

Urban Green Commons for Socially Sustainable Cities and Communities

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Abstract

In these times of global pandemics and climate crisis, social sustainability has become a crucial issue within diverse sectors and disciplines. This article aims to broaden the discussions on social sustainability in general, and in relation to community work within professional social work in particular. By means of a cross-disciplinary bricolage approach –with a focus on the commons – we aim to construct a holistic view of urban social sustainability. Beginning with the Anthropocene concept, which recognises the human impact on the Earth’s natural systems and hence highlights the need to include the natural environment as a determinant of good and fair living conditions for all, we remix arguments and examples relating to social sustainability with environmental and spatial dimensions to develop an urban green commons. Our cross-disciplinary perspective extends beyond contemporary social policy by bringing together natural resource management, public health, and spiritual aspects of the commons. In order to fit the plurality of urban contexts across the planet, further critical deliberations are needed, focusing on social sustainability and collective action for sustainable change in each context.



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Introduction

Urbanisation is amongst the primary characteristics of the Anthropocene (West 2017). It is a concept that carries emblematic significance, designating a generally negative human impact on the environment (Barthel et al. 2019). The

Anthropocene, and its impacts on ecosystems, have scarcely been discussed within Nordic social work, which primarily focuses on social welfare, and not directly on the links between our collective natural and social resources, or on how these resources and city life should be managed from a sustainable-earth perspective. Community work, the theme of this special issue, encompasses a number of community approaches, from local development and social planning to social action (e.g. Popple 2015; Sjöberg and Turunen 2018; Turunen 2004). In this article, the emphasis is on the direction of social planning, analysing living conditions and improving them from environmental and socio-spatial perspectives to develop an urban green commons.

Regardless of context, the urban transition is a challenge for everyone, including researchers in diverse fields. By 2050, two-thirds of all humanity, 6.5 billion people, are expected to live in cities across the planet, which already today generate about 80% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2019). Critics emphasise that the unprecedented acceleration of harmful environmental impacts since the 1950s should be credited to the parallel deregulation of the global economy (Barthel et al. 2019). This is a trend that popularly goes by the name of neoliberalism, meaning less state regulation, increasing marketisation, and more privatisation across fields ranging from the global economy and the transformation of cities to welfare services (Allelin et al. 2021; Popple 2015; Righard, Johansson, and Salonen 2015).

From the perspective of urban ecology, global urbanisation processes that accumulate, concentrate, and centralise capital, matter, energy, and people into hubs of ‘modern urban lifestyle mass consumption’ have a detrimental impact on the social resilience that is necessary to buffer crises, as well as on Earth-systems processes between the land, the water, living things, and the air (Barthel et al. 2019). Raworth (2012) has illustrated this interaction symbolically as a doughnut with a sustainable area situated between the boundaries of minimal social needs and the planet’s maximum carrying capacity. Within this doughnut-shaped space, humans can act for the better management of natural resources and greater equity in order to create an environmentally safe and socially just space for humanity. Raworth illustrates and discusses factors ranging from the basic human needs for food, water, education, income, social participation, equity and gender equality, etc. to the planetary ones, such as atmosphere, climate, land use, flora and fauna, etc., as a suggestion for a holistic perspective on sustainability. A similar perspective is discussed by Dominelli (2013, 2012), who has highlighted the need for a new paradigm – green social work – to promote environmental justice and care for the planet, with the aim of facilitating sustainability and well-being.

Within Nordic social policy and social work, the social aspects of welfare are well known (Nygård 2013; Meeuwisse, Swärd, Sunesson, and Knutagård 2016), while the planetary focus on ecosystems has not been addressed more than marginally, if at all. The traditional focus of social policy has been on the nexus of welfare and employment (Johansson and Koch 2020). Illuminated by the coronavirus crisis, we can now clearly observe how ecosystems, the economy, and the welfare of citizens are interconnected, and the impact of the removal of protective regulations over our common natural resources has been made clear (Samuelsson et al. 2020). In this paper, we therefore argue for the need to study the links between social sustainability and the natural environment, which also require collective action for the management of urban green commons in practice.

The UN’s Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) calls for action to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable (United Nations (UN) 2015). Despite the setting of this goal, and the preceding sustainability goals, social sustainability issues arising from welfare policies and seen from residents’ perspectives are far less thoroughly studied or practised aspects compared to issues of economic and ecological sustainability (Brusman and Turunen 2018; Shirazi and Keivani 2019). In political practice, the focus has been on

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economic growth and competition. From a critical perspective, it is apparent that the global trend of privatising 'our commons' often fails to promote the fair distribution of wealth, but instead increases differences in wealth (Standing 2019), an outcome that has also been observed in Sweden (Allelin et al. 2021; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2019). Therefore, the role of the urban green commons,

explored in more detail further on, in promoting fair resource distribution in order to achieve SDG 11 is expected to increase and become a new global research frontier in urban social sustainability (e.g. Lee and Webster 2006; Standing 2019).

In Sweden, sustainability has not been a crucial issue in mainstream professional social work, even though environmental issues have been part of community work and urban community planning for decades (Brusman and Turunen 2018). Some recent exceptions are discussions about green social work by Kennedy (2018), and disaster social work by Björngren Cuadra (2015). As late as 2017, the Swedish government established a committee to review the Social Services Law (Socialtjänstlagen), which has now resulted in the suggestion for a new law, outlining sustainable social services and planning in the future (SOU 2020:47).

Compared to Swedish and international social work (Ramsay and Boddy 2017), Finland was an early mover in the field. Here, the first pioneering initiatives towards ecosocial work were taken during the 1980s and empirically developed through comparative research between Finland, Germany, and Great Britain during the period 1997–2000 and later (Matthies et al. 2000; Närhi and Matthies 2018).

In general, professional social work has prioritised individual and family-oriented approaches. Paradoxically, this is true even in Sweden, which during the 1970s was a promoter of structural social work focused on preventive approaches in the forms of field-based youth work, community work, and social planning (see further Sjöberg and Turunen 2018; Turunen 2004). As late as 2020, a Nordic social work conference was announced with the slogan 'No one will be left behind: Social work and sustainability: Opportunities and challenges for social work practice, education and research' (Förbundet för forskning i socialt arbete (FORSA 2021).

Therefore, in this article, we aim to revitalise discussions about sustainability perspectives on cities and communities from a cross-disciplinary perspective on the urban green commons (Colding and Barthel 2013), which combines material, social, and existential aspects. Following this introduction, the methodology and theoretical framework of the article are described, before the diverse perspectives on social sustainability with a focus on cities and communities are presented and problematised, and finally analysed using the discussed theories, focusing on urban green commons.

Methodology

The methodology developed here is a form of co-writing. The authors have created a common space and interactivity forum where they bring together diverse perspectives and reflections on social sustainability from five different scholarly disciplines. An alternative approach to generating knowledge developed by Conrad and Sinner (2015) encourages scholars to work together to create spaces of possibility and interactivity with other professionals and community groups. Within these, they can then explore questions, generate knowledge, and express shared understandings of phenomena. Such an approach also enables multi-layered and cross-disciplinary collaboration and analysis from diverse perspectives.

This type of deliberative writing has not been typical within traditional academic communities, but feminist research, participatory action research, and inter-active research have all experimented with it (Lundgren Stenbom and Turunen 2018).

In our case, this collaboration between authors stems from our common interest in discussing urban social sustainability amidst accelerating urbanisation, neoliberal politics, and global pandemics. Using a bricolage approach – which means creating something new by recombining existing features that are at hand – we deliberate upon and remix multidimensional arguments and examples, weighing up possible options from multiple scholarly fields. We use this bricolage approach in order to create deepened understandings and hopefully even new insights into the phenomenon under study. The concept of bricolage was invoked by Lévi-Strauss and later used by researchers in disciplines ranging from cultural studies to psychology and welfare studies in undertakings such as The Welfare Bricolage Project (UPWEB) (cf. Ehn 2011; Sanchez-Burks, Karlesky, and Lee 2013; UPWEB, n.d.). Our research material encompasses previous results and arguments, which are brought into dialogue with each other in order to find common ground for a broadened perspective. We assume that the problems in the field are so complex that our best way forward is to research and work in a cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral manner, including both top-down (e.g. United Nations goals and strategies) and bottom-up (e.g. community work and civic activism) approaches.

Theoretical Assumptions

Social sustainability is a contested concept, encompassing both normative and analytical aims, and utilised by both politicians and scholars. Karlsson (2013, 2–3), who has conducted a literature review of the field, argues that the key concepts or themes within social sustainability have varied and have been developed within certain contexts, with specific utilitarian goals. She highlights eight dimensions of social sustainability: 1) social equity, 2) social justice, 3) social cohesion, 4) social inclusion, 5) well-being, 6) happiness and quality of life, 7) sustainability, and 8) community. These dimensions display a number of similarities with the classic concept of well-being discussed by, among others, Allardt (1975, 2003), who describes it as ‘Having’, ‘Loving’, and ‘Being’; in other words as material, social, and existential aspects of well-being.

Later, additional aspects of social sustainability – such as power, democracy, and influence, as well as cooperation and the need for coordinated knowledge production across sectors and disciplines – have also been deliberated (Mistra Urban Futures 2017). Our point for further deliberation is the theory of the commons, which we have approached by employing perspectives from public health, resource management, community work, and life philosophy. The latter perspective means that issues of spirituality are included, which is related to the fact that this article also discusses existential aspects based on a pluralistic and post-secular understanding of societal development and the urban commons.

The theory of the commons refers to the management and distribution of various forms of collective resources for

Hardin’s metaphor states that users of a commons are caught in an inevitable process by which the common good will be lost through acts of self-interest that will eventually lead to the destruction of the very resource upon which they depend.

wellbeing. Since Hardin (1968) first published the science article ‘The tragedy of the commons’, most economists have agreed, and still agree, with Hardin’s metaphor. This states that users of a commons are caught in an inevitable process by which the common good will be lost through acts of self-interest that will eventually lead to the destruction of the very

resource upon which they depend. This metaphor is used to refer to the misuse of any kind of common resource, ranging from natural resources to social ones.

Since the publication of Hardin's metaphor, our shared commons have been legislated out of existence, usually based on the argument that private or public ownership offers enhanced efficiency in resource management (Standing 2019).

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While the metaphor of the tragedy of the commons is compelling, it was never empirically validated in real-world settings. Based on many cases of empirical observations, political scientist Ostrom (1990), who received the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009, modified Hardin's theory to 'The Tragedy of Open Access'. She developed the theory of the commons further, to include common-pool resource

management and principles for collective self-governance. Ostrom showed that, in real-life settings, community management is often more sustainable than private or state organising and regulating of local commons, if local participants are allowed to self-organise their engagement, and co-design and enforce their own rules-in-use (Ostrom 2015). Additionally, Poteete, Janssen, and Ostrom (2010) have developed multiple methods for collective action when working together in practice.

Ronnby (2010), social worker and researcher on community work, has encouraged community workers to use Ostrom's theories and research for sustainable resource management of the commons within community organisation and local democracy. Ronnby has illustrated Ostrom's theory in brief as 'the trinity of social coordination', according to which the local people involved must: 1) have influence over changes in decisions, 2) be able to participate in making decisions and, 3) have an influence on implementing the rules that are decided upon for sustainable resource management of the commons. We assume in this article that the involvement of local people is crucial not only for community work but, in fact, for all kind of joint actions for sustainability, regardless of whether they are discussions within the fields of public health, equity, spirituality, or natural resource management (cf. Berkes and Ross 2013).

In fact, we can find a number of connections between the urban commons and social policy, as discussed in the Nordic countries since the end of the 19th century (Allardt 2003; Nygård 2013; Meeuwisse et al. 2016), although the focus has not been on bio-physical or planetary resources, but rather on socio-economic resources in the form of good and fair working and living conditions. In the Nordic context, social policy takes a holistic perspective on social resources and needs, encompassing a spectrum of political fields, from health and housing to social insurance and social services, by means of social reforms, legislation, and redistributive resource allocation at national, regional, and municipal levels to ensure universal well-being for all (Nygård 2013).

Human-nature interactions have been rare but further developed within ecosocial work, which makes reference to the combined environmental aspects of social work, social policy, and ecology (Matthies et al. 2000; Närhi and Matthies 2018). Ecosocial work has also been studied in relation to community resilience and 'glocal' social change. This is exemplified by the situation of coastal fishing communities, which are exposed to both global and local exploitation by the neoliberal transitions in fishing, housing markets, and the welfare state (Rambaree, Sjöberg, and Turunen 2019).

Recently, climate change has been recognised as a new kind of social risk in social policy, and 'ecosocial' policies have been designed as an alternative approach to address both environmental and welfare issues for future social policy

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(Johansson and Koch 2020). Even Global Social Policy (GSP) has highlighted merging tendencies of social and environmental policies with specific regards to vulnerable parts of the population (Kaasch and Schulze Waltrup 2021). We agree with the above ecosocial perspectives, but will

expand them to encompass the urban green commons. Next, a socio-political perspective on this is highlighted from a public health position.

Sustainable Living Conditions and Equity

Social sustainability is, to a large degree and regardless of context, based on people having equal value and equal access to fair living conditions, i.e. to equity issues, including justice around access to and use of 'common resources'. Linked to the ideas of Raworth (2012) and the SDGs of the UN (2015), global goals must also take into account the fact that living conditions and equality vary between urban and rural contexts, as well as between diverse population groups (World Inequality Lab 2017). In general, employment opportunities are better in cities than in rural areas, improving the ability to meet basic needs and enabling economic participation in society that supports physical, psychological, and social health. In addition, it is easier and cheaper per capita for municipalities and other authorities to provide infrastructure and services to people living in cities than to those living in rural locations, since rural populations are often spread across large geographical areas. On the other hand, although urban dwellers tend to be relatively healthy, a wide range of health challenges remains, and there is a large and growing inequality in the distribution of conditions that promote good health within cities. Poor and transitional urban neighbourhoods may in some cases demonstrate health outcomes that are worse than those observed in rural areas (Friel et al. 2011; Siri 2016).

Hence, spatial planning and urban design strategies matter when promoting equity in preventive public health. For instance, communities and cities that are designed to promote good physical and psychological well-being, protective of the natural environment, and socially cohesive are essential for health equity (Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH) 2008; Marmot et al. 2008). A population's experience of place can have important health implications, and research has shown the importance of the neighbourhood and built environment as social determinants of health. These include environmental conditions, access to healthy food, and levels of crime and violence (Berkes and Ross 2013; Mathis, Rooks, and Kruger 2015). Friel et al. (2011) have argued that efforts to improve urban health equity and actions for climate change mitigation need the involvement of local people and must go hand-in-hand with actions to promote the social determinants of health (World Health Organisation (WHO) 1986).

In advancing sustainability and equity, the social determinants of health are emphasised as key factors in the promotion of health (Friel et al. 2011; Jennings, Larson, and Yun 2016), and much attention has been paid to the role played by

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social determinants as a source of health inequalities. Therefore, there is a growing awareness that public health promotion is also a suitable tool for improving environmental sustainability (Pedersen, Land, and Kjærgård 2015). The opposite perspective is equally valid: the conservation and management of natural resources need to be addressed in any health-

promotion strategy (World Health Organisation (WHO) 1986). Studies from various countries and a variety of contexts have also found that social cohesion correlates with good health in cities and that such social features can impact upon a range of factors that are linked to physical and psychological well-being (Andrews et al. 2014; Ruiz et al. 2019). Moreover, the benefits of accessible neighbourhood green space for health and physical and psychological well-being

are well documented (Hartig et al. 2014; Jennings, Larson, and Yun 2016), making this an important reason for promoting urban green commons.

Urban Green Commons in Spatial Planning

In a spatial planning context, urban green commons can include diverse features, among others community gardens and allotments, pocket parks, tiny forests groves, wetlands, sports fields, 4-H farms, and entire city parks (Colding and Barthel 2013). The focus is directed towards natural resource management, which is not explicitly discussed within Nordic social work or community work. What natural resource policy and social policy have in common is the fact that decades of following the neoliberal agenda have resulted in diverse types of privatisation, such that even land held in the public domain has become privatised. The economic ‘rationale’ explaining this process is that urbanisation leads to population densification and is accompanied by an increase in land value, which stimulates the subdivision of land to be put on the market (Barzel 1997; Lee and Webster 2006).

With the increased privatisation of public land, urban populations may become increasingly removed from actively engaging in the use of local land or from becoming involved in the management of their local neighbourhoods (Rhode and Kendle 1997). Such processes incrementally reduce opportunities for marginalised people to take part in urban affairs. Civic rights to manage and restore local resources are a vital mechanism in the functioning of citizen participation in urban planning processes (Krasny and Tidball 2012), which have traditionally been governed in a top-down manner, regardless of the goals of increasing citizen participation that have been pursued since the 1960s (e.g. Arnstein 1969; Brusman and Turunen 2018).

Inspired by the work of Ostrom (1990, Ostrom 2015), studies of urban green commons in Sweden, Germany, and South Africa have shown that the right of civil society groups to manage natural environments actively and practically on the ground is a key characteristic of urban green commons, whether ownership of the land is in the private, public, or club domain, or constitutes a hybrid of these (Colding et al. 2013a). While the ownership of land in cities generally differs markedly from ownership patterns in rural settings, with a greater proportion of landless people living in metropolitan areas, self-organised rules-in-use, enforced in collaboration with government authorities, seem to create the social conditions needed for the efficient and inclusive management of local resources in cities (Colding et al. 2013a).

This research indicates that people generally engage with green commons because they aspire to become co-creators of local neighbourhoods, a notion that has long been promoted in collaborative urban planning as an approach for

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improving issues of social sustainability (e.g. Healey 1997). As an example, Sanecka, Barthel, and Colding (2020), in a study in Warsaw, found that local groups were primarily motivated by three interconnected impetuses: nature, place, and community. An interview study in Berlin found that motives for engaging in the

management of green commons in cities are often oriented towards nurturing place, social cohesion, and environmental learning (Bendt, Barthel, and Colding 2013), while still other research groups have concluded that deep environmental learning among urban children requires frequent engagement with nearby natural environments (Giusti et al. 2018; Colding et al. 2020).

Green commons are areas of nature in cities that are viewed as a common-pool resource by a local community (Colding and Barthel 2013). Due to the fact that such commons are generally subject to the problems of congestion and overuse, especially in urban areas, there is often a need to devise and enforce rules, which are in the hands of an identifiable local community of stakeholders (Colding et al. 2013a). Hence, members of such commons may collectively craft their own rules-in-use (local institutions) for the management of common-pool resources within given legislative forms of society (Colding et al. 2013a), reminiscent of community work

The Role of Urban Green commons in Community Work

In professional social work, community work is known as a third method of social work, alongside case work and group work, with the aims of societal analysis and the mobilisation of both material and immaterial resources for social development and change, regardless of context (Turunen 2004, 2017). Historically, the environmental approach of community work is especially visible within the settlement movement, which established neighbourhood centres in poor housing areas, such as the settlement of Toynbee Hall in London in 1884 and that of Hull House in Chicago in 1889 (Turunen 2004, 2017). These two settlements were engaged in both research and socio-political reforms in close cooperation with university researchers, politicians, other stakeholders, and local people, by means of local development, social planning and social action to create better living conditions and environments. They did not discuss the urban green commons, but started to investigate social needs and environmental problems locally. They initiated a number of social improvements and activities in practice, ranging from socio-sanitary conditions and day-care for children, to town planning and art galleries. Hampstead Garden Suburb in London is a historical example of a new type of town plan, initiated by Henrietta and Samuel Barnett, founders of the settlement of Toynbee Hall, in 1906. Their vision was to create something other than a smoky and unhealthy housing area, inspired by the Garden City Movement for self-contained communities surrounded by 'green belts' (Gayler 1996). This initiative has been characterised by Dominelli (2012) as an early form of green social work, which established what we describe in this article as urban green commons.

In terms of urban planning in Sweden, it is difficult to find empirical examples of socio-politically orientated city and community planning since the neoliberal agenda took off during the 1990s (Brusman and Turunen 2018), regardless of existing examples within sustainable urban development (Lundström, Fredriksson, and Witzell, 2013). Thus, the example that most merits highlighting is still the planning of Skarpnäcksfältet, sometimes called Skarpnäck City, in the 1980s, located in the south-east of Stockholm. This housing area was designed for 10,000 inhabitants and was intended to become something other than the typical monolithic suburb of the 1970s. It was purposely socially planned to include a diversity of houses and people, in a post-modern style, combining both city and neighbourhood/community planning (Brusman and Turunen 2018; Turunen 2017). In this case, social services became an active co-partner in the cross-sectoral planning processes during the period 1975–1990. Even youth and community work were initiated in cooperation with diverse local authorities in order to promote a good start for all by means of preventive social work, and a number of community activities for everyday life and participation were set up during the implementation processes (Brusman and Turunen 2018; Turunen 2017).

The planning of Skarpnäcksfältet is still an important example of urban community planning, with its aim of creating socially sustainable cities and communities as well as the sustainable management of urban commons in both a top-down and a bottom-up manner. This housing area even has a local power station, fuelled by local domestic waste, and is surrounding green belts. One can also find similarities with the planning of 'Hampstead Garden Suburb' in London in 1906, which was also inspired by the spiritual dimension of the commons that existed in the settlement movement of the

19th century (Stebner 1997; Turunen 2004). This dimension has surfaced again in current post-secular societies, as described below from a life-philosophical perspective.

The Spiritual Dimension of the Urban Commons

A city has ‘physical, social and mental dimensions’ (Knott 2010, 24), as discussed above. The spiritual dimension, which refers to the socio-cultural and existential aspects of life, has not been the chief focus of urban planning or research about urban commons. However, there are several reasons why these aspects need more attention, even within contemporary community work.

One reason concerns the impact of globalisation and migration. In a culturally heterogeneous social environment like Sweden, with a great diversity of views on life, and where the secular no longer plays a hegemonic role in the same way as before (Sorgenfrei and Thurfjell 2021), it is increasingly difficult to talk about a generally accepted framework for understanding the meaning of ‘well-being’ or ‘equal value’. This makes urban planning with social aims more complex and complicated. For whom are the nature environments, or even entire neighbourhoods, being planned? Researchers or city planners can assume a narrow secular interpretation of concepts such as ‘well-being’, but the extent to which this perspective is shared by the residents, or what weight they attach to the concept, remains an open question, which can only be answered by some kind of empirical research or cultural analysis.

Another reason why the existential aspects of life need more attention is the slow change, closely related to the cultural

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process described above, from a secular to a post-secular condition in many Western countries (Franck and Thalén 2020). This latter change implies that spiritual values will become more important in urban social sustainability research since a secular framework that understands quality of life principally as an improvement in material conditions can no longer be taken for granted in either

the academic community or social work. A common denominator in a post-secular understanding of quality of life seems to be a personal endeavour to connect with something ‘higher’.

However, it is no simple matter to define the post-secular context of social sustainability and urban planning, although there is a vast body of literature – sociological, philosophical, and theological – discussing post-secularity, including

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literature dealing with post-secular urbanism (see e.g. Molendijk, Beaumont, and Jedan 2010; Beaumont and Baker 2011; Berking, Steets, and Schwenk 2020). In the field of the sociology of religion, the discussion addresses several issues of a complex kind, which often contain conflicting elements (Furseth 2018). The main issue concerns whether or not we can observe the actual return of religion to society. The word ‘return’ in this case does not refer to established religious

institutions – they are still in decline in many places – but to non-organised or individual expressions of religion or spirituality (the line between these is unclear). This means that the infusion of spiritual values – self-realisation, inner peace, harmony, hope, charity etc. – into society is not only a result of the activity of hierarchical organisations, a top-

down process, but also increasingly a process growing up from below: small islands of spirituality that sometimes attract large numbers of followers or sympathisers and unexpectedly ally themselves with different views of life (Warner 2010).

If social planning is to assume that spiritual values are important and will be so in the foreseeable future, urban green commons represent a key institutional framework for nurturing and preserving these values.

An example from Swedish society is the practice of mindfulness, which seems to be widespread in schools and other public contexts. Another example is the contemporary discussion about Nature as a spiritual grove or 'church' in Sweden, where the forest has become a place not only to relax but also for contemplation, a trend accelerated by the

current coronavirus pandemic (Sykes 2020).

If social planning is to assume that spiritual values are important and will be so in the foreseeable future, urban green commons represent a key institutional framework for nurturing and preserving these values (Colding et al. 2013b). Whether post-secularity is about an actual change in society or a changed understanding of it – 'a new awareness' – or both, it seems important that urban planning with a focus on 'the commons' is inclusive of the diversity of voices, including spiritual voices, that can be heard in the post-secular city. This plea for an inclusive approach is also in accordance with SDG 11, set by the UN.

Concluding Remarks: Towards a Deeper Understanding of the Significance of Urban Commons

Evidence from our bricolage approach – including perspectives from public health, natural resource management, social work with a focus on community work, and contemporary spiritual practices – shows that we need to revive discussions about the role of the urban commons with an expanded meaning. Our bricolage approach hence moves us beyond contemporary social policy towards the urban green commons, connecting existential, social, spatial, spiritual, and health issues as well as human actions in designing and developing built environments and communities, places, and spaces. This expanded approach requires cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral perspectives, research, and action.

Within community work, the environmental discussion and experiments have existed since the end of the 19th century in terms of socially oriented town planning and socio-political action, but not explicitly in relation to urban green

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commons (Pople 2015; Sjöberg and Turunen 2018; Turunen 2017). In these times of pandemic and environmental threats in cities and communities, there is a need to reorient social work, including community work, more explicitly towards urban green commons, as outlined in this article. We agree with greening social work (Dominelli 2013) and natural resource management (Bendt, Barthel, and Colding 2013), but also with the Commission

on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH) (2008) that cities must be designed in such a way that the physical, social, informational, and natural environments minimise urban health risks and improve common living conditions, while ensuring the equitable integration of all of a city's residents during the process of urban policymaking. By making cities sustainable, inclusive, safe, and resilient, the urban green commons should therefore contribute towards a healthier environment in a broad sense, promoting equal opportunities for spirituality, health, and well-being for all ages.).

From the perspective of spatial planning and resource management, the focus is to a larger extent on town planning in relation to land, later combined with social issues of equality and fair access to healthy living conditions and effective

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natural resource management (Colding and Barthel 2013). In life philosophy, the relationship between post-secular urbanism and existential questions is visible in the spiritual dimensions of the urban commons. In particular, we need to examine how city and community planning take into account various spiritual needs and how these needs can be

redefined within an urban environment characterised by cultural diversity and a plurality of worldviews, in which even religious practices play a part (cf. Berking, Steets, and Schwenk 2020).

Viewed from a post-secular community perspective, the aspirations of residents, mentioned earlier in this article, to become ‘co-creators of cities by transforming and rejuvenating local neighbourhoods’, also seems to manifest spiritual values, a desire to work for the common good that brings together both material and immaterial aspects of the commons (cf. Söderberg 2020). However, determining how and to what extent such values act as a driving force in particular cases requires empirical research, which remains to be done in each specific context. In addition, our bricolage indicates a similarity between issues of social sustainability, green social work, and urban green commons. It is only a matter of time, if it has not already happened, before diverse discourses and practices influence each other, practising what Peter Berger has called ‘cognitive contamination’ (Berger 2020). Therefore, the revival of the urban commons with a green orientation based on the perspectives tentatively outlined here should also become an accepted part of the development of professional social work, including community work, in the Nordic countries, but also in other fields of sustainability.

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