Research Article

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Organising for Social Sustainability in Urban Housing: Hitting the Target but Missing the Point

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Abstract: Social sustainability has become a widely known term, not least in the area of housing and urban development. While the literature has improved our understanding of the various meanings and interpretations of the concept, there is still a need for studies that explore processes of organising for social sustainability as processes of translation that can take into consideration several dimensions of translation, i.e. shifts in meaning, as well as agency and interests. This paper aims to address this issue-complex by exploring how social sustainability is conceived and translated into practice in urban renovation projects. The contribution of our analysis is that we show how resources within organizational theory and research can contribute to a more general understanding of how popular but vague concepts are or are not transformed into action and the implications of this.

Keywords: social sustainability; housing; processes of translation

1 Introduction

Social sustainability has increasingly been attended to in urban development and other policy areas (Langergaard 2019; Scheller and Thörn 2018). The popularity of the term motivates that social sustainability is explored as an empirical phenomenon in its own right. Over the decades, the literature on social sustainability has

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substantially contributed to an improved understanding conceptually as well as empirically. It is conveyed that despite an improved understanding of key themes and indicators for social sustainability, there is a continued need for context-specific information and research on how social sustainability is implemented (Weingaertner and Moberg 2011). While there are many important contributions made in the area of social sustainability, there is still a need for a better understanding of how the organisations make sense of the term and how it affects their practices (Winston 2021). It is also crucial to explore whether the increased popularity of the term "social sustainability", means that it has become entirely disembedded from the original sustainability discourse that emphasised equal treatment of the three elements ecological, economic and social sustainability. While critical studies have commonly noted that the "equal treatment" of the three elements is often overridden by more persuasive economic arguments, we need to understand what an increased popularity of the "social" means in relation to the ecological and the economic in a sustainablity context (Griessler and Littig 2005:66).

Our entry point into this field of inquiry are recent developments in urban housing in Sweden. In particular, we are interested in the mismatch between the popularity of the term social sustainability among key actors in Swedish municipalities and urban housing and the concrete effects of changes in housing policies and large renovation projects, resulting in high rent increases and displacements of tenants. Such events are not unique to Sweden, but are part of European and even world-wide patterns (Hackworth and Smith 2001; Uitermark et al. 2007).

The apparent contradiction between sustainability goals such as affordable housing and urban renewal projects resulting in shock increased rents is particularly pertinent to explore. The national housing program, known as 'the million program', was built between 1965 and 1974 in Sweden. It was initiated due to housing shortage and it was strongly state-subsidized. The initial overarching goal motivating the housing program was to offer spacious, well-designed, and functional residents of good quality and to a reasonable cost. Research shows that renovations of these houses have sometimes caused rent increases of 60–80 % (Westin 2011; Thörn and Thörn 2017). This obviously has huge implications for the tenants, especially for the socioeconomically weaker groups.

How are we to understand these results? What role does the social sustainability dimension get in the renovation process? When looking at these detrimental increases in rents after renovations, it seems like social sustainability is forgotten all together. On the contrary, however, we believe that the social pillar is not ignored, but has rather gained prevalence in processes of governance, including in the areas of built environment and housing. So how can we understand this mismatch between an increased interest in the social pillar and the socially unstainable effects of displacements and/or increased poverty and dependence on social subsidies due to sky-rocketing rents?

We tackle this problem by elaborating on what it means to organise for social sustainability in the area of urban housing. In this paper, and on the basis of three case studies, we present research that has been guided by the research question: How is sustainability translated in the studied cases, in official documentations and in concrete renovation processes by the housing estate companies?

In the following sections, we first summarize previous research on current urban developments, including large renovation projects, and social sustainability. We discuss the results in relation to a brief account of the history of social sustainability and how it has entered urban development and housing. Second, we present our theoretical approach to organisations and organising inspired by actor-network theory and Scandinavian institutional perspectives on translation. Third, we include a section on methodology and empirical data. Fourth, we set the scene for the Swedish case and present the governance context as a tension between legislation that requires that public housing companies act in accordance with business-like principles (which opens up for economic gains' motives) and local strategies and policies that translate social sustainability and affordable housing in rather specific (and narrow) ways. Our cases are then analysed and discussed in relation to how sustainable housing gets to be understood in this context, the processes of translations involved and how we can understand its effects in terms of sustainability considerations.

2 Social Sustainability and Urban Development

Only a decade ago, the social dimension used to be ignored or underprioritized in sustainability projects, compared to the ecological and economic dimensions (Boström 2012). Today, the situation is rather the reverse – social sustainability is emphasised, especially in the area of urban development. Simultaneouosly, shifts toward entrepreneurial governance and new forms of private-public partnerships have been especially pertinent in the area of urban development (Harvey 1989). A distinctive feature of new forms of public-partnerships is the creation of municipal development companies that engage in urban renewal programs in close cooperation with real-estate owners. These collaborations give private investors a high degree of influence and are more oriented towards economic growth at the cost of public transparency and thus differ from earlier public-private co-operations that focused on general welfare (Thörn and Thörn 2017: 294). In Sweden, urban policy and development have been strongly affected by these shifts; local governments in Swedish cities are involved in facilitating processes of private exploitation and gentrification of urban areas with increased segregation as an effect.

In tandem with these shifts, in Europe and beyond, sustainability has become an increasingly popular and marketable term in the context of housing. This

mainstreaming of sustainability often comes with a narrowing down of its meaning, as a market orientation becomes the overarching principle and prevents ambitious sustainability goals. While sustainable housing used to mean a focus on community, self-provisioning, local empowerment, and shared facilities, such objectives are largely absent in the new mainstreaming of sustainable housing, characterised by a much narrower approach to sustainability, focusing primarily on low energy standards (Jensen et al. 2012:94ff). Previous sustainable building concepts, such as eco-villages, prioritized the "goal of self-sufficiency" due to the belief that this created "a strong relationship between environmental and social issues" (Jensen et al. 2012:101; Agger 2010). Thus, it used to be the residents that were key in taking initiatives, defining goals and achieving them, now however, these activities are divided on the owners (housing companies) and building companies.

The recently noted popularity of the concept of social sustainability can, in the light of the above, be understood as the mainstreaming of a shallow version of term. The social dimension of sustainability can be practiced by 'ticking boxes', or by defining and evaluating "critical factors" at the scale of concrete renewal projects (see for example Chan and Lee 2008). There is a risk that such operationalisation of social sustainability misses the fact that goals related to social equity often are dependent on achievements at national, regional, and urban scale. It is thus crucial to be aware of the difference between *the social pillar*, which may refer to any kind of social aspects, and *social sustainability*, which requires a more comprehensive view on time perspectives, scales and power relations (Ballet et al. 2020). Without critical reflections over these relations we may find many exercises that are hitting social sustainability targets but missing the point. To illustrate this point, we can take the example of a study in which the authors identified two social sustainability goals in relation to housing – affordable housing and mixed communities (Lind et al. 2016:3). The authors argue that these two goals are in conflict with each other when house estate owners try to create more mixed communities in areas that are dominated by low-income households. On the contrary, we argue, this *becomes* a goal conflict *only* because the issue has been narrowed down to a local issue, at the level of housing area and house estate owners. That is, the goal to prevent segregation through mixed communities, cannot be seen from the local community only, but need to be seen in relation to consequences for both current and future tenants, as well as effect over wider areas or whole cities. Hence; social sustainability requires a comprehensive view on time perspectives, scales and power relations. To attend to the connection between overarching goals and their local translations and implementations is therefore crucial (cf. Dempsey 2008).

There are several efforts to define, theorise and to make 'social sustainability' a more useful concept both analytically and practically. For example, Dempsey et al. (2009) examine the underlying principles of social sustainability and on the basis of these suggest a definition of social sustainability that includes both social equity and

a notion of the sustainability of community. Manzi et al. (2010:2) discuss the meaning of social sustainability in the context of urban policy and urban development, and suggest that the words 'sustainability' and 'social sustainability' have three interrelated components: a "normative component, indicating a broad vision of a desired end state that is both holistic and long term"; a "strategic component, indicating the desire to align a wide range of specific actions towards achieving the desired end state"; and "a descriptive component, which talks about 'what is' in terms of how it can be measured against strategy and vision."

Very seldom explicitly discussed in these debates and efforts to conceptually clarify the notion of social sustainability, are assumptions made about organisations and the relation between goals and action. In most of the above-mentioned literature it is possible to discern assumptions about linearity: first, goals are defined, second, there are strategies and means to achieve them, and third there are possibilities to evaluate these achievements. Assumptions about linearity, moreover, carry with them assumptions about actors – as relatively stable entities that act on behalf of interests, knowledge and principles. We argue that there is still a need for studies that focus equally on how social sustainability become popular and travel to new settings, and how organisations relate to social sustainability in these new contexts. The study by Langergaard (2019) is doing something along these lines, when exploring how social sustainability as a concept becomes part of practice in a housing context, but this study stops at recognizing the multiple and changeable meaning of social sustainability. We wish to add a more nuanced perspective to what it means to translate social sustainability, also for the identity of participants and how sustainability concerns can be taken into consideration. The next section will give an account of how organizational studies can contribute to a better understanding of the nexus "social sustainability and urban development".

3 Organising for Social Sustainability

The prevalence of "sustainability", "sustainable development" or "social sustainability" in both public and private organizations is a result of efforts to govern activities by sustainability goals. Rather than just seeing these terms as vague and toothless, all practices subsumed under labels of sustainability are interesting to explore as organizations are either obliged, or may believe they are obliged, to adopt sustainability thinking in their work, or in other words: organizations tend to do what they believe is expected of them (Corvellec and Eriksson-Zetterqvist 2021). Sustainability becomes relevant for organisations through other organisations' talk about it, through legislation or other forms of regulation that are requiring that organisations take sustainability measures or through standards and indexes that

are voluntary (Brunsson and Jacobsson 2000). In our empirical studies of urban housing and renovation processes, it is thus of interest to know how the organizations involved perceive the need to adopt social sustainability thinking in their work, and what effect this perception has on their practices.

Social sustainability is not an a-political discourse or a neutral practice. Woodcraft (2012) points out the necessity to pay attention to the discourse of social sustainability, and to understand "how the concept is translated by different actors and used as justification for making decisions about interventions and investments in the material and social fabric of cities" (p. 30). Even though policy objectives related to social sustainability are ambiguous, Woodcraft points out that there is a consensus in the literature that social sustainability entails such concepts as social capital, human capital, and well-being. Woodcraft (2012) calls to raise questions about power, voice, access to resources, decision-making and accountability, legitimacy and boundaries, and more specifically - "who are the stakeholders involved in promoting social sustainability as a planning discourse, what kind of conceptualizations are they enacting, and for what purpose?" (p.32).

While we agree that the kind of translation that Woodcraft describe is relevant, we propose a more fine-grained conceptualization of translation that both take into consideration that translation always involves shifts in meaning (cf. Freeman 2009) and creates new links between entities and agents (Latour 1994). Wæraas and Nielsen (2016) discuss three perspectives on translation: the actor-network perspective, the knowledge-based perspective, and the Scandinavian institutional perspective. The latter is associated with Czarniawska and Sevon (1996) who developed the notion of translation "as an alternative to diffusion models and decoupling scenarios developed by American institutionalists" (p.245). In our analysis we are inspired both by the actor-network theory approach, associated with Latour (1994) and by the Scandinavian perspective and their emphasis on how ideas are transformed into objects or are enacted while travelling across different contexts.

Processes of translation always involve "displacement, drift, invention, mediation" and result in new attachments and combinations that modify involved actors, and in our case also built environments (Latour 1994: 32). Czarniawska and Sevon (1996), in a similar sense, adopted an understanding of translation that enables studies of how management ideas are translated into objects (blue-prints, best-practice-models, education material etc.), and hence can be made to travel to other places than where they emerged, and at these new sites they can be translated into new connections between ideas, people, actions and objects. The need for ideas to materialize (as written words, compiled and presented in attractive ways, or as objects such as reports, visual representations etc.) in order to travel to new contexts is highlighted in this understanding of translation.

What puts the vehicle of translation in motion, according to Czarniawska and Sevón, is related to shared desires. In our case, this could be thought of as the housing companies' desire to adhere to values such as sustainability concerns, which is and should be on the agenda for any organisation today. In our study the context for the housing companies to take on sustainability concerns is circumscribed on the one hand by the new legislative requirements of public housing companies to act in accordance with business-like principles, as well as previous definitions and principles relating to social sustainability. These ideas of "business-like principles" and "social sustainability" have been picked up, disembedded from their original context, and packaged in a way that have enabled them to travel in a context-free manner, which means they need to be re-contextualised or re-embedded. Czarniawska and Joerges' (1996) argue for treating *disembedding* and *re-embedding* on an "equal footing" (p. 246) in analyses of translation processes.

As if this is not complex enough, one can add the contextual elements in a renovation situation that are likely to be in tension: the expectations from tenants, tenants' association and the renovation needs of the house itself. These expectations and needs are likely to be framed within different temporalities, which has been shown in a related study to function as hinder to, rather than support of, sustainability considerations in renovation (Bogdanova and Soneryd 2024).

In addition, we approach 'social sustainability' in line with how Boström (2012:4) defines it, as "a conceptual tool that policy makers and practitioners can use to communicate, make decisions, and measure or assess current developments". Boström asserts that social sustainability is an empirically open concept that we as researchers can explore by asking how other actors make sense of it. Just because it is empirically open, however, does not mean that it is empty. In Latour's (2005) account of translation, which is about making new connections, the focus in the analysis is not on the social as explanation (social as material) but to explain how the social becomes (social as association). While there is both a historical legacy of the term 'social sustainability' that gives it content, as well as established formulations in national and local policies, it is in an empirical analysis still our main task to see whether and how these meanings are re-embedded in the new setting. In addition, when something that was not before labelled 'social', is starting to be categorized and narrated as 'social' – we know that something is going on. According to Latour "Moderns" derive their power from setting up and then crossing the boundary between social and natural, hence, "social sustainability", if anything more than a buzzword, could signal new configurations and associations for the manipulation of the social (as material).

The research question that guide our analysis is: how do organisations translate social sustainability in their sustainability reports and practices in relation to renovation projects?

4 Urban Renewal and the Housing System in Sweden

Before we turn to our case studies, we will give some background to the Swedish situation. In the context of urban renewal projects in Sweden, there are often strong discursive ambitions to renovate and to construct new buildings in economically, environmentally and socially sustainable ways. Yet, several studies point to power asymmetries and negative impact for tenants, forced displacement, gentrification and increased segregation (Baeten et al. 2017; Grundström and Molina 2016; Mangold et al. 2016; Olander et al. 2019; Polanska and Richard 2018; Richard and Polanska 2017; Stenberg 2018; Thörn and Thörn 2017; Westin 2011).

The possibility for landlords to profit through renovation and displacement was facilitated through changes in the Swedish housing system, previously characterised by affordable housing, strong tenant protection, high formal demands on quality standards and collectively negotiated rent levels. Thus, the ideological underpinning of the Swedish housing system has changed since the million program was built. The idea then, was that a large rental sector with affordable housing for everyone, as opposed to social housing for the few, would create an egalitarian and just housing regime (Baeten et al. 2017:637). Since then, the proportion of public housing has substantially been reduced, the housing market is dominated by private market actors, and public housing companies have been circumscribed with new regulations, that favours market mechanisms. A study of Gothenburg city, the second largest city in Sweden, shows that due to rent increases after renovations up to every third tenant in Gothenburg risks living below "reasonable living standards" (Mangold 2016: 41).

5 Methodological Considerations and Empirical Material

This study was part of a research project that explored how the renovation of the housing estates built between 1960 and 1974 as part of 'the million program' in Sweden, fulfils the goal of sustainable cities and communities, as articulated in the UN 2030 Agenda. The project ran between 2018 and 2022 and involved studies in three cities in Sweden: Stockholm, Gothenburg and Uppsala. It involved several in-depth case studies, based on observations of consultation meetings, document analysis and interviews conducted with house estate owners, politicians, tenants and the tenants' association in all three cities. The analysis in this paper draws on our field work in

Gothenburg City, with a focus on three municipally-owned housing estate companies, and three concrete renovation processes. Municipal housing companies are situated in contexts with high demands on acting according to goals that: 1) to a large extent are set by others, for example by the legislator, through national formatted goals around housing and through public-private partnerships, 2) are multiple and may be conceived as difficult to combine with each other. We are interested in how our three estate companies translate these goals in their talk about social sustainability and in the practical organization of renovation processes and consultation with tenants.

The empirical material is a mix of interviews, observation and documentation. We made in total 21 interviews with: politicians in Gothenburg City (4), the management of the real estate group Framtiden Group (1), estate owners (10), tenants association (4), and tenants (2). In two of the cases we have followed the renovation process from its first consultation meeting and onwards, which amounts to around 16 meetings spread out over 2019–2022. Informed consent was obtained from all individuals included in this study. We have analyzed the three estate owners' presentation of their sustainability work in their sustainability reports between 2016 and 2021. In total this amounts to 22 documents (six documents per company and four documents from the Framtiden Group). In addition, our understanding of the governance context is based on our reading of policy documents and regulations on a national basis.

6 Organising for Social Sustainability in Renovation Projects

In this section we first present a governance context in the area of public housing in Sweden and Gothenburg City. This context provides with a view on tensions already built into legislation and overall regulation of the housing area, and hence gives a picture of what is left for estate owners, who are those who initiate and organise the renovation processes, to decide.

Since mid-1990s a number of changes of Swedish housing politics have been conducted. A fundamental change was the legislation from 2011 that regulates the public housing in Sweden, but which have had consequences for the housing market as a whole. In principle the legislation (SFS 2010: 879) meant that companies, including the public housing companies:

> …should run their operation on businesslike principles, which represents a deviation from the principles embodied in the Local Government Act requiring operations to be run on a cost price basis and prohibiting undertakings being run for profit. (Public Housing Sweden 2010)

The new legislation opened up for economic incentives among also public housing companies to use the possibility to conduct standard raising renovations with considerable rent increase. In Gothenburg, the mother company to all public housing companies – the Framtiden Group – announced a new strategy in 2020 for "particularly vulnerable areas", a concept that has been used by the Swedish Police since 2015 and which denotes areas with low socio-economic status and high criminality. The new strategy presented by the Framtiden Group was based on four core dimensions: renovations, transformations of rentals to privately owned apartments, new-built, and efforts to increase safety in the areas. This meant that the renovations also started to be seen as – and presented by the companies as – part of a more overarching "upgrading" of the million program areas in Gothenburg. By the Framtiden Group the aim of this work was presented as a means to remove areas from the police's list of "particularly vulnerable areas", and to fight segregation in a longer time perspective (Framtiden 2022). The main strategy was that of introducing "social mixture", which among other things meant that areas with almost only rentals was now mixed with privately owned apartments.

A central problem with houses in the vulnerable areas was the so-called "renovation debt" that had been accumulated by neglecting the maintenance of the housing (Salonen 2021: 174–177). Framtiden Group also admitted the existence of this debt by introducing the "Gårdsten model", where such renovation debt was covered first, and then followed by other propositions to decide the renovation standard in consultation with the tenants. However, later the Framtiden Group turns to a different strategy instead of implementing this best practice, issuing the so-called 20–80 directive in 2019, that specifies that 20 per cent of the apartments should be renovated without any rent increase (F2020).[1] It was up to each managing company to decide the selection principles for these 20 percent. This we refer to as the 20-80 decision in our analysis below.

From the above it is clear that there are already some inbuilt tensions in the housing system in Sweden, due to the requirement in legislation to act in business-like manners, and due to local policies and strategies that mean particular ways to define the sustainability goal of social housing. In the next sections we focus on how these tensions are managed in local translations of social sustainability in official documents and concrete renovation processes.

1 In 2022 this document was revised again, and the goals redefined claiming that 50 percent of tenants should have the "basic" level of renovation with "minimal possible rent increase". This document did not receive a broad discussion, as most of the companies treat "base" as a part of their different "packages" of different levels of renovation and consecutive rent increase. This document was not a part of the initial sample for analysis, and it came after we completed the observations, and interviewing in the field (F2022).

6.1 Making Sense of Social Sustainability

This part of our analysis focuses on how the house estate companies make sense of social sustainability in official reports. We have analyzed the annual reports and sustainability reports from the three companies and the Framtiden Group between 2016 and 2021. In the following sections we argue that despite explicitely formulated goals of sustainability, they are focusing on the short-term procedural aspects of inclusion, well-being and safety, ignoring the issues of social equity and justice with a broader time and power perspective.

6.1.1 Sustainability as a Policy Concept: Explicit Goals and Measures to Follow up on Goals

In their sustainability reports the Framtiden Group relates to the sustainability goal of "affordable housing" in rather general ways, through stating that "tenants should not be forced to leave their homes because of increased costs after renovation" (F2017; F2018). While the statement could be strongly connected to a meaning of sustainability in a context that considers scale, time and power struggles, we argue it is already disembedded from such a context, due to developments in Swedish housing policies described above that strenghten a bias towards house estate owners power over tenants' rights.

In the report there are statements pertaining to social aspects and formulated in a rather general manner, such as "our tenants should be satisfied" and the "safety, comfort and influence" of the tenants shall be improved. Human rights is the headline for a section that discusses what it means to live in a "safe housing area", and "everyone has a right to a home" is not discussed as a question of affordable housing but in relation to illegal tenancy (F2020).

The sustainability reports of the housing estate companies resemble the reports by the Framtiden Group. For example, many formulations are general and programmatic, such as "we relate to the three dimensions of sustainability in everything we do" (A2019) but what is meant by this is never explained or made operationalized into concrete goals or measures. The companies differ in how much they write about social sustainability – company A and C, for example, write quite extensively about social sustainability in their annual reports, while company B refers to the Framtiden Group as the coordinator for the sustainability work for all Gothenburg city's housing companies. Company C is the only one of the three companies (and also differs from the Framtiden Group in this respect) that is reflective and open about the fact that not all sustainability goals have been operationalized, and that especially in

relation to "social responsibility" there are no measurable goals formulated yet (C2016).

"Careful renovation" given the specific meaning of safeguarding 20 percent of the apartment from standard increasing measures, is one of the few goals that is operationalized and measurable. The companies either directly express compliance with the 20–80 goal, as it is formulated by the Framtiden Group (company A) or indirectly, by referring almost all sustainability work to the Framtiden Group (Company B) or express compliance but also indicate that the companies' measures go beyond this particular goal, i.e. sometimes formulating a higher ambition than 20 percent and sometimes by giving all tenants the opportunity to safeguard their apartment from standard increasing measures (Company C).

In the analysed documents affordable housing is never specified, neither are the rent increases nor the number of tenants that move after renovations and their reasons for doing so, reported. How social sustainability goals are followed-up is most often not clear from the annual reports or sustainability reports. There is *one* goal that is followed-up quite frequently, however, and that is the goal of customer satisfaction.

In the reports, there is no explicit time frame or ideas about *how* to safeguard the 20 percent apartments, with what principles or methods, from standard increasing measures. With this loose coupling to sustainability, the way in which the companies write about "social sustainability" thus largely boils down to what we would rather term the "social dimension" (Ballet et al. 2020). These loose couplings to fashionable terms like "social sustainability" is however according to Czarniawska how organizational change come about: organizations will primarily be involved in their daily practices. That ideas are only loosley coupled to the daily practices of an organization is a way to incorprate new ideas without risking its own survival (Corvellec and Eriksson-Zetterqvist 2021:474–475).

6.1.2 The Social Dimension: Inclusion, Well-being and Safety

Social sustainability, as we have argued, is an empty term that can be filled with meaning by actors who engage in formulating sustainability policy or are active in implementing such policies. Many of the themes that the housing estate companies label as related to "social sustainability" are however disconnected from a context in which sustainability is explicitly related to time, space and power dimensions. In addition, instead of focusing on substantial issues, such as sustainability goals that could be related to social equality and justice, the focus is more often on issues that could be related to 'process', such as the inclusion of, communication with and listening to tenants, but also other dimensions such as the tenants' comfort and safety.

Tenants' influence is mentioned as an important dimension by all companies and by the Framtiden Group. It differs however, how specific the reports are in what issues tenants are supposed to have influence on. Sometimes, the tenants' possibility to choose from various standard alternatives (Framtiden Group) is mentioned, sometimes influence on rent is emphasized (Company A) and sometimes the living environment (Company C) is taken up as an example of what the tenants should be able to influence.

All companies emphasise the importance of listening to the tenants. One frequent form of listening is through the survey that ask questions about the tenants' well-being and appreciation of living in the area and the services provided by house estate owner. This kind of listening makes the companies approach tenants through measures such as "customer satisfaction", rather than in terms of "tenants' rights" or "influence". For example, company A reports that it is among the "25 percent best companies in the country when it comes to customer satisfaction" (A2017). "Influence" is in the same report, embedded in a list of goals and strategies of the company:1) continued emphasis on customer satisfaction, 2) developing the influence of tenants, 3) creating good relations to the tenants early on. The concrete activities that company A plan to conduct in their work towards the desired customer satisfaction are to make surveys and develop the local information flows. While we do not want to deny the importance of local information and tenants being satisfied, we argue that measurements of tenants' well-being and customer satisfaction miss important aspects that are related to social sustainability such as affordable housing (tenants who did not afford to stay will not be respondents to the surveys when they have left), segregation and social equality (which are aspects that are not best assessed through respondents' self-reported well-being and satisfaction).

The consultation process as well as the agreement with the tenants' association are also mentioned as important forms to make sure the company is listening to its tenants (Company C).

Even though all companies formulate programmatic statements and vision about affordable housing, and that they want tenants to be able to stay in their apartments, they do not report on the implications that their (renovation) actions have for their tenants. The second part of the analysis will explore how the companies organize concrete renovation processes and how they interpret the 20-80 decision as a way to accomplish the social sustainability goal of affordable housing for all.

As we have described in previous sections, ideas will materialize into concrete objects when they are translated in a local setting (Czarniawska and Sevon1996; Latour 1994). In our analysis of the sustainability reports, we can discern how the meaning of "social sustainability" is narrowed down to various social aspects, and materialised into for example the survey on well-being and satifaction. We will now

turn to the concrete renovation processes and ask whether these meanings and materialisations prevail in this context, or whether other meanings and materialisations are added or combined with these?

6.2 Translating Social Sustainability into "Careful Renovation"

We now turn to the renovation processes at Carnation Street, Rose Hill and Springfield. In the following sections we analyse what happens in the concrete renovation.

While questions of power asymmetry were not discussed in the companies' reports, they explicitely materialized in the consultation meetings with tenants, and we can relate them to differences in tenants' engagement, access to knowledge, and possibilities to influence the choices of technical solutions during renovation.

6.2.1 Tenants as Legitime Knowledge Producers

In the renovation processes at Carnation Street, the housing company (Company A) explicitly discussed sustainability goals, but without connecting these to the overarching goals of affordable housing or reduced segregation, but rather to values such as "belonging", "community" and "trust". Despite the emphasis on dialogue and listening practices the housing company generally believed that tenants cannot contribute with substantial input to concrete renovation plans and technical solutions.

However, at Carnation street, after pressure from tenants with the help of tenants' association, the discussions about technical details were in the end more inclusive. After a dialogue with the tenants' association and with a very engaged and technical competent representative from there, the company changed many of its initial plans and conducted the renovation without any larger increases in rent. In this case, there was a mutual dialogue and tenants could have some influence, due to the presence of technical competence in the tenants' association and due to persistence in the efforts to affect the company. This project was implemented before the Framtiden Group issued the 20–80 directive of "careful renovation". Our two other cases, however, were to translate this directive into practice.

6.2.2 Engaged Tenants with Limited Possibilities to Influence

The renovation process at Rose Hill resembled Carnation Street initially, as tenants were kept outside of technical discussions and decisions in both cases. Similarly, in Rose Hill there was a strong engagement among tenants, but they got very little

opportunity to influence the process. In both cases the tenants were given the possibilities to make choices in relation to internal decorative details, but not concerning the big technical decisions that could affect rent increase. However, for tenants the bigger technical decisions entailed the questions of equity and justice. At Rose Hill, even after continued pressure from both tenants and the tenants' association, the technical reports and discussions around the technical decisions were not opened to tenants. Eventually the company (Company B) changed their plans and made less costly interventions when it comes to the pipelines (instead of replacing pipes, sliplining was used to restore the existing pipelines).

The consultation process before renovation of Rose Hill was ongoing when the Framtiden Group issued its directive on "careful renovation" (i.e. the 20-80 decision we described earlier). The Framtiden Group did not formulate specific guidelines about how to implement the directive, and in Rose Hill the management decided that selection criteria for the 20 % renovated flats without rent increase, would be the length of tenancy and the condition of the apartments. This decision, however, was taken to the rent tribunal by one of the tenants who was not chosen as 20 %. In 2021 the court decided that the company's decision was discriminative and ruled in favour of the tenant. The court decision stalled the renovation processes in the cases that we studied at the time, and the companies waited for a decision from the Framtiden Group about further actions.

6.2.3 Well-Organised Process with Participatory Qualities, and Expert Dominated

In the case of Springfield the housing company (Company C) had expressed ambitions to organize the process in an inclusive way, however, the engagement among tenants was rather low. The process was organized in a structured way and tenants could take part of the process through several meetings. Even though the process had some participatory qualities, it was still expert dominated. Similar to the other cases mentioned above the companies presented plans without introducing any dialogue around the structural solutions.

The issues that were in focus were reduced to the internal, decorative elements of apartments. Every question regarding technical structure of the house or technical systems were always framed as the responsibility of engineers – "you have to trust our engineers", and concerns about the rent increase as a question for the future: "we will talk money much much later". In contrast to the two other cases, there was no significant protest from tenants, and consequently they focused mostly on the details of interior design, renovation timespan, and how their everyday life would be affected during renovation.

In Springfield the tenants were informed about the directive 20–80 in 2019, and they were also told that the project management would do everything to prevent discrimination and to give everyone the option for basic renovation and minimal rent increase. The project management announced that this would mean plastic floor instead of tiles in the bathroom, and other materials that were still functional would be reused. They were also pointing out possible tension between different sustainability goals:

> [The question is] how to follow the directive without mistreating our buildings over time. We must make the buildings waterproof, fireproof, and they should be maintained over time and keep their value. There is a tension here, between the goals. (Project manager, Company C)

As the company considered itself actively engaged in promoting social sustainability, the directive was perceived as an obstacle, rather than something that facilitated their own judgment of how to accomplish sustainable renovation.

In spring 2022 a new directive was issued where it was specified that at least 50 % of tenants should get the "basic renovation package" with the minimal possible rent increase. This brought the issue of translation of social sustainability back to the level of the particular managing companies.

6.2.4 Materialising Social Sustainability through Enrolling Tenants

Our analysis shows that the way in which tenants are enrolled in consultation in relation to "shared desires" (Czarniawska and Sevón 1996) adds a new dimension to and affects the course of translation process. In the table below we summarize the sustainability goals as translated by the companies in their own documents, and how ideas materialized in companies' renovation strategies, and tenants' enrolment in relation to shared desires (Table 1).

Our results show that the description of the procedural aspects of renovation in the official documents and in the interviews with the company representatives are rhetorically similar. However, they are at the same time disembedded from a strong idea of how to implement the more general goals of sustainability that takes into consideration the time perspectives and long-term sustainability goals, equality in relation to various scales (i.e. from local housing area to city and national scales), and how power biases could be evened out through the involvement of all concerned. The goal of affordable housing is not supported by ideas of good quality of governance largely due to the structure of communal housing system allowing mismatch between the actors that formulate sustainability goals, and the actors that have responsibilities, mandate, and power to implement these ideas and policies.

Table 1: Overview of the three cases and the translation of social sustainability.

Empirical cases	Managing company	Sustainability goals in the documents	Ideas materialised	Tensions in relation to shared desires
Carnation street	A	Affordable housing mentioned but not specified	Belonging, community, and trust survey on customer satisfaction	Coproducer of renovation through tenants' active input on technical issues vs chosing decorative elements
Rose hill	B	references to documents by the Framtiden group	Comfort focus on material sustainability of estate	Tenants' protests and local organisation vs blackboxed structural solutions
Springfield	C	Possibility to influence living environment refers to the lack of operationalisation of e.g. "social sustainability goals" in their activities	Comfort, influence on interior design focus on material sustainability of estate Modernisation of the apartments vs maintenance and preservation	Tenants' nuanced discussions of alternative technical solutions vs choice of decorative elements

These dialogue processes can be dismissed as token participation, which is neither surprising nor a new phenomenon. What is new is rather that this form of token participation is now labelled social sustainability. We argue that the ways in which sustainability is attached to a rather narrow meaning of the term, as well as materialised into concrete choices made in terms of decoration i.e. enrolling the tenant as a consumer/market agent prevents rather than facilitates the accomplishment of sustainability in the area of housing. This may very well be discussed as an unintended effect of the translation process, but it may also be understood as a succesful translation, one in which the housing companies become better and better at incorporating loosely coupled ideas into their daily practices, while at the same time also making it concrete through the specific tools of measuring customer satisfaction and giving tenants the possibility of individual choice rather than a sense of ownership and influence. Such developments would then be very much in line with the overarching organizational changes that we described in our background section, that are about weakening tenants rights and giving prevalence to market forces. Hence these "innocent local interactions" can be seen to "bear traces of history, contemporary politics and the dominant fashions" (Czarniawska 2000:29) in the housing context in Sweden and beyond.

7 Conclusions

In neither of the cases is the social sustainability dimension ignored; on the contrary the companies write and talk a lot about social sustainability and connect it to affordable housing, reduced segregation, trust, community, and a sense of belonging. We would like to end with three general conclusions.

First, the relation between the goal of providing affordable housing and the qualities of governance will be evaluated differently depending on scale. At a national level or local governance level, it is assumed that, parliamentary anchored decisions already ensure the qualities of governance. When the mandate to implement such decisions are weakened through transformations of the housing system, however, such qualities cannot be replaced by dialogue and listening practices. In terms of translation, then, one could understand this as a dis-embedding of "social sustainability" from a context that secures the rights of tenants previously materialised in legislation, and in some cases ownership of the process (cf. Jensen et al. 2012) and then re-embedding in a context where the meaning of social sustainability is narrowed down and materialised into a customer satisfaction survey, as well as the opportunity to make choices of decoration material.

Second, participation without influence, might be dismissed as token participation, which is nothing new. However, we continuously need to attend to its unwanted and unintended effects. If social sustainability is about levelling out inequalities, then the actors that are working on social sustainability measures need to be aware of power asymmetries between those with mandate, resources and expertise, and those without it. Care for tenants – as it was expressed by the housing company in our cases – is often an expression of power asymmetries, and when this is combined with a view of tenants as emptied of any valuable substantial input, it even becomes paternalistic. We could in all our cases see a tension in how tenants could be enrolled in shared desires around the renovation. While the tenants themselves expressed the desire to be part of the renovation process, including technical deisions, potentially balancing the goals between ecological, economic and social sustainability, they were only allowed to be enrolled as customers able to make consumer choices around the standard of their own apartments.

Third, when old concepts and goals are placed in new governance contexts, we need research that explores the co-productive effects of these new combinations: how the objectives, values, as well as subjectivities, change as they are translated in this new context (Czarniawska and Sevón 1996; Latour 1994). When organizations interpret, formulate and practice sustainability these activities will also change the actors involved in the process, their ideas about the shared project, as well as their understandings of the ends towards which the project should be heading. This not

only complicates the accomplishment of pre-defined goals, they can also lead to unwanted and unsustainable effects. While we do not believe that such mechanisms can be entirely eliminated, we argue that organisation studies can also learn from entering the research area of housing and look closer at the coproduction effects of translating social sustainability, both in terms of the subjects enrolled (i.e. tenants subjectivated into customers, rather than with rights to affordable and safe housing) and in terms of what sustainability is shaped in relation to the material buildings. While the latter opens up for multidisciplinary approaches, we believe organisational studies should be part of such inquiries.

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