explained by the general ambiguity and uncertainty in the implementation process as a whole and thereby an insecurity in bigger decisions.

Municipality size is an aspect causing difference of opinion both between literature and interviewees (Gustafsson et al, 2018; Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018). There is no consensus whether larger or smaller municipalities facilitate the localization process. Regarding the municipalities in this study, it is the smaller one that so far has had the most success within implementing the SDGs. It is not possible to conclude that this is specifically due to the municipality size, but the case of municipality 1 goes in line with what the literature says about smaller municipalities in the implementation process; smaller distances between departments facilitates decision making and actions, which is presented as a success factor by the interviewees. Another success factor in municipality 1 is the opportunity with trust and the guidance by reliance. The local authority in municipality 1 has great faith in the interviewees which are also responsible for their local Agenda 2030 implementation. The interviewees maintain that they have had a bit of luck with random incidents and timing throughout the
process. However, the interviewees from 1 are confident in their Agenda 2030 work and maintain their encouragement from the local authorities. Literature frequently pushes for the importance of task forces within Agenda 2030 localization (Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018). Since none of the municipalities have task forces specialized on the area a challenge is seen for the process as a whole. Different departments are responsible in the different municipalities, however none of them work specifically with Agenda 2030. This is assumed to aggravate the process. The interviewees say that the localization should permeate all departments and activities which, of course, is seen as an opportunity. Yet, someone needs to responsibly lead the work forward. Comparing the municipalities according to this, municipality 1 have made the most significant progress. This is assumed to be because of the large political trust.

A general opportunity is seen in common communication actions where Agenda 2030 information and knowledge is spread (Patel et al, 2017; Bernstein, 2018). All interviewees have great faith in the information project Glokala Sverige that they assume will raise the in municipal knowledge around Agenda 2030. Municipality 3 believe that the project will lead up to a special task force responsible for Agenda 2030 localization which will favor the implementation process. The in municipal awareness of Agenda 2030 varies between the municipalities. Municipality 1 has a high municipal awareness; however, the awareness is not especially spread external. 2 and 3 show opposite results. This might be a result of municipality 1 being a smaller one, where internal connections and relationships are stronger while 2 and 3 have more resources to put into external communication and knowledge spreading. However, a responsiveness and interest for Agenda 2030 is seen within all municipalities which is favorable, yet the extent of interest varies between municipalities which is assumed to be based on the general attitude towards Agenda 2030 where the one in municipality 1 is more evolved.

There seems to be no general similar method for decision making among the studied municipalities. In municipality 1, the decisions are done in tight collaboration with the politicians. 2 and 3 have not yet reached this step yet, however they have started the work either on their own or together with the local decision makers. There is a consensus regarding the importance of taking the localization proposal into action. This requires internal collaborations and interactions developing the processes and tools. Political leadership and involvement are seen as general opportunities in Agenda 2030 localization according to both interviewees and previous research (Kanuri et al, 2016). It can thus be argued that a municipality with larger political leadership has better prerequisites for Agenda 2030 implementation. It is stated that politics permeate all implementation steps. However, there is a need for interplays between municipality officials and policy makers which is stated as a key to success in municipality 1. Yet, none of the other municipalities call their collaboration with authority aggravating. It can be assumed that the interactions between politicians and officials will be improved and intensified in 2 and 3 further in the localization process. Not only interplays within the municipality are seen as opportunities for Agenda 2030 implementations, also external interplays. Both the interviewees and previous research see the enabling opportunities in external knowledge exchange caused by interplays and collaborations (Gustafsson et al, 2018; Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018). However, municipality 2 see a challenge in what the formation of the interplays should look like.

The last step of the implementation process, as stated by Kanuri et al (2016) is monitoring. As stated in the beginning of this discussion; none of the municipalities have been implementing Agenda 2030 long enough to reach this step of the process. Interviewees from municipality 1 maintain that they try to evaluate everything they do within the Agenda 2030 localization process, yet they state that this could be improved. All interviewees agree on the possibilities
with follow-up, both for the own development process, but also as support in knowledge spreading (Kanuri et al, 2016; Zelenev, 2017). Monitoring the process and identifying how and where challenges appear will facilitate for the future process and show decision makers where prioritization and resources are needed. National indicators for Agenda 2030 monitoring exist, however there is disagreement between interviewees whether these are useful or not since they, as well as the SDGs, can be hard to implement in the local contexts. A general opportunity is seen when the municipalities can be compared to each other through the same measurements, however the indicators do not regard local contexts and differences. Either way, since none of the municipalities have started their follow-up step properly yet, these reflections are preliminary.

The study shows that municipality 1 has a much more developed Agenda 2030 implementation work, which was assumed from the beginning since the municipality was stated as a good example. The Agenda 2030 approach in 1 is considered holistic where the SDGs are integrated across all administrative levels. It is identified that 2 and 3 also strives towards a holistic Agenda 2030 approach, however their approaches are yet more targeted. Right now, 2 and 3 involve Agenda 2030 through separate actions in specific cases. An aspiration towards a more holistic approach can be seen, however this is restricted by the yet limited progress in the implementation process. It is assumed that 2 and 3 not yet have the possibility to integrate the agenda in the whole organization system.

Whether a holistic or targeted approach is preferable cannot be said (Sánchez Gassen et al, 2018). Through the analysis, it is concluded that there is no one-size-fits-all model for Agenda 2030 localization. To succeed in the implementation process it is important to consider both local prerequisites and prioritizations. The SDGs must be broken down and interpreted to local contexts which requires good governing and resources allocated to the process. Authorities and decision makers are central for the process, but decisions need to be in line with the available space, possibilities, and agenda. This requires a workforce reserved for Agenda 2030 implementation.

Comparing the results from this study with research on Agenda 21 and MDG implementations, as well as previous research within the field of Agenda 2030 adaptation, similar challenges and opportunities are seen. The most frequent challenge is within the local preconditions regarding both organization, capacity, and other local circumstances. This challenge is seen within previous research on both Agenda 21, MDG, in terms of various extent of challenge (Fehling et al, 2013), and SDG, in terms of the indicators that are not adopted to all local circumstances (Gustafsson et al, 2018), as well as in the results of this study. In relation to previous research on SDG localization and the analysis of this study, the same challenges appear within ways of implementing Agenda 2030 in the already existing processes (Emas, 2015; Gustafsson et al, 2018). Also, when trying to implement indicators that aim globally and by that, are not adapted to local contexts. A mutual opportunity is seen in the possibilities of stakeholder inclusion within and without the municipality organization (Fehling et al, 2013; Fidélis & Pires, 2009).

Since Agenda 2030 localization is a relatively new working area, new insights and knowledge will be appearing continuously. Previous research requested research on the localization process and the need still exist. Therefore, future research that investigates the same concepts is advocated.
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Appendix

Interview guide

Warm-up questions
- Describe your professional roles
- For how long have you been working with that?

First impressions of Agenda 2030
"Free" brainstorming around the meaning of Agenda 2030. Paper cards presenting the SDGs are used
- What do you think when you see these goals?
- How do you look at these goals from your professional role?
- How do you work with the goals from your professional role?

The four steps of the implementation process

Introduction
- What actions do you do to raise awareness around the global goals in your municipality?
- What stakeholders are involved in this step of the process?
  - Introduction, knowledge spreading, communication, awareness
- Describe the current Agenda 2030 steering system
- What challenges and opportunities do you see in the first step of the process? What ways do you see to conquer the challenges?

Agenda/ setup
- Describe your local agenda for the global goals
- Describe the decision making around the global goals in your municipality
- Was the public involved in this step, if so, how?
- What challenges and opportunities do you see in the second step of the process? What ways do you see to conquer the challenges?

Planning and implementation
- What departments are involved in the Agenda 2030 implementation in your municipality?
- What do interplays and collaborations look like?
- How do you use resources for Agenda 2030 implementation?
  - Knowledge, money, time, staff
  - Potential for improvement?
- What challenges and opportunities do you see in the third step of the process? What ways do you see to conquer the challenges?

Monitoring
- What does the monitoring step look like in your municipality?
- How do you measure progress and development?
  - Indicators
  - Examine the effectivity in the implementation
- Do you use any special monitoring and evaluation system? If so, what does it look like?
- In what ways is the development of local capacity favored and promoted through Agenda 2030 localization?
- What challenges and opportunities do you see in the fourth step of the process? What ways do you see to conquer the challenges?

**Priorities, opportunities, and challenges**

**Chosen goals 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15**

- Sort the goals according to municipal prioritization
  - From your professional role, which of these do you find the most important?
  - Do you feel that that/those goal/s get enough attention in your municipality?
  - If not, what is missing?

- Sort the goals according to municipal opportunities - what goal/s has the best potential for achievement in your municipality?
  - From your professional role, which of these do you find has the best potential for achievement? Why? Describe potentials

- Sort the goals according to municipal challenges - what goal/s face the most challenges for achievement in your municipality?
  - From your professional role, which of these do you find to face the most challenges for achievement? Why? Where in the implementation process are these challenges seen?