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## **PARTICIPATORY GREEN STRUCTURE PLANNING FOR LINKING URBAN AND RURAL LANDSCAPES – A CASE STUDY FROM RONNEBY, SWEDEN**

**HELENA MELLQVIST, LONE SØDERKVIST KRISTENSEN  
AND CECIL KONIJNENDIJK VAN DEN BOSCH**

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### **Abstract**

Green structure planning has mainly been an instrument for urban planning as well as for developing and managing urban green spaces and green structures. This paper explores the potential of green structure planning for urban-rural integration in landscape development. This is studied for the case of a municipality-wide planning project in Ronneby, southern Sweden. Applying a policy and governance “arrangement model”, the paper investigates the social and inclusive dimensions of the proposed planning approach. The working method for developing Ronneby’s green structure plan has been highly participatory, aimed at creating a visionary document in which the respective qualities of rural and urban areas are mutually strengthening. Walk-and-talks were arranged with local “connoisseurs” across the municipality for identifying the most important places, routes, and landmarks in their respective village and its surrounding. These connoisseurs, in this case representatives from local associations, helped explore whether the green structure planning instrument can also contribute to a sense of belonging, strengthening the relations between people and their everyday landscape at a municipal level. Results show that a collaborative planning process supported a broad learning process on green structure by the involvement of the local connoisseurs, municipal staff and politicians. The long time span and repeated meetings were important for raising awareness of the potential in visionary green structure plans. Findings not only support the continued municipal planning process; they also contribute to the current debate on how “green infrastructure” can be applied as an interdisciplinary concept covering e.g. green space spatial pattern, aesthetic values, biological diversity, and ecosystem services.

Keywords:  
collaborative planning,  
connoisseur approach, green  
structure planning, empowerment

## Introduction

Green structure planning in various forms has gained wider acceptance as a planning activity since the 1990s (Jongman, 1995). However, already prior to the 1990s ideas of green structure planning existed. Greenways in North America (e.g. Frederik Law Olmsted's activities in New York) established from the 1850s, Ebenezer Howard's plans for Garden Cities in the UK during the early 1900s and the green structure plan for Greater Copenhagen formulated in the 1930s (later on incorporated into the famous "Finger Plan") can be considered early "seeds" of green structure planning (Primdahl, et al., 2009; Mell, 2010; Caspersen and Olafsson, 2010). The practice of green structure planning has mainly been related to urban planning, but recently it has been applied to rural areas as well (e.g. The Dutch National Ecological Network (Jongman, 1995) and the European Union's Natura 2000 programme ([http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm)). There is no clear or unifying definition of green structure planning. However, the underlying rationale is that coherent green structures comprising networks of different green elements should become an integrated part of urban and rural areas through the instrument of physical planning. Green structures, therefore, are not equivalent to urban green areas but cover a range of landscape types including both urban and rural areas and also (specifically) inter linkages between these.

Different approaches to green structure planning have been applied ranging from a focus on sole biological purposes (e.g. concerning habitats and species) to more multifunctional purposes, including landscape, health, recreation, water management and climate adaptation. Moving from biological to more multifunctional purposes, as well as from "pure" urban planning to incorporating rural areas, increases the complexity of the planning and the risk for conflicts. Generally, planning conditions for rural areas are complex partly due to the dominance of private land use rights and the presence of relatively little public space. Moreover, heavy sectorial regulation of space and the place-bound production of agriculture and forestry offer little room for the activity of spatial planning. Commitment to democratization of planning, as well as the search for new and innovative planning solutions to environmental and societal problems in general, feature in debates on the role of contemporary planning and policymaking. These debates have engaged scholars from political science (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003; Sørensen and Torfing, 2007), planning (theory) (Healey, 1996; 2006; Innes and Booher, 2010) and natural resource management (Folke, et al., 2005). The need for democratization of planning and policymaking is also reflected in a range of policy documents at the international level, e.g. the UNCED Rio Convention and the Aarhus Convention (United Nations, 1992; 2001). A recent example is the European Landscape Convention (ELC) which demands parties "to establish procedures for the participation of the general public, local and regional authorities, and other parties with an interest in the definition

and implementation of the landscape policies mentioned” (Council of Europe, 2000, article 5), while also prescribing a democratic definition of how landscape should be understood. It states that “‘Landscape’ means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”.

Inspired by the demand for practical examples of integrated and more inclusive solutions for development of sustainable urban and rural landscape, this paper explores and discusses how a participatory green structure planning process for the entire territory of a municipality may be organised and implemented. More specifically, we investigate the applicability of the so-called connoisseur approach (see below) and discuss its pros and cons. This approach allows for a broad inclusion process and builds on different methods to frame dialogues about values and the use of the landscape. The present study analyses a green structure planning process in the small municipality of Ronneby in southern Sweden. The aim of the planning process has been to prepare a green structure plan for the entire municipal territory, based on inputs obtained through direct meetings with people living and working in a certain place, and with the ambition to strengthen urban-rural integration in landscape development and enhance a sense of belonging. The planning process was carried out as a partnership between the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and the municipality of Ronneby. The research hypothesised that collaborative planning (in a broader perspective) can contribute to better informed and broader supported planning, than traditional expert led and top-down performed planning processes. Further, we expect that collaborative planning will create long-term networks and sustainable platforms for many different kinds of planning projects.

### **Collaborative planning and the connoisseur method**

The inclusion of citizens and other stakeholders in the planning process has been dealt with in spatial planning for the last 30 years. It relates to the effort of bringing diverse actors into the planning process at an early stage and reaches a dialogue-based consensus about how to shape the future of a given (social) space. Different scholars engaged in refining and disentangling the concept have named this kind of planning differently, partly depending on the aspect in focus: communicative, participatory, deliberative or collaborative planning (Pløger, 2002). In this paper, we use the term collaborative planning as coined by Patsy Healey as one of the most prominent scholars in the field (Healey, 1996). Collaborative planning requires alternative working methods and while developing these the ambitions of public participation need to be kept in mind, i.e. not only producing a document but rather achieving a shared process leading to shared experiences and development of new knowledge. In the planning context investigated in this paper, the “connoisseur approach” (Mellqvist, Gustavsson and Gunnarsson, 2013) has been used to collect opinions and information from inhabitants in the municipal-



ity of Ronneby, focusing on organized groups. The term “connoisseur” originates from the French word *connaître*, to know, and the basic idea is that connoisseurs form a group with specific in-depth knowledge and expertise within a certain topic. This group of “knowers” represents relevant stakeholders with valuable personal experience of using a particular landscape (Arler and Mellqvist, 2015). The connoisseur approach contains several complementary methods such as in-depth interviews during field walks, walk-and-talk encounters, and meetings between connoisseurs (local people, planners, experts).

To work within dialogue-based planning requires a flexible and somewhat humble mind, but also a strong professional self-esteem. The challenge is how officials can involve new groups in planning processes (Arler, 2000), avoiding a top-down approach promoted by the authorities (Tahvilzadeh, 2015). Parallel to this, responsible planners should manage to involve colleagues from their own organisation to challenge the prevailing norms (Wiberg, 2015). This includes the delicate task of maintaining a good dialogue with citizens as well as officials who are not very used to collaborative ways of working. The connoisseur approach aims to improve communication in decision-making processes by ensuring that personal and local knowledge of everyday landscapes is considered in projects on landscape development (Mellqvist, Gustavsson and Gunnarsson, 2013). It has been tested in contexts of landscape democracy as highlighted by the ELC in relation to landscape transition (Arler and Mellqvist, 2015). Inviting people in processes of planning where they “belong” might be a true win-win situation where local connoisseurs get empowered and planners gain local knowledge and get to know a certain place as it is for the local inhabitants. Central to the connoisseur approach is not to merely focus on one aspect at the time but rather to insist on an integrative perspective and on “real” meetings between people and places. For example, connoisseurs are not only part of the initial phase collecting material but they also participate in formulating the actual green structure plan through different forms of meetings. Furthermore, municipal officers and politicians participate in the process, and it is just as important to discuss politics and economy with participating connoisseurs as it is to discuss their personal relations to their everyday landscape (Mellqvist, Gustavsson and Gunnarsson, 2013).

Although collaborative planning has been in favour during the last 30 years, e.g., because of its capacity to generate new ideas and solutions (Innes and Booher, 2010), its rationales have also been contested (Healey, 2006; Innes and Booher, 2015). Some authors claim that the purpose of public involvement is often unclear, which could justify the partial replacement of current representative democracy with public participation (Tahvilzadeh, 2015). Others are more in favour of public participation as a complement to representative democracy. Fung, Wright and Abers (2003) mean that collaborative planning is wise to use when the complex-

ity of specific questions goes beyond the capacity of the representative system. Landscape values (Arler and Mellqvist, 2015) and green structure planning (Mell, 2010) both represent complex questions where inclusive planning also can contribute to empowerment and greater interest for citizens' home environment through the learning process a clever participatory process can lead to. Tahvilzadeh (2015) points out how the use of participatory planning methods in the future probably will depend on a political battle where basic values regarding the development of society and the role of the state is in the forefront, rather than the invention of new methods of dialogue.

Three sets of values are relevant in relation to democracy: self-determination, co-determination and respect for arguments. These are all relevant in different phases of a planning process but "respect for argument" is probably the most important in deliberative processes with focus on place-based knowledge. Deliberation becomes illusory if the autonomous individual is not protected. It needs to be clear that deliberative processes are not always resolved through reaching consensus. This is why co-determination procedures can be important in some cases. Co-determination includes different forms of citizen involvement and can thereby play an important role in citizens' identity building through mutual learning (Arler, 2008; Arler and Mellqvist, 2015). Respect for arguments is closely related to the communicative turn identified by Healey (1996), who based her argument on Habermas who argued for the power of the better argument. Healey's description of how things, people and places are not connected as they used to originates from an urban context. Urban regions, in this perspective, are just like rural regions with "a diversity of social and economic relations, linking people in a place with those in other places, but not necessarily with those in the same place" (Healey, 1996, p.237). She describes one of many challenges as developing the capacity to detect a crack in traditional planning processes and realise when it is possible to do things differently. We must learn to involve people with this "capacity to see and articulate to others a strategic possibility" (ibid., p.244) in contemporary development of society. Based on Van Tatenhove, Arts has presented a model for analysing and understanding policy and governance arrangements (e.g. Arts, Leroy and Van Tatenhove, 2006). Temporary stabilizations of policy and governance (so called "arrangements") are described through four interlinked dimensions: discourses, resources, actors and the rules of the game (see Figure 1). Discourses focus on the joint understanding on key "story lines" and assumptions the planning process is anchored in. The actor dimension identifies individuals and organizations involved in the process, interlinked in different ways. Resources are used to identify power relations and division of other resources between involved actors. Finally, rules of the game focus rules and routines shaping formal and informal procedures in this particular policy domain. This model, which can be applied to a wider governance context as well (e.g. Konijnendijk van den Bosch,

2014), can be useful to situate Healey's disconnected linkages between things, people and places while explaining the policy domain of collaborative green structure planning in the municipality of Ronneby. In the Results section, the four dimensions are used as a frame for analysing the green structure planning project in Ronneby.

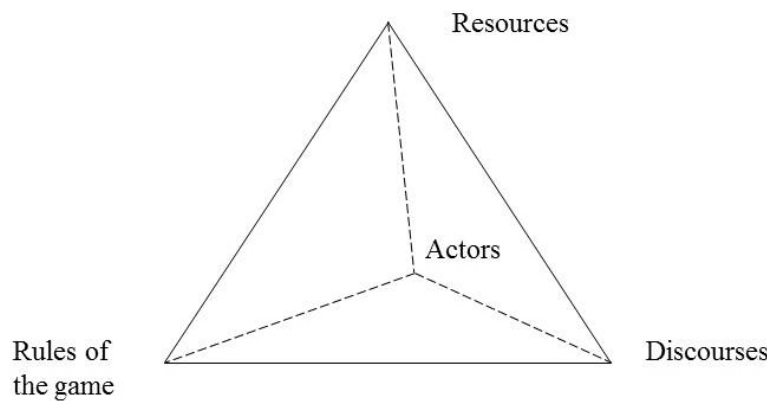


Figure 1  
Graphic representation of the dimensions in the Policy Arrangement Model (Arts, Leroy and Van Tatenhove, 2006).

## Material and methods

### Overall research approach

Robert Stake's (2003) definition of case study focuses on the object of study, not the methods used (in contrast to e.g. the approach of Yin (2013)). From a case-perspective, the present study is inspired by Bent Flyvbjerg (2001), who in turn bases himself on Stake's place-oriented use of case studies (Johansson, 2003). Miles and Huberman (1994) emphasize the importance of temporality in analysing processes, as the particular order of the course of events has great effect on the results. As described below, the municipality of Ronneby is an "average" municipality in many ways. The case being studied is the green structure planning process for the entire municipality. Ronneby was chosen because of an existing collaboration in green structure planning between the municipality and the first author's university, combined with a municipal agenda that saw the time was ripe for a project like this. A collaborative planning process resulting from this will be discussed with support of the policy and governance arrangement model by Arts, Leroy and van Tatenhove (2006, see Figure 1). Further information about the specific methods for data collection is provided below.

As mentioned previously, the connoisseur approach is a method that emphasises stakeholder participation in deliberative (planning) processes, with particular focus on place-based knowledge (Mellqvist, Gustavsson and Gunnarsson, 2013; Arler and Mellqvist, 2015). The working process plays an important role in the connoisseur method, as real and meaningful communication is believed to require repeated meetings

(Mellqvist, Gustavsson and Gunnarsson, 2013). Feedback on completed contributions is crucial; this is where the process leans more towards collaboration than participation, and where collaborative planning can get a chance to work. The connoisseur approach can comprise of several different practical methods. Collaborative planning requires time in the form of repeated meetings and feedback to participating connoisseurs to ensure that learning goes both ways and that trust is built up between the community associations and the municipality. What can be gained is understanding of in-depth, long-term (planning) case studies in order to be able to predict things as you develop an intuition, but also an interesting progress where the researcher is acting both as “insider” and “outsider” (Flyvbjerg, 2001). The result may be a conscious method where the researchers build up trust through a persistent presence and interest for local activities, in this case through the connoisseur approach. This trust requires attentive maintenance, but it is also this trust that helps opening doors to fruitful communication between the local community and, for example, municipal institutions and officials. Flyvbjerg describes the value of case studies as follows: “Final proof is hard to come by in social science because of the absence of ‘hard’ theory, whereas learning is certainly possible” (2011, p.303). Learning is a key word in a project like the present one and we hope it can result in knowledge generation and awareness raising, as well as vocational education related to how collaborative planning can benefit from collaboration with a university or other academic partner.

## Methods

In order to lead the process, a steering committee was set up formed by two representatives from the municipality and two from the university (including the lead author). Relevant local associations from the entire municipality were invited to take part in the process. By inviting organised groups, access is also gained to their respective networks. All registered local associations were invited to participate through a forum for rural associations called “landsbygdsråd” (i.e. “village council”, a cooperation between different kinds of organised groups in the rural and peri-urban parts of the municipality), while planners from the municipality assisted as well. The municipality acted as coordinator and sent out invitations. Additional groups joined the process through “snowballing”. The steering committee also invited preschools and sheltered accommodations to contribute (see the Results section). Walk-and-talk was used as the primary method of collecting materials and creating good contacts with participating local associations. Walk-and-talk has been successful as a research method in e.g. ethnography (Kusenbach, 2003), health (Carpiano, 2009) and participatory rural appraisal (PRA) (Chambers, 1994). The 32 walk-and-talks were very different depending on the hosting association and their engagement, but they were all prepared in the same way by the steering committee. In each walk, 1–15 people

participated and many participants also involved their respective organization in preparation of the walk-and-talk. The chosen method enabled the researcher to obtain interviews with connoisseurs/stakeholders in the actual landscape under discussion (Kusenbach, 2003; Mellqvist, Gustavsson and Gunnarsson, 2013). To walk while talking is a relaxed way of communicating, permitting the conversation to evolve along the road as new landscape features emerge. It is a way for the researcher (or project leader) to understand local contexts and reach a local knowledge on place related questions (Carpiano, 2009). Through the walk-and-talks, the steering committee could meet connoisseurs in their respective “home landscape” and learn about their special conditions. The associations were equipped with maps of different scale together with a list of questions to keep in mind while reflecting on use and concern for their local green structure. The questions were sent out to support the associations if they did not really know how to start reflecting on their local landscape. Examples of the 43 questions are: “Where do you meet for midsummer celebrations?”, “Where do you go skiing?”, “What do you consider as special with your village?”, “Where do teenagers hang out?” During the meetings, the associations were asked to mark places or paths/connections, views of special importance etc. on maps and send this information to the steering committee at a later occasion. At the same time, staff from the municipality and from the Centre for Research and Development in Ronneby (Cefur) was invited to four focus group discussions (4 x 7 people), discussing the main topics in the green structure plan: *ecosystem services, recreation, biodiversity and landscape identity*. The mix of competences covered by focus group participants included architecture, biology, landscape architecture, environmental science, recreation and public health. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2011) discuss the potential of focus groups to function as consciousness-raising groups, something that happened in Ronneby.

After 10 months, the walk-and-talks were concluded. Maps and comments were summarised and the steering committee sent out invitations to five follow-up meetings. The associations were divided in groups classified according to their geographical location (see Figure 5). All five meetings turned out to be productive and important steps to involve the connoisseurs in the following steps. In all, 15–20 people attended, discussing the steering committee’s analyses and proposals for visionary goals. In Sweden, statutory consultations are to be held as part of the planning process according to the national *Planning and Building Act* (Swedish government, 2010). Citizens as well as officials are thus familiar with the concept even though few people normally attend these meetings (Lindholm, Oliviera a Costa and Wiberg, 2015). The steering committee proposed alternative forms of consultation to attract more people but everybody chose the classic model where the project group presented and the public discussed afterwards. Usually the statutory consultations are held late in the process, but in the Ronneby case, the



consultation was part of the collaborative planning process and thus took place earlier in the process. Statutory consultation as part of the planning procedure in Sweden includes a period where the public, different associations, the public sector, governmental bodies etc. are invited to send in comments on “the version for consultation”, in this case of the green structure plan (regulated in the *Planning and Building Act*). This input was the last data to influence and be integrated in the final version of the green structure plan.



**Figure 2**  
The location of Ronneby in northern Europe.

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### *Background to the case study*

Situated in southeastern Sweden, Ronneby is 825 km<sup>2</sup> in size and has 28,300 inhabitants (i.e. in the middle tier of Sweden’s 290 municipalities). The municipality stretches from the Baltic coast with substantial arable fields in the south, through the middle part with a mosaic landscape; patches of grazing fields, forest, water bodies and fields up to the widespread coniferous forests in north. Approximately 75 % of the entire area of the municipality is owned by private landowners, to be compared with an average of 60 % in Sweden ([www.scb.se](http://www.scb.se)). This fact pinpoints the importance of creating collaboration and cooperation as the municipality cannot plan for the citizens’ private properties. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Ronneby experienced a downward economic spiral and politicians started to argue how the future of Ronneby had to be guided by sustainability. Ronneby lost the local university of technology; a huge business park was looking for new tenants and the local government commissioner became firmly convinced of how sustainable develop-

ment was to be the new “guiding star”. After 80 years in power, the social democrats lost the local election in 2010, a political shift that led to an agreement to continue and a serious commitment to sustainable development started across party frontiers, as reflected in the municipality’s policies and strategic aims. This has turned out to become a “signature” of some sort for the entire municipality of Ronneby.

Thus Ronneby is, in a way, also a rather special municipality. Sustainable development covers a wide spectrum, e.g. economic, ecological, cultural and social issues; it is about “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987). The entire municipality made an effort to meet this ideal and the message was spread to the citizens through local media. In 2011, the Centre for research and Development in Ronneby (Cefur) launched a cooperation with the municipality to assist and strengthen sustainable development. Cefur has operated as an innovative engine for sustainable development of business and society in Ronneby and surroundings (The municipality of Ronneby, 2015b). Collaboration with Cefur has been very strong in smaller projects on physical planning but focuses more on communication of sustainable issues to schools and local companies. Cefur’s collaboration with the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), started as a deep and practice-oriented interest shared for improvement of the living environment. The two academic members of the green structure steering committee had been involved in a handful projects as experts of the outdoor environment (primarily the landscape surrounding schools and preschools). The intention of working with green structure planning on a larger scale relates to the sustainability discourse. The green structure plan shall ensure that current and future citizens have access to recreational areas with high biodiversity and robust ecosystems (The municipality of Ronneby, 2015a). In this work, the identification of the region’s identity is important to strategically ensure and develop the uniqueness of the municipality of Ronneby. The plan offers a possibility to show the sustainability of using the physical green structure as a solid and multifunctional base for anchoring other municipal development plans related to e.g., housing, infrastructure and public services.

Ronneby’s Master plan from 2006 included an action strategy for municipal green leisure. It provided a comprehensive presentation of Ronneby city’s green areas and green structures, with emphasis on how the countryside should be preserved, developed, and changed. A slight neglect of the rural parts of the municipality had led to a wish of strengthening the links between these and the municipality’s urban areas. The green structure project started in 2009, with a draft version of a plan for consultation exhibited during summer 2010. This first part of the plan focused on the densely built-up parts of Ronneby. The municipal executive board then decided to expand the green plan to include the entire municipal-

ity (The municipality of Ronneby, 2015a). Collaboration with Cefur was launched to support the municipality in achieving goals associated with sustainability principles, presented as a sustainable alternative, emphasising future generations and to move towards a circular economy. The green structure plan was considered as one step towards this. The municipality established collaboration with SLU, which contributed among others with intensified interactions with local associations engaged in an extended dialogue during the working process. Furthermore, *landscape identity* could be brought in as guiding concept, partly based on previous collaborations. Landscape identity is part of the green structure plan's introductory part as thematic elaborations. From a pedagogic perspective the presence of SLU led to a broader interest for the realisation of the green structure plan, i.e. it was no longer seen as just a matter of municipal interest but rather as being of wider interest to society. In this respect, Lindholm (2002, p.43) describes green structure as not only a physical pattern but also as a structure, describing a process while "a pattern describes a result, but not necessarily a result of a structuring process". Ronneby's green structure project emphasized this process and informed participant connoisseurs of the green structure plans political context.

## Results and discussion

### Implementing and analysing the planning process

The design of the collaborative planning process for Ronneby's green structure plan was guided by a wish to include connoisseurs from different parts of the municipality. The steering committee, agreed on assumptions such as the importance of meeting people at repeated occasions and in different settings and the importance of meeting people as much as possible outside in their respective home landscape.

The process kick-off was hosted by the municipality, held at the town hall and moderated by the project leader. All (four) members of the steering committee for the plan were present and the university member of the committee (a senior researcher) introduced landscape identity and green structure from a landscape perspective. At this stage, it was important to emphasize how the entire municipality supports the green structure project.



### *Discourses*

The Aarhus convention, the Rio convention with Agenda 21 (United Nations, 1992; 2001), and lately ELC (Council of Europe, 2000) have all been important landmarks preparing the ground for the green structure project. On the top of this attention to public involvement, the municipality of Ronneby's commitment for sustainable development (WCED, 1987) during the last 15 years has led to a political as well as public acceptance for investing in economic and ecological as well as social sustainability. The wish to develop more comprehensive and inclusive municipal planning, focusing on landscape features and functionality, is not unique for Ronneby but an issue for all municipalities. The connoisseur approach has been developed over the last 10 years in Sweden and other countries as part of the challenges posed by the democratization of planning process (and in this case green structure planning). Place-based knowledge is in focus and people's everyday landscape the arena, ELC's intentions pervades the entire planning procedure (Council of Europe, 2000).

### *Resources*

As 75 % of the land in the municipality of Ronneby is owned by private owners, and only 25 % by the municipality and other actors, an important strategic purpose of the green structure plan is to identify possibilities for development and cooperation to achieve shared projects for a shared green structure. A mere action list was therefore avoided, even though some connoisseurs requested this. Initially the priority list only treated municipal land, but a major need to bypass bottlenecks makes it important to include private-owned land in such a list as well. Searching for Ronneby's identity, the connection to nature and landscape is immediate. Sometimes this relates to privately-owned buildings (example of a characteristic landscape feature), sometimes to municipal ones. Even culturally important buildings can be sold, and as private property, it is even more important that these buildings' importance in a landscape context is documented in e.g., a green structure plan. Therefore, the green structure plan aimed to discuss green structure on a strategic level, in quite "sharp" ways for the municipal land, and in a more neutral one for the privately owned land in order to be careful in the introductory dialogue phase. One example of this is the "Blekingeleden", a walking trail crossing the municipality. A functioning but fragile system is in place with agreements with private actors, but ownership and prerequisites can change implying that a green structure plan should not be too detailed in order to invite new owners to be a part of the dialogue as well as to cherish and manage the landscape. There have been very few existing possibilities for financial support for implementing green structure planning; in this case "the beautification money" (municipal support) which involves very small amounts but contributed with a great portion of hope and some belief in the future. It remains to be seen what role the green structure plan actually will play in the further strategic planning at municipal level as well as for the non-profit sector as for the entire



region. However, as mentioned, some kind of co-financing will be needed for innovative projects aiming for collaboration. Time is a major resource in green structure planning. Unexpectedly much time was spent on preparing the walk-and-talks. This concerned not only the public sector staff's working hours for printing maps and scheduling meetings with volunteers at local associations, but also the major task to communicate with many people about "green structure", a topic which was not crystal-clear to everybody. The municipal members of the steering committee got slightly stressed, but the senior official stated at the end of the project that: 1) the large amount of time spent was necessary; 2) it had been proven that this part of a dialogue project requires a greater share of the total budget; and 3) the walk-and-talks gave the steering committee considerable new knowledge and understanding of the citizens' different preferences and needs. Thus, it was believed that all extra working hours had been worthwhile.

### Actors

Both governmental and non-governmental connoisseurs have been involved in the Ronneby green structure planning process. The latter have included local associations, schoolchildren and other institutions. All local associations were encouraged to meet the steering group outdoors during a walk, discussing issues related to function, attitudes and use of landscape features. Some chose to arrange the walk-and-talk in their local community centre, discussing while sitting around a table. Figure 4 shows a walk-and-talk together with some of the local associations. The connoisseur approach aims to involve as many local associations as possible, and there will always be someone who leave and enter the process over time. The many meetings and interactions made the steering group feel confident that all interested got a chance to participate.

**Figure 4**  
Walk-and-talk in the old harbour of Saxemara (left) and in the Community Center, Backaryd (right). Two meetings with different set-up but the maps played equally important roles in both meetings.

PHOTOS BY LEADING AUTHOR.



The steering committee is a key actor acting as project leader, mediator, scout, inspirer, experts and in a cohesive function. Having two officials from the municipality and two representatives from the university involved made it possible for the steering committee to take responsibility for different roles, such as to design the communicative planning process, and describe landscape history and previous municipal efforts of green structure planning on different levels. Swedish municipalities are responsible for land-use planning and the university has in this case contributed with knowledge on landscape development including experience in methods for participatory planning and with many factors that influence and affect such processes. Governmental actors involved have included municipal staff, local politicians and Cefur. The four focus groups were composed of municipal staff and Cefur, and were needed by the steering committee to 'test' and sharpen its argumentation for different aspects of the greens structure plan (see Figure 3, input from municipal departments and Cefur). The knowledgeable audience was initially sceptical and the steering committee stated that it was probably hard for their colleagues to be introduced to a project and have opinions on the material from scratch. The group working with landscape identity was actually the most successful, probably because the senior researcher who led the meeting knew exactly what to aim for. The two municipal members of the steering committee were more open and hoping for the colleagues to contribute without any deeper preparation. However, all four topics were elaborated by the focus groups and placed in a background description in the first part of the green structure plan, including a more in-depth deliberation on motives and the time perspective needed to discuss the landscape identity as encouraged by the steering committee. By that, the focus groups helped to sharpen the material and helped to anchor the green structure plan wider among the officials at the municipality of Ronneby. Planners and managers from different departments met and talked to each other, which is rather rare. From this point of view, it was important to meet early, and it was rather the initial intention of getting expert opinions on the result and intentions that did not work. The steering committee realised in retrospect that they were not really prepared for a dialogue situation with their colleagues, which was completely different from the "usual" dialogue meeting with citizens, not in the least because these colleagues have more in-depth knowledge and professional responsibility related to the discussed topics. The municipal park manager commented in a focus group that this was the first time he really understood what green structure planning was about. A colleague from the leisure and recreation committee was so delighted that she volunteered to formulate a part of the green structure plan. The steering committee also received letters and phone calls from the public. Especially the senior researcher involved was contacted, i.e. the committee member who has been revisiting places after walk-and-talks to check up things. In this way, new spontaneous meetings were possible and a deeper trust for the project and the steering

committee was built. Cefur took part in focus groups, but otherwise they did not participate actively during the actual collaborative planning process. However, they actively supported the project on a strategic level in the daily debate. Another governmental actor is the municipal assembly who appreciated the collaborative working methods as well as how the process manifested the discourse of sustainable development and collaboration with Cefur. The progress and status of the green structure project was presented to the municipal council three times during the project period, see Figure 3. The response was very positive; the steering committee did actually expect somewhat more resistance from the politicians. Thus, the committee realised that it is hard to comment and have opinions on complex and strategic questions like this. The committee actually felt a little crestfallen that in the absence of criticism they did not get credit for a year of work. However, the lack of criticism can be seen as positive for the process.

The planning process was successful in the rural parts of the municipality, but less so in urban parts. In more rural (and peri-urban) areas, it was relatively easy to attract people's attention and get engaged connoisseurs to show up. The village council played an important role in backing up the entire project as all local associations have one (or more) representative(s) in the group. In urban settings, this was harder and the few well-established connoisseurs were "worn out" in the sense that they were too few and probably drained by acting solely as volunteers. The importance of local competence has been decisive for the process, and when it was absent, the steering committee assisted. The result was thereby more a lack of urban network of connoisseurs than thin description of urban areas in the green structure plan. It was noted that the process leaders, the steering committee, must be present in many layers with a possibility of attracting people's attention. It was discovered rather late, how an equivalent to the senior researcher's engagement in the "rural" "landsbygdsråd" was lacking in the urban context. Citizens are organised differently in cities, working together within narrower areas of interest and harder to engage in broader issues like green structure development. To reach out to urban connoisseurs, the steering committee would have needed different working methods. Social aspects and values are an important part of green structures, and an important part of the provision of these is played by connected "green hotspots" in and outside villages. The project leader of the green structure project stated that the added value of participatory planning relates to public health and strengthened social relations between inhabitants on a local scale, and between people and their everyday landscape.

In total eleven private actors, seven community associations, three neighbouring municipalities, three municipal councils, and seven regional actors commented on the draft version of the plan. Received comments were relatively positive, more well grounded and less critical on

details than the steering committee experienced from previous planning processes. Many relevant comments were received, for example, one on how the discussion on biodiversity was missing in the green structure plan's conclusions. Another example is a proposal from the municipality's technical board that the green structure plan needs to be complemented by a group of officials at the municipality to ensure all good intentions are operationalized.

### *Rules of the game*

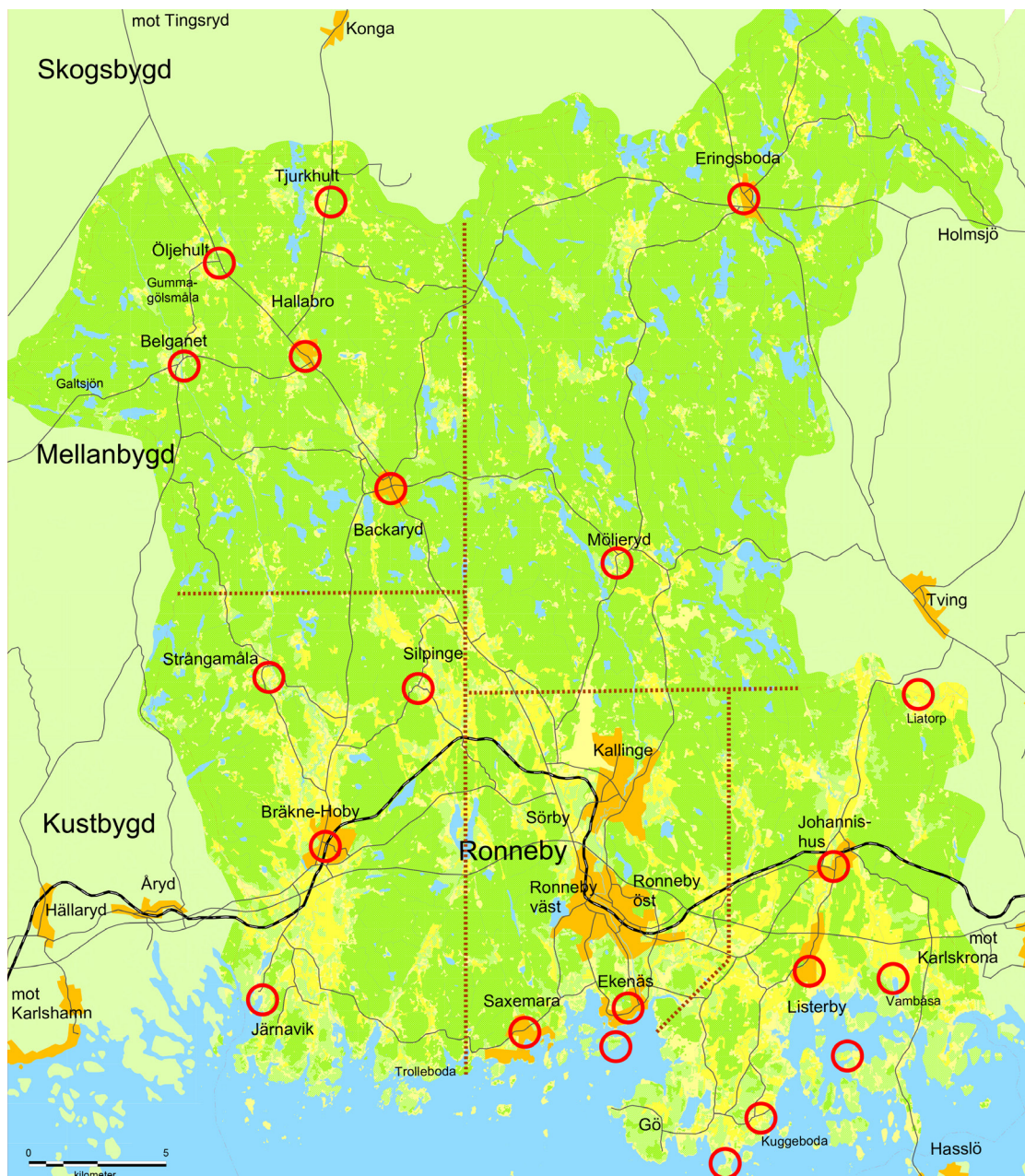
This paper focuses very much on the “rules of the game” used in the green structure planning process, and specifically on the collaborative nature of the process and the “place-based” involvement of connoisseurs. These are in line with the ambitions of the ELC in terms of recognising the important role of local inhabitants in landscape planning and management. The project's steering committee discovered the benefit of working with collaborative methods that addressed officials as well as local associations. A shared view upon the landscape was found to be a fruitful way towards enhanced collaboration. Cefur supported the sustainability discourse, while the participatory working methods were strongly supported by the municipal council. The local commissioner in Ronneby stated that this inclusive way of working is the only accurate way today as it represents a shared process leading to shared knowledge, shared responsibility and a shared feeling of belonging. Walk-and-talk encounters as well as focus group meetings in Ronneby's green structure project have shown how collaborative planning is suitable for discussing hard-to-define or hard-to-grasp concepts such as green structure (Lindholm, 2002; Mellqvist, Gustavsson and Gunnarsson, 2013). Green links and ideas were found, which the steering committee would not have identified alone. The walk-and-talks worked well and could easily adapt to local associations' needs (for example indoor meetings due to physical disabilities). During the process it was identified a need to revisit the local associations' places in order to understand submitted material or to check things that appeared unclear when analysing material from the walk-and-talk encounters. Curious citizens, many of whom had been involved in the walk-and-talks, visited the follow-up meetings. They showed a sincere interest in neighbouring associations and discussed each other's opinions, looking for new inputs to affect old local prejudices. The classification from geographical positioning was a clever move (see Figure 5). Large maps covered the walls during the dialogue meetings and participants drew and wrote comments. This led to discussions on how the different associations could support each other and ideas were shared between them. It is worth noting how all participants looked for their own contribution in the material and also their own village or group of houses. It is also important to mention the importance of meeting the connoisseurs repeatedly. Participants feel empowered when invited to see results of previous efforts.



The connoisseur approach worked well in relation to inclusion and building of confidence in local society (principally connoisseurs from rural parts) as well as among the officials. To meet the local associations in their everyday landscape was important for building confidence. The 1.5-year long time-span made it possible to arrange repeated meetings as platform for collaboration. It made the steering committee realise, among other things, how the dialogue inwards, i.e. within the municipality, is just as important as the dialogue outwards, toward the local society; something which is often missing in collaborative planning projects (Tahvilzadeh, 2015). The acceptance was high at the statutory hearings. The statutory consultation as part of the planning procedure in Sweden includes a period during which the public, different associations, the public sector etc. are invited to send in comments on a draft version of the green structure plan (regulated in the *Planning and Building Act*).

**Figure 5**  
Map with the 18 local associations that participated in the green structure planning process in Ronneby municipality. The dotted line shows how these were grouped in the follow-up meetings. Source: The Swedish mapping, cadastral and land registration authority and the municipality of Ronneby 2015. Kustbygd = Coastal area, Mellanbygd = Intermediate zone and Skogsbygd = Forested area.

ADAPTED BY PETRA MOGENSEN (2015).





The green structure plan is a strategic and flexible document. One way of ensuring flexibility and multi-functionality is to encourage the environmental and planning department to compile material from the green structure project and make this available as a more in-depth knowledge base also for future planning. This material bank is valuable, and so is the “web” of new contacts between municipal employees and local associations and organizations. This contact web will probably be of great importance in future work with the master plan – work that started in the phase of finalizing the green structure project in Ronneby. The technical board sent in comments during the statutory consultation. They proposed a new “green structure working group” to ensure future implementation of the green structure plan. The wide network developed during the green structure project inspires another idea originating from the collaborative planning process. Officials responsible for the master plan in Ronneby hope to get political back-up for working with a so-called “rolling master plan” where the major task to produce a new master plan every 10–20 years is replaced by a section-by-section revision on a regular basis. Working with rolling master planning could facilitate maintaining the web of contacts and keep citizen attention and interest for municipal planning. This would embody a substantial change to the rules of the game in planning.

## Conclusion and perspective

### Green structure plan

The most striking result from the dialogue process in Ronneby’s green structure project was the realisation of how the planning process itself was more important than the isolated green structure plan. Political support was strong and awareness of the green structure project was spread through out the town hall. The plan was launched in a time when the sustainability discourse was established and dialogue-based working methods were also considered as an obvious need. The collaborative planning process established a network of connoisseurs in the entire municipality but also within the town hall. The green structure plan is a rich document with visionary and thoughtful strategies on Ronneby’s green structure as well as very deep descriptions of the villages, rivers and other landscape features. Awareness, engagement and involvement of several actors in the process did limit the number of reactions on the final green structure plan and prevented opposition to the plan. The rich descriptions in the green structure plan came from the many meetings with local connoisseurs. Descriptions of places are the local connoisseurs’ way of communicating and a thorough description also give power to place. To exclude descriptions would mean that places are taken for granted and can easily be neglected and forgotten. The town hall officials needed the thorough inventory (see Figure 3) and compilation of place-related knowledge of this kind. Collected material was actually analysed and the results of this were partly presented in the green structure plan.

In terms of actors and collaboration, the planning process built on a strong partnership between the municipality, the university and Cefur. The connoisseur approach guiding the collaborative planning process was intended to link urban and rural parts through dialogue and by realising the value of shared and developed green structure. Many different dialogue based methods were used through the process, aiming for repeated meetings in different settings that requires flexibility from both planners and participating connoisseurs. Considering the purpose of the green structure plan (i.e. ensuring that current and future citizens should have access to green recreational areas with high biodiversity and robust ecosystems), five strategical points of departure for further developing Ronneby's green structure were identified in the final plan. They all contribute to elaborate what is unique for Ronneby and make it an attractive place to live and work: 1) the meaning of landscape for identity and attractiveness for the villages; 2) the meaning of a "good" outdoor environment for public sector activities; 3) the multi functionality of the green structure; 4) the importance of the green structure for recreation, tourism and outdoor recreation; 5) the importance of water.

### Process and perspective

Green structure represents the physical, multi-functional structure used to support further development of a municipality's different responsibilities. When green structure planning is "anchored" through public participation of some kind and the citizens' uses of the green and blue structure are expressed, a more sustainable landscape development can be expected with social, ecologic, economic and cultural benefits for people, the landscape and for the municipality. This encompasses an important process of empowerment for all citizens, but especially for those residing in rural areas – as these are often less visible in planning projects. From an actor perspective, the steering committee played an important role in stimulating the associations to reflect and formulate shared answers on the identity of their village and issues related to local green structure. The inhabitants were empowered, and so was the steering committee itself. Inhabitants got together, formulated strategies and appreciated how the municipality showed interest in them and their neighbourhood. The strategies were local projects that they could launch to work actively with green structure development. At present, when the green structure plan is almost finished, it would be fruitful for those involved in the planning to meet citizens, and encourage them to act as true connoisseurs also in future planning projects. Continuing the dialogue will be valuable now that they know about the project, understand the process, are familiar with the steering committee and hopefully see their potential in participating.

Ronneby's green structure project shows the benefit of collaboration between different actors and competences and of changing the "rules

of the game” in municipal planning. It links to the current debate on how “green infrastructure” can be applied as an interdisciplinary concept covering green space spatial pattern, aesthetic values, biological diversity, ecosystem services, and so forth. One challenge is how to put people at the centre of events and to link this to organisation in space, in this case green structure on a municipal level. To initiate collaborative planning demands courage both within the administrative and in the political part of the municipal system. In Ronneby, the striving for political acceptance and support will hopefully open some doors to future projects based on collaboration across areas of expertise. Sustainable (landscape) development should be a shared responsibility. Planning processes need to be opened to innovative working methods even though implementing new methods is risky (Statens offentliga utredningar, 2015). In this case, citizens, officials and politicians in Ronneby were brave and farsighted when they decided to opt for participatory planning and for trying out the connoisseur method in their green structure planning project. This resulted in a process which was truly participatory and locally-anchored – and in many ways the process and the way it was structured was more important than the final product, i.e. the green structure plan itself.

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