

# Citizen involvement in urban and regional planning processes

Mapping the current situation and assessing future opportunities for Swedish municipalities

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## Abstract

Historically, citizen dialogue primarily took place through face-to-face meetings with a limited representation of the target group. However, societal changes have sparked interest in exploring alternative forms of citizen involvement. This study highlights the presence of barriers to inclusion and transparency in citizen engagement and identifies challenges in ensuring social sustainability within Swedish municipalities' efforts to engage citizens, particularly in the context of detailed planning processes. Overcoming these challenges is crucial for improving the relationship and collaboration among politicians, civil servants, and citizens.

The aim of this study is to investigate how Swedish municipalities can enhance citizen involvement in planning processes, with the goal of reducing appeals, minimizing time consumption, and fostering transparency and understanding. To achieve this aim, the study employed semi-structured interviews, with case selection guided by the growing political pressure on Swedish municipalities to enhance citizen involvement. The study's theoretical framework is built upon an extensive literature review, while empirical evidence is derived from 16 interviews. Through qualitative analysis and discussion, the study explores how local authorities can develop their practices regarding citizen involvement.

The study sheds light on the current practices and working methods employed by the interviewed local authorities, revealing the need to address existing barriers, such as digital exclusion, communication gaps, and empowerment issues. Previous research emphasizes the necessity for innovative and revised approaches to citizen involvement. Increasing the participation of citizens is crucial for ensuring representative democracy and leveraging digitalization can be a means to enhance involvement.

*Main concepts: citizen involvement, citizen dialogue, social sustainability, planning processes, digital involvement*

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Linköping in June 2023

Maria Alsterskär

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## Word list

*DP* – Detail planning.

*DDP* – Digital Data Platforms. Digital platform where, for example, a city administration can collect, share, and use data.

*DPP* – Digital Participatory Platforms. Digital platform for sharing opinions, insights, and knowledge internally and externally.

*Citizens' dialogue* – is used by SKR (The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions) and many Swedish municipalities to describe various forms of contact between regional and municipal politicians and their citizens (see further explanation in Annex 1).

*Citizen involvement* – alternative word to citizen dialogue. Citizen involvement means that the citizen is involved in the process and does not assume that one party has the answer (as the study has shown can be the case in citizen dialogue). It means that it is an issue that concerns everyone (citizens, politicians, service providers and other actors) and that everyone works on it together and is involved in it. (See further explanation in Annex 1).

*PBL* – Planning and Building Act (2010:900). (In Swedish: Plan och Bygglagen).

*SKL* - Swedish Association of Local Authorities and County Council (In Swedish: Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting).

*SKR* – Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. (In Swedish: Sveriges kommuner och Regioner).

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Problem background

Urban planning is a complex process that involves various stakeholders, including citizens (Hasler et al., 2017). The benefits of citizen involvement in urban planning are numerous, including better acceptance of urban planning projects and policies (Evans-Cowley & Hollander, 2010; Simonofski, 2021; Hello Lamp Post, 2022). Citizen involvement refers to the right of individuals to participate in and influence public assessment and decision-making processes, specifically in the planning of their local environment (Cardullo & Kitchin, 2019; Hello Lamp Post, 2022; Simonofski, 2021). However, conventional participatory processes face challenges such as time constraints, limited motivation, lack of representativeness and diversity, limitations on participation, and associated costs (Hasler et al., 2017).

One of the significant benefits of citizen involvement in the planning process is that it can help reduce the number of appeals against detailed plans. When citizens are actively involved and can provide input and influence decisions at an early stage, it can lead to greater satisfaction among the residents and result in better-informed and more robust planning decisions (interview, R12, Oct 22). Moreover, involving citizens in dialogue contributes to increased knowledge and planning information, ensuring that planning proposals are better anchored and aligned with the needs and desires of the community, ultimately facilitating the planning process, and reducing the likelihood of appeals (Abrahamsson, 2018; interview, R11, Oct 22).

The traditional methods of citizen engagement in urban planning often require citizens to read complex documents, which can be time-consuming and frustrating (interview, R12, Oct 22). Consequently, only a few citizens choose to actively participate. However, studies indicate that digital methods of citizen engagement can alleviate these challenges and lead to increased citizen involvement (Wilson et al., 2019). Digital methods encourage citizens to think critically about their local areas, express their preferences, and contribute to creative thinking, thereby empowering citizens and simplifying the engagement processes (Wilson et al., 2019).

By actively involving citizens in the planning process, municipalities can also experience cost savings by reducing the number of appeals against detailed plans. When citizens are given the opportunity to participate and provide input in the early stages of planning, their concerns and preferences can be addressed, resulting in more satisfactory outcomes (interview, R12, Oct 22). This proactive involvement can prevent situations where citizens feel unheard or excluded, leading to legal challenges and appeals against detailed plans. By reducing the need for appeals, municipalities can save resources that would otherwise be spent on legal proceedings and associated costs.

Digitalization as part of urban planning and citizen involvement opens up new opportunities for citizen participation. Through digital tools and platforms, communication and participation can be facilitated, allowing more citizens to have a voice in the planning process. However, unfortunately, many local authorities lack sufficient knowledge and strategies to fully harness the potential of digitalization. Digitalization offers new avenues for citizen involvement in urban planning, but it requires local authorities to have adequate knowledge and strategies to utilize the technology in an inclusive manner. This is something that will be investigated in this report.

In Sweden, there is a growing political pressure for municipalities to involve citizens in planning processes, especially concerning the detailed planning phase (interview, R11, 22 Oct; personal communication Benes, Bäckgren & Levin, 22 May). While there is some dialogue at the early stages, deficiencies in target group representation and commitment have been observed, along with an increasing number of appeals against detailed plans (interview, R11, Oct 22; personal communication Benes, Bäckgren & Levin, May 22). Therefore, it is crucial to analyse the current situation and conduct a needs assessment regarding citizen influence in Swedish municipalities. By questioning and developing working methods and routines to enhance citizen involvement, municipalities can reduce the likelihood of appeals, foster greater satisfaction among residents, and achieve cost savings.

## 1.2 Aim & research questions

The aim of the study is to investigate how Swedish municipalities can improve the involvement of citizens in planning processes to reduce appeals and time consumption and to create more transparency and understanding. This leads to the following research questions:

1. How do Swedish municipalities work with citizen involvement today and what challenges and needs emerge?
2. What could be areas of development in the future and how could digital platforms and tools help to overcome challenges that exist today?

Based on the purpose and research questions, a structure for the study has been established, which is presented under the next heading.

## 2. Method

The following chapter describes the approach of the study. Its relevance to the research questions and the implications of the process are discussed to ensure transparency and validity. The study adopts an abductive approach and is based on a literature review and a case study with semi-structured interviews conducted in person and over Microsoft Teams.

### 2.1 Unit of analysis

According to Lewis, Saunders & Thorn (2015), qualitative studies are well suited for exploratory studies, where expertise in a particular topic is a good source of data collection. Dubois & Gadde (2002) raise the problem of the choice of theoretical framework and Yin (2013) the possible subjective influence of the researcher. These pitfalls can be overcome with the use of an abductive approach as data collection, theory and analysis often occur simultaneously and are refined during the process (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2008).

The core of the study is citizen involvement in planning processes with a focus on the detailed planning process and digitalisation. Citizen involvement as an area is of interest because it is an area that is highly debated, but also an area of innovation and development right now (interview, R12, Oct 22). In Sweden, the PBL's writings published in 1987 have been a strong contributing factor to the increased interest in the area (Abrahamsson, 2018). There is now political pressure on Swedish municipalities to work more with citizen dialogue and citizen involvement in various forms as part of the socially sustainable work municipalities develop (Abrahamsson, 2008).

According to the Swedish Constitution (1974 § 2), "the public shall promote sustainable development leading to a good environment for present and future generations". The PBL's portal paragraph similarly states the importance of: "Promote the development of a society with equal and good social living conditions and a good and long-term sustainable living environment for the people in today's society and for future generations". Social sustainability is often seen as "a way to integrate and include all groups in society".

Work on developing specific social sustainability plans is ongoing in most municipalities, including the inclusion of social sustainability issues in master plans (interview, R12, Oct 22). However, there is a lack of work on social sustainability around the detailed planning process (interview, R10, Oct 22). Increasing safety and trust can mainly be achieved from below by enabling people to feel seen as well as being involved in society (Stigendal, 2016). Research shows that neighbourhoods where citizens demonstrate a high level of community engagement also experience increased social trust (Abrahamsson, 2018).

Interest in citizen dialogue has grown in Sweden in recent years; 83 per cent of Swedish municipalities conducted dialogue processes in 2015 (Wiberg, 2016), and the concept is visible in more and more types of processes - processes where citizen dialogue was previously absent. Citizen dialogue and dialogue with developers and local stakeholders is becoming increasingly relevant in planning processes (Abrahamsson, 2013). In both urban planning and research, there is a perceived increased need in the sector to drive the development towards more and more forms of citizen involvement (Abrahamsson, 2018). Involving planning is crucial for developing sustainable cities as it then ensures planning that is based on residents' practices and needs (Hasler et al., 2017).

## 2.2 Research design

Through the choice of case study and literature review, the study is limited to how some municipalities work and could work with citizen participation. This limits the generalizability of the study but may provide guidance to other municipalities for and inspiration for further research on the topic.

When choosing a research strategy, there are two approaches: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research focuses on numerical values, while qualitative research emphasizes words and meaning (Bryan & Bell, 2013). A flexible qualitative approach encourages questioning and the potential for new findings (Robson, 2011), but there is a risk of overlooking different interpretations (Robson, 2011).

This study used a qualitative method with an abductive approach, where the theory was revised throughout the research process. The abductive approach reduces the risk of missing different interpretations by moving between theory, empiricism, and analysis (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008; Yin, 2013), enhancing credibility. The empirical data was gathered from officials, elected representatives, and experts in various Swedish municipalities such as Örebro, Linköping, Helsingborg, Uppsala, Malmö, and Gothenburg. During an exploratory interview, it was revealed that these municipalities are particularly recognized for their innovative approaches in prioritizing diverse forms of engagement and implementing digital dialogue to achieve long-term benefits. The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKR) and experts provided a broader understanding of Swedish municipalities irrespective of size and financial resources. The collection of empirical data and the design of the theoretical framework alternated to align theory with respondents' perceptions and experiences.

Epistemology, the study of knowledge and its emergence, is essential in research (Bryman & Bell, 2013; Gialdion, 2009). This study adopts an interpretive perspective, enabling the examination of social phenomena, including social and cultural factors (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Recognizing that reality is discursive and ever-changing, researchers interpret the context in different ways. The study takes a realistic ontological position, acknowledging the distinction between the real world and the specific problem area under investigation (Riege, 2003). Applying a realist approach, the study aims to understand the current reality, reflecting relationships and networks within the case study, and exploring experiences rather than confirming predetermined hypotheses (Riege, 2003). The study presents classical theories of citizen involvement within representative democratic systems, along with social sustainability theory that emphasizes equality, participation, trust, and value creation for citizens in various forms. Additionally, digital inclusion and engagement theory are discussed. The authors consider these theories complementary and compatible in the studied context.

The research aims to explore the utilization of digital platforms and tools in participatory processes for generating and exchanging data to inform future planning. To analyze current practices in Swedish municipalities, the study will conduct interviews with relevant individuals and examine documents related to citizen dialogue. Previous work done by municipalities will be discussed, referring to Hans Abrahamson's (2018) co-creative dialogue illustration and other relevant theories. A review of different methods, informed by interviews and document analysis, will be conducted to understand how digital tools can facilitate citizen engagement in planning processes. This includes examining web-based platforms and technology-based devices for data

collection. Selection of digital platforms and tools will be based on literature examples, Google searches, web portals, and insights from semi-structured interviews with experts and practitioners in participatory urban planning.

While the study's focus on specific case studies and literature review limits generalizability to certain municipalities' approaches to citizen participation, it can provide guidance and inspiration to other municipalities and serve as a foundation for further research on the topic.

## 2.3 Literature review

The literature review plays a crucial role in this thesis by providing an in-depth understanding of the chosen topic (Bryan & Bell, 2013). It enables the researcher to identify key concepts, trends, and unexplored areas within the field (Robson, 2011). Moreover, the literature review generates knowledge and empirical material that is utilized throughout the study.

Based on scientific articles and relevant sources, the framework of the study is designed, encompassing citizen engagement, social sustainability, and digital platforms for citizen participation. The search for literature was conducted using UniSearch, Google Scholar, and Web of Science databases, employing search terms like "citizen participation," "social sustainability," "digital participation platforms," "communication," "metaverse," "digital tools," and "ArcGIS." All articles utilized in the study are properly cited and peer-reviewed, ensuring the credibility of the theoretical framework.

Based on the existing literature, a comprehensive review has been conducted focusing on several areas presented in chapter 3. Firstly, an analysis was carried out on the Swedish planning process and its primary documented sources, such as reports and similar documents. Secondly, an overview of research literature on (digital) participation in planning was conducted. Additionally, a review of literature emphasizing the importance of participation was included, with a focus on social sustainability, exclusion, and related subjects. Furthermore, an overview of various digital tools and relevant literature in the field was undertaken.

As a result of this review, a theoretical framework has been formulated, emphasizing dialogue theories, which have served as the foundation for the study.

## 2.4 Data collection

Data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews. Semi structured interviews are based on the interviewer addressing certain predetermined themes, based on an interview template, but leaving room for the interviewee to shape the answers in their own way (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Interviews have great potential to highlight important details, ideas, and explanations of problems (Yin, 2013). At the same time, it places great demands on the interviewer to ensure the validity of the results (Bryman & Bell, 2013).

*Tabell 1. Case study interviews.*

Respondent	Municipality/org/titel	Position	Type	Validation	Date
1 (R1)	Linköping municipality	Master planner	Digital meeting	Transcription	220921
2 (R2)	Örebro municipality	Plan architect	Personal meeting	Transcription	220922
3 (R3)	Örebro municipality	Plan architect	Personal meeting	Transcription	220922
4 (R4)	Örebro municipality	Elected official	Personal meeting	Transcription	220922
5 (R5)	Örebro municipality	Elected official	Personal meeting	Transcription	220923
6 (R6)	Helsingborg municipality	Communication strategist	Digital meeting	Transcription	220927
7 (R7)	Uppsala municipality	Plan architect	Digital meeting	Transcription	220927
8 (R8)	Helsingborg municipality	Project manager	Digital meeting	Transcription	220928
9 (R9)	Malmö municipality	Architect	Digital meeting	Transcription	221003
10 (R10)	Malmö municipality	Strategist	Digital meeting	Transcription	221003
11 (R11)	Malmö municipality	Architect, planner, process manager, researcher/consultant	Digital meeting	Transcription	221004
12 (R12)	SKR	Project manager	Digital meeting	Transcription	221004
13 (R13)	City of Gothenburg	Head of department	Digital meeting	Transcription	221005
14 (R14)	Kramfors municipality	Development officer	Digital meeting	Transcription	221006
15 (R15)	Linköping municipality	Planning architect	Digital meeting	Transcription	221007
16 (R16)	City of Gothenburg	Project leader	Digital meeting	Transcription	221110

*Source: own processing.*

Table 1 provides an overview of the interviews, when they were conducted, how they were conducted, and how quality was ensured. All interviews were recorded and transcribed so as not to miss essential details and have been anonymized by replacing names with "Respondent X" (abbreviated RX). Empirical data are validated through transcription and were sent for respondent validation to the respective person for approval.

## 2.5 Quality assurance

According to Bryman & Bell (2013), it is important to ensure the quality of the data collected to establish legitimacy and credibility. This can be done by examining the validity and reliability of the study. Several researchers have defined these concepts. Flyvberg (2006) argues that the value of case studies has been criticised and highlights five misconceptions about case study research in his article. Generalizability, theoretical knowledge versus practical knowledge and the verifiability of the case study are some examples of what case studies are criticised for (Bryman & Bell, 2013; Riege, 2003). Measuring validity and reliability is therefore of utmost importance to ensure the quality of the study. Riege (2003) has contributed a tool that can be used in all phases of case study case study research to ensure validity and reliability (see Appendix 3).

To ensure validity and reliability in this study, multiple sources were used, and different perspectives were considered. All interviews were transcribed and sent to the respondent for validation. To ensure internal validity, all respondents' questions were based on the same framework and illustrations and models were created to facilitate reading. The scope and boundaries are clearly conveyed in the research design, and the abductive approach with clear links to both empirical and theoretical data can allow for generalisation in the analysis. This ensures external validity. Reliability is ensured through a range of tools such as clear linkage between empirical and theoretical data, documentation, case study protocols, application of the same framework to all data and use of peer review literature. By using these techniques, Riege (2003) argues that the study is of good quality.

## 2.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are an important part of any phase of research (Bryman & Bell, 2013). In this study, two ethical considerations will be made: in the collection of data and in the analysis of data. Firstly, to ensure that ethical principles are adhered to when collecting data, all respondents must agree to be interviewed and recorded and be informed of the purpose of the study, which Bryman & Bell (2013) highlights as important aspects to ensure an ethical procedure. Secondly, after the interview, all respondents should be given access to the transcription and the opportunity to change wording.

In addition, all data, audio files and transcripts will be stored on OneDrive, an online service to which only the author has login and access. Finally, the data will only be used for this study.

## 2.7 Data analysis

When analysing data, a qualitative study differs from a quantitative study as the analysis is based on words and not numbers (Bryman & Bell, 2013). This means that the researcher interprets the respondents' answers, narrative, and interpretations (Bryman & Bell, 2013). The interview questions in this study were designed using the theoretical framework and the research questions of the study (Table 2).

**Tabel 2: Summary of theoretical framework (Abrahamsson) and literature (digital platforms and tools) linked to research questions.**

Theory & literature	Research question 1	Research question 2
	How do Swedish municipalities work with citizen involvement today and what challenges and needs emerge?	What could be areas of development in the future and how could digital platforms and tools help to overcome challenges that exist today?
Hans Abrahamsson – co-creation citizen dialogue	X	X
Digital platforms and tools	X	X

*Source: own processing.*

Table 2 gives a summary of theoretical framework (Abrahamsson) and literature (digital platforms and tools) linked to the research questions. The study used narrative analysis to analyse the data. A narrative analysis is an approach to producing and analysing data based on



respondents' own narratives of how they perceive their context (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Tables were used to organise and categorise the data.

## 2.8 Delimitation

The focus of the study is on how Swedish municipalities can develop their way of working with citizen involvement. The theory and empirical evidence highlight the challenges that Swedish municipalities face when working with citizen dialogue and involvement. Furthermore, limitations have been made to focus on challenges related to the detailed planning process and social sustainability. Studying how influence can be developed in the detailed planning process is interesting as most of the interviewees have expressed a difficulty and at the same time a willingness to work with more citizen involvement in that process.

Through a selection of municipalities and a literature review, the study is limited to highlighting how some municipalities work with citizen involvement today and how they can work with it in the future, which constitutes a certain limitation of the study's generalizability but can lead to guidance for further research on the topic. Technical solutions for digital platforms are left out of the study. The study's conclusions are based on 16 interviews from a few selected municipalities and theory.

## 3. Theory and background

In the following chapter, the background literature is presented as the study's comprehensive literature review, complemented by the introduction of the theoretical framework. The literature review delves into the planning systems within the context of Sweden, providing readers with a fundamental understanding of the prevailing planning landscape. Furthermore, it encompasses literature exploring the significance of citizen engagement, including aspects of social sustainability, inclusion/exclusion, and a collaborative model. A separate section is dedicated to digital opportunities, featuring an extensive review of the potential impacts of digitalization on citizen participation within municipalities.

To provide a historical context for the field of dialogue, a distinct theoretical background is included, showcasing various dialogue theories. Notably, Abrahamsson's dialogue theory is later utilized to analyse the empirical material of the study.

### 3.1 The Swedish planning processes

As this study focuses on citizen involvement in a Swedish context, national regulations and laws are fundamental to how urban development should take place. Below is an overview of the current structure of Swedish planning legislation.

#### 3.1.1 Comprehensive plan

Chapter 3 of the Planning and Building Act (PBL) states that every municipality must have an up-to-date outline plan and that the municipality must set out the direction for the long-term development of the physical environment in this plan. In addition, the master plan must provide guidance for decisions on how land and water areas are to be used, and how the built environment is to be used, developed, and preserved. The plan is adopted by the City Council and must be regularly updated by the Planning Department - it must be up to date. When new planning projects are initiated in the municipality, the master plan should be used as a tool for decision-makers, setting out the basic principles of how the municipality's future land use will be developed and designed, how the municipality intends to meet its long-term housing needs, and how the municipality intends to take into account and coordinate the master plan with national and regional objectives, plans and programmes for the importance of sustainable development in the municipality in its physical planning.

#### 3.1.2 Detail plan

The detail plan differs from the master plan in that it is binding, both for the public towards landowners, but also between landowners. As an instrument, the detail plan can be said to have two main purposes, firstly to regulate changes in land use and development, and secondly to regulate more permanently the preservation or renewal of buildings and built environments. In both cases, the aim is to specify rights and obligations for each property to achieve a good overall environmental impact and appropriate social development (see Walin & Vängby, Plan- och bygglagen (20 Dec. 2022, Version 11, JUNO), commentary on Chapter 4).

The provisions of the Land Code state, among other things, that the detail plan regulates how land and water areas may be used in each area. The planning process therefore evaluates the design and use of the detail plan, which is done by checking that the provisions are consistent

with those of the Planning and Building Act (Boverket, 2022c; PBL, 2010). The responsibility for the planning processes lies with the municipality itself, as PBL Chapter 1 Section 2 states that "it is a municipal matter to plan the use of land and water" - the municipal planning monopoly. In a detailed plan, the municipality may also determine, among other things, how public places that have private ownership are to be used and designed (Act 2014:900).

The detailed planning process is divided into three separate planning procedures. Limited procedure, standard procedure, and extended procedure (Boverket, 2022a; Boverket 2022b). The procedure is determined by the complexity of the plan, which is determined by three aspects:

- Is the plan consistent with the master plan?
- Is the plan considered to have a significant environmental impact?
- Is the plan of significant public interest?

If the answer to any of these questions is no, the planning procedure should be extended in accordance with PBL Chapter 5. The restricted planning procedure is a simplified way of implementing the standardised planning procedure. Minor measures can be approved already at the consultation stage, which then leads to direct adoption (Boverket, 2022). The difference between the procedures is that the extended planning procedure includes more steps to consider during the planning process (Boverket, 2022b). See Figure 1 below for the full planning process for the standard planning procedure and the extended planning procedure.

**Figure 1. The process for standard and extended procedures.**

Consultation, standard procedure.



Consultation, extended procedure.



*Source: own processing with inspiration from Boverket (2022).*

When a proposal for a detail plan is prepared, the municipality must consult with, among others, the land registry, known property owners, the county administrative board and residents affected, which must be done both for a new detail plan and for the amendment or cancellation of an existing detail plan (Boverket, 2022). The aim of the process is to improve the basis for decision-making by gathering knowledge about the detail plan area in question and to provide an opportunity for interested parties to submit comments and gain insight. Another purpose or benefit of including affected stakeholders early in the process may be to reduce appeals. Therefore, it is important to start the consultation before the proposal has taken the right shape (Boverket, 2022).

By law, there are requirements on who should participate in the consultation (or rather who should be invited), but not how it should be carried out (Boverket, 2022). Therefore, there is scope for how the consultation is to be carried out - which can be a meeting on the relevant site,

a mailing, a referral, or public meetings (digital or analogue) (Boverket, 2022). When the draft plan affects a larger group, the municipality can organise a public meeting to receive comments and questions from the public. The municipality may adapt the scope of the consultation to the complexity of the planning task in the individual case (Boverket, 2022). This may mean that several meetings need to be held or that the consultation may need to be extended or rescheduled to meet the purpose of the consultation (Boverket, 2022). Comments should be handled and considered regardless of the form in which they are received. This may include, for example, service notes from telephone calls, emails, and documentation from consultation meetings (Boverket, 2022). Depending on the type of area to which the draft detail plan relates, it is important to hold the consultation at times when as many people as possible can participate (Boverket, 2022).

### 3.1.3 Regulation on digital plan documents

At the turn of the year 20/21, there was a change in the legislation on how detailed plans should be handled and stored. Boverket (2021a) was authorised to write regulations on new detailed plans and plan descriptions, which must include a uniform structure, which means that detailed plan information must also be made available digitally (but not for older detailed plans where work began before 31 December 2021). Boverket (2021a) describes that with these measures, efficient and innovative services can be created and become accessible to all (Boverket, 2021a). The new regulation in PBL (2011:338) states that all new detailed plans that are produced must be available digitally. The aim of a digital planning process is to streamline processing in municipalities and enable better e-services that better meet the needs of citizens (Boverket, 2023). The digital information also creates opportunities for national purposes and commercial services such as analysis of building rights and statistics on land use. Digital detailed plan information is one of the prerequisites for an uninterrupted digital urban planning process (Boverket, 2022d; Boverket, 2023). Some municipalities are also working with digital master plans to, among other things, improve citizen dialogue and enable the exchange of experience between municipalities (Boverket, 2021b). In the autumn of 2022, work began on developing a technical service that municipalities and other stakeholders can use to build a digital master plan. It will be like a planning regulations catalogue that currently exists for detailed plans.

## 3.2 Digitalisation, participation, and inclusive urban planning

Cardullo and Kitchin's article, "Being a 'citizen' in the smart city: up and down the scaffold of smart citizen participation in Dublin, Ireland," critically examines the impact of smart city initiatives on citizens and challenges the notion of being "citizen-centric." Drawing on Sherry Arnstein's framework of citizen participation, the authors introduce the "Scaffold of Smart Citizen Participation" as a conceptual tool to assess the inclusiveness, engagement, and empowerment of citizens within smart city projects in Dublin, Ireland. The study reveals that many so-called "citizen-centric" initiatives in smart cities are grounded in stewardship, civic paternalism, and a neoliberal understanding of citizenship that prioritizes individual autonomy and market-driven solutions over civil, social, and political rights and the collective well-being. The authors argue that substantial normative work is required to redefine the notions of "smart citizens" and "smart citizenship" and to transform smart cities into genuinely citizen-centric environments.

The concept of smart cities has garnered attention, but Bouzguenda et al. (2019) argue for a

broader perspective emphasizing social sustainability. Their article, "Towards smart sustainable cities: A review of the role digital citizen participation could play in advancing social sustainability," explores the potential of digital citizen participation and its relationship with Information and Communications Technology (ICT). Through extensive review, they highlight citizen participation as crucial for social sustainability in smart cities. ICT enables engagement, collaboration, and problem-solving, contributing to inclusive and responsive urban environments. The findings underscore the significance of ICT in promoting social sustainability and inclusivity (Bouzguenda et al., 2019).

Inclusive cities necessitate engaging planning processes to foster citizen participation in urban design (De Siqueira, Malaj, & Hamdani, 2022). The COVID-19 crisis accentuates the importance of digitalization in co-designing workshops due to face-to-face limitations. The article "Digitalization, Participation and Interaction: Towards More Inclusive Tools in Urban Design—A Literature Review" examines the impact of digital technologies on participatory approaches (De Siqueira et al., 2022), their evolution since the 1990s and the correlation between participation levels and interaction in urban design workshops (De Siqueira et al., 2022). While new methodologies and tools digitize co-designing, there is a dearth of evidence on integrating digitalization, participation, and interaction (De Siqueira et al., 2022). Advanced tools addressing social barriers are imperative for inclusive and sustainable urban development (De Siqueira et al., 2022). Coordinated interdisciplinary efforts are lacking, with a focus on either interactive experiences or neglecting advanced user interaction (De Siqueira et al., 2022). Further exploration is needed to understand the association between digitalization and urban design comprehensively (De Siqueira et al., 2022). Urgently needed is a comprehensive research agenda, with practical and theoretical mechanisms, to overcome the digital divide. Blockchain technology holds promise for enhancing accessibility, traceability, and safety in digital workshops (De Siqueira et al., 2022).

In the Swedish context, there has been a growing acknowledgment of the significance of citizen participation in urban planning, particularly in terms of shaping cities and strengthening democratic trust. With the ongoing digitalization efforts in Sweden, the traditional approach of conducting face-to-face meetings between planners and citizens is undergoing a transformation. A study by Sinclair (2021) focuses on the implementation of digitalization in Skellefteå and Sorsele municipalities, aiming to explore the challenges they encounter. The findings underscore the potential of digital tools to facilitate citizen engagement, transcend geographical constraints, and foster inclusive decision-making. However, Sinclair (2021) writes that it is crucial to address issues concerning internet accessibility, digital literacy, and resource allocation to ensure equitable participation and prevent the emergence of a digital divide.

Until now, there has been limited research on the digital utilization for citizen involvement in planning processes within the context of Swedish municipalities. Although there have been studies conducted in selected municipalities, a comprehensive understanding of the broader picture in Swedish municipalities is lacking. Therefore, this thesis aims to contribute to filling this gap in the literature. This thesis seeks to bridge the existing gap in Sweden's development concerning the utilization of digital methods to engage citizens in urban planning. The exploration of this gap will be facilitated through the application of Abrahamsson's theoretical framework. This framework will offer valuable insights into the combination of digi-physical dialogue methods and literature on digital methods, thereby paving the way for Swedish municipalities to enhance citizen dialogue and engagement in planning processes.

## 3.3 The need for participation in planning

### 3.3.1 Social sustainability

Social sustainability in urban development and spatial planning involves promoting accessibility, connectivity, and distance in time and space (Legeby et al., 2015). By analysing different spaces in cities, relationships between various resources can be identified, including citizens, recreation, workplaces, and services. Barron & Gauntlett (2002) suggest that social sustainability occurs when formal and informal systems actively support the ability of current and future communities to create healthy and viable communities, characterised by equity, diversity, interconnectedness, democracy, and a good quality of life.

Boverket (2010) and the Swedish Association of Architects (2008) stress the importance of creating environments that cater to individual needs, where people can thrive. They argue that cities should be coherent, accessible to all, and mixed in functions such as housing, jobs, business, and culture (Ullstad, 2008, p. 32).

At the local level in Sweden, sustainability and public health commissions have been established for many years, following the World Health Organization's 2008 report aimed at creating a more equal society and strengthening social sustainability. Several municipalities have started to develop specific social sustainability plans and/or include social sustainability in their master plans. Swedish legislation, including the Constitution, PBL, Environmental Code, Education Act, Discrimination Act, Health Care Act, and others, provides an opportunity to integrate issues of social sustainability and equality.

Abrahamsson (2018) further argues that a complex issue in socially sustainable urban development is to take measures that enhance integration. The ongoing cohesion transformation of our time, with the local increasingly intertwined with the global, has come to reinforce the importance of intercultural interaction. This builds on the concept of integration, which refers to people's identity as socially constructed, not essentially biologically determined (Abrahamsson, 2018). He further argues that democratic value and legitimacy are strengthened when spatial planning and urban development is anchored in different groups in society and the groups affected.

### 3.3.2 Inclusion/exclusion

Municipalities are increasingly involving citizens in urban planning, but opinions on the value of participation are divided (Abrahamsson, 2018; Stenberg et al., 2013). Challenges arise around equal dialogues and representation of marginalised groups (Abrahamsson, 2018). Although Swedish citizens have the legal right to transparency and participation in planning processes, there is no obligation to listen to protests or dialogues, resulting in weak representation and dissatisfaction (Brynhildsen, 2019; Abrahamsson, 2018). Citizen-driven initiatives can strengthen legitimacy and reduce exclusion (Abrahamsson, 2018), and SKR offers training courses and network cooperation to improve citizen participation (Abrahamsson, 2018).

Housing segregation presents complex challenges that require promoting inclusion and social cohesion to maintain social sustainability (Abrahamsson, 2018). SKR encourages municipalities to broaden the concept of dialogue and develop more forms of dialogue to counteract political exclusion and include resource-poor groups (Abrahamsson, 2018). However, digitalization poses a risk of excluding certain demographic groups, resulting in a new digital divide (Kolotouchkina et al., 2022; Unwin & Bastion, 2009). SKR emphasises the importance of including resource-

poor groups through both physical and digital methods to promote everyone's right to participation and influence (Przeybilovicz et al., 2022; Roga, 2021; Abrahamsson, 2018). Although digital participation may not create the same level of involvement as traditional methods, it can be an important tool for promoting citizen participation and improving social sustainability (Stern et al., 2009; Brandtzaeg et al., 2011).

### 3.3.3 Increased efficiency and equality

Fischer (2012) discusses the importance of promoting citizen involvement in decision-making processes, highlighting its potential benefits in terms of efficiency and equity. However, it is crucial to consider the cultural and contextual differences between countries. In the planning context, there is often a conflict between the desire for increased participation and the need for quick processes to minimize costs. One challenge is ensuring equal representation and avoiding biased opinions, as certain groups may be given more space for participation than others. Fischer (2016) notes that individuals from the middle class, with higher socioeconomic status and education, tend to be more engaged in political discussions, while reaching marginalized and socioeconomically vulnerable groups can be more difficult.

Despite educational disparities, studies have shown that socioeconomically disadvantaged groups can contribute valuable expertise to participatory processes (Fischer, 2016). When citizens feel involved in public decision-making, it can contribute to their personal development, and their local knowledge becomes valuable to officials and politicians. However, Fischer (2016) emphasizes that while there are benefits to participatory governance, there are also inherent risks. She proposes an alliance between experts and citizens in a co-creative process, emphasizing the need for urban planners to be trained and educated in promoting citizen participation and recognizing its purpose and benefits.

## 3.4 Dialogue theories

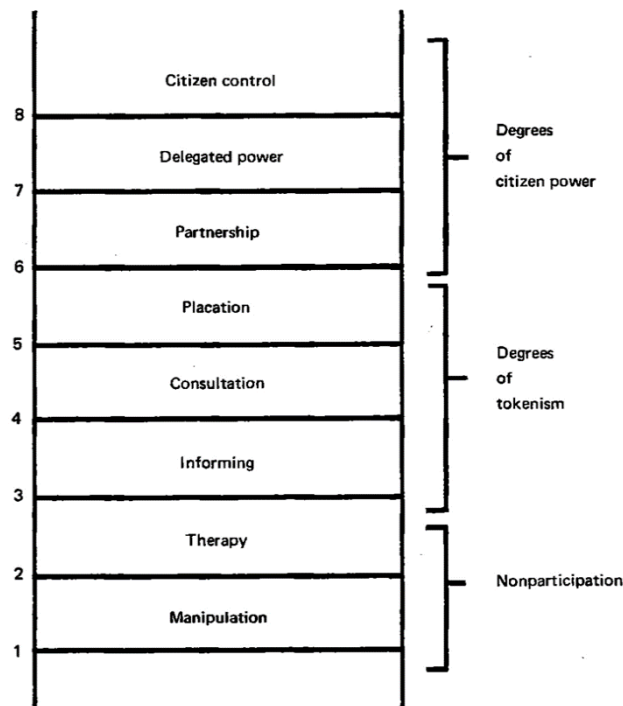
### 3.4.1 Ladder of participation

Citizen participation in urban planning in scientific discussion dates to 1969 when Sherry Arnstein published the well-known article "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" in the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* (Arnstein, 1969). Arnstein developed a ladder of participation with different levels based on three specific case studies (see Figure 2). She sees the bottom two rungs as attempt at manipulation (possibly with some therapeutic elements to deal with people's frustration) (Abrahamsson, 2018). She described the other three steppingstones as more symbolic participation (tokenism) to increase the legitimacy of decisions by informing or consulting the population on a particular issue - or to simply try to calm upset feelings and passive participants (Abrahamsson, 2018). The model explains basic theories of public engagement and participation and describes how public institutions and officials in power deny citizens power and how citizens' influence, control and power can be increased (Abrahamsson, 2018). The model represents one of the most referenced and influential models in the field of democratic public participation and is important to understand as it has influenced many subsequent models.

Arnstein's analysis contained a central argument that is as relevant today as it was in 1969: citizen participation in democratic processes requires a redistribution of power, if it is to be considered 'participation' in any genuine or practical sense (Abrahamsson, 2018). The author argues that without a redistribution of power - for example, in the form of money or decision-

making powers - participation only means that those in power can claim that all sides have been considered, but that only some of those sides can benefit (Abrahamsson, 2018). It maintains the status quo. It is a redistribution of power that enables citizens who are currently excluded from the political and economic processes to be consciously included in the urban planning of the future. Arnstein (1969) argues that it is only when one reaches the third level of partnership, delegated power, and citizen control that one can speak of true civic participation (Arnstein, 1969).

**Figure 2. Ladder of participation.**



*Source: Arnstein (1969).*

### 3.4.2 The SKR dialogue ladder

In the Swedish context, Arnstein's model has influenced Swedish municipalities' work with citizen dialogue, and SKR has used the steps to develop their own dialogue ladder (see Figure 3). The different forms of dialogue used by SKR all have an important function. SKR's model consists of the following steps:



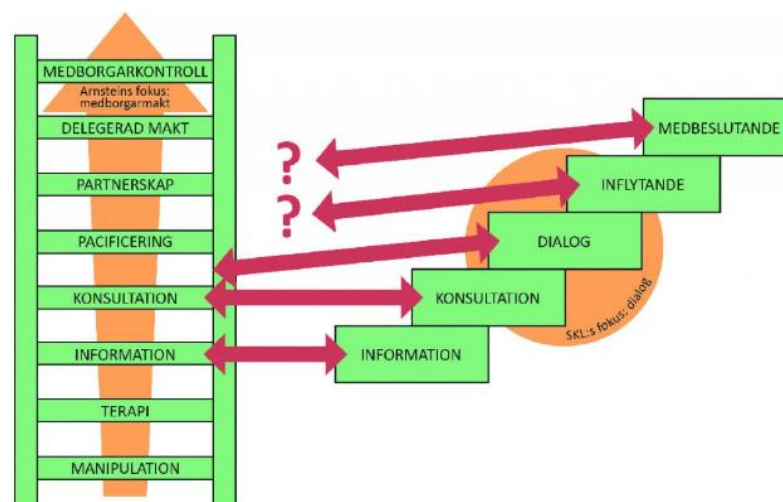
**Figure 3. SKR's dialogue staircase.**



*Source: SKL (2011)*

- information - an important step in preventing problematic rumour spreading
- consultation - to get the perspective of the people concerned on how to deal with the issue, the decision-makers have already identified the options
- dialogue - citizens should be given the opportunity to have their say and listen to others in open formats, their views should be considered in the decision-making process, but they have no direct influence on the decisions themselves
- influence - involving citizens over a longer period and following a planning process from idea to finished proposal
- co-decision - citizens outside the party system may be members of boards or councils that have been mandated to make decisions on certain issues, such as a school or other municipal activities

**Figure 4. A summary comparison between Arnstein's participation ladder and the SKR participation ladder.**



*Source: Mellanplats (2013)*

Arnstein's ladder and SKR's dialogue ladder have some similarities but also some differences. Abrahamsson (2018) highlights that Arnstein's ladder is a researcher's analytical tool while SKR's ladder aims to help officials and politicians design their methods (Abrahamsson, 2018). Another clear difference Abrahamsson (2018) draws between the models is that SKR's model is meant to describe the different five steps as equivalent strategies to choose from, while in Arnstein's model one moves "up" the ladder and thus reaches a higher level (see Figure 4).

Criticisms of the dialogue ladder include that if citizens lack direct influence over the decisions taken, dialogue can be used as a game for show (Thörn, 2012; De Bourg & Larsson, 2012). Critics also argue that the influence step should be questioned as it depends entirely on the attitude of decision-makers whether the wishes of citizens are considered when decisions are made.

### 3.4.3 Co-creative citizen dialogue by Abrahamsson

Hans Abrahamsson, Associate Professor of Peace, and Development Studies at the University of Gothenburg has discussed and further developed SKR's dialogue staircase (Abrahamsson, 2018). The basis for this is that the research literature in recent years has pointed to a need for a democratic reinforcement and updated format of citizen participation. The core of democracy is political engagement which is basically about why things should be done and what should be done (Lindholm et al., 2015; Olofsson, 2015; Stenberg et al., 2013). In many electoral districts there is low participation which is a cause for concern and fewer and fewer people are involved in party politics, especially among low-resource groups, people born abroad and the young (Abrahamsson, 2018). According to scientific research, there are two main reasons why young people's involvement decreases with age (Abrahamsson, 2018). Firstly, individualisation and the fact that they believe more in their own individual abilities or, together with other citizens, come up with their own solutions to problems, and secondly, the convenience factor that young adults are too well off materially to get actively involved. As a result of this situation, the representative democratic system has been thinned out as citizens' different perspectives on different issues have been greatly reduced (Abrahamsson, 2018). According to research, citizens need to have a sense of participation and feel that there are conditions for social sustainability (Abrahamsson, 2018). However, studies conducted by SKR show that people in society would like to be involved and feel part of urban and community development, what emerged, however, is that it should then be about concrete issues and functions that affect one's everyday life (Abrahamsson, 2018).

Abrahamsson (2018) further argues that co-creation with citizens should be strengthened for the following reasons:

- for the social polarisation and conflicts of values that follow in the wake of social transformation, when the local is increasingly intertwined with the global
- the importance of political participation in defining the content of the concept of social sustainability,
- the changing political landscape where more and more of the political energy of citizens is channelled outside the party-political system
- for the formulation and management of complex social issues
- for the drivers of social change

Hans Abrahamsson's development of the staircase aims to be more about replacing the interpretative prerogative of decision-makers with greater influence and co-creation with the population concerned. According to Abrahamsson (2018), discussion leaders need to strive actively and sensitively to equalise the hidden power orders that exist between the participants. He further argues that increased civic participation strengthens political legitimacy and the political representative system. In his model (Figure 5), Abrahamsson attempts to explain how the research literature views the role that citizen dialogue can play in creating more co-determination.

The declining interest in political parties and low voter turnout has resulted in a political need to increase people's trust in the political system (Abrahamsson, 2018). Many municipalities have therefore begun work on citizen dialogue projects and developed principles for when dialogue should be conducted and how. Often, this involves authorities wanting to inform citizens about decisions that have been made, or consult, which then means that, for example, municipal administrations prepare a decision to ask citizens for advice.

Abrahamsson (2018) argues that it is important that the design and implementation of dialogue is constantly evolving in line with the evaluations of previous dialogues. Something that the author believes that many municipalities miss is that the principles of citizen dialogue rarely include the value of qualitative content for social cohesion. Nor is it common to recognise the importance of creating a culture of dialogue and a systematic approach. Therefore, Abrahamsson (2018) argues that many times it is simply a matter of officials and politicians informing about something or obtaining views on what has already happened or what is already planned for. According to Abrahamsson (2018), it should instead be about an issue that can be influenced, because otherwise dialogue can be largely useless - as expectations are then set, which ultimately create dissatisfaction.

**Figure 5. Overview of the research literature and more equal dialogue.**



Source: Hans Abrahamsson (2018) based on inspiration from KAIROS, S2020GBG CITY, and the SKR Participation Ladder.

Abrahamsson (2018) presents a model, as shown in Figure 5, that visualizes co-creative civic dialogue, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity and equal power relations among participants. The model distinguishes between different types of civic dialogue, including information, consultation, discussion, and learning dialogue, each serving a specific purpose in the dialogue process. However, Abrahamsson argues that co-creative dialogue is the most suitable approach for meaningful citizen involvement. Co-creative dialogue involves active and responsive facilitators who aim to equalize the power dynamics among participants. By involving citizens throughout the process, from problem formulation to evaluation and feedback, a sense of responsibility and ownership is fostered. This approach combines evidence-based expertise with the experiential knowledge of citizens. Abrahamsson emphasizes that the action itself is crucial in co-creative citizen dialogue. Through collaborative decision-making and active participation, trust is built, and a collective sense of identity emerges. Sustainability and outcomes are also important considerations in the dialogue process. In summary, co-creative civic dialogue aims to be inclusive, with equal power relations and citizen involvement in problem definition, identification, implementation, decision-making, and follow-up. This approach enhances the legitimacy of municipalities and strengthens the relationship between citizens and politicians. Flexibility is required to accommodate changing circumstances throughout the process (Abrahamsson, 2018).

## 3.5 Digital opportunities

### 3.5.1 Smart cities

Urbanisation, resource depletion, climate change and the desire for more sustainable development, as well as the increased use of the internet and mobile phones, are challenges that urban planning is grappling with today (Przebylowski et al., 2022). Models for smart cities attempt to address these challenges, often landing in technological solutions (Przebylowski et al., 2022). Rarely are citizens truly involved in planning processes, even though the knowledge citizens possess about how they use and live in the city and what they want from the city in its future is extremely valuable to planners (Przebylowski et al., 2022). Digital technology can be a means of creating opportunities in planning processes as it can create interaction and information exchange between urban planners and citizens which is central to moving towards a more sustainable development of urban planning (Przebylowski et al., 2022). The following theory will present an overview of how digital tools can contribute to urban planning by providing citizen-centric data to promote more inclusive and more responsive planning.

There is no clear, universally accepted definition of the term 'smart city', but all include the massive use of information, communication, and technology to create more vibrant, efficient, and sustainable cities (Przebylowski et al., 2022). However, smart cities focus mainly on urban management, such as optimising urban environments and flows, resources, and systems such as traffic management (Przebylowski et al., 2022). Many researchers note that urban projects lack social considerations and point to the importance of shifting the focus from a technology-oriented vision to a people-oriented vision. Although technological innovations have improved the daily lives of city dwellers by helping them make informed decisions, the data produced by these technological innovations has rarely been used to inform urban planning to date (Przebylowski et al., 2022).

### 3.5.2 ICT

Thanks to the widespread and ever-increasing use of smartphones, the internet and social media, people now easily express their opinions digitally (Roga, 21). Participatory planning has therefore become even more important as these widespread opinions cannot be ignored, nor can they be addressed in an impactful way that makes sense for planning processes. Digital technology is effectively a new way of addressing the shortcomings of participatory planning processes. Many studies focus on the opportunities that ICT (Information and Communication Technology) based participation offers (Criado & Gil-Garcia, 2019). Digital participation includes any participatory process that uses digital tools, such as PPGIS (public participatory geographic information system) (Roga, 2021), visualisation tools such as CAD, virtual reality, mobile applications or crowdsourcing and collaboration platforms (Hasler et al., 2017). Researchers agree that digital technologies have great potential for positive use in participatory planning. How citizens and urban planners will produce and use urban data is something that is still relatively unexplored (Roga, 2021).

### 3.5.3 Digital Participatory Platforms

According to the literature, there are three forms of Digital Participatory Platforms (DPPs) used in cities globally in development projects (Falco & Kleinhans, 2018). These three types are:

1. **Information sharing:** which is a type of one-way information exchange between the municipality and citizens. It may involve the municipality creating a website to inform citizens about things going on in the city and its plans for urban development projects. Another form is for citizens to share data, information, or knowledge with the municipality, which then takes an advisory role. Here there is some interaction between the two parties - the municipality and the citizens.
2. **Interaction:** This is a two-way communication and dialogue between citizens and the municipality. It can be seen as a combination of information and consultation. Citizens are encouraged to provide feedback on information and the municipality can act on the feedback received from citizens. In this form, citizens still do not have any decision-making power.
3. **Citizen engagement, participation, and co-production:** here citizens are operational actors in urban development projects and interact with the municipality on spatial concepts and policies. The municipality makes good use of citizens' resources, assets, and knowledge to achieve better results and planning.

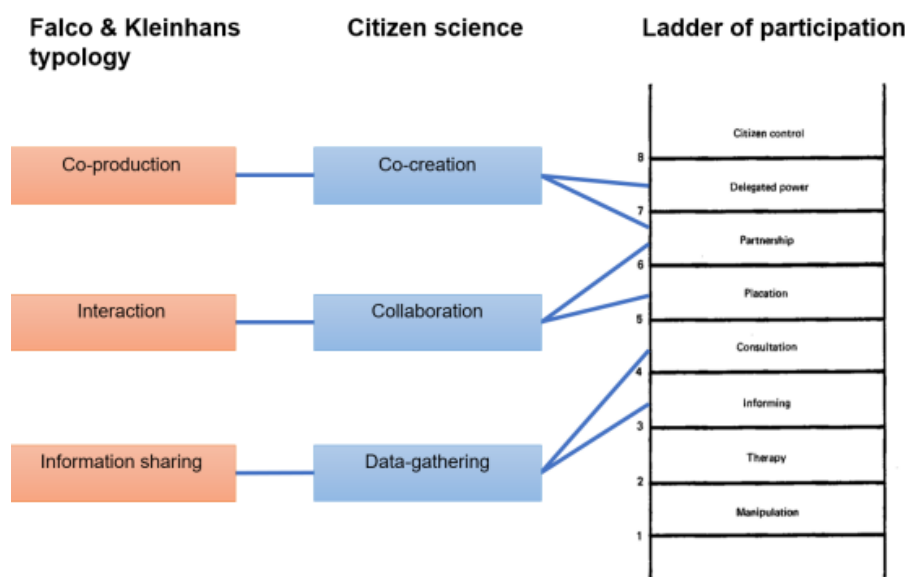
DPPs can be particularly useful when used in networks (e.g., within a municipality) with communities and where the platform is accessible to all members of that community (Falco & Kleinhans, 2018). The members of that community can then share opinions, insights, and knowledge, both lay and professional, which is open information available to all citizens and authorities (Roga, 2021). The platform aims to foster collaboration. There are a growing number of web-based and mobile-based DPPs, but what is lacking is the interactive skill or usability to qualify as a collaborative form of DPP (Roga, 2021).

These typologies and studies have much in common with the academic research on citizen participation and both Arnstein's ladder, SKR's ladder and Abrahamsson's extended form of citizen participation. The literature of citizen science is mainly focused on the role of the citizen in the game of participation, while the above typologies focus more on the interaction between

the two parties - citizen and government (municipality). However, there are similarities between them.

The information exchange/consultation type of Falco & Kleinhans (2018) can be likened to the role of data collection identified in the literature on citizen science (Muktharov et al., 2018). When this is placed on the ladder of Arnstein and the ladder of SKR, they would be called consultation. An interesting line drawing of comparisons can be made between all the types and categories in these theories (see Figure 6). Ultimately, all these categorisations are different ways of explaining participation in urban development projects.

**Figure 6. Similarities between digital participation typologies, citizen science and the ladder of participation.**



*Source: Falco & Kleinhans (2018), Muktharov et al. (2018), Bonney et al. (2009), Arnstein (1969), Refererad i Roga (2021).*

Information sharing, interaction and co-production are used in research terms which are derived from Falco & Kleinhans's (2018) typology. Information sharing can either be about the municipality sharing information with the public or the public sharing information with the public, which indicates a low level on Arnstein's (1969) ladder. Collaboration (collaboration) and interaction (interaction) have an academic historical background in the planning literature and fall a little higher on the staircase. Co-creation is a good and deeper way of collaboration where citizens are on the same level as the authorities in the planning process, which can be compared to Abrahamsson's (2018) co-creative dialogue. A further difference to draw is, again, that Abrahamsson chooses a more horizontal visualisation instead of Arnstein's staircase structure.

### *Digital Data Platforms (DDP)*

Around the world and in Sweden, the use of digital tools to support processes and develop smarter governance has become increasingly common (Pettit et al., 2017; Roga, 2021). Looking beyond Sweden's borders, the most illustrative example is the Digital Data Platform (DDP), which is a platform where a city government uses digital data platforms to collect, share and use data to improve planning practices and encourage external parties (such as citizens, businesses, and program developers) to co-design public digital services (Roga, 2021). Often, these data

platforms take inspiration from an open-source ideology where there is an aspiration to make digital data available to all as part of a broad ecosystem (Pettit et al., 2017). In Sweden, a paradigm shift from an information society to a data-driven urban planning process is currently underway, which includes transparency, portability, and consistency in urban planning data, which can also be seen as a path towards a broad ecosystem of data and supports the development of data platforms (DIGG, 2023).

### *Public Participation GIS (PPGIS)*

One form of DDP is the Public Participation GIS (PPGIS), which is a suite of GIS platforms specifically designed to support participatory urban planning (Kahila-Tani, 2015). The most sophisticated platforms for data collection are licence-based (Roga, 2021). By using PPGIS in participatory urban planning, multi-faceted information can be made available at early stages of the planning processes (Roga, 2021). Roga (2021) argues that PPGIS is a global research agenda and practice whose main purpose is to facilitate informed participation in decision-making planning processes, not least for socially marginalised groups in society. PPGIS projects range from rural land use to natural resource conservation and management, advocacy, and not least urban planning. PPGIS work is grounded in social and political theory that also includes studies on technology, human-computer interaction, feminist theory and organisational theory (Roga, 2021). The spatial and participatory knowledge production from PPGIS is conditioned and shaped by contextual factors (Roga, 2021). The tool combines cartography with participatory methods to put people's desires, experiences, and knowledge on a map. In recent years, PPGIS approaches have attracted considerable interest and are being applied in a variety of fields, including urban planning (Hasler et al., 2017; Roga, 2021).

Research shows that PPGIS favours assessments of perceptual and intangible, intrinsic and/or symbolic values of ecosystems, landscapes, nature, and the urban environment (Roga, 2021). A web based PPGIS approach can reach out to many citizens and facilitate citizen involvement for easier land use planning. There is potential for interdisciplinary analysis through the integration of biophysical spatial data or qualitative site descriptions. What can be seen as critical is that it requires available information and technical skills that are sometimes lacking (Roga, 2021). Therefore, Hasler et al., (2017) and Roga (2021) argue that PPGIS as a method should be seen as a combination of other participatory methods. Digital surveys and questionnaires can be time-efficient and unconstrained for a given location and time, but it has been shown that response rates are sometimes low, which reduces data quality and credibility, compared to having a person in a physical location instead, who can check representativeness and data quality. Digital surveys therefore require visibility and dissemination to be effective (Hasler et al., 2021).

### *ArcGIS Urban*

ArcGIS Urban is a web-based 3D application that provides a GIS-based solution for planning challenges with its impact on the built environment and housing capacity. It enables collaboration between different teams through scenario planning and impact assessment. It is presented as a "web-based solution that applies GIS technology to urban planning to streamline plan creation, analyse plan impacts, visualize ongoing projects and facilitate public engagement". According to Soward & Li (2021), It is used for visualizing existing conditions and future scenarios for planned areas and argues that aesthetic and demographic impacts can be easily evaluated. Moreover, the integration with other ESRI products, such as ArcGIS Online and ArcGIS Hub, increases the reach of these 3D scenarios and allows them to be shared online,

which can influence public reception of proposed projects and planning initiatives.

The tool enables digital transformations of urban and regional planning to increase collaboration with community stakeholders and to help create a more sustainable future, in economic, environmental, and social terms. In North Carolina, the city of Charlotte is implementing ArcGIS Urban as a centralised platform for tracking development changes. This shift from "flat models" to an accessible 3D model "could give council members, planners, and the public access to a whole new perspective on proposed development, [allowing them] to see it from multiple angles and see how it works in the surrounding neighbourhood" (Portillo, 2020).

ArcGIS Urban offers project and feedback options. The project option allows planners and municipal administrators to document individual development projects, their development status, and other information about the project. The feedback option allows the public to provide their comments on a particular plan or project. However, feedback can be further improved with sorting of comments/feedback by topic categories (Soward & Li, 2021).

ArcGIS Urban is still a new application (2019), but according to the literature it is used by cities worldwide to solve various planning challenges. It has some limitations, but ESRI is improving the application with each release (Soward & Li, 2021).

#### 3.5.4 Other digital tools

Planning support systems as tools are designed to support planning processes and outcomes (Roga, 2021). There are many other digital tools that can be used to support spatial planning that are not designed for this purpose. It could be like an informational website where citizens can easily access information about a particular project in their neighbourhood or projects in which they may have other interests. The line between participation and non-participation is somewhat blurred with these tools. These types of websites do not fall high on the participation scale as they are purely informational tools (Roga, 2021). If it is a website that provides an email address where citizens can respond to plans and provide feedback, it will probably rank higher according to Roga (2021). Looking beyond digital map features and engagement platforms, there are also opportunities to be exploited, such as social media for communication, looking towards the metaverse and Web3, and data-dense digital twins of entire cities or entire municipalities.

#### *Social media*

One way to involve citizens is through social media. The potential power and value of using social media in participatory planning has been both explored and established in recent academic research, enabled by web 2.0 (Lin & Geertman, 2019). Research argues that social media and web 2.0 offer opportunities to create new participatory strategies that can reach entirely new segments of society. Data collected through social media in combination with conventional datasets is increasingly used for urban analysis and modelling, and social media has provided a new platform for participation, collaboration, and communication (Lin & Geertman, 2019). The authors argue that social media is a way to involve citizens and organise civic initiatives.

A platform such as social media enables reaching a wide audience that was previously difficult to reach (Lin & Geertman, 2019). In addition, it is a cheap and easy way to communicate in real time, something that was previously considered time-consuming and costly in traditional methods (Lin & Geertman, 2019). Social media can also provide methods for rapid information sharing, so that stakeholders can always be up to date on the latest developments. Social media



also addresses the inefficiencies of traditional constraints in terms of times of participation, as participation via social media can occur at any time of the day when it suits one's schedule. According to CIVITAS (2015), social media can engage citizens in five ways:

1. Providing citizens with information
2. Quick answers to questions
3. Creating citizen engagement
4. Sharing information in real time
5. Collect information from the public to improve city services

The limitations of social media are that the data collected may be biased as it only reaches the actual users of the social media platforms (Roga, 2021).

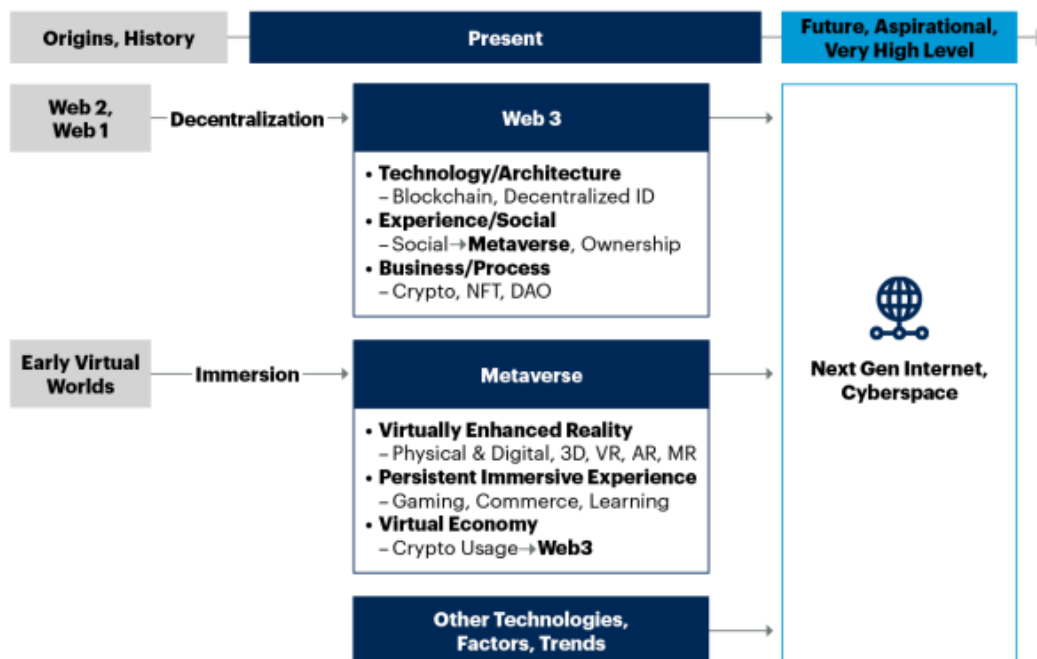
### *Metaverse och Web3*

The metaverse, defined as the next level of interaction in the virtual and physical world, has potential in the field of participatory planning and could enable new avenues for collaboration and engagement (Gartner, 2022a; 2022d). Although it will not replace the internet or web, it will build on them to create immersive digital and physical spaces using 3D rendering, augmented and virtual reality, ambient computing, and human augmentation, offering urban planners a new toolkit (Hudson-Smith, 2022). The metaverse emphasises immersive virtual and digital worlds, evolving from earlier virtual worlds, games, social networks, and online gaming (see Figure 7).

Web3, on the other hand, is an evolution of the web beyond technology and standards to create and manipulate web pages, embracing new experiences and business models. It is driven by decentralisation and blockchain protocols to offer a more decentralised model (Gartner, 2022b). It is inaccurate to consider web2 as centralised and bad, while web3 is decentralised and good (Gartner, 2021).

Web3 and metaverse are complementary concepts evolving in parallel, offering organisations the opportunity to leverage them either independently or together. Although there is only one internet, there will be several metaverse implementations, possibly building on web3 (Gartner, 2021; 2022c).

Figure 7. Summary of Web3 and Metaverse.



Source: Gartner (2022a).

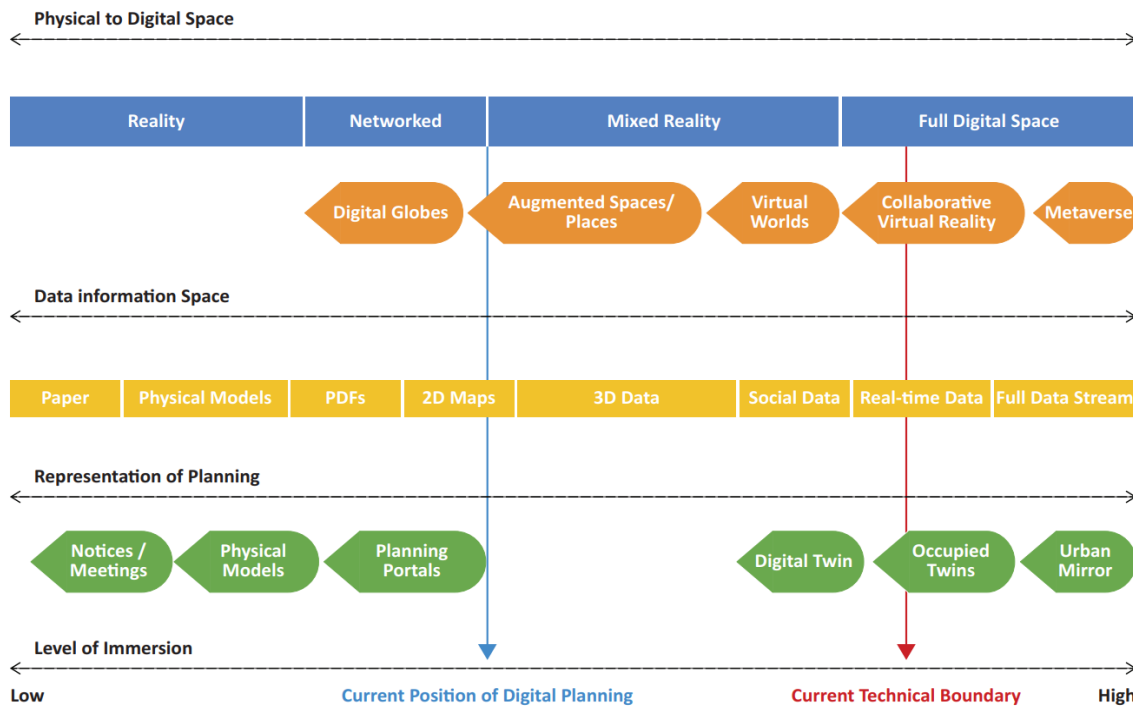
Six trends are driving the use of metaverse technology today and will continue to drive it for the next three to five years (Gartner, 2022a):

- **Games** - creating experiences for both entertainment and educational simulations
- **Digital humans** - interactive, artificial intelligence (AI)-powered representations that exhibit some of the characteristics, personality, knowledge, and mindset of humans
- **Virtual spaces** - engage multiple senses and empower participants with the ability to immerse and engage with the space or other participants
- **Shared experiences** - bringing groups of people together for sustained or defined periods of time
- **Tokenized assets** - digital assets that are secured, exchanged, traded, or used for some defined purpose
- **Spatial computing** - providing digital enhancements and experiences of 3D and the physical space

According to Yakali (2022), digital twins, interactive toolkits, tokenization, and urban platformization are key components of future cities and metaverses. Hudson-Smith (2022) suggests that the emerging metaverse will be the driving force for change in the urban planning industry, as it is an inhabited mirror world with the potential to exist at different scales. Despite the hype surrounding the metaverse, Gartner (2022a) advises caution when investing in a specific metaverse, as adoption is not yet advanced, and it is too early to determine which investments will be profitable in the long term. Establishing user-centred guidelines for ethics and governance is another challenge that encompasses different aspects of the metaverse, including privacy, data sovereignty, acceptable use policy, accountability, identity, and legal protection. Many cities already have 3D models of their city, and emerging platforms may link representations of places and spaces in the metaverse (Hudson-Smith, 2022). While the

technology is in place, the metaverse is still in the early stages of development, and it is a time for learning, exploration, and preparation for its limited implementation (Gartner, 2022a).

**Figure 8. A timeline of the current position of digital planning and its direction towards the metaverse.**



Source: Hudson-Smith (2022).

To provide an illustration of current digital planning capability and its direction forward, Figure 9 provides an overview of the situation (Hudson-Smith, 2022). Some of the largest global companies are now behind the next step to the metaverse, digital twins are being built, and the technological frontier in Figure 9 may be 10 years away from a reality that cities have an occupied digital mirror world (Hudson-Smith, 2022). With more than 160 incoming metaverses under development and digital planning gaining momentum, avatars and digital collaborations and more may have reached their time, and the current state illustrated in Figure 8 will begin to move towards a metaverse. What is required is a recognition that urban planning with digital technologies, game engines and background infrastructures such as cryptocurrencies needs to become part of the planning curriculum. In this way, the next generation of urban planners can lead the way into these emerging metaverses and will forever catch up with the technology. The risk of not daring to welcome and test forms of metaverse is likely to be like considering around 1997 that the World Wide Web was only for nerds (Hudson-Smith, 2022).

### Digital twins

Digital twins, as part of the emerging metaverse, are being developed in various software and visualized in different ways (Gartner, 2022a). While initially used in production and manufacturing, digital twins are now being applied in urban planning globally, with variations in their construction based on their intended purpose (Gartner, 2022a). These models incorporate multi-faceted information, including city structures, infrastructure, and real-time data on energy consumption, noise, and traffic patterns (personal communication, Brand, Dec 22). By integrating and visualizing this information, digital twins enable testing of different planning

scenarios and prediction of outcomes, such as detailed plans (Gartner, 2022a). The primary objectives of digital twins are often seen as time and cost savings, although there is no standardized framework regarding their content or data sources. Digital twins have evolved independently and are tailored to specific objectives (ABI Research, 2019). Common components of digital twins include BIM, GIS, game engines, IoT, AI, and virtual/augmented reality (Gartner, 2022a).

The fundamental function of a digital twin is accessing relevant information at the right time (Gartner, 2022a). Visualization of data is identified as the second crucial aspect by Gartner (2022a). Connecting information and data to specific locations enhances contextual understanding, while visualizing different sets of information together reveals the effects and consequences of various options (Sweco, 2021). The ability to present data in 3D, potentially with a photorealistic surface, facilitates comprehension, fosters shared understanding, and enables effective dialogue among stakeholders. Visualization also aids external stakeholders in providing feedback on digital documents (Sweco, 2021). Additionally, it allows for monitoring and assessment of the realization of different decisions, particularly regarding climate and sustainability considerations in planned areas (Sweco, 2021).

Digital twins have gained popularity in urban planning, with several Swedish municipalities actively developing them, each with their specific focus and scope (Sweco, 2021). In essence, a digital twin is a sophisticated digital model used for organizing, visualizing, and analysing information (Gartner, 2022a).

## 4. Empirical research

The following chapter presents the empirical data for the study. The empirical data is structured by first leading the reader through the empirical data where six Swedish municipalities' work on citizen participation is presented as well as additional expert knowledge. The chapter provides the groundwork for addressing the first research question, which examines how Swedish municipalities currently engage in citizen involvement and identifies the challenges and needs that arise in the process. To anonymize and compress the interview respondents in the study, the abbreviation "RX" (Respondent X) is used.

### 4.1 Six Swedish municipalities and selected experts

Below, the municipalities of Uppsala, Helsingborg, Linköping, Malmö, Gothenburg and Örebro present their work on citizen involvement based on the interviewees (see Table 1). The municipalities have been selected because they have all tested some form of digital dialogue and are municipalities that prioritise working with more varied forms of engagement to achieve long-term benefits. However, all municipalities face challenges, so it is interesting to study municipalities with willingness but also challenges and analyse the situation of participation in combination with digitalisation. In addition to the municipalities, expertise in the field from SKR, Kramfors municipality (involved in SKR) and a researcher/consultant in the field who recently conducted research together with Malmö municipality are also presented. The overall five areas categorised are Challenges, Communication, Digital Platforms and tools and looking to the Future. The five areas have been selected to capture a baseline and needs analysis of the municipalities today. The *challenges* for the municipalities concern the current financial situation of the municipalities, perceived challenges regarding the current detailed planning process, the lack of structural and systematic working methods, criticism of the dialogue staircase and the lack of education and training in the area among the municipalities. The *communication* area concerns external communication in the sense that each municipality is unique, that there is a need for a clear communication department and that target groups require different communication channels. Internal communication is also addressed, with an emphasis on working across administrative boundaries and the benefits of having guides for internal communication to improve the work on civic engagement. *Digital platforms and tools* present an overview of platforms and tools used by the municipalities and digital tools suggested by the municipalities in the interviews. It is presented in a table with accompanying explanatory text. The *future* part explains what the interviewees have said about the likely future situation and what there is a need for such as comprehensive dialogues, to work according to phases, to look towards housing cooperation, citizens' budget, to work with digital-physical dialogue, that the younger target group is important to achieve and that municipalities will have to work more systematically and transparently.

#### 4.1.1 Challenges

##### *The current economic situation*

The world economic situation and a general global imbalance obviously affect the situation of municipalities in Sweden. To understand the current situation and probably the situation a couple of years ahead, it is good to get an understanding of the economic situation municipalities in general are in today.

In Sweden, according to R11, municipalities have for a long time been so well off financially that they have been able to afford to make investments that have not always been successful. There may be large urban projects that in the end did not turn out to be what the citizens wanted, where there was then the financial possibility to rectify it (R11). Given the economic situation and the reality of the situation now and probably for some time to come, municipalities will not have that opportunity and must therefore be much better at inviting and involving citizens in what is most beneficial for those who live and work in the area. By asking themselves these questions, municipalities can be more precise in the investments they make (R11). R14 (interview, Oct 22) argues that it is a matter of the so-called trinity working together: 'good citizen dialogue is based on an interaction between elected representatives, staff and citizens', and that it is a joint responsibility to succeed in making it good for everyone. If the trinity cannot talk to each other or communicate, the risk of a poorer outcome increases, which is particularly important going forward to consider so that the right decisions are made (R14).

### *Dialogue process in planning*

Planning processes are generally very lengthy processes and have a top-down and formal approach to citizen participation (R11). Municipalities are politically controlled and therefore citizens come in late in the process which leads to citizens' voices coming in late in the planning process (R11). R11 argues that the planning process is therefore a weak process from a citizen perspective. An additional challenge with the current situation is the financial and time constraints. When preparing a detail plan, service providers have received money from the property owners and are therefore in a pressured situation financially and in terms of time, which poses a major problem (interview, R2, Sep 22; interview, R10, Oct 22). They further argue that the property owners take investments in the area, and they pay for the detail plan, so it is driven by the private owner.

There is a lot of difference in how far municipalities have come in citizen involvement in detail planning processes (R12). Consultation from a citizen's perspective is, as mentioned earlier, placed late in the planning process. There is little room for influence, as all municipalities agree. According to R11, extended dialogue in the planning process also comes very late in the process and there is a lack of time and resources. It has also been shown that questions or appeals against plans have increased as citizens feel 'run over' where views expressed have not been considered (R11). Appeals are not free for municipalities as they delay the time process and cost a lot of money (R11). In Uppsala, Örebro and Linköping municipalities the work has for a long time been about the consultation process, which is not seen as a constructive form of dialogue as it is an opportunity to legally invite comments where decisions have already been taken, something that Malmö expresses as "a game for show" (R10). It is, according to R11, a very formal process where the proposal is presented to citizens where they could provide feedback. R11 points out that people usually have very simple questions that could be easily fed back but that the feedback mechanism is not circular. Prior to consultation there is a statutory obligation to send referrals to other planning departments and agencies, which is also considered problematic as other departments have not usually been involved until the referral and consultation stage.

Based on the interviews, dialogue is rare in the preparation of detailed plans, prior to land allocations and development projects. This is due to the difficulty of reaching the desired groups, and it is difficult to create the desired dialogue on the knowledge needed for further work in the administration. It is also difficult to feedback results to those who have participated, which makes municipalities reluctant to initiate dialogue/involvement (interview, R3, Sep 22;

interview, R1, Sep 22). On a few occasions, there has been an extended form of dialogue in Uppsala and Linköping municipalities during the preparation of detail plans; this has been on occasions concerning particularly vulnerable areas and has mainly been through outreach dialogue and at an early stage, to reach out in the right way and get residents involved on the spot (R1; interview, R7, Sep 22). At SKR training sessions and seminars on dialogue, young planners often attend and express frustration that the process is very controlled and that they would like to have dialogues earlier in the process where fewer decisions are made and where the impact is higher. Something that also emerges from interviews with municipalities is that it is generally difficult to maintain a long-term relationship with citizens as they are only involved and have a say in some one-off project. Uppsala states that "we understand what they are thinking at that moment (at a particular dialogue) but then we lose contact" (R1). According to R11, many times citizens do not know what happens after consultation.

When it comes to the preparation of a master plan, dialogue and consultation are a more natural part of the process for most municipalities. It is considered important to disseminate what the municipalities stand for, what visions there are for the municipality and important to get citizens involved in their environment as it contributes to knowledge and decision-making. What R1 feels is challenging is the feedback as the difficulty lies in visually communicating the technical pieces of an urban project and deciding something together with the citizens, who are not experts.

Malmö, Gothenburg, and Helsingborg municipalities have made significant progress in utilizing extended forms of dialogue in early stages of planning (beyond mere consultation). They view this as crucial in establishing a strong knowledge and decision-making foundation for politicians (interview, R9, Oct 22; R10). In Malmö municipality, emphasis is placed on incorporating "knowledge-gathering dialogues in the early stages of planning processes" (R10) to ensure well-grounded proposals for consultation. They believe it is essential to address complex issues early on before the process advances too far and thus "engage with stakeholders early on and discuss important perspectives that should be considered in the planning process." The first step, as described by R10, involves engaging politicians in discussions regarding development and implementation work, which then informs the choice of dialogue method. Large group meetings with supplementary questionnaires have been used as a working method, although challenges arise when dealing with many participants (R9). Additionally, time constraints and residents' reluctance to engage in city development pose difficulties, prompting the municipalities to be self-critical and analyze their approaches (R9).

Similarly, the Municipality of Gothenburg employs dialogue methods during the early stages, particularly in the program and planning program development for specific areas. A broader approach is adopted for larger areas, and the platform My City is utilized to capture opinions and ideas about the city, which are then considered when formulating detailed plans (interview, R13, Oct 22). In the Municipality of Helsingborg, the timing of dialogue varies significantly, occurring at different stages of the planning process - early, middle, and late (R8). They acknowledge that opportunities are often greater in the early stages, but it can be challenging to secure participation when concrete questions from citizens do not yet have clear answers. R8 (interview, Oct 22) acknowledges the challenge of finding a balance, as sometimes the city is willing to engage but residents are not, while at other times, residents desire dialogue closer to the realization phase when the city is less inclined. Adaptation of methods and approaches according to the specific project is deemed important to address this challenge (R8).

All the municipalities see that the target group representation at consultations and other types of physical dialogue is currently narrow, with almost exclusively questioning older, well-educated men, many of whom engineers are. It is a small target group that wants to have a very big impact and be involved in understanding and influencing policy decisions (R12). This target group is an important target group but should be seen as a complement, it is important to consider in the future who is not being reached and not having their voice heard (R1).

### *Structure and overall responsibility for citizen involvement*

The municipalities of Malmö, Linköping, Helsingborg, Gothenburg, and Kramfors have varying working methods, responsibilities, and structures for citizen involvement. In Malmö, two individuals support planning officers in dialogue activities, adapting the form of dialogue based on project needs and stages (R10). They conduct baseline analyses to investigate requirements for detail planning and involve citizens through qualitative analysis (R10, R9). In Linköping, two master planners are responsible for monitoring dialogue issues and developing a consultation guide in the urban planning department (R1, R15).

Helsingborg has a part-time "krångelombudsman" position in the Democracy and Development Unit, providing support for citizen dialogue in various city activities (R8). Each administration handles its own dialogues, while the "krångelombudsman" and colleagues act as democracy coordinators, aiming to increase citizen involvement and dialogue skills in the city (R8).

Gothenburg's City Planning Office has a development manager responsible for citizen participation, who stays updated, trains others, and promotes participation internally and externally (R13). In Kramfors, a central coaching role supports dialogue initiatives in urban planning, rural development, and business development, emphasizing the importance of citizen dialogues for understanding citizens' perspectives (R13, R14).

These municipalities recognize the value of citizen involvement, emphasizing the need to adapt methods, engage target groups, and collect relevant material for baseline analysis (R9). They aim to create a common understanding, involve citizens in decision-making, and invest time and persistence in the dialogue process (R9, R13).

Overall, these municipalities have designated roles, training initiatives, and support functions to facilitate effective citizen dialogue, contributing to informed decision-making and a greater sense of community engagement.

### *Lack of systematic approach*

To continue the previous paragraph about structure and overall responsibility, there is also a major challenge that has become clear in recent years, which according to R12 is how municipalities get citizen dialogue to go from being a project or an event to becoming a systematic way of working in the municipality, which is lacking today. She does not believe that there should be dialogue on all issues, but Swedish municipalities must have a structure for how they handle citizen dialogue and participation issues in their municipality with principles and policies for how it should be done and who in the municipality can form a team around these issues. Municipalities need to look horizontally in the organisation and find coordination opportunities to see the benefits of each other. Furthermore, R12 says there should be an ongoing conversation about citizen dialogue within different parts of the municipality, where thoughts and ideas are captured and disseminated across the municipality's different administrations. She



says that it should not necessarily be a permanent group, but people with knowledge of different areas, especially in larger cities where there is a greater need for support in civic dialogue issues and methods. This leads to less vulnerability and maintains a continuous and ongoing knowledge work according to R12. One example is to have discussions on how the municipality should develop together in a good way and what the needs are in the municipality in different areas. This clearly creates a way to have an ear to the ground to capture and create understanding of what citizens think and think (R12). She gives an example that administrations should not repeat themselves to citizens, for example with surveys that deal with the same kind of issues, which creates confusion among citizens, something that can be avoided if synergies and cooperation are created in this area.

### *Evaluation/follow up*

Follow-up and evaluation of extended dialogues are not common among the municipalities interviewed. Compilation of opinions/data during consultations is often a formalised process following the consultation report according to a formal template under the PBL, and a recurring comment from the municipalities is that they need to get better at systematic evaluation and follow-up, for example by discussing the level of participation and how the information for the dialogue worked (R11; R12).

There are no formal or unambiguous systematic ways to manage this and often dialogue work is saved in documents in personal folders on the computer and disseminated, at best, by word of mouth in the department. R12 believes that feedback is important as it has a strong signalling value. They also believe that people who make suggestions do not necessarily believe in the implementation, but that it is important to feel that politicians and staff have taken note of the opinion, thought it through, discussed it and listened to it. The municipality of Helsingborg always works with evaluations, as a well-executed dialogue project always includes an evaluation of lessons learned, so that it can be shared with others within and between administrations (R8). There is also a lack of structured ways of learning, developing, and disseminating information, which they feel the municipality needs.

R13 expresses that what is important for many municipalities going forward is to think about communication strategies and then put a lot of effort into the execution. He believes that municipalities are currently often focused on the implementation of the citizen dialogue itself, but the implementation is a small part of the whole process. It should be standard practice to inform at the beginning how feedback will take place, how the dialogue will be followed up and that it will include an evaluation (including the citizens' perspective) to learn for the next dialogue (R14).

### *The dialogue staircase*

Some municipalities use the SKR dialogue ladder in internal guides and manuals for dialogue, but opinions on it differed in the interviews. The aim is for it to serve as a navigation and planning tool to see what a municipality offers in terms of different types of activities, where the municipality can evaluate and communicate on what stages the municipality is at (R12). "It should not be about being on the top step, but the idea is that you have to be on several steps and know when you are on something so that you invite the right kind of dialogue, so that false expectations are not created" (R14). R12's view is that the staircase is used in a good way as many municipalities use it and have it in their planning work, something that R14 also agrees with as it visualises the degree of influence. However, R13 and R11 highlight risks with the

staircase as it can be interpreted as being about progression to reach as high up the staircase as possible, which creates a complex situation. They further argue that, for example, information and focused consultations should always be included and that one stage is not necessarily better than the other but depends on the situation and purpose.

Malmö municipality has chosen not to work around the SKR staircase as it is square and can be interpreted as just a staircase for development (R10). He believes that it is the politicians who make the decisions, so there is no co-decision ("top" step). He further argues that the planning process has already decided how it will look like, which means that there is no co-determination in the way the staircase wants to show. It is usually politicians who receive information on important issues and make final decisions (R10).

### ***Education and training***

In general, it is rare among municipalities that planners and aspiring planners have received training on issues related to civic dialogue, and municipalities lack good tools today (R1; R12). Helsingborg municipality has no internal training on involvement and dialogue but has internal work on user-driven service design (R8). It is one to two days of training based on a composite material from SKR's innovation guide where the focus is to develop how the municipality works together with citizens (R8). SKR runs a lot of training both in the form of seminars and training courses that go into depth on certain methods (interview, R4, Oct 22). According to R14, they also offer a network where municipalities can participate to discuss the topic and learn more. During the pandemic, web lectures were offered to municipalities, for example for the municipal council, networks, or requests from groups. This has continued after the pandemic but the number of municipalities wanting support varies (R14).

## **4.1.2 Communication**

### ***External communication***

#### ***Unique municipality situation***

R12 acknowledges that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for all municipalities, and each municipality must determine what works best for them and their target audience. Traditional consultation meetings often attract older retired men with engineering backgrounds, making them predictable. To reach new target groups, municipalities need to explore alternative approaches (R12). R2 and R12 suggest the need for better dissemination of information regarding urban development in municipalities.

R11 emphasizes the importance of understanding where people are and which platforms they use. Conducting periodic surveys to identify citizens' preferred information sources, such as newspapers, transport locations, health centers, and supermarkets, is crucial. Communication diversity and providing information in different languages based on needs are also highlighted (R11).

In Helsingborg, communication channels range from traditional methods like physical mail and local newspapers to modern platforms such as a digital dialogue platform. Efforts are made to guide people to the platform and make it a place for sharing information and engaging in shaping the city's future (R8).

Linköping municipality employs various channels for inviting people to dialogue, including websites, physical mailboxes, newspaper advertisements, posters, flyers, and postcards distributed within a specific radius. They also engage with the community by being present at local supermarkets, schools, recreation centers, and the Church of Sweden, adapting their channels based on purpose and need (R1, R15).

### ***Communications Department***

Uppsala and Linköping municipalities are very consistent in having a close cooperation with the communication department (R1; R7), which according to R7 should be a natural part of any dialogue. In the well-functioning projects, a communication strategy is developed together with communicators who are responsible for everything related to communication towards citizens and other stakeholders. They also try to use the languages available in the geographical area so that there is no exclusion due to language barriers. In dialogue projects in Linköping Municipality, they always work out communication plans together with the communicators and they help to discuss the target group and the purpose of the consultation/citizen dialogue (R1; R7). R7 believes that what will always be important is who is reached, as there needs to be enough strong voices for it to be representative. They further argue that representativeness today is extremely unequal, urban planning tries to make relevant interventions, but the reality is that those who have a harder time in life have a harder time linking urban planning vision and everyday life.

### ***"Targeted" advertising***

The sharpest and most underestimated tip according to Linköping municipality is to send out Swedish direct mail, then it goes out to all households as community information (R15). According to them, this is a cheap and easy way to reach many citizens. They also use Instagram where they geographically reach, for example, citizens within a one-kilometre radius and publish information videos on the municipality's website. They must work hard to get people interested in the master plan, detailed plans, and other urban planning. "It deals with everyone, but how do we reach everyone? It's a big challenge how we get citizens involved, we have tried methods of being out in town etc. but we are using more and more social media to reach out" (R1).

According to R12, it is important to work on several fronts. Internationally, there are some examples where "the mayor sends out mail that says, 'Hi Maria, you are very important to us and it is important that you come and join us at this meeting', then it becomes apt. It may not have the same effect if the chair of the municipal council is with us, but I don't think you should underestimate that either" (R12), as she believes that it is basically about seeing what works in your own municipality.

### ***Internal communication***

Many service providers in municipalities are familiar with the concept of citizen dialogue but lack clear routines for implementation (R12). To address this, R2 suggests the dissemination of information internally and increased training to raise awareness and curiosity about citizen involvement. Documents and knowledge on the subject should be updated and shared within municipalities to align with the digital maturity of society (R2). Furthermore, there is a need for management to provide guidance on how municipalities should work with dialogues (R12).

Internal communication on citizen dialogue is often spontaneous and lacking a strategic approach within and between municipal administrations (R12). Helsingborg Municipality acknowledges the current scarcity of internal communication and the absence of a strategic

framework (R8). Similarly, Gothenburg Municipality relies mainly on departmental meetings for internal information sharing, although the My City platform automates data collection (R16).

Uppsala Municipality has an informal knowledge exchange network among staff but calls for a more organized internal transfer of knowledge (R7). In Linköping municipality, little internal exchange occurs, and citizen dialogue knowledge remains a small part of social sustainability work (R15). Both municipalities express a need for strategic ways of working, internal discussions, and evaluations to inspire and improve their citizen engagement efforts (R7; R15). Sharing experiences internally and establishing formal pathways for knowledge transfer and evaluation are essential (R15).

R14 emphasizes the importance of having discussions and sharing knowledge within the municipality to foster a common understanding of citizen dialogue and its value (R14). Unity among different administrations is crucial for effective citizen engagement and to act as one municipality (R15). Training is recommended to grasp the concept of citizen dialogue as a powerful tool when utilized properly. Building networks and learning from other municipalities through platforms like SKR (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions) can be beneficial (R14).

Kramfors Municipality has an intranet where editors post information, for example, about citizen dialogue and how it will take place. Information is also distributed at Monday meetings and in other contexts because they consider it important to disseminate information internally (R12). *"The strength of Kramfors municipality, as I see it, is the closeness to each other and to the politicians and all the administrative managers. This means that we can reconcile things quite quickly. However, it should be mentioned that it is very much in the organisational culture how a municipality works and Kramfors municipality is an open organisation that has a curiosity and willingness to try out different ideas. The journey to get there has taken time, and it was not obvious to work with citizen dialogue when we started thinking about this topic, but it has emerged that this is a good tool because we have realised the possibilities of it"* internally (R12). Kramfors has had politicians and officials in leadership positions who have dared to use these tools and think they are good, which according to R12 is an obvious prerequisite for working with citizen dialogue in an involving way.

### **Cross-administrative work**

R11 believes that the structure of the municipalities is one of the biggest problems as there is a "top-down silo approach" and different departments and administrations do not talk to each other. There is a lack of good links between, for example, preschools, administrations, and architects. Urban planners believe that they have all the necessary information and that there is no need to talk between departments and administrations. If a preschool is to be planned, it is important to invite the preschool department from the start and not just get opinions by sending out consultation responses. In Malmö, a project tested putting together a group of people from all the departments involved to sit physically together in the area being planned, which made it easier to work with citizen involvement. They had a funded lab environment where the people involved could act as change agents (R11). They further argue that it is necessary for the people to be in such a position of influence and to know the manager and the daily life of their department, as that platform of people becomes important to be able to collaborate. That person should also act as a co-communicator for the whole department to write news stories, how they work with other departments and so on. According to R11, it is about inspiring other people to talk to, for example, the preschool administration and creating a normality around involving the

right departments at an early stage, rather than involving at the point of referral. It can also be in an area programme that different administrations are physically presented in the area and use the opportunity for meetings, projects, and workshops with local citizens (R11). One way to develop this in the right direction, according to R11, is to have continuous learning lunches where different departments can inform and discuss how they are working with their issues, challenges, and opportunities. She exemplifies this with a student project, an urban development process from the citizen side or student presenting research on the area. So, it is very much about knowledge sharing - there must be ongoing and structured forums (R11) for internal communication. It is also important to be part of the SKR as they are knowledgeable and up to date on citizen involvement and make sure it is part of the ongoing work in the municipalities (R11).

### Guide

Linköping municipality is currently compiling a guide on social sustainability with a separate chapter on participation with an attempt to write more in-depth about the work on citizen dialogue and tips and tricks worth considering (R15). The municipality is also developing reflective questions about involvement in the early stages, by becoming more project-specific and thinking about purpose, target group and methods and so on and not having a "Small, Medium, Large" as exists now and in other municipalities (R12). R15 believes that it is important to make it systematic that everyone should have a discussion and reflection early on how dialogue and involvement should proceed and ask themselves if there is a particular focus the dialogue should have so that the right target group(s) are involved.

#### 4.1.3 Digital platforms and other digital involvement

The area of digital platforms is also one that differs between municipalities. There are several platforms and projects to study in more detail, which emerged from the interviews, both the municipalities' own platforms and tools, and other tips that came from interviews and document analysis. Table 3 provides a comprehensive overview of platforms and initiatives that focus on various methods of engagement in planning. It offers a detailed explanation and categorization of a selection of these initiatives.

**Table 3. Presentation of digital platforms and other digital involvement.**

Platform/tool	Municipality/city/org	Purpose	Status
ArcGIS Urban	Uppsala municipality, ESRI	3D map for visualisation of detailed plans and to use for visualisation and consultation.	Under development
Borås-förslaget <sup>1</sup>	Borås municipality	Suggest developments and voting	Ongoing
Botkyrkadialogen <sup>2</sup>	Botkyrka municipality	Platform for information and proposals but also politicians as a dialogue commission that aims to physically meet politicians in different geographical areas of the municipality.	Ongoing
City of Amsterdam <sup>3</sup>	Amsterdam	Citizen involvement and participatory budgeting.	Ongoing

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.boras.se/kommunochpolitik/inflytandeochdialog/borasforslaget.4.27c3ecf01817fe17035c4841.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.botkyrka.se/kommun-och-politik/sa-kan-du-paverka/botkyrkadialogen>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.amsterdam.nl/en/>; <https://thehagueacademy.com/blog/2021/02/citizen-participation-inclusive-governance/>

<b>City of Utrecht<sup>4</sup></b>	Utrecht	Citizen involvement and participatory budgeting.	Ongoing
<b>Dialog.Helsingborg<sup>5</sup></b>	Helsingborg municipality	Overview of ongoing and upcoming projects.	Ongoing
<b>Digitalt samråd, On Demand<sup>6</sup></b>	Sweco	Digital consultation portal where interested parties can find out about a project and submit comments digitally, directly on the portal. Text, maps, images, videos and web links.	Ongoing
<b>Digitala ÖP och DP</b>	Örebro municipality, ESRI, Geosecma	Developing digitisation of MP and DP.	Under development
<b>Helsingfors dialog<sup>7</sup></b>	Helsingfors	Overview of what residents and partners can participate in the city's development. Open participation with interactive communications. Citizens' budget.	Ongoing
<b>Karlstadsförslaget<sup>8</sup></b>	Karlstad municipality	Suggest developments and vote.	Ongoing
<b>Los Angeles Open data<sup>9</sup></b>	Los Angeles	Transparent statistics and information about the city for citizens.	Ongoing
<b>Malmöinitiativet<sup>10</sup></b>	Malmö municipality	E-service as part of the municipality's website where citizens' initiatives are published with voting; if an initiative receives more than 100 votes, it is taken up and dealt with by the respective responsible political board committee.	Ongoing
<b>Maptionnaire<sup>11</sup></b>	Ex. City of Stockholm	Tools for citizen dialogue, participation and interaction based on map-based data and involving citizens in the city's development.	Ongoing
<b>Medborgardialog i metaversum<sup>12</sup></b>	Sweco, Around the Corner	Digital meeting and dialogue platform in virtual environments to create more interactive, democratic, sustainable and engaging experiences between citizens, services, politicians and other stakeholders.	Ongoing
<b>Medborgarpanel<sup>13</sup></b>	City of Stockholm, Origo Group	The "Big Citizens' Panel" for everyone over 15 and the "Young Panel". The questions are answered anonymously and can range from the construction of new homes and schools to the refurbishment of various sites around Stockholm.	Ongoing
<b>Minecraft<sup>14</sup></b>	Helsingborg municipality, Göteborg municipality	Stimulate interest and involvement in urban development issues. A way to make geographic data available to the public.	Ongoing
<b>Min Stad<sup>15</sup></b>	Göteborg municipality, Bentley	3D map with the possibility to see Gothenburg from a realistic perspective and create your own proposals based on your dreams, needs and interests.	Ongoing

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.utrecht.nl/city-of-utrecht/>;

<sup>5</sup> <https://dialog.helsingborg.se/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://ondemand.sweco.se/produkt/digitalt-samrad/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.hel.fi/helsinki/en/administration/participate/channels/participation-model/>; <https://omastadi.hel.fi/?locale=en>

<sup>8</sup> <https://karlstad.se/Kommun-och-politik/delta-och-paverka/lamna-ett-e-forslag/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://data.lacity.org/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://malmo.se/Om-Malmo-stad/Politik-beslut-och-paverkan/Var-med-och-paverka/Malmoinitiativet.html>

<sup>11</sup> <https://maptionnaire.com/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.sweco.se/projekt/sweco-oppnar-upp-for-medborgardialog-i-metaversum/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://vaxer.stockholm/besok-oss/medborgardialog-och-samrad/medborgarpanel/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://stadsutveckling.goteborg.se/se-och-gora/aktiviteter-och-forelasningar/minecraft/>; <https://innovation.helsingborg.se/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://minstad.goteborg.se/>

<b>Piteå<sup>16</sup></b>	Piteå municipality	Platform with an overview of what is going on in the city and how you as a citizen can influence the municipality.	Ongoing
<b>Plan- och byggprojekt<sup>17</sup></b>	Göteborg municipality	Platform for ongoing detailed plans, projects and land allocations and other types of projects where it is possible to follow the process from start to legal force.	Ongoing
<b>Toronto<sup>18</sup></b>	Toronto	Interactive and design-based platform. Not independent - citizens controlling part of the platform.	Ongoing
<b>Sunne<sup>19</sup></b>	Sunne municipality	Platform for citizens' suggestions and comments.	Ongoing
<b>"Umeås stadsdelar – så står det till"<sup>20</sup></b>	Umeå municipality, Lantmäteriet	Map view of the municipality with dialogue questions for collecting opinion data as part of a dialogue initiative.	Completed
<b>Virtual Singapore<sup>21</sup></b>	Singapore, Bentley	The world's first digital twin of an entire nation. Using sensors, drones, and other tools, it collects information in real time. The aim is to coordinate all 3D efforts from different government agencies on a single platform so that all public authorities can use a common 3D digital city model for data analysis and citizen dialogue.	Ongoing
<b>Visionsfonden Helsingborg<sup>22</sup></b>	Helsingborg municipality	Civic engagement/ideas.	Ongoing
<b>VR<sup>23</sup></b>	Helsingborg municipality, Göteborg municipality, Sweco	VR dialogues in fictional outdoor or indoor environments or digital replicas of physical environments. Experienced via web browser, e.g., mobile phone, tablet, computer, etc.	Ongoing
<b>Övergripande plattform</b>	Linköping municipality, ESRI, Geosecma	Development of a new business model for geographical information where detailed plans will be published which will also offer functions for digital dialogue. 3D visualisation of maps and integration.	Under development

Source: Own processing.

## Collecting views

Something that recurs in the interviews is the idea of "collecting views". Both Gothenburg and Malmö do this, but there are also hints of Umeå municipality doing it in a recently completed dialogue project (R10).

Gothenburg utilizes Min Stad (My City) platform, developed with Bentley's OpenCities Planner (OCP) software, to promote citizen involvement in planning processes (R13). This platform provides a realistic 3D map of the city. Through Min Stad, citizens can submit proposals reflecting their dreams, needs, and interests, which are incorporated into Gothenburg's internal mapping tool (R13). Bentley has created an API to periodically transfer the data to a database. The data is published as a geodata service (WMS) displayed in Gothenburg's internal web map,

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.pitea.se/invanare/Kommun-politik/Paverka-din-kommun/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://goteborg.se/wps/portal/start/byggande--lantmateriet-och-planarbete/kommunens-planarbete/plan--och-byggprojekt>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.toronto.ca/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://sunne.se/kommun/kommun-och-politik/politik-och-demokrati/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.umea.se/download/18.333c64e217718860a233e3/1611148173163/Ume%C3%A5s%20stadsdelar%20-%20s%C3%A5%20st%C3%A5r%20det%20till.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.nrf.gov.sg/programmes/virtual-singapore>; <https://city2city.network/virtual-singapore-digital-twin-planning-innovation-type-institutional-pioneer>

<sup>22</sup> <https://helsingborg.se/kommun-och-politik/helsingborg-2035/visionsfonden/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://stadsutveckling.goteborg.se/sa-planeras-staden/digital-stadsutveckling/>

GOkart, developed in Hålk. This allows easy access and serves as a checkpoint for major changes. Although comments and views are not directly addressed, they serve as an opinion repository for planning processes (R13). Feedback on suggestions or comments is not explicitly provided, which is considered a weakness. However, received opinions are carefully reviewed and considered in detailed planning. The My City platform also functions as a collaborative tool for on-site dialogue with citizens, often used via iPads or screens (R13). Citizens can contribute thoughts on various development aspects, such as suggesting new crosswalks, addressing safety concerns, or proposing larger projects like playgrounds or residential areas. My City incorporates filtering to ensure relevance, and an email address requirement adds accountability. Engaging a wider audience remains a challenge, as My City primarily attracts tech-savvy and well-educated individuals (R13). However, once explored, the platform generates excitement and curiosity, effectively fostering enthusiasm for the city (R13).

Umeå municipality put the pulse on the municipality's neighbourhoods through the project "Umeås stadsdelar - så ligger det till" to create supporting material for future planning, for which they have been nominated for the 2021 planning award (R9). Through the municipality's website, a map view of the municipality was accessed with associated dialogue questions (the same questions asked during physical methods) and map pins to place out in response to the questions, with the opportunity to leave further comments (R9).

There are also examples of municipalities that have a digital citizens' panel where citizens can continuously ask questions in various important areas, so that the municipality "can feel which way the wind is blowing and what issues are being discussed" (R12). R12 mentions that the city of Stockholm has a digital citizens' panel where the aim is that citizens in the city can sign up to be part of a digital citizens' panel on urban development. She says that as a member of the panel you receive several short questionnaires via email per year, depending on where you live, and results from each completed questionnaire are presented and fed back on the website. An ongoing project that is appreciated by many (R12).

### *Platforms for overview, narrow target group representation*

Most municipalities provide information on their website about ongoing projects linked to 2D or 3D maps for visualisation, and only one of the municipalities interviewed, Helsingborg, has its own dedicated platform for dialogue. Piteå and Helsingborg municipalities stand out somewhat as examples of municipalities that have clear platforms with an overview of what is going on and what is coming up in the city (R12). According to R12, Piteå has a very clear presentation of projects and shows how citizens can participate and influence. According to R11, the city of Toronto has a very interesting platform and works a lot with it together with citizens physically on site. The platform is interactive and design-based, and citizens are involved in controlling part of the platform (R11).

Linköping municipality is currently developing a new way of doing business for their geographic information where detailed plans will be published, using Geosecma. There will be several features that F15 believes will provide opportunities for digital dialogues. It is a service with 3D visualisation of maps and a way to connect with citizens (F15). Malmö municipality also has a team visualising detailed plans now, which is linked to consultation (F9). Gothenburg has a platform called "Plan- och byggprojekt" which is a platform where it is possible to look at ongoing detailed plans, projects and land allocations and other types of projects where it is possible to follow the process from start to legal force (R13). They say that it is used quite a lot



but that they would have liked to see it more widely used. Now the platform is being modernised as it is a transparent platform that is used but needs to be more accessible (R13).

All municipalities express a difficulty in attracting citizens to digital platforms. As with consultations, it is often a narrow target group that takes the time to look up the municipality's website and most interviewees point out that the threshold is high to look up, for example, a detailed plan.

### *Digital documentation of data*

The interviews reveal a lack of systematic ways to digitally document data from dialogue sessions and digital ways for follow-up, feedback, and transparency (R1; R14). "It is important to provide feedback to those who have made comments, but it is not something we are good at except in the consultation process" (R1). Citizen dialogue that takes place outside the statutory consultation is more difficult to provide feedback on.

The municipality of Helsingborg also expresses a lack of compilation of comments and data, but at the same time it depends on how the information/data is received (R8). Digital surveys can be exported in Excel as survey responses, and they say that there are tools to analyse data and get statistics. "We are competent to take care of what we receive, which is our Achilles heel. It is usually easier to get residents to start a dialogue but difficult to deal with the comments received" (R8). This is something that is currently perceived as resource intensive by municipalities. The city planning administration in Gothenburg is looking at AI to analyse large amounts of data more quickly, but so far free text responses are often complex and difficult to analyse (R13).

In Linköping municipality and Kramfors municipality, it is possible to send opinions to the city/environment via a 2D map if something is broken, where the focus is on safety and fault reporting (R1; R14). R1 expresses that it could just as easily also be possible to send in wishes and opinions there, something that it does not explicitly aim for today. Most municipalities also have some form of telephone service for handling comments (R15).

There is a great curiosity about using technology and digital solutions and finding new ways to interact with residents, both to collect data and to involve them through digital methods (R8). At the same time, a challenge emerges as R8 expresses that he "sometimes feels that the interest in all this digital stuff is too great so that the focus on the dialogue itself and what insights we get from it gets overshadowed, here it is important to have good ways of documenting the opinions and data received" (R8).

### *E-service*

Also common are e-services/suggestions to come up with ideas for development, such as the Malmö initiative (first in Sweden), the Borås proposal and the Gothenburg proposal (R12) where the aim is for municipalities to develop or change something through citizens' initiatives that are published with a vote. If an initiative receives more than, say, 100 votes, it is taken up and dealt with by the relevant political board committee. Different committees are responsible for different areas of the municipality. R13 believes that something concrete can come out of it and mentions that one of the most famous examples is the cable car in Gothenburg, which was a suggestion from citizens and something on which a lot of resources were invested. There are about a hundred municipalities that have it today and there is no clear legal regulation, but the

municipality can design it as they want, but the important thing is that it is open and transparent and that everyone sees what proposals have been made (R13). R13 further argues that it is about proposals early in the planning process about what an area should become, it is rarely about asking a question from the municipality but often it is linked to proposals about spatial planning.

### *Innovative projects*

VR are utilized for dialogue in both Helsingborg and Gothenburg municipalities. While Helsingborg has not extensively employed them in urban planning, there are plans to do so, such as in an innovation project where children were asked to envision their ideal playground (R8). In contrast, Gothenburg regularly utilizes VR glasses in various projects, particularly in engaging children and young people through platforms like Minecraft (R13). For example, in a project to rebuild a school, children were given the opportunity to enter a Minecraft world of Gothenburg and contribute their thoughts and opinions on the school area, which proved to be a highly appreciated dialogue activity (R13). The aim is to engage young people on their preferred platforms and arenas, with Minecraft serving as a concrete way to reach them. Other initiatives in Gothenburg include pop-up offices with Minecraft computers, enabling direct dialogue with service staff (R13).

Helsingborg Municipality primarily focuses on digital methods of involvement but also recognizes the importance of physical engagement when deemed necessary (F8). They recently inaugurated a physical space called H22 or Helsingborgsrummet, located in a new harbour district. Helsingborgsrummet serves as a meeting place for physical dialogues linked to urban planning, equipped with digital tools. However, there is a level of scepticism among those involved in resident dialogues, as the location may be exclusionary for residents living outside the city. Therefore, it is necessary to complement the use of Helsingborgsrummet by reaching out and engaging with people in local areas and neighborhoods (R8).

The interviews mention Singapore as a leader in digital citizen dialogue, particularly in the field of digital twinning technology. The Netherlands, specifically Amsterdam and Utrecht, are also highlighted as being ahead in this regard. Helsinki has made significant progress in 3D visualization and participatory budgeting, while Los Angeles successfully works with open data (R12, Oct 22; R13).

#### 4.1.4 Future and development possibilities

##### *Early involvement*

To effectively influence the planning process and reduce the number of appeals, it is crucial for municipalities to involve citizens early on (R11). Engaging citizens only during the consultation stage is insufficient, and dialogue should occur throughout the entire process (R11). R11 emphasizes the importance of decision-making in the consultation phase, which necessitates initiating dialogues at an early stage of planning. The planning process should be structured to ensure continuous involvement, with conversations among citizens, service providers, and politicians (R11). R14 also underscores the significance of early citizen involvement, citing a successful project where citizens and stakeholders were called to a meeting a year prior to the project's commencement (R14).

R11 asserts that the planning process offers a significant opportunity for influencing decisions. The focus should be on concrete issues relevant to people's immediate environment and daily lives, rather than long-term visions (R11). R8 provides an example of involving pupils and their parents in decisions concerning the school environment, which is not currently standard practice. R11 suggests holding shorter dialogues that address specific questions using simple language, enabling citizens to understand and engage with the process (R11). Citizens need to participate in the early stages of projects to develop visions and detailed plans based on concrete issues (R11). Linköping Municipality agrees, noting that issues are often too distant and abstract, and there is a need to break them down into manageable aspects that impact individuals' everyday lives (R15).

Addressing design elements and detailed plans early on, such as colour schemes and heights, through dialogue can help resolve potential issues that may arise during consultation, leading to fewer appeals (R14). The municipality's willingness to invite citizens to share their opinions and desires about the area at an early stage plays a crucial role (R12).

### *Work with dialogue phases*

What R11 presents as a possible solution to a pressurised and controlled process in the detail planning process is for the planner/municipality to have a better dialogue with the property owners and divide the detail plan into different phases. For example, in "phase 1 we can try this and this with the citizens, phase 2 we can try this and this and so on" to have a clearer structure around impacts (R11). Phasing is something that Helsingborg is working with a lot, as they are currently working with dialogue in two phases around well-defined issues (R8). R8 also believes that they have a political mandate and space to carry out the dialogue in a good way. The project has been given the space and budget to be able to invite widely to create a large interest, and the location is in a known and logical place. Something that they also emphasise is the call for mid-analysis, which means "in the middle of a dialogue process, to do an analysis of what has come in and evaluate whether there are, for example, issues or perspectives that have not been highlighted" (R8). In the remaining time, they believe that the dialogue can then be adapted, adjusted, and directed to target groups that have previously been missed.

R12 argues that clear frameworks need to be set to ensure that expectations are not set higher than what is avoidable. R12 further argues that it could be an area where new housing is to be built where the framework is that there should be at least housing for two thousand people, but then the design can be open for discussion. "Should there be high or low houses, where should the houses be located? Here it is good and important to be clear about what has already been decided at the political level" (R12). This is in line with R11 who believes that "it is not possible to just have a dialogue, there has to be a framework to relate to".

### *Housing cooperation*

A further proposed solution going forward to avoid the squeeze and open for more influence is for the municipalities themselves to invest in an area, i.e., a housing partnership owned half by the municipalities and half by a real estate company (R11). As it stands today, development plans are largely already decided for e.g., x houses, x offices etc. but R11 explains that in a research project they tried to explore the model of the property owners coming in as a partner and meeting the need instead of vice versa. Needs were then determined with citizens before the detail plan was developed. In Sweden, according to them, these forms are not yet common (but they are becoming more common), but they are common in some other countries, especially in

the Netherlands, where they work with area programmes in the municipality linked to citizen budgeting.

A municipality that has recently tested working together with developers and property owners is Linköping municipality, not in housing cooperation but working more together in the early stages (R15). He says that it has been clear from the beginning that dialogue is an important part of the planning process and that dialogue and needs will form the basis of the detailed plan, and further expresses that "as it is the developers and the property owners who will build, it becomes a way for them to pick up what people want more specifically, something that adds value to the property owners" (R15).

### *Participatory budgeting*

R11 emphasizes the potential of participatory budgeting as a crucial tool for citizen engagement in the planning process. This model allows citizens to influence the allocation of resources by making suggestions and voting on measures within their communities (R11; Sweden's municipalities and regions, 2022). Originating in Brazil in 1982, participatory budgeting aims to foster trust, increase social sustainability, and enhance social trust among different stakeholders in municipalities (R12; Swedish Municipalities and Regions, 2022). Unlike other dialogue methods, citizen budgeting yields tangible outcomes, making it a distinct approach (R11; R12).

Although participatory budgeting is still in its early stages in Sweden, numerous municipalities have begun experimenting with this approach in recent years (R11; R12). However, Swedish municipalities differ in their allocation of resources compared to other regions. For instance, Paris dedicates approximately 2% of its investment budget to citizen budgeting, while a Portuguese municipality allocates 12-15% of its investment budget and Helsinki designates 4.4 million euros annually for citizen-led urban development projects (R12). Yet, no Swedish municipality has allocated even 1% of its investment budget for citizen input (R12).

SKR, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, has been actively testing citizen budgeting, with around a hundred municipalities adopting various forms of this method (R12). Noteworthy cases include Nässjö, Trelleborg, and Uppsala, where resources have been systematically allocated for local development beyond city centers. This approach has yielded positive outcomes, enabling meaningful conversations between residents and municipality representatives (R12).

Participatory budgeting also finds support from municipalities like Helsingborg and Uppsala, who envision its strength in the future (R7; R8). It is viewed to integrate management, governance, and citizen participation within effective governance models (R8). Malmö City is implementing area development initiatives, incorporating citizen budgeting as an additional incentive for community involvement (R10). By linking planning processes with participatory budgeting, tangible value can be added, allowing citizens' energy and ideas to be channelled effectively (R10).

### *Experts*

According to R12, an important realisation for municipalities is to realise that there are a lot of wise people out there in the community who both know a lot about their everyday environment in different areas. R12 says that many people working in the organisations are employed as experts and think they know and can do this, and that it can be difficult to realise that there are

others who have views. They also say that allowing citizens to come up with good ideas is seen as complicated. This is especially true when looking at areas classified as exclusionary, where citizen dialogue methods can be part of an effort to build trust and confidence. Another example is when a municipality is working on outdoor environments, for example, when it is quite easy to say that "we at the municipality know best, I am a landscape architect and I have worked with park development and planning for many years, and so we do not take into account what the citizens want from the outdoor environment. "By inviting citizens and looking at them as experts, staff and politicians get new perspectives and new ways of thinking, which creates understanding for all parties" (R14). R14 further argues that if citizens learn about how the municipality works and the municipality learns more about the citizens, they can benefit from each other and create better environments together.

### *Physical and Digital Methods*

Municipalities foresee a future where citizen involvement is easier and more accessible through various dialogues and channels. There is a shared desire to improve information dissemination and engagement, with a particular emphasis on utilizing social media platforms (R8; R15). R3 and R8 highlight the importance of effectively communicating how opinions are received and targeting different audiences with information (R3; R8).

Citizens express their preferences for different participation methods. Some prefer digital approaches due to flexibility, while others enjoy face-to-face interactions over a coffee (R12). Recognizing the need for a diverse range of methods, a combination of physical and digital approaches is considered ideal, including utilizing digital tools within physical spaces (R15). However, challenges exist in fostering creativity within digital environments, making physical presence valuable. Digital platforms provide an opportunity for engaging with local issues, but R11 emphasizes that trust and collaboration are vital for reaching marginalized groups, suggesting that digitalization alone may not be the most effective means of communication (R11).

Municipality envisions a citizen-centric tool for gathering essential information to guide city development. They aim to facilitate citizen interaction through various methods, from digital surveys to evening workshops, with the goal of reaching and involving more people (R9). R14 supports the idea of embracing digital tools, such as platforms that provide information on ongoing and upcoming activities, digital systems for voting during meetings, and digital support functions for dialogues. However, it is important to ensure accessibility for those who are not digitally connected (R1).

Gothenburg City discusses the possibility of making digital dialogues available around the clock to enhance accessibility and participation. Although initial attempts have had limited response rates, a combination of digital and personal interactions is seen as effective for engaging a broader audience and capturing input from those less active on digital platforms (R13).

Kramfors Municipality highlights the benefits of using visual and interactive tools like viewpoint maps and web maps for citizen engagement (R14). These platforms allow citizens to easily mark areas for improvement, comment, and build upon each other's opinions. However, digital exclusion remains a concern, and a combination of digital and analog methods is seen as essential (R14).

While interviewees acknowledge that digital engagement is becoming more widespread, they emphasize the importance of making advanced technology accessible and user-friendly (R13). The challenge lies in providing technology that is easily understandable and usable by a diverse range of society, similar to the simplicity and accessibility of an iPhone (R13).

### *Involving and visible dialogue*

Most of the interviewees/municipalities believe that what governs today is resources, time, and money, which they also claim can often be wrong, as investigations into what more involvement would lead to do not dare to be done. R15 believes that *"the dialogues that have been held in our municipality in the past have produced good results with increased dissemination and increased involvement, something that I hope will be the basis for us to work with more involvement in the future"*.

Education is seen as important in the future where Malmö municipality has taken a prominent role. They educate mainly children and young people but also adults in urban planning about what is good to know to be part of urban planning through information about who decides what, what to do if you have a point of view about something, who to turn to depending on the owner - is it the municipality's land, private land, is it a property owner (R9). "By giving a basic course in urban development, it makes it easier to take in information if you are not pissed off when something comes up that affects you" (R10).

Almost all interviewees stressed the need for municipalities in the future to be better at getting communication out and creating understanding and willingness and thus greater engagement, which in turn can lead to better dialogue and involvement. Municipalities need to communicate the knowledge of what a detail plan is and that it exists, and present information and what is in them in an accessible and interesting way (R3). How this is disseminated depends on the target audience, but R3 thinks it is a mix of attracting more people to the website and making it more educational with story maps/story maps - and that it can be used in the telephone interface. "The feeling should be that it is more educational and easier to get involved" (R3).

### *Reaching the younger target group*

According to R7, there are many people today who have no interest in urban planning for the simple reason that there are more important things to spend their time on. R7 further argues that *"young boys and young girls are often dissatisfied because there is a dissatisfaction that 'we' are not doing something about what 'they' want"*. He further argues that it is important to understand from the beginning what involvement and dialogue can lead to and that going forward it is important to think about how the younger target group can be reached and involved. A lot can be done through place development, which means doing things together with young people through temporary methods to *"talk to the area"* (R7). R12 argues that there are a lot of young people who want to be involved in the community today, but that they may not do so for various reasons. R12 further argues that *"it is not done in the same way as the traditional way like being a member of a political party or being a member of an association or organisation, but people*

*want to participate around certain issues that they themselves think are important. What is needed then is to find ways to participate and influence in different ways".* She also argues that Swedish municipalities have so far not been very good at channelling young people's opinions and have not managed to incorporate them into the regular processes, and stresses that forms of reaching the younger target group and taking their opinions, thoughts and views into account need to be developed. She believes that it is important to go out and meet them and invite them to participate in ways that suit them. *"It can be as simple as elected representatives going out and meeting pupils in schools in a different way and systematically going out and listening in and hearing what are the issues that are important to you in terms of wanting to stay in this municipality or develop, it has been shown that in these contexts very good and important opinions emerge. It's not primarily what you think, for example, that they should have a basketball court or a skateboard ramp, but it's about housing, jobs and other basic things that are very important. The younger target group often has very wise views on how to solve things"* (R12).

### ***Common transparent platform/location***

In the future, it is important for Linköping municipality to have a unified model or map that provides an overview of ongoing urban development projects (R15). This model would allow citizens to click on detailed plans, view project statuses on a timeline, and determine when they can participate and have an influence. Currently, the urban planning department often neglects the citizen's perspective, so it is crucial to include information such as street reconstructions or traffic work in the model or map, along with communicative functions (R2). Digital forms for comments are necessary to accommodate the relatively large number of comments received on urban planning issues, requiring adaptation in terms of language and vocabulary (R2).

Transparency is emphasized as a vital element of future platforms. Los Angeles is cited as an inspiring example of a city that effectively incorporates transparency by maintaining a dashboard displaying goals, criteria, and their status (R13). This daily updated platform allows citizens to track progress and areas requiring improvement.

Within the next five to ten years, Uppsala municipality envisions a digital twin linked to a map for comments, while Gothenburg municipality hopes to employ their digital twin for citizen dialogue, featuring avatars to facilitate participation and expression of opinions (R13). Being an avatar in the digital twin is seen as rewarding and less intimidating, as research indicates that people find it easier to express their real opinions in a digital world (R13). It is important to ensure that the platform is accessible, well-known, and capable of attracting external contributors interested in urban development. Nevertheless, civic dialogue must continue to involve physical interactions between politicians, service providers, and residents (R13). The aim is to complement the digital world with real-life engagement, as both are necessary. Generating genuine interest is a greater challenge than creating interesting tools, and people need to feel empowered and motivated to participate. Representative dialogues require reaching a sufficient number and diversity of voices (R7).

A digital platform with a digital twin and avatars allows municipalities to overcome barriers to participation for individuals with disabilities, illnesses, or time constraints (R13). Such a platform can offer various models and architectural options, enabling more insightful dialogues and addressing concerns more effectively (R13).

The Helsingborg Room is mentioned by several respondents as a remarkable space for citizen dialogue, featuring a large map of the city, models of urban planning processes, and interactive screens with informative film clips (H22). The hope is to create similar gathering places in other municipalities, where consultation meetings can be held and a clear point or place is established for the future of the city (R15).

### *Systematic approach*

Looking to the future, SKR (R12) hopes that more municipalities have become more systematic in their work with dialogue so that it becomes a way of working in the municipality as it has proven to be good over time. New ways of working take time to get into (R12). R12 believes that as things stand now, it is generally often on the sidelines as a project, but it would be beneficial to bring it into the mainstream organisation. The big challenge, according to R12, is to succeed in building ecosystem of how municipalities work with participation issues and how municipalities ensure that they have a representative democracy where we have our elected representatives who are responsible for carrying out tasks and making decisions. What is also needed is to find different ways of working around involvement. He further expresses that *"a lot is happening, and it is happening very fast now. Things are happening that affect how we deal with different issues, and we see that many of the issues that municipalities and regions must deal with are becoming more and more complex, i.e., there is rarely a given answer"* (R12). She argues that there are very many different perspectives that need to be weighed up for or against each other, and so many perspectives need to be considered to have a good idea of what the best way forward is, and so ensure that more people realise that decisions are being made on a sound basis. *"If we are to succeed in maintaining democracy in this country, we need to work with participation issues in a real way and in a different way than the way many municipalities work today. This is extremely important"* (R12). Something that is fundamental is politics, as it requires political leadership that prioritises this issue in the municipal organisation (R8). R8 also believes that there is a need for a clearer way of working on dialogue so that it does not depend on a particular person in a particular activity or administration who thinks these issues are important, but that it is an issue for the entire municipality.



## 5. Discussion: Results & Analysis

The discussion chapter includes presentation of results and analysis and outlines a link between the study's theory and empirical findings. The structure of the discussion chapter is based on the research questions to ensure that the research questions and purpose of the study are answered. In the recommendations (chapter 5.4), the study provides a response to the research's purpose by presenting three suggestions.

### 5.1 Challenges and needs (research question 1)

#### 5.1.1 Social sustainability in planning processes

By engaging in environmental, social, and economic issues, municipalities can positively influence the development of society and promote equality and inequality (Globalportal, 2020). Social sustainability in urban planning seeks to create environments in which people thrive and where their individual needs can be met (Boverket, 2010). A city should be cohesive and accessible to all and mixed in functions such as housing, development, jobs, business, and culture (Ullstad, 2008). An overall challenge on municipalities to manage complex issues in a local environment intertwined with global changes (Abrahamsson, 2018). Several cities and municipalities are currently in a field of tension where social unrest and trust are each a pool in which society moves between, and there is also increasing social exclusion and a lack of cohesion (Abrahamsson, 2018; R12). More participation in public deliberation and decision-making can result in greater inclusion, equality and even efficiency (Abrahamsson, 2018). Civil society and citizens together with knowledge institutions, commercial partners, and government (municipalities) are important components to successfully develop knowledge and economy in a municipality forward, just as the Triple Helix model argues in terms of society at large (Roga, 2021). The fact that Swedish municipalities are now also entering a more difficult economic situation makes trade-off decisions more important, where it is of great importance that investments are made according to what citizens want (R12).

In terms of urban planning processes in the form of master plans, planning programmes and detailed plans, there is currently predominantly one specific target group represented in consultations and dialogues, older retired men with high socio-economic status and education (R1; R3; R7; R12; R15). This indicates that a narrow target group representation becomes the voice of the people as Abrahamsson, (2018) and Stenberg et al (2013) indicates, which opposes socially sustainable development (Fischer, 2016).

According to Fischer (2016) and municipal representatives, involving socio-economically disadvantaged groups in public processes can lead to valuable contributions and personal development. This inclusion fosters local knowledge and enhances trust in officials and politicians. Municipalities recognize the importance of reducing language barriers by providing information and dialogues in the languages spoken by target groups (R1; R7), as highlighted by R11. Additionally, establishing connections with 'gatekeepers' and individuals with local knowledge, such as through associations or the church, is crucial for reaching currently excluded target groups. It requires the courage to acknowledge the valuable knowledge held by others in society, and the potential for reaching specific groups is only limited by one's imagination (R12).

Noteworthy examples of successful initiatives include Umeå, which received a planning award nomination for its work in taking the pulse of different areas, and Malmö, currently developing area programmes based on the same approach (R9; R12). Malmö Municipality actively involves residents in influencing pre-planning discussions, leading to a baseline analysis that informs planning commissions about relevant issues and opinions (R10). Similarly, Gothenburg utilizes the digital platform My City to gather and consider public opinions during the development of detailed plans (R13).

### 5.1.2 The detail planning process

The current situation regarding the detail planning process is perceived as problematic by all parties interviewed. Financial and time pressures are common in the detail planning process, primarily because real estate companies often control the process, leading to a lack of prioritization for citizen dialogue and involvement from service providers (R11; R12). Literature supports these findings, indicating that citizen involvement in the detail planning process faces barriers related to location, information, and language (Brynhildsen, 2019).

Although there is some level of citizen involvement in master plans and in-depth master plans, dialogues are less common when it comes to detailed plan consultations. The opportunities for influencing the detailed plan process are perceived as limited, and the consultation often occurs late in the process, causing frustration among planners. Many interviewees emphasize that the consultation lacks a true dialogue perspective, with a focus on information sharing and legal obligations to seek citizens' opinions (R2; R11). This traditional approach to "dialogue" is seen as outdated (R8). According to R11, when dialogue is reduced to mere consultation, it becomes one-way communication, and the opinions expressed by citizens are rarely considered. Consequently, R11 says that this leads to an increase in appeals and complicates the planning processes, findings that is confirmed by Brynhildsen (2019).

Regarding dialogue at the early stages and across entire planning areas, some interviewees argue that it is challenging for people to have the motivation to influence a future that seems too distant and abstract (R12). Abrahamsson's co-creative citizen dialogue (Abrahamsson, 2018) emphasizes the importance of helping citizens understand the reasons behind addressing the area and empowering them to recognize their opportunities to influence and shape its development.

### 5.1.3 Prioritised and systematic approaches

Abrahamsson (2018) emphasizes the significance of pre- and post-work in dialogue and the need for dialogue and involvement to be integrated throughout entire processes. This aligns with F11's observation that the current feedback mechanism lacks circularity, indicating a major shortcoming in the existing procedures. The interviews reveal a conspicuous absence of strategic and systematic approaches to enhance internal knowledge, raise awareness, and foster the continuous development of dialogue and involvement. Consequently, dialogue often remains confined to isolated events or projects. To address this, there is a critical requirement to establish an ecosystem of working methods (R12), as proposed by Abrahamsson (2018). The co-creative citizen dialogue framework highlights the necessity for the design of dialogue to evolve in response to evaluations of previous dialogues. To achieve this, it may be necessary to define overall objectives that can be translated into actionable steps and processes, thereby creating formal pathways for knowledge transfer and evaluation (R7).

Another notable finding from the interviews, particularly in Kramfors and Malmö Municipality, is the emphasis on closeness among politicians, service providers, and citizens, often referred to as the "trinity" (R9; R14). The establishment of such closeness may be deeply rooted in the cultural norms of municipalities, posing challenges for change implementation. Nonetheless, it is essential to have the courage to initiate this transformation (Abrahamsson, 2018; R14).

Municipalities need to recognize the value that qualitative dialogue content provides for social cohesion (Abrahamsson, 2018). Achieving this requires organizational willingness and curiosity, elements largely influenced by the leadership styles of service providers and the policies of the municipality. Currently, these aspects are not given high priority (Abrahamsson, 2018; R12).

R11 emphasizes the need for a fundamental change in the municipal structure to overcome the inhibiting silo approach. Moreover, R12 suggests that citizen dialogue should be incorporated into the line organization. By establishing an understanding that citizen dialogue and involvement are winning strategies for municipalities, questions and opinions can be considered at the appropriate stage, avoiding situations where they are only raised through appeals against decisions (Abrahamsson, 2018; R11; R12). Research reveals a predominantly top-down and formal approach to citizen participation in Swedish municipalities, where citizens are involved too late in processes due to the political governance of municipalities (R11).

#### 5.1.4 Overall responsibility

To enhance citizen dialogue and involvement in municipalities, an effective approach involves assigning specific individuals with the responsibility for driving these initiatives (R12).

Helsingborg municipality exemplifies this approach by having designated individuals who actively address inclusion, equality, and discrimination issues. These individuals also provide support and act as coaches for various projects across different activities in the city. However, it is crucial to ensure that knowledge dissemination does not remain confined to a limited number of individuals or a specific department. Instead, it should be deeply embedded throughout the entire administration and municipality (R8). This broader anchoring of knowledge is essential for its effectiveness and impact.

According to R11, individuals in these roles can be regarded as change agents and communicators. To fulfill these roles effectively, they need to have a comprehensive understanding of the organization as a whole and wield influence within it. Horizontal coordination within the organization plays a significant role in disseminating and developing knowledge. It also allows for a more unified approach towards citizens, who typically perceive the municipality as a cohesive entity (R12). Working across administrative boundaries not only strengthens the municipality's resilience but also promotes smarter practices (R12). Malmö municipality implemented a pilot study in an area program where representatives from each department worked together in a shared physical space to focus on citizen dialogue during the project. This pilot initiative can be seen as a potential model for a similar structure within the broader municipal organization (R11).

#### 5.1.5 Guides/routine descriptions

Municipalities commonly produce documents such as guides or manuals that include sections on dialogue activities or social sustainability, albeit often as a smaller component. Typically, these documents describe the SKR dialogue ladder and offer communication strategies and tips for conducting dialogues. However, Linköping municipality is currently taking a step further by refining their dialogue descriptions. They are incorporating reflective questions to improve early-

stage involvement by adopting a more project-specific approach and considering factors like purpose, target group, and methods. This approach deviates from the common "level-1-2-3" framework found in the documents (as observed in the study's document analyses). Most of these documents date back to 2015-2017, making them around 6-8 years old at the time of writing. The SKR dialogue staircase, although widely used, has sparked controversy and criticism in interviews with several municipalities. Some criticize its design, viewing it as square and lacking true co-decision-making (top step), as the ultimate decision-making power lies with politicians. It is also criticized for creating a bias by presenting an "upward" trend, leading citizens to perceive the municipality as either "good or bad" at citizen involvement. Instead, the focus should be on providing fundamental information (the bottom step of the SKR dialogue ladder), and consultations (the second step) should be frequent elements (R11). However, SKR and Kramfors municipality do not share this criticism. They argue that the staircase is used by many municipalities as a visualization tool to showcase the type of dialogue employed, rather than implying a progression in levels of participation. They believe it assists officials and politicians in designing their methods (Abrahamsson, 2018; R12; R14).

Abrahamsson (2018) advocates for a new presentation format that encompasses different forms of involvement. They propose a more horizontal visualization of various participation approaches, drawing inspiration from KAIROS, the City of Gothenburg, and SKR's Participation Ladder. Their aim is to visually depict co-creative citizen dialogue based on existing research literature, promoting more participatory and inclusive practices (see Figure 6). In summary, participatory civic dialogue should strive for inclusivity, equal power relations, and active citizen involvement in problem definition, identification, implementation, decision-making, and follow-up processes.

### 5.1.6 Communication

#### *Internal communication*

Municipalities face a significant knowledge gap when it comes to citizen involvement, as planners and officials are rarely trained or educated in this area. However, municipalities are increasingly recognizing the importance and benefits of citizen engagement, leading to a growing need for greater understanding (Fischer, 2016; R2; R7; R8; R11). Helsingborg municipality is actively addressing this by implementing internal training on user-driven service design. This training, spanning one to two days, draws on a compilation of material from SKR's innovation guide, focusing on collaborative practices between Helsingborg municipality and its citizens (R8).

According to the interview findings, there is a widespread lack of knowledge regarding the concept of citizen dialogue, and clear routines for citizen involvement are often absent. R2 suggests that introducing internal training programs and improving information dissemination within municipalities could address this issue. SKR plays an active role in sharing developments with Swedish municipalities and regions, offering training courses, seminars, master classes, and networking opportunities for cross-boundary learning. They also provide digital lectures tailored to the specific needs of municipalities (Abrahamsson, 2018; R12), a resource utilized by Helsingborg and Kramfors municipalities (R8; R14). Furthermore, ongoing knowledge-sharing sessions that facilitate continuous learning and discussions among departments are essential for fostering internal knowledge development. These sessions focus on working methods, organizational structure, and establishing forums for effective knowledge exchange (R11).

### *External communication*

Co-creative citizen dialogue encompasses the active involvement of citizens in problem formulation, action identification, implementation, evaluation, and feedback (Abrahamsson, 2018; Adler, 2015; KAIROS, 2016). However, a significant challenge identified by all municipalities in the study is the limited dissemination of information to citizens. The preferred communication channels vary among the municipalities, but there is a consensus that a combination of channels is necessary, requiring continuous analysis and updates. Linköping municipality emphasizes the value of direct mail as a comprehensive means of reaching all citizens, including those who opt out of advertising. They also acknowledge the increasing importance of social media (R15). Moreover, municipalities have started to strategically identify the physical locations frequented by citizens, such as shops, transport stops, sports clubs, and organizations, in order to tailor communication efforts (R11). Localization and language customization are crucial considerations, ensuring information availability in the appropriate language for the specific area (Brynhildsen, 2019; R7; R12). Helsingborg municipality additionally collaborates with advocacy groups as communication channels to minimize barriers and enhance engagement (R8).

A common need expressed by most municipalities, including Örebro municipality, is the exploration of new and more effective communication channels to engage broader target groups and provide transparent visibility of ongoing projects within the municipality (R2). Initiating involvement among citizens at the early stages of projects is a desired goal, drawing inspiration from other municipalities and developing communication methods with accompanying follow-up procedures. Systematic documentation and dissemination of lessons learned regarding dialogue methods and communication channels, ensuring their relevance and up-to-dateness, are emphasized (R2).

Furthermore, the engagement of the younger demographic is a crucial consideration. R12 suggests that young people are highly invested in social issues, yet Swedish municipalities have struggled to effectively incorporate their perspectives into regular processes. It is essential to explore avenues for involving young individuals in urban planning and accommodate their thoughts and viewpoints. Engaging with young people on their preferred platforms and creating tailored opportunities for participation are important strategies to consider (R12).

## 5.2 Digital platforms and tools for engagement (research question 2)

Urban planning faces several challenges, including climate change, resource constraints, urbanization, and the impact of mobile and internet technology (Przebylłowicz et al., 2022). These challenges are further compounded by the decreasing engagement of young people due to individualization and convenience, as well as a broader democratic deficit and declining trust in political systems (Abrahamsson, 2018; Stigendal, 2016). To address these issues and promote sustainable urban development, there has been a suggestion to harness digital technologies and platforms (Przebylłowicz et al., 2022; Roga, 2021), an approach supported by many local authorities (R2; R7; R15). However, it is important to acknowledge that digital solutions may not be universally applicable due to ongoing issues of digital exclusion, particularly in socio-economically vulnerable areas (Brandtzaeg et al., 2011; R11; R14).

While digital platforms offer potential for information gathering and mapping, there is a concern that an excessive focus on technology overlooks the social aspects of urban projects (Przebylovicz et al., 2022). Nevertheless, recent research highlights the potential of digitization and technology in addressing deficiencies in participatory planning (Przebylovicz et al., 2022). By integrating intelligent digital collaboration methods with physical participation, it becomes possible to leverage data and technology to support urban development across various dimensions, including social sustainability, the economy, and quality of life (Lai et al., 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to present technologically advanced yet user-friendly solutions and deploy these digital tools in face-to-face interactions between citizens, service providers, and politicians (R13).

The prevalence of the internet has led to discussions and opinions being shared on various social channels, posing challenges for local authorities to stay informed and address dissatisfactions (Roga, 2021). Many local authorities express the need for a unified platform to collect data, regardless of whether the dialogue takes place in physical or digital spaces, in order to enhance transparency, evaluation, and feedback management (R3; R7). Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can facilitate citizen involvement throughout the planning process and promote interaction, social sustainability, economic prosperity, and an improved quality of life (Lin, 2018).

While different local authorities adopt various approaches to digital platforms and tools, there is a consensus on the importance of combining social and digital engagement methods. Efforts are made to engage older individuals, young people, persons with disabilities, and socio-economically disadvantaged populations, indicating a desire to reach a wider target group. Innovative methods, such as using digital tools on-site (e.g., Minecraft games or interactive maps on large screens), provide new avenues for involvement (R8; R12). Challenges related to managing collected data are evident, as observed in Helsingborg's use of digital surveys and exporting data to Excel format. Gothenburg municipality is exploring the application of artificial intelligence (AI) to expedite the sorting and analysis of feedback (R13). Providing feedback to citizens is crucial, as it signals that their opinions have been acknowledged, considered, discussed, and valued by politicians and officials (R13).

To enhance citizen involvement, particularly among socially marginalized groups, Public Participation GIS (PPGIS) has emerged as a well-developed approach that combines participatory features with cartography (Kahila-Tani, 2015). ArcGIS Urban, a form of PPGIS, offers local authorities a comprehensive platform for visualizing projects, facilitating engagement, and receiving feedback (ESRI, 2020b). This tool enables the creation of interactive web maps, 3D views, and questionnaires for early dialogues while ensuring data protection. However, it is crucial to recognize that addressing the social, political, economic, environmental, and cultural dimensions of urban planning requires a multi-method approach (Hasler et al., 2017; Roga, 2021).

Digital forms of engagement, such as digital surveys, consultation portals, map portals, 2D and 3D digital models, participatory budgeting, virtual reality (VR), and Minecraft, can be integrated into a platform and adapted as needed. Helsingborgsrummet (H22), a physical gathering place for citizen dialogue that combines digital and physical interactions, serves as an inspiring example for several local authorities (R8; R15). Such physical meeting points can effectively

disseminate municipal digital platforms, educate citizens on their usage, and strive for inclusivity in terms of geographic accessibility. However, it should be noted that digi-physical dialogue should not be limited to a central location but spread across different areas of a municipality to also reach less easily accessible geographic regions (R11).

## 5.3 Future perspectives

### 5.3.1 Co-creation, phasing, and middle analysis

The current detail planning process has been criticized for its lack of citizen involvement and limited dialogue opportunities, particularly emphasized by young planners who advocate for earlier engagement (R12). This empirical data highlights a significant concern within the planning field. To address this issue, scholars such as Abrahamsson (2018) suggest an alternative approach of early and continuous involvement throughout the entire planning process, from the initial idea stage to the final stage. This theoretical perspective aligns with the empirical findings and offers a potential solution to enhance citizen participation (R11).

To implement such an approach, municipalities can explore housing cooperation models where they collaborate with property companies, ensuring that detailed plans are developed in consultation with citizens and based on their needs. This integration of empirical data (R11; R15) and theoretical insights provides a pathway for municipalities to enhance citizen involvement and address the current shortcomings in the planning process.

Another proposed improvement is involving developers and property owners at earlier stages and actively listening to citizens' needs and preferences for specific areas. This empirical suggestion (R11) reinforces the idea of creating a more inclusive and participatory planning process, aligning with the theoretical framework of co-creative citizen dialogue put forth by Abrahamsson (2018). By incorporating empirical data and theoretical insights, the text establishes a clear connection between the need for citizen involvement and potential strategies for achieving it.

Furthermore, the concept of equal power relations emerges as a fundamental aspect of achieving co-creative citizen dialogue, where citizens can actively influence the entire planning process and feel co-responsible for the outcomes. This theoretical proposition (Abrahamsson, 2018) aligns with the empirical examples of Linköping and Kramfors municipalities, which demonstrate successful knowledge dissemination and involvement efforts before project initiation, aiming to foster a sense of belonging and reduce dissatisfaction (R11; R15). The integration of empirical evidence and theoretical concepts strengthens the argument for the importance of equal power relations in facilitating effective citizen participation.

In terms of practical implementation, municipalities like Gothenburg and Malmö have recognized the value of engaging citizens in the early stages, such as the planning phase, to gather their views and address crucial issues that will influence later stages of the process (R10; R13). Linköping municipality also emphasizes ongoing involvement throughout the detailed planning, design, and construction phases, emphasizing the potential benefits of fostering a sense of responsibility and reducing complaints and destruction (Abrahamsson, 2018). These empirical examples provide tangible evidence of successful approaches to citizen involvement and reinforce the theoretical notion of continuous participation throughout the planning process.

One significant challenge identified in the detailed planning process is the predominant influence of property owners due to their financial contributions (R11). To overcome this challenge, R11 proposes dividing the detail plan into different phases and promoting co-ownership between municipalities and property companies. This pragmatic solution aligns with the theoretical framework of co-creative citizen dialogue, focusing on citizens' everyday concerns and ensuring manageable issues for consideration (R11). The integration of empirical findings and theoretical perspectives strengthens the argument and provides practical recommendations for overcoming barriers to citizen participation.

In terms of evaluation and improvement, Helsingborg municipality stands out by employing mid-analysis, which allows ongoing evaluation during the dialogue process to make necessary adjustments and enhance communication (R8). This practical approach resonates with the theoretical emphasis on systematic evaluation and follow-up, as highlighted by Abrahamsson (2018). The text connects empirical practices and theoretical recommendations, highlighting the significance of evaluation, communication strategies, and diligent execution for successful citizen engagement.

Transparency and managing expectations emerge as crucial elements in facilitating effective citizen engagement. Citizens need to understand what aspects they can influence and what is predetermined by the municipality to foster meaningful dialogue and a sense of involvement (R14). Failure to provide such transparency can result in dissatisfaction, emphasizing the importance of clear communication (Abrahamsson, R11; R12). By integrating empirical insights and theoretical perspectives, the text establishes a strong connection between transparency, managing expectations, and successful citizen participation.

### 5.3.2 Data-driven methods and education in urban planning

Based on the analysis of interviews conducted, a consistent theme emerges regarding the importance of understanding the opinions and desires of the city's residents in the planning process. The empirical data suggests that by developing both physical and digital methods, municipalities can better incorporate citizen perspectives. Malmö municipality exemplifies this approach by continuously gathering data on citizen opinions and desires, which serves as a foundation for planning processes and urban development projects. This systematic data collection eliminates the need for individual invitations for each dialogue project, facilitating more efficient and inclusive dialogue (R9). The integration of empirical findings and theoretical concepts supports the idea that such data-driven methods align with Abrahamsson's (2018) framework of participatory dialogue, emphasizing the significance of implementation for successful resident involvement.

Furthermore, the interviewed municipalities highlight the importance of citizen education to foster interest, knowledge, and curiosity among residents. Malmö municipality, for instance, actively works on educating young people about urban planning, providing them with the necessary information to participate in the process (R10). This educational initiative aims to reduce barriers and potentially minimize the occurrence of contentious opinions in the long run. By implementing approaches like citizen budgeting, the municipality sparks interest and disseminates knowledge and information on a more practical level. The allocation of real funds dedicated to citizens creates a sense of ownership, emphasizing their right to influence the design and future of their municipality and city (R11).



### 5.3.3 Breaking silo structures and exploring participatory approaches

The imperative of citizen involvement extends beyond development areas, requiring a shift in the organizational mindset and breaking the existing "silo structure" prevalent in Swedish municipalities (Abrahamsson, 2018; R12). Acknowledging that citizen involvement is a concern that spans all administrative domains and affects all residents, it should be perceived as an ongoing developmental effort rather than a one-time event or project. This necessitates open discussions and collaboration within and between administrations, with prioritization from political leaders and management (R12).

Abrahamsson (2018) emphasizes the importance of establishing appropriate forms of dialogue that dismantle power hierarchies and provide equal opportunities for everyone to contribute. As mentioned earlier, structured dialogue formats that integrate citizen involvement into the municipality's culture are crucial. Abrahamsson (2018) further emphasizes the significance of pre- and post-work, sustained participation, and comprehensive analysis and evaluation. Adapting working methods and approaches to each specific project requires top-down prioritization (Abrahamsson, 2018; R8).

Citizen budgeting has gained prominence in Sweden and internationally, with its prevalence expected to increase among Swedish municipalities in the future (Allert & Lindblom, 2020; R12). This approach empowers citizens by allocating them a budget to formulate proposals, which are then subjected to a democratic vote to determine which proposals will be implemented. Abrahamsson (2018) highlights citizen budgeting to foster trust among different stakeholders, enhance social sustainability, and reinforce the legitimacy of representative political systems. Notably, citizen engagement through budgeting yields tangible outcomes, setting it apart from more consultative forms of dialogue (Abrahamsson, 2018). R11 also emphasizes the liberating nature of citizen budgeting compared to other dialogue formats, as it intertwines management, governance, and citizen involvement in genuine dialogues (R8). R14 further supports citizen budgeting as a favourable approach based on community maturity but acknowledges that its implementation requires municipal management to grasp its benefits. Prioritization plays a crucial role, and while participatory budgeting training is available through SKR (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions), it ultimately hinges on the willingness of municipal leadership (R8).

### 5.3.4 Expanding citizen engagement through emerging digitalisation and technologies

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for informing and engaging citizens in urban planning, offering unprecedented opportunities for information sharing, mapping, and involvement, accessible anytime and anywhere (Harsler et al., 2017; Roga, 2021). While the data collected through social media may be biased, a combination of diverse opinions gathered from these platforms proves to be a successful approach. Municipalities recognize the potential of social media and are increasingly leveraging it to reach out, generate interest, and foster engagement in urban planning (R12; Roga, 2021).

Linköping municipality envisions H22 as a future gathering place, serving as a natural meeting point for residents. This space will inspire dialogues and consultations, facilitating the use, testing, and evaluation of new digital forms of dialogue (R15). According to Abrahamsson (2018), involvement throughout the planning process is crucial, emphasizing the importance of action. Having a physical place in the city equipped with digital platforms not only encourages involvement but also provides a transparent platform to showcase the city's vision and progress.

Incorporating various project-specific methods that consider diverse views, along with exploring "fun" inclusion formats like VR glasses, avatars in game environments, and metaverse, holds promise for future engagement practices.

Cutting-edge technologies such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), Minecraft, and Metaverse offer novel ways to understand and interact with stakeholders regarding area plans and designs. Several Swedish municipalities have successfully utilized Minecraft to gather ideas and promote understanding and interest in community planning, particularly among schoolchildren who actively participate and contribute their suggestions for place design (R8; R13; R16). Metaverse, the latest technological platform, provides a fully immersive virtual environment (Gartner, 2022), enabling politicians, officials, and citizens to digitally convene, study the same perspectives, and engage in dialogues through speech or writing. In a virtual environment, participants can communicate and navigate just as they would in the physical world. Organizers have the flexibility to create various environments, including fictional outdoor or indoor spaces or digital replicas of physical environments. Meeting in a manner resembling physical gatherings stimulates natural dialogues and enhances engagement. Moreover, the ability to simulate different scenarios and present text, images, videos, 3D objects, and traditional presentations in innovative ways further increases engagement, fosters value-creating dialogues, and opens up exciting new avenues for involvement that are not bound by physical constraints.

## 5.4 Recommendations

### 5.4.1 A changing process

The analysis conducted in this report highlights several challenges associated with the detailed planning process, which is characterized as a controlled and formal procedure. One key issue identified is the lack of transparency and communication, along with the prevailing perception that citizen involvement is confined to a specific administration or department, treating it as a separate project rather than integrating it within the line organization. Drawing upon the analysis of the current situation and the identified needs, specific recommendations are provided below in the areas of i) a transformed detailed planning process, ii) a digital platform, and iii) alignment with the line organization.

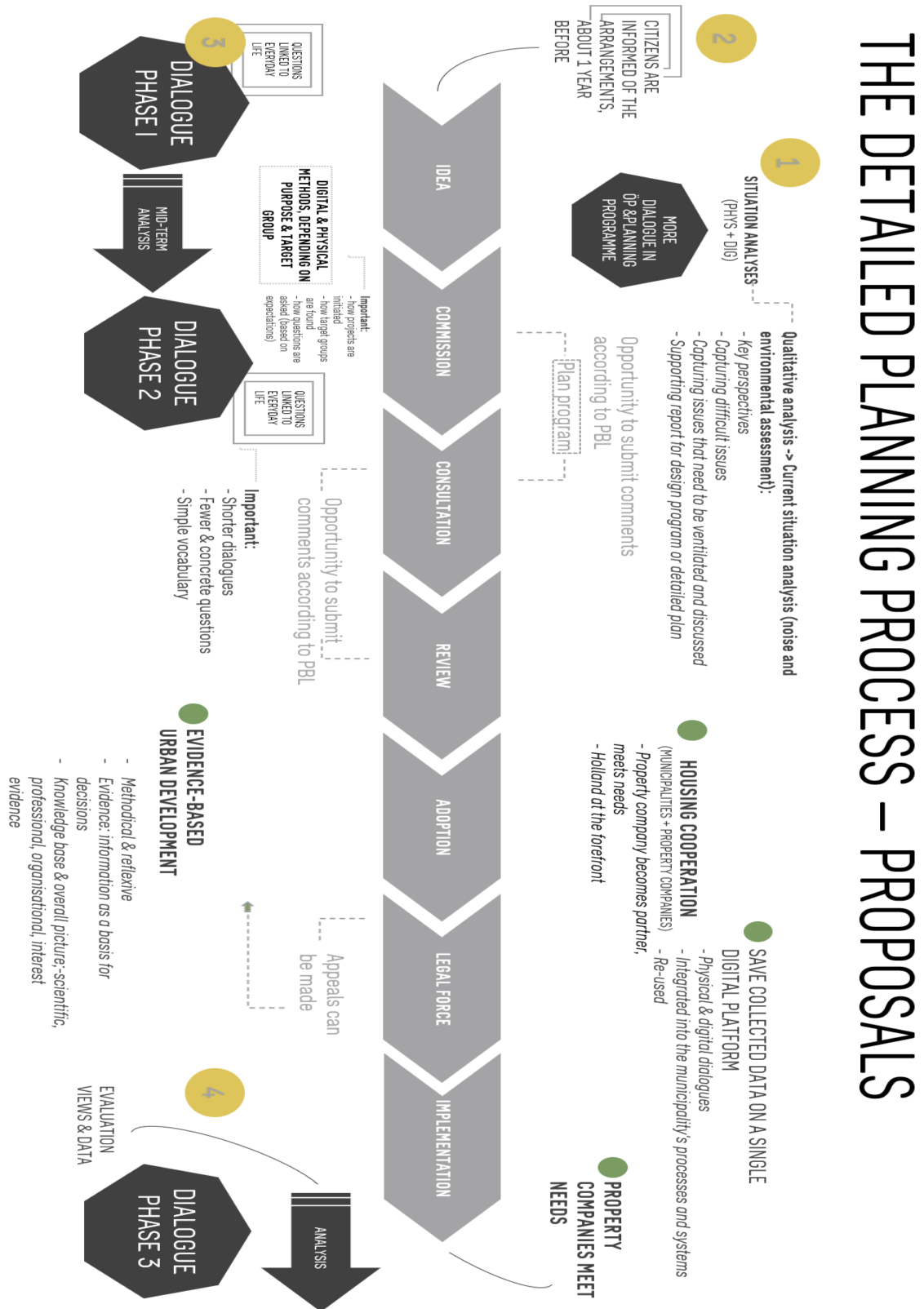
Implementing changes in these three elements has the potential to significantly transform how municipalities engage citizens in urban planning, resulting in increased efficiency, transparency, and a reduction in appeals. Enabling early and extensive citizen participation necessitates effectively communicating the timing and mechanisms for citizens to engage in decision-making processes. By promoting dialogue and participation at the initial stages of planning, municipalities can enhance citizen satisfaction, make more informed decisions, reduce appeals against detailed plans, and deepen overall knowledge and planning information. Consequently, planning proposals become better anchored, streamlining the planning process as increased citizen satisfaction leads to a likely reduction in appeals.

### 5.4.2 A changed detailed planning process

Currently, the detailed planning process is predominantly controlled by real estate companies, limiting opportunities for citizen involvement. Planners and service providers often feel constrained by project economics, leaving little room for meaningful citizen engagement. Consultations and reviews typically manifest as one-way "dialogues" through the distribution of

pre-prepared documents, providing citizens with a legal opportunity to comment on proposed plans. Regrettably, these interactions rarely involve active consideration of citizen perspectives, as evidenced by research findings and interviews with municipalities. Consequently, this lack of constructive and co-creative dialogue engenders dissatisfaction and appeals, thereby exacerbating the duration and costs associated with the planning process.

Figure 9. A proposal for a modified detail planning process based on the results of the study.



Source: Own processing. Comment: light grey colour visualises the current situation around detailed planning process, the dark grey visualizes proposals based on the report's analysis.

This study provides insights into the advantages of early citizen involvement in planning processes (1). As Figure 9 visualise, it suggests the utilization of interest groups, individual citizens, area programs, citizens' offices, and digital platforms to establish "baseline analyses" prior to project initiation (1). To ensure transparency and enable citizen influence, it is crucial to proactively inform citizens well in advance, ideally a year before the processes begin (2). Maintaining transparency throughout the entire process and avoiding sporadic engagement is essential, emphasizing the need for sustained citizen involvement (3). Effective citizen engagement should encompass diverse physical and digital methods within well-defined frameworks (3). Moreover, specific phases within the process should address issues relevant to citizens' everyday lives, such as the placement of cycle paths based on their current living situations or the identification of housing requirements (3). Furthermore, incorporating citizen involvement into evaluation and follow-up procedures is recommended to foster self-critical and developmental dialogue (4). This would facilitate ongoing assessment of the planning outcomes and provide opportunities for continuous improvement.

In addition to the forementioned suggestions, municipalities should explore the possibility of housing collaboration between property companies and the local authorities, granting property companies a more prominent role in meeting citizens' needs. This can further enhance dialogue and cooperation among various stakeholders.

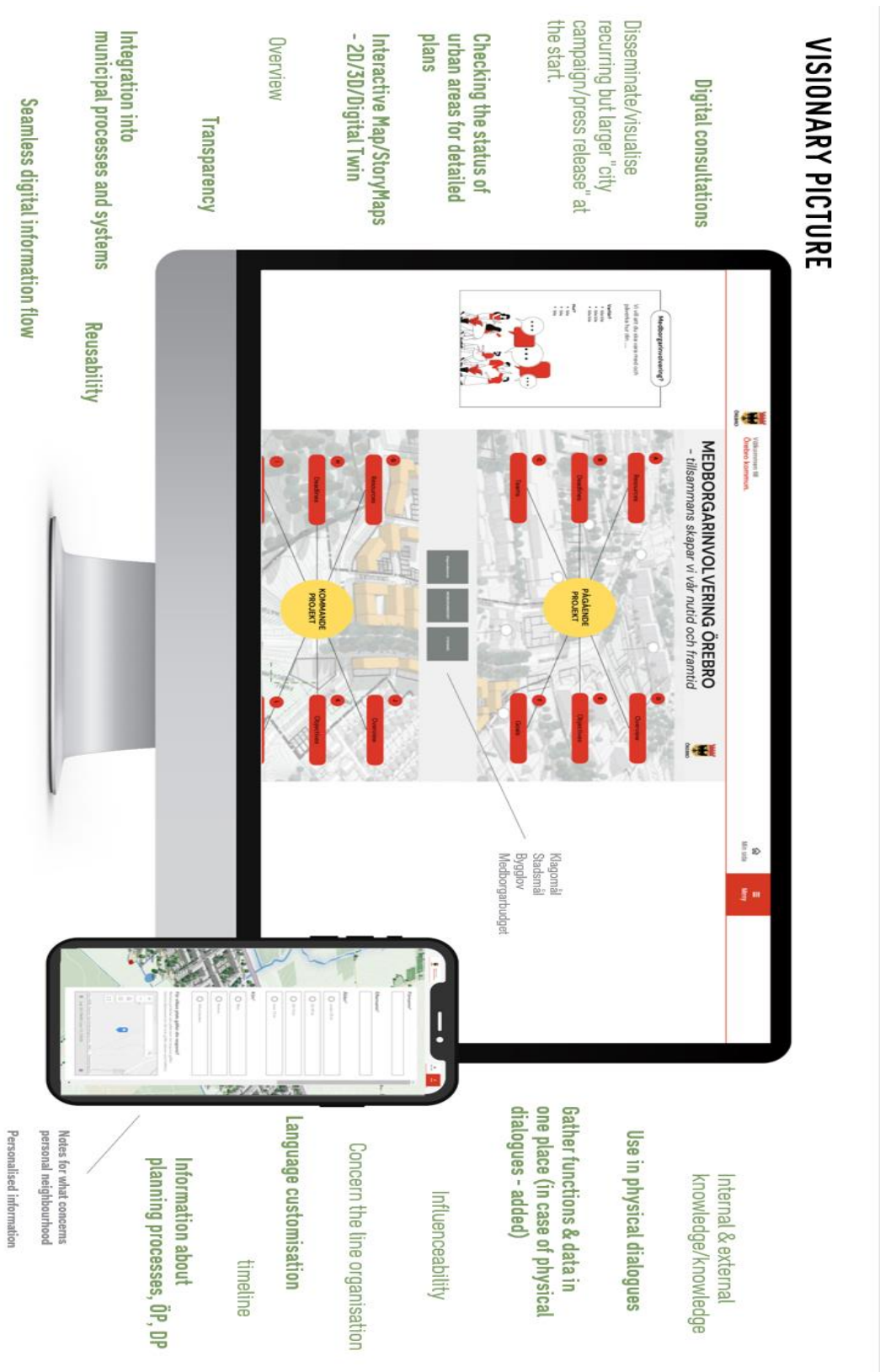
#### 5.4.3 Digital platform

The development of a digital platform emerges as a potential solution to address the identified needs of municipalities, particularly in terms of transparency and information management. The proposed platform in Figure 10 aims to visualise centralize data collection, visualization, and information retrieval, thereby mitigating the issue of multiple fragmented platforms that can confuse citizens. Rather than having separate platforms for safety opinions, building permit management, and citizens' suggestions, the recommendation is to integrate these functions into a single platform accessible through the municipality's website. Although the underlying technology would be advanced, the platform should be designed to be user-friendly, visually appealing, and easily accessible for citizens.

By incorporating map services and digital surveys, the digital platform would facilitate seamless data collection and structuring, potentially leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to streamline the process. This would provide an efficient means of gathering opinions in specific areas and linking them to surveys and digital dialogue initiatives as needed. To ensure effectiveness, the platform should be consistently utilized by both politicians and service staff to inform various planning, dialogue, and engagement events. Regular communication efforts, including press releases, would be necessary to keep citizens informed and prevent the platform from feeling outdated or neglected. Maintenance tasks such as updating maps, disseminating views, and keeping the platform relevant and up to date would be essential. Moreover, the platform should be optimized for both desktop and mobile views to accommodate diverse user preferences.

Furthermore, interactive maps can serve as a valuable tool in face-to-face dialogue activities, facilitating continuous dissemination and relevant utilization of the platform. This integration of technology and real-world engagement activities holds promise for enhancing citizen participation and involvement in urban planning processes.

Figure 10. A proposal for a municipal digital platform.



Source: Own processing.

The platform could propose to include:

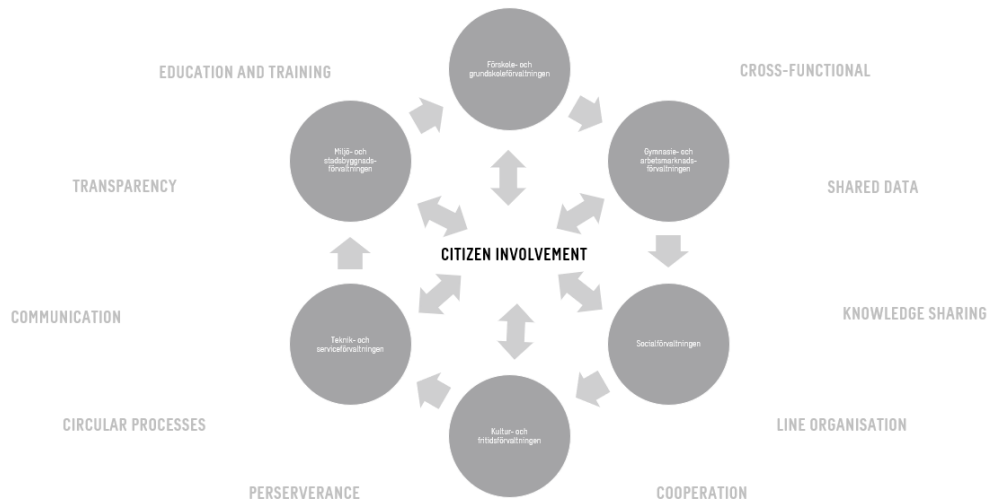
- ongoing, upcoming, and completed projects linked to the 3D map (with purpose, time and activity plan and associated StoryMaps)
- digital surveys
- digital consultations
- collection and visualisation of opinions, suggestions, and knowledge building on citizens' perception of their neighbourhoods
- collection point and logbook for the whole citizens' dialogue
- integrating the opinion material into the municipality's processes and systems within the urban planning process and reusing it in the appropriate place
- the possibility of integrating VR/metaverse functions, thus enabling a more exciting and innovative way of conducting conversations between politicians, officials, and citizens in a virtual environment
- dissemination of the democratic right of citizens to be involved in decision-making processes and knowledge of planning processes (which could be used as educational material in schools, for example).
- presenting current trends and changes in e.g., PBL or other relevant changes. This creates an understanding of the planning process and enables realistic expectations of influence to be created
- presentation and contact details of relevant people from the planning processes and from the community and urban planning
- present follow-up and evaluation of previous dialogues/citizen involvement activities
- digital supports, such as visualisations or digital models and data, stored in systems that allow communication and re-use (thus contributing to the collection of information and knowledge in citizen dialogues to the municipality's ambition of an uninterrupted digital information flow in urban planning processes)
- accessibility adaptation based on the choice of colours, fonts and reading of text so that the requirements of the Accessibility Directive are met and in line with the municipality

The proposed digital platform should be equipped with direct links to various social digital communication channels to ensure seamless access for digital audiences. Additionally, the platform's dissemination can be expanded through mailing initiatives that include QR codes, distribution through educational institutions, libraries, and advocacy groups. One effective strategy to foster relationship-building and trust is to feature staff and/or politicians on the digital platform, allowing them to engage directly and initiate conversations with the public. This approach facilitates open dialogue and strengthens the connection between politicians and citizens. Moreover, integrating digital forms into physical occasions or dialogue events creates a sense of increased digital intimacy. In this context, service providers and the municipality play a crucial role in engaging citizens in the digital sphere, utilizing public spaces such as libraries to encourage participation. By adopting these measures, the municipality can effectively involve citizens in the digital realm and promote their engagement in decision-making processes.

#### 5.4.4 Line organisation

**Figure 11. Dialogue and involvement as part of the municipality-wide work.**

**VISION PICTURE – CROSS-ADMINISTRATIVE WORK**



*Source: Own processing.*

The current landscape of citizen dialogue and involvement reveals a common trend where these responsibilities are often confined to specific departments or administrations, with limited engagement from upper management. Research findings and interview responses highlight a deficiency in recognizing the significance of citizen engagement at the management level (see Figure 11), resulting in a reliance on individual enthusiasts to champion these efforts. There is a clear desire to elevate citizen dialogue and involvement to the level of the line organization, making it a cross-cutting concern for all administrations. The ideal solution would involve the creation of a high-ranking position within city management, such as the Democracy and Development Unit, with city-wide responsibility for driving these initiatives. This role would collaborate with selected individuals from each administration, forming a cohesive group dedicated to advancing citizen engagement within their respective areas. While the administrative head provides support, the individuals in charge of their respective administrations are entrusted with spearheading the initiatives, serving as coaches, informants, and sources of inspiration. Effective management of citizen involvement necessitates remaining well-informed, proactive, and responsive in the field, while continuously updating procedures and work methods. It also requires the exploration of appropriate mechanisms to listen to citizens' needs, facilitate discussions on emotional aspects related to urban and municipal development, ensure transparency, and strive for inclusive participation across all segments of the municipality's population.



## 6. Conclusion

This chapter will summarize the key findings of the thesis, addressing each research question. It will also offer suggestions for future research and discuss the broader implications and potential for further studies.

### 6.1 Key findings of the thesis

The aim of the study has been to investigate how Swedish municipalities can improve the involvement of citizens in planning processes to reduce appeals, time consumption, and create more transparency and understanding. The study findings reveal key points related to citizen involvement in planning processes within Swedish municipalities.

Swedish municipalities are facing challenges and needs in citizen involvement in urban planning processes. Currently, the engagement primarily involves a limited group of older, retired, and socio-economically advantaged individuals, hindering social sustainability. To address this, municipalities should broaden citizen involvement to include socio-economically disadvantaged groups by reducing language barriers, establishing connections with local knowledge holders, and partnering with civil society and stakeholders. Additionally, the detail planning process encounters difficulties such as financial and time pressures, with insufficient prioritization of citizen dialogue. To overcome these challenges, there is a need for earlier and more meaningful citizen involvement throughout the process, fostering true dialogue perspectives and reducing the risk of increased appeals.

Integrating dialogue and involvement systematically into the entire planning process is crucial. Municipalities should adopt prioritized and systematic approaches, emphasizing horizontal coordination and organizational willingness for knowledge transfer and evaluation. Overcoming cultural norms and implementing structural changes within the municipality can help avoid a silo approach. Enhancing citizen dialogue and involvement requires assigning specific individuals responsible for driving these initiatives. Knowledge dissemination should be embedded throughout the entire municipality and change agents with influence within the organization can play a significant role in promoting citizen involvement.

Although municipalities produce documents with sections on dialogue activities, there is room for improvement. The current SKR dialogue ladder framework has received criticism, leading to proposed alternative visualizations like the co-creative citizen dialogue framework. These alternatives aim to foster more inclusive and participatory practices.

Effective communication, both internally and externally, is vital. Municipalities should provide internal training programs to enhance knowledge and establish routines for citizen involvement. External communication should employ a combination of tailored channels, focusing on localization, language customization, and collaboration with advocacy groups. Exploring new and effective communication channels and engaging the younger demographic are also important considerations for successful citizen involvement in urban planning. The second research question concerns potential areas for development in the future and how digital platforms and tools can help address present challenges. Digital platforms and tools have the potential to address present challenges and contribute to future development in urban planning, including climate change, resource limitations, urbanization, and declining engagement and trust in

political systems. However, it is important to consider issues of digital exclusion that may hinder the universal applicability of these solutions, particularly in socio-economically vulnerable areas.

The second research question concerns what potential areas for development exist in the future and how digital platforms and tools help address present challenges. While digital platforms offer opportunities for information gathering and mapping, there is a need to balance technology with the social aspects of urban projects. Integrating intelligent digital collaboration methods with physical participation can leverage data and technology to support urban development across various dimensions, including social sustainability, the economy, and quality of life. User-friendly solutions should be presented, and digital tools deployed in face-to-face interactions between citizens, service providers, and politicians.

The prevalence of the internet has led to discussions and opinions being shared on social channels, posing challenges for local authorities. The need for a unified platform to collect data, regardless of the dialogue's location, is expressed to enhance transparency, evaluation, and feedback management. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can facilitate citizen involvement throughout the planning process and promote interaction, social sustainability, economic prosperity, and an improved quality of life.

Different local authorities adopt various approaches to digital platforms and tools, but there is consensus on the importance of combining social and digital engagement methods. Efforts are made to engage diverse groups, and innovative methods, such as using digital tools on-site, provide new avenues for involvement. Managing collected data and providing effective feedback to citizens remain challenges. Public Participation GIS (PPGIS), such as ArcGIS Urban, offers comprehensive platforms for visualizing projects, facilitating engagement, and receiving feedback. This approach combines participatory features with cartography, enabling interactive web maps, 3D views, and questionnaires while ensuring data protection. It is crucial to recognize the multi-dimensional nature of urban planning and adopt a multi-method approach.

Digital forms of engagement, such as surveys, consultation portals, digital models, participatory budgeting, VR, and Minecraft, can be integrated and adapted into platforms. Physical gathering places that combine digital and physical interactions serve as inspiring examples, disseminating municipal digital platforms, and striving for inclusivity. Digi-physical dialogue should be spread across different areas to reach geographically diverse regions.

Overall, the study highlights key points for citizen involvement in planning processes. Engaging a broader range of citizens, addressing financial and time pressures, and implementing systematic approaches are essential. Assigning specific individuals, improving dialogue frameworks, and balancing digital platforms with face-to-face interactions are crucial. The study emphasizes a multi-method approach and digital inclusion for enhanced citizen involvement in urban planning.

## 6.2 Broader impact of the results

The content of the report opens the possibility of inspiring municipalities in Sweden to evaluate their practices regarding citizen dialogue. The results may inspire management to raise this area as a relevant and important area to prioritise and devote resources and time to. The municipality is the citizen's provider and politicians, and staff should be based on the citizen's needs. It should be seen as a priority issue and staff should be mandated to devote time to work proactively and

operationally with these issues, both at an initiating stage by educating themselves and others within the municipality, and by educating citizens on the subject. The study could also lead to SKR updating its dialogue framework, as it is considered outdated and misleading by some municipalities and researchers. Changing needs and digital maturity in society and among municipalities require a new way of visualising involvement, in a comprehensive national way.

## 6.3 Further studies

The study opens for further research as it only provides an overview of the challenges that exist and suggestions on how these challenges could be overcome. Further suggestions for research could be to go deeper into the challenges and study specific solutions in more detail. Further research could also analyse which interactive platforms are best suited to the needs and analyse communication channels. Metaverse and Web3 is still a relatively new area that could be explored more in this field, especially in a couple of years when developments and direction are clearer. A further suggestion could be to use the report's findings and conclusions and develop a hypothesis that could then be tested in a quantitative study involving municipalities, thus gaining information from their perspective on the topic. In this way, the study could become more transferable and generalizable, while a new theory could be developed (based on already existing contributions to theory).

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## Appendix 1. The concept of citizens' dialogue

Different ways to conceptualize citizen involvement exist within municipalities. Some municipalities, such as Linköping and Örebro, use the term "citizen dialogue," which is employed in the SCR (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions) and is well-known within municipal and regional contexts (Abrahamsson, 2018). Additionally, terms like "user involvement," "citizen dialogue," and "citizen involvement" are used (Abrahamsson, 2018). The following discussion is based on interview data.

Regarding the choice between "citizen" and "resident," some municipalities argue that "citizen" excludes certain individuals and groups, favoring the term "resident" as a more inclusive alternative. They contend that "resident" addresses everyone within the municipality, including Swedish citizens, non-Swedish citizens, and visitors (Abrahamsson, 2018). However, "citizen" is a broader concept encompassing individuals who live, work, or visit the municipality, without being restricted by geographical boundaries (Abrahamsson, 2018). It is important to note that the concept of civic dialogue goes beyond the legal definition of "citizen" associated with national citizenship (Abrahamsson, 2018).

Malmö municipality has opted to use the term "user involvement" based on their argument that it captures individuals who do not possess a formal mandate in the planning process. They suggest that "citizen dialogue" implies the involvement of politicians, which is not always the case. However, they occasionally use the term "citizen dialogue" within specific target and professional groups where it is an accepted term (R9; R10).

In contrast, Helsingborg municipality defines "citizen dialogue" as a structured conversation between city representatives and one or more target groups of citizens. They distinguish it from "consultation," which they consider to be an outdated and ineffective form of engagement (R8).

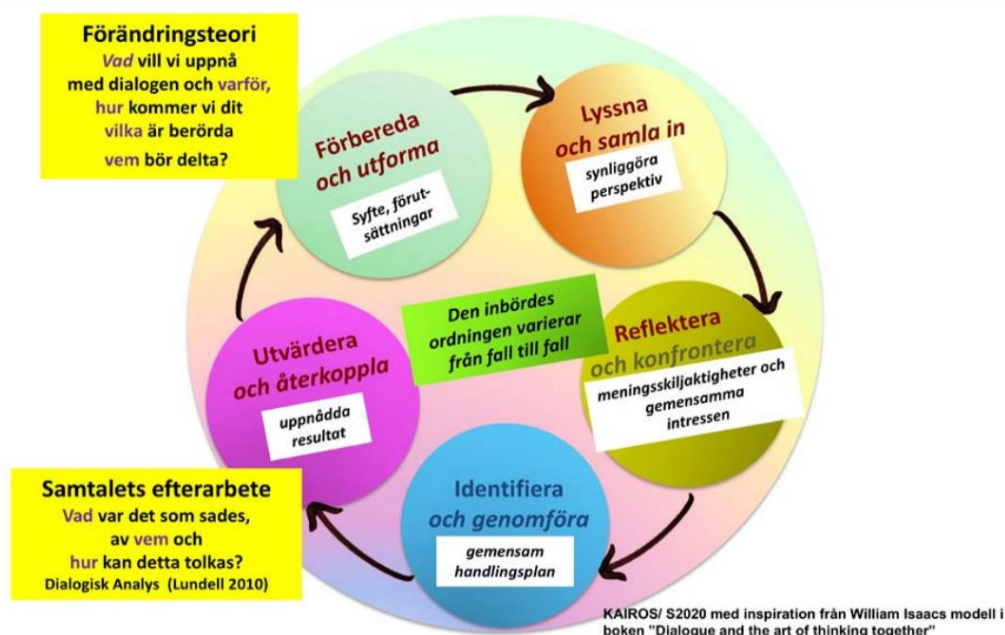
One interviewee (R11) who extensively researched the field suggests that "citizen involvement" is the most appropriate term, referencing the Cambridge definition. They argue that "involvement" signifies that citizens are active participants in the process and emphasizes the absence of a single party holding all the answers. They propose that "citizen involvement" encompasses various forms of engagement throughout the process, extending beyond formal dialogues. Furthermore, the use of "citizens" instead of "residents" is justified by the fact that citizens are not bound by geographical boundaries, in contrast to residents. This choice also highlights the direct link between citizens and democracy (R11).

In this study, the main terms used are "citizen dialogue" and "citizen involvement" (Abrahamsson, 2018).

## Appendix 2. The different elements of co-creation

The primary goal of co-creative citizen dialogue is to make policy-making as inclusive as possible. It involves identifying problems, proposing solutions, and taking joint responsibility for implementing measures based on citizens' conditions, values, and experiences. Various forms of political participation and dialogue, such as dialogue walks and café dialogues, have become increasingly popular. It is crucial to find effective dialogue formats that allow everyone to voice their opinions and challenge existing power dynamics. According to Abrahamsson (2018), the purpose of the dialogue should be defined first (including expected outcomes, the use of outcomes, and participant selection), followed by determining the format and location of the dialogue (based on the purpose, nature of the questions, number of participants, interpersonal relationships, and participants' prior knowledge). These conditions must be analyzed beforehand on a case-by-case basis, as they are unique to each situation. Abrahamsson (2018) recommends viewing dialogues as diverse instruments suitable for different contexts. Emergency dialogues, which often arise spontaneously in response to an event requiring dissemination of information or soliciting opinions on an upcoming decision, are not sufficient for developing a sustainable culture and practices around dialogue. The goal of co-creative citizen dialogue is to establish working methods that foster a favorable dialogue culture. It is crucial for participatory civic dialogues to embrace multiple perspectives and approaches, allowing participants to have equal visibility and space to express themselves.

The preparation and follow-up work of a dialogue have proven crucial to its outcomes (Abrahamsson, 2018). The following are the five phases of citizen dialogue, depicted in the accompanying figure, which represents an idealized dialogue process. These phases outline the different stages of co-creative civic dialogue when the initiative for dialogue comes from authorities, municipal administration, or political decision-making bodies.



According to the above explanation of co-creative dialogue, co-creation can be divided into five different "moments", something that comes from international literature, hence also English concepts (Abrahamsson, 2016, Polk, 2015, Bengtsson, 2013, Adler, 2015, KAIROS, 2016):

- **Preparatory phase:** here it is important to have a thorough discussion about the purpose, design, and conditions of the dialogue. How will the results be used, who are the stakeholders, who are particularly important to include and what resources are available in terms of time, finances, and staff?
- **Listening and collecting** contact citizens and listen to different perspectives, coordinate and complement the perspectives of other actors who are part of the dialogue or affected by the project.
- **Reflect and confront:** all participants in the dialogue work through a reflective phase and problematise opinions and perspectives with goals and visions for the future. The aim is to arrive at a structure and purpose based on the perspectives and interests received. This is also done to create social trust so that all participants can feel comfortable. Trust and security in a dialogue are very crucial for the later outcome. It is also important that conflicts and disagreements are brought to the surface so that they are discussed before the dialogue work is carried out. This can be seen as a trust-building phase.
- Identify and implement identify short-term actions, develop an action plan with responsibilities. It is also important here to set a plan for how dissent and disagreement will be handled. Then, in dialogue, the parties can begin work on implementing an action plan.
- **Analyse and evaluate:** a phase that is important but often not given much attention. What has the dialogue taught us and what can we take forward to the next dialogue? What needs to be developed, what can be maintained and what was missing? This is also the important part of feeding back and informing the citizens concerned and other stakeholders, which is important to increase trust and confidence in the political system.

Aspects to keep in mind are that i) it represents an ideal form of dialogue. In reality, it rarely follows this order but the dialogue skips between phases, especially phases 2-4, ii) the appointed dialogue facilitator as well as the process facilitator for the dialogue represent two major roles, as they are most responsible for making it as inclusive as the dialogue is meant to be, that everyone gets to have their say and that all aspects are included in the dialogue. Abrahamsson (2018) suggests that experience has shown that a participatory culture emerges when the role of the dialogue leader becomes less prominent the further into the process/project you go. iii) It can be an easy mistake to rush past phases, but here it is important to spend time on each phase as otherwise it can be easy to miss conflicts of goals, power structures and disagreements. Having a specified phase makes it easier for facilitators to highlight the more resource-poor parties and to bring out important views that would not otherwise have been raised. It is also important for building and maintaining trust and legitimacy. iv) It is also important to consider how citizens are informed about their opportunity to participate in civic dialogue and also important how the dialogue is framed.

## Appendix 3. Respondent validation

Case study design	Examples of relevant techniques (Riege, 2003)	Applied in this study
<b>Construct validity</b>	Use multiple sources of evidence when data collection	Triangulation using multiple interviews, perspectives and data sources.
	Establishing a chain of evidence at data collection	Interviews are transcribed and literature is documented.
	Third party review of evidence	Transcribed interviews sent for respondent validation.
<b>Internal validity</b>	Use illustrations and diagrams in the data analysis to simplify the explanation	Graphical models and illustrations from literature/theoretical framework are used for analysis.
	Ensure that concepts and results are systematically related	The same framework is applied to all data.
<b>External validity</b>	Define the scope and the boundaries of the study	Done in 2.1.1 and 2.7.
	Compare evidence with existing literature in data analysis	Used an abductive approach; analysis based on the theoretical framework
<b>Reliability</b>	Give full account of theories and ideas	Done
	Ensure consistency of research problems and research design tools.	Ready by chapter 2.
	Document observations and activities as concretely as possible	Interviews are recorded; notes are taken on observations
	Use case study protocols	Appendix 1
	Document data digitally	Interviews are recorded
	Collect all case study data in one place	OneDrive
	Ensure meaningful comparability across multiple data sources	Same framework/logic used in all interviews and documents.
	Use peer review/examination	Proposal and mid-term seminar, certificate and opposition.

# Appendix 4. Interview guide

## **Introduction**

- What is your name and how do you work on civic dialogue?

## **Theme 1 - Conducting a citizens' dialogue**

### **General**

- What is civic dialogue for you?
- How long have you worked with citizen dialogue in your municipality?
- How do you view consultation in relation to dialogue?
- Where in the participation ladder would you say the municipality is today? (SKR, see picture below)

### **Förberedelser**

- Who initiates the dialogue and its content?
- How do you invite citizens to dialogue?
- Do you see a difference between dialogues initiated by the municipality and dialogues where citizens themselves formulate the "problem"?
- Is there any training within the municipality on civic dialogue? If so - how?
- How is the method chosen?

### **Implementation**

- What are the municipality's procedures for citizen dialogue?
- Do you have an open channel for dialogue? (e.g. digital customer service or similar). If yes - how does it work?
- Who is responsible for the dialogue methods? One unit or different ones?
- Who conducts the dialogues and how? At what stage?
- How is information shared between organisations and administrations?
- What do you think the division of roles between officials and elected representatives looks like - does it need to be clarified?
- Do you keep your dialogues active and delete them if they are not used? What effect do you want citizen dialogues to have?
- How do you handle information/data received after a dialogue intervention? Do you have a systematic way of handling comments/suggestions received?
- Is there a continuous and ongoing "dialogue" with citizens in the municipality? If yes, how? If no, what is needed?

### **Lessons learnt**

- Can you name the last five dialogue methods and explain them in more detail?
- Can you name one or two methods that have worked particularly well?
- Why do you think it/they were successful?
- What is a particularly effective tool?
- What are the things you have learnt/developed further?
- Can you name a method that has been less good?
- Why do you think it worked less well?
- How do you work to assess how well a dialogue effort reaches those affected by the issue? Model?
- How do you evaluate your dialogue methods?
- How do you assess how many of the comments received have led to a decision on improvement and contributed to quality development?

## **Theme 2 - Communication**

- What does the communication work look like in practice? Are those working on the detailed plan responsible for communication? What works better/worse?
- How does the municipality work to market citizen dialogues? What communication channels are used to involve citizens in the planning process? E.g. website, newspapers, information letters, social media, QR code? What works better or worse?
- Do you use any digital portal/platform that provides an overview of how the municipality collects citizens' opinions?

## **Theme 3 - Future**

- What is the interest in physical vs. digital, officials vs. citizens?
- How do you see the value of digitalisation?
- What is your experience with digital tools? In which contexts is it suitable? What requirements does it place on the municipality?

- What factors do you think have influenced and are influencing the development of methods for citizen dialogue?
- How do you think citizen dialogue has developed in your municipality in one year? Five years? Ten years?
- Is there any municipality/city/method/project in the rest of the world that should be studied more closely for inspiration for digital tools that would work in the Swedish context?
- Do you see any need for consultation in any area?

#### **Theme 4 - Concluding**

- How do you perceive the general interest among citizens to be involved in planning processes?
- What has this interest led to? What factors do you think have influenced and are influencing the development?

## Appendix 5. Case study protocol

A case study protocol should include information on how the process from initial contact with respondents, the ethical considerations, and information on the questions asked during interviews (Yin, 2013).

### **Case study**

Selected Swedish municipalities' work with citizen dialogue/involvement

### **Background to the case study**

Presented in 2.1.1

### **Research questions**

Presented in chapter 1.2

### **Data collection method/sources**

Semi structured interviews were conducted across teams

Documents (previous research)

### **Data collection process**

- August/September 2022: contacted service staff and politicians for interview
- September 2022: literature review started to prepare interview questions and Interview guide (Annex 4)
- September/October/November 2022: interviews via teams. All interviews are recorded
- December 2022: all recordings coded and saved together; all notes structured
- January 2023: transcripts sent to interviewees
- November 2022: January 2023 - categorisation, analysis, and report

### **Ethical aspects**

- Respondents must be aware of the purpose of the study and how the data will be used
- Respondents should know that they will be recorded
- Respondents have been informed of the transcription

### **Interview guide**

Appendix 4

### **Preparation**

- Mobile phone app for recording the interviews
- Notes on computer
- Book precise time and place for interviews to show professionalism