



CHALMERS
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From Blueprint to Belonging

Translating Social Inclusion in a Municipal Housing Pilot

Master's thesis in Design and Construction Project Management

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MASTER'S THESIS ACEX30

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ABSTRACT

Cities across the Nordics face a persistent gap between inclusive city ambitions and neighbourhood-level practice. This thesis examines how social inclusion is operationalised within an area-based planning process led by a municipal housing company and how challenges and tensions around roles, mandates and resources arise in that process. The study is a qualitative case study of a pilot area plan in Bergsjön, Gothenburg, a particularly vulnerable area according to the Swedish Police Authority. The mixed method approach includes semi-structured interviews, field notes from internal workshops and one public seminar as well as document analysis. The findings show that social inclusion is not a stable goal that travels intact from policy to practice. It is progressively translated and narrowed as it moves across strategic, programme and operational levels, shaped at each step by mandate boundaries, institutional accountability structures and resource constraints. While the municipal housing company has achieved sustained improvements in security, service quality and building conditions, harder-to-measure dimensions such as belonging, resident influence and structural integration remain largely rhetorical. Coordination between the municipal housing company and local actors, including schools, social services and civil society, is often informal and person-dependent, creating fragility under political and funding shifts. The analysis further reveals that social inclusion functions as a boundary object: sufficiently flexible to align actors around a shared agenda but unable to resolve the underlying divergences when concrete action requires genuine trade-offs. The thesis contributes empirical specificity to debates on operationalisation, translation theory and collaborative governance in Swedish urban planning and demonstrates that area-based social inclusion work is a project management challenge as much as a social policy challenge marked by mandate–capacity misalignment, coordination gaps and role ambiguity that are structural characteristics.

Key words: Social inclusion, area-based development, municipal housing company, multi-actor collaboration, Sweden.

Från Papper till Praktik

Hur social inkludering operationaliseras i ett kommunalt bostadsbolags pilotprojekt

Examensarbete inom masterprogrammet Master 'Organisering och ledning i bygg- och fastighetssektorn'

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Avdelningen för Byggnadsdesign

Chalmers tekniska högskola

SAMMANFATTNING

Detta examensarbete undersöker hur visioner om tankar och teorier om social inkludering tillsätts inom praktiken i ett områdesbaserat utvecklingsprojekt i Bergsjön, Göteborg, lett av det kommunala bostadsbolaget Familjebostäder. Genom en kvalitativ fallstudie bestående av intervjuer, dokumentanalys och workshop-observationer analyserar studien hur övergripande hållbarhetsmål översätts till konkreta aktiviteter, samt de spänningar som uppstår kring roller, mandat och resurser i gränssnittet mellan strategisk ledning och lokal fastighetsförvaltning.

Resultaten visar att begreppet "inkludering" genomgår en flerstegsöversättning där målen progressivt smalnas av för att passa bolagets formella uppdrag och resursramar. Detta medför att mätbara, fastighetsnära åtgärder såsom trygghetsskapande insatser och kundnöjdhet prioriteras, medan svårämnen, strukturella aspekter, som inte tydligt definierats och dekonstruerats förblir visionära. Studien synliggör ett samordnings-gap där de externa förväntningarna på bostadsbolaget ofta överstiger dess formella auktoritet, vilket skapar ambivalens i relation till aktörer som skola, socialtjänst och polis.

Ur ett projektledningsperspektiv visar avhandlingen att styrningen av sociala mål i komplexa stadsutvecklingsprojekt är ett organisatoriskt ledningsproblem snarare än ett renodlat planeringsproblem. Slutsatsen understryker att effektiv områdesbaserad utveckling kräver en tydlig synkronisering mellan uttalade förväntningar, tilldelade resurser och formella mandat intersektoriellt.

Nyckelord: Social inkludering, områdesbaserad utveckling, kommunala bostadsbolag, samverkansstyrning, projektorganisering, Bergsjön.

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“The conceptual foundation of this thesis is intimately tied to my own navigating of space, identity, and place. In BBC correspondent Kate Mayberry’s (2016) analysis of individuals raised across shifting cultural boundaries she describes “Third Culture Kids” as “citizens of everywhere and nowhere”. This existential inquiry of exploring who we are, where we belong, and how that belonging is actively constructed was what served as the primary driver for my commitment to sustainable community planning and urban development.

Cities are far more than static assemblages of infrastructure, roads, subterranean tunnels, or residential blocks; I see them as the physical and social landscape within which human lives take shape. My professional motivation is anchored at this precise intersection: understanding what makes a neighbourhood “tick” and analysing how the life lived in the spaces between buildings, or as Jan Gehl so famously put it “The life between buildings” is directly enabled, or constrained, by the functional design of our robust, concrete environments. This thesis represents a conscious effort to bridge the technical mechanics of project management with the deeply human necessity of creating inclusive, everyday spaces where everyone can experience a genuine sense of belonging.”

- SEREH NYASSI

“I have lived abroad several times during my life; but to be honest, that is not really what led me to the topic of social inclusion. When I had to choose a topic for my master’s thesis, I only knew that I wanted to work at the intersection of urban policy, social sustainability, and public responsibility. During my studies and previous work experience, I came across the work of architects and urban planners like Jan Gehl, whose concept of “life between buildings” reframed my understanding of the built environment, and working with the Housing First model showed me that housing can be so much more than just shelter. So, when the opportunity arose to study a pilot area-based development process, it immediately caught my interest, wanting to understand what it actually means to implement visions – and the rest you will read below...”

- ANNA-LENA GLOTZBACH

Preface

The authors of this paper would like to preface it by saying *thank you...*

We want to express our deepest gratitude and thanks to our supervisor and examiner Martine Buser for her endlessly valuable insights, recommendations and feedback. For her motivational spirit and for believing in this outcome.

Furthermore, we also want to extend our thanks to our supervisors at Familjebostäder, for having the patience with us when navigating the interconnected field of social inclusion hands on. Thank you for providing us with the right tools and resources throughout our thesis and for always being available to answer our many questions.

Last but not least, we want to end this note by showing appreciation for all those we interviewed and met during the course of this study: from scheduled interviews to workshops and impromptu meetings. This work is possible because of you.

Göteborg June 2026

SEREH & ANNA-LENA

“Housing is an incredibly important foundation for the individual and plays a major role in shaping our society. Even though we can’t solve all of society’s problems through housing policy, a great deal of it does start with housing. If you don’t have a good living environment, you don’t have a solid foundation to stand on.”

- Elin Blume, Community Builder of the Year 2025

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List of Abbreviations

%	Percentage
ABD	Area-based development
ABP	Area-based planning
DCPM	Design and Construction Project Management
Familjebostäder	Familjebostäder i Göteborg AB
Framtiden	Förvaltnings AB Framtiden
KPI	Key performance indicator
Int.	Interviewee
RQ	Research question
SCAFT	Stadsbyggnad, Chalmers, Arbetsgruppen för Trafiksäkerhet
SWOT	Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

1 Introduction

This chapter establishes the research foundation by framing the challenge of transforming abstract inclusive city and social sustainability agendas into concrete urban practices within segregated neighbourhoods before outlining the thesis's aim, research questions, scope and related sustainability aspects.

1.1 Background and problem formulation

Cities are often portrayed as places of encounter and opportunity, where people with diverse cultural backgrounds, socio economic positions and life experiences live side by side and shape urban life together (Schreiber & Carius, 2016; Short, 2021). At the same time, contemporary urbanisation is marked by deepening inequalities and socio spatial divisions as wealth accumulation, housing markets and labour market dynamics contribute to uneven distributions of resources, risks and opportunities across different groups and neighbourhoods (Janssen et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2025). These dynamics bring questions of exclusion, marginalisation and conflict over urban space to the forefront of policy and academic debates. In response, the idea of “the inclusive city” has emerged as a key normative agenda in international and local urban policy. Inclusive city discourses envision urban futures in which all residents can access decent housing, services and public spaces, participate in decision making and experience safety and belonging. They are closely linked to global frameworks such as the United Nations’ (2015) Sustainable Development Goal 11 which calls for “cities and human settlements [that are] inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” (p. 24), and to the New Urban Agenda’s emphasis on leaving no one behind (UN Habitat, 2016). Concurrently, research highlights that efforts to build inclusive cities are full of contradictions and implementation challenges as economic growth objectives, housing market dynamics and institutional path dependencies can clash with ambitions for equity and social justice (Liang et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2025).

Within this broader discussion social inclusion has gained importance as a central – and contested – component of sustainable urban development. Social inclusion is commonly associated with efforts to reduce inequalities, prevent discrimination, improve access to housing and services, strengthen safety and security and enable meaningful participation, recognition and a sense of belonging in urban life (Liang et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2025). At the same time different actors emphasise different elements of inclusion and may interpret it in divergent ways, for example, as integration into existing structures, as redistribution of resources and rights or as transformation of exclusionary norms and practices (Liang et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2025). This contestedness is not merely academic: when a concept as broad and value laden as social inclusion must be translated into concrete plans, priorities and activities within a specific organisation or planning process, actors with different institutional mandates, professional vocabularies and accountability structures will inevitably read it in different ways. Understanding how inclusion travels – and changes – across these different actors and organisational levels is therefore a central analytical challenge for studying how inclusive city agendas are put into practice. These questions are especially apparent in urban neighbourhoods characterised by socio economic disadvantage, stigmatisation and complex governance arrangements, including many public housing areas. In such contexts ambitions for social inclusion and social sustainability are often channelled through area based programmes, targeted investments and collaborations

between municipalities, housing companies and other local actors (Andersson & Bråmås, 2004; Stjernberg et al., 2020). Area-based planning is not simply a technical instrument for neighbourhood development; it is the organisational and political setting in which contested social goals are assigned meaning, negotiated between actors and – only sometimes – translated into lasting practice. There is still limited empirical knowledge about how inclusive city and social sustainability agendas are interpreted and enacted in the everyday work of planning and governing these neighbourhoods, and about the tensions and trade-offs that arise in the process.

In the Swedish context these dynamics are sharply visible in large cities where long standing welfare ambitions confront increasing segregation and inequality. Gothenburg has frequently been characterised as one of the most segregated cities in Sweden with substantial disparities in living conditions between neighbourhoods (Adolfsson & Brorström, 2020; Saldert, 2024). Within this landscape several areas have been classified as “particularly vulnerable” by the Swedish Police Authority, including Bergsjön where socio economic disadvantage, crime and low institutional trust intersect (Police Authority, 2025). What makes this case analytically productive is the way in which the contested concept of social inclusion must be operationalised across multiple actors with different mandates, vocabularies and priorities within a planning process that is bounded by time, resources and organisational authority. One key stakeholder in this landscape, a major municipal housing actor in Bergsjön, is leading a pilot area-based planning process there that seeks to link physical development with social goals and inform future area plans. As a municipal housing company operating under both social and financial mandates the local stakeholder sits at the intersection of exactly these tensions: expected to contribute to social sustainability in the neighbourhood while managing within the limits of its own organisational capacity and formal authority.

This thesis is written within the Master’s Programme in Design and Construction Project Management (DCPM) at Chalmers University of Technology. The challenges examined here – how to manage contested goals across multiple actors with different mandates, how to coordinate without formal authority, how to translate strategic ambitions into bounded deliverables under resource constraints – are central concerns of project and construction management, not only of urban planning. Multi-actor collaboration, stakeholder alignment, role ambiguity and the governance of complex processes are recurring topics in DCPM research and practice. The area-based planning process examined in this thesis can therefore be read as a project management problem as much as a social policy problem: a case in which the tools, tensions and trade-offs familiar from complex construction and infrastructure projects appear in a context where the deliverables are not buildings but social outcomes and where scope, time and resources must be negotiated across actors.

1.2 Aim and research question

The aim of this thesis is to examine how ambitions for social inclusion are understood and operationalised within an area-based planning process led by a municipal housing company, and to explore the challenges and tensions that arise in this work in the neighbourhood of Bergsjön in Gothenburg. To address this, aim the thesis is guided by the following overarching research question:

How is the concept of social inclusion operationalised within an area-based planning process led by a municipal housing company, and how do challenges and tensions around roles, mandates and resources arise in that process?

This overarching question is unpacked through three sub-questions:

- 1 How does the municipal housing company as well as local stakeholders understand social inclusion, and how do these interpretations shape the area-based planning process?*
- 2 How does the municipal housing company as the lead initiator translate social inclusion goals into priorities, organisational arrangements and concrete activities at the neighbourhood level?*
- 3 How do tensions around roles, mandates and resources arise in and around the project, and what do they reveal about the conditions for effective area-based management?*

1.3 Scope and delimitations

This thesis is based on an in-depth qualitative case study of an area-based planning process in the Gothenburg neighbourhood of Bergsjön with a primary focus on the municipal housing company and its role as lead actor in the pilot. The study examines how ambitions for social inclusion are interpreted and operationalised within this specific organisational and territorial context rather than attempting to provide a comprehensive account of all inclusion-related initiatives in Gothenburg or Sweden. The analysis is therefore anchored at the neighbourhood scale and in one particular area-based planning process and does not aim for statistical generalisation.

Substantively the thesis concentrates on the social dimension of sustainability with a particular emphasis on how social inclusion is understood, prioritised and translated into organisational arrangements and everyday practices. Environmental and economic aspects of sustainability are recognised as important and closely intertwined with housing and urban development but they are treated as contextual conditions rather than primary objects of investigation. While the broader institutional landscape, including national housing policy, labour-market dynamics and migration regimes, provides crucial background for understanding conditions in Bergsjön, these structural dimensions are not analysed in detail.

The study is also temporally bounded. It follows the Bergsjön pilot during its second phase initial planning and early implementation stages, when goals are being re-defined, priorities re-negotiated and organisational arrangements (newly) established. It does not evaluate long-term outcomes such as measurable changes in segregation, safety or residents' sense of belonging nor does it assess whether interventions work in achieving inclusion. The thesis takes a snapshot from the ongoing area-based planning process to investigate how ambitions for social inclusion are interpreted, translated and contested as the groundwork for future initiatives is laid.

1.4 Social inclusion and sustainable urban development

Sustainable development is a central point of departure for this thesis. As mentioned earlier, international frameworks such as the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 11 emphasise that cities should be inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, highlighting the need to address social, economic and environmental dimensions in an integrated way (United Nations, 2015; UN-Habitat, 2016). In the Swedish context social sustainability has become the primary lens through which municipalities and municipal housing companies are expected to respond to segregation, unequal living conditions and territorial stigmatisation. This thesis aligns with that agenda by focusing specifically on the social dimension of sustainability, and more narrowly on social inclusion in a disadvantaged neighbourhood.

The choice to examine an area-based planning process in Bergsjön is grounded in the recognition that neighbourhoods like this are focal points where sustainability ambitions and governance constraints intersect. Municipal housing companies operate under both social and financial mandates and are increasingly expected to contribute to socially sustainable development through their everyday activities and investments. By studying how such an actor interprets and operationalises social inclusion within a concrete planning process the thesis engages directly with questions about how sustainable development is pursued in public housing practice contexts.

Methodologically, the qualitative, case-study design enables an in-depth understanding of how sustainability-related goals are translated into organisational arrangements, priorities and routines. Rather than assessing sustainability through predefined indicators the study investigates how local actors themselves define inclusion, what they regard as feasible within their mandates and resources and where they perceive tensions and limits. This perspective contributes to sustainable development debates by illuminating the political and organisational work required to move from broad sustainability commitments to situated practices in a specific place. The thesis addresses both to urban sustainability and to DCPM where questions of how to manage complex, multi-actor processes with contested goals are central to realising sustainable development in the built environment.

2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides an integrated analytical lens for the empirical analysis that follows. It is structured in five layers each addressing a related question about how social inclusion is pursued in practice. The inclusive city literature and the Swedish planning context establish the normative backdrop and institutional setting; area-based planning and management and stakeholder coordination theory provide the organisational and governance lens; and translation theory and boundary objects offer a mechanism-level explanation for how inclusion goals move from ambition to situated practice. Table 1 maps these layers against the thesis sub-questions they address.

Table 1. Theoretical framework structure.

Theoretical Concept	Core Analytical Question	Research Question
The inclusive city and its dimensions	What does social inclusion mean normatively, and where does it fall short in practice?	RQ1
Social inclusion in Swedish urban planning	How is social inclusion articulated and contested in this specific institutional context?	RQ1, RQ2
Area-based planning and management	How is the planning process structured, bounded and managed?	RQ2
Stakeholder roles and coordination of multi-actor collaboration	Who are the actors, how do their interests align or conflict, and how is coordination achieved?	RQ2, RQ3
Translation theory and boundary objects	How are social inclusion goals re-interpreted and made actionable as they travel between actors? What holds multi-actor collaboration together, and where does it break down?	RQ2, RQ3

2.1 The inclusive city and its dimensions

The idea of “the inclusive city” has its roots in longstanding debates about urbanisation, social justice and spatial inequality. Early urban theorists such as Jacobs (1962) and Lefèbvre & Nicholson-Smith (1991) drew attention to the ways in which cities simultaneously concentrate opportunity and produce exclusion, raising fundamental questions about who belongs in urban space and on whose terms. As Zhao et al. (2025) note, the concept of “the inclusive city stems from earlier discourses on urbanisation and social justice, reflecting growing concerns about urban diversity and spatial inequality in the context of globalisation” (p. 2). Initial research focused primarily on spatial dimensions – transforming the built environment to address marginalisation and reduce disparities in accessibility and equity. Over time the framework expanded considerably. UN-Habitat (2001) describes inclusive cities as places where governance deliberately promotes social cohesion and equity, ensures that all residents – especially disadvantaged and low-income groups – can claim their rights to the city and enables them to participate as empowered partners in decision-making. The World Bank (2015) similarly conceptualises them as complex networks where everyone, especially the urban poor and other excluded groups, has affordable and reliable access to land, housing, infrastructure and services, can participate in economic opportunities and is recognised and protected through legal rights and accountable institutions.

In contemporary research Liang et al. (2022) use a bibliometric analysis and systematic review of studies from 2000 to 2020 to map the key features of inclusive cities, identifying five interrelated dimensions that together shape urban inclusiveness. Zhao et al. (2025) further develop this model adding corresponding inclusion sectors to the previously defined inclusive city dimensions. As Figure 1 illustrates the five dimensions span a wide range of urban concerns: from affordable housing and spatial justice (spatial inclusion), to education and employment (economic inclusion), to green spaces and waste management (environmental inclusion), to civic participation and media inclusion (political inclusion), to safety, belonging, social equity and anti-discrimination (social inclusion). These dimensions do not operate in isolation. Liang et al. (2022) emphasise that a holistic approach is a prerequisite for building a genuinely inclusive city; similarly, Zhao et al. (2025) argue that comprehensive inclusive policies covering multiple dimensions facilitate better coordinated and more effective implementation. Addressing spatial exclusion without attending to economic marginalisation, for example, risks leaving the underlying drivers of disadvantage untouched.



Figure 1. Inclusive city dimensions and their related sectors (Zhao et al., 2025).

Within this framework, the social dimension is this thesis's primary concern. It is centrally focused on "increasing equal development opportunities for everyone and attending to social members' needs" and that "all individuals and social groups should have equal access to social resources (e.g., employment, insurance, education, information), and their rights should be protected and secured in situations of vulnerability with diseases, crime, violence, food and accidents" (Liang et al., 2022, p. 73). It further encompasses safety and security, demographic diversity, cultural and civil life inclusion and anti-discrimination – underscoring that social inclusion is not only about material access but also about recognition, belonging and the conditions for everyday coexistence in diverse urban settings.

Social inclusion is, however, an inherently contested concept. Different actors tend to emphasise different elements: some foreground integration into existing social and institutional structures, others stress redistribution of resources and rights and still others call for transformation of the exclusionary norms and practices that produce inequality in the first place (Liang et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2025). Espino (2015) argues that inclusion requires more than physical proximity; it demands that marginalised residents have a real stake in and influence over urban development and that structural

barriers keeping certain groups at the margins are actively dismantled. This controversy becomes consequential when ambitions must be translated into concrete neighbourhood-level interventions: different actors can invoke the same language of social inclusion while pursuing quite different agendas.

2.2 Social inclusion in Swedish urban planning

Sweden's engagement with what is today called social sustainability has deep structural roots. The large-scale housing estates built during the Million Programme of the 1960s and 1970s were conceived as a welfare-state instrument to eradicate substandard housing and provide decent, affordable homes for all citizens. Within a generation many of these estates had become synonymous with socioeconomic concentration and ethnic segregation as selective migration flows brought in increasingly marginalised residents while those with greater resources moved out (Andersson & Bråmås, 2004).

Since the early 2000s social sustainability has served as the overarching framework through which Swedish municipalities address neighbourhood-level disadvantage, spatial inequality and social cohesion. The concept is characteristically vague: it typically encompasses equity, well-being, social justice and fulfilment of basic needs but its meaning shifts over time and across institutional contexts (Saldert, 2024). Saldert (2024, p. 2) argues that “social sustainability function[s] as a discursive boundary object in [Swedish] strategic planning” – a concept sufficiently plastic that actors from different departments and with different mandates can all agree at the level of the vision even when their operational interpretations diverge sharply. Adolfsson & Brorström (2020) illustrate this dynamic in Gothenburg where sustainability was adopted as an overarching goal yet remained open enough that “everyone could agree at the vision level, but differences became visible only when the vision had to be translated into concrete planning activities and budget priorities” (p. 62).

This structural fuzziness has a direct consequence for governance. Swedish municipalities are expected to deliver on social sustainability goals shaped by national housing policy, labour market integration, migration and welfare reform although no single governance level carries full responsibility for the translation from ambition to outcome. Adolfsson & Brorström (2020) trace how siloed municipal departments create barriers to collaboration as each unit translates the shared goal according to its own policy priorities. Saldert (2024) shows how, in Gothenburg's Frihamnen project, short-term financial practices eventually displaced long-term socioeconomic goals, narrowing the meaning of inclusion from “everyone being able to live there to everyone being able to go and spend time there” (p. 7). Zhao et al. (2025), in a comparative study of three European port cities, confirm that even in a city with relatively high local autonomy like Gothenburg, institutional silos and shifting political priorities remain consistent obstacles to implementation.

A distinctive feature of the Swedish context is the role of municipal housing companies as central actors in neighbourhood-level social work. Following the 2011 legislative reform requiring them to operate according to business principles these companies find themselves in a structurally hybrid position: carrying an implicit social mandate rooted in their public ownership and concentration in disadvantaged neighbourhoods while simultaneously being required to demonstrate financial accountability (Troje, 2022). In practice, social sustainability has become the most complex issue on the facilities management agenda for Swedish housing companies. It is a challenge involving

unemployment, criminality, safety and tenant well-being that falls outside their formal core business (Troje, 2022). Companies have increasingly moved beyond property management to coordinate broader social initiatives: hiring unemployed tenants, setting up activity spaces for youth and collaborating with Social Services and law enforcement on crime prevention (Troje, 2022). Zetterberg et al. (2023) add a spatial dimension to this challenge, arguing that neighbourhood social sustainability indicators shift significantly when the analytical focus is rescaled upward or downward: what appears as a local problem of crime and exclusion at neighbourhood level is often produced by city-level dynamics of segregation, shaped in turn by national labour market and housing policies. This means that even committed local actors operating within a bounded area-based process are structurally limited in what they can achieve.

2.3 Area-based planning and management

Area-based development (ABD), also referred to as area-based planning (ABP), is an approach that targets geographically defined areas characterised by complex and interlinked developmental challenges and addresses them through participatory, multisectoral and context-sensitive methods (Harfst, 2006, as cited in Santini et al., 2012; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2025). Its defining quality is that it does not treat urban problems as isolated or unidimensional: it is specifically suited to situations where social, economic and institutional difficulties reinforce one another and cannot be resolved through a single sector or a single intervention (Ayad, 2011). Common goals include jointly identifying and addressing the area's central challenges together with local actors, reaching the most vulnerable population groups and fostering long-term cooperation to ensure sustainable results (UNDP, 2025).

The management of an ABD process is a phased, iterative workflow in which stakeholders move together from broad policy ambitions to contextualised, actionable strategies. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2025) describes this through five interconnected steps (Figure 2). In *problem definition*, stakeholders gather information about the target area, for example, its challenges, assets and development potential, and map relevant actors, including assessments of their capacity, interests and influence. This initial assessment can be structured through scenario planning or visioning, translating desired outcomes into shared reference points for actors with different mandates and interests (Lee, 2017). In *prioritisation*, interventions are ranked and negotiated with an emphasis on identifying complementary agendas and determining where the greatest added value lies (UNDP, 2025). *Coordination* involves ensuring stakeholders move in the same direction, clarifying who does what and when, and preventing parallel or duplicated tracks (Khilji & Roberts, 2015; UNDP, 2025). *Implementation* involves creating short-, medium- and long-term plans that connect available capacities to concrete actions (UNDP, 2025). Finally, *follow-up* is understood not as a terminal evaluation but as an iterative process of identifying progress and adjusting, with local engagement and ownership as central mechanisms for assessing whether developments remain consistent with original plans (UNDP, 2025; Taylor, 1998, as cited in Daniel, 2017).

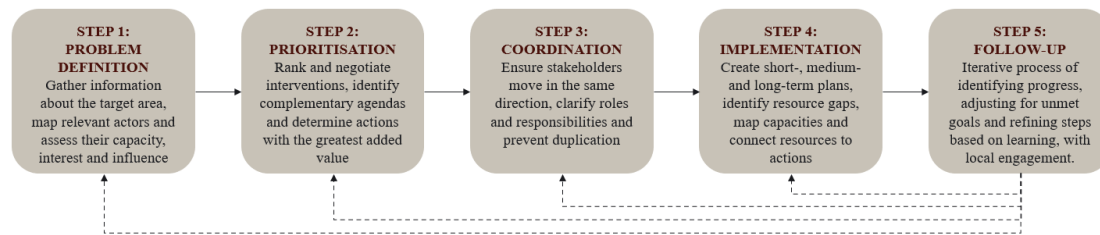


Figure 2. ABD process based on UNDP (2025).

The literature points clearly to both enabling conditions and recurrent challenges in area-based work. The balance between top-down coordination and bottom-up participation is a central tension. Purely top-down models risk weak local legitimacy as residents and civil society actors may experience the process as something done to them rather than with them (Wijitporn & Tansukanun, 2023); purely bottom-up approaches can struggle to achieve the coordination capacity and policy leverage needed for structural change at scale (Potluka et al., 2017). The most robust models combine both: a lead coordinator with sufficient mandate and resources to hold the process together, paired with genuine participation structures (Santini et al., 2012; UNDP, 2025). Multi-sector integration is a further critical success factor as combining the perspectives of municipalities, civil society, private actors and knowledge institutions broadens the resources and legitimacy available to the process (Santini et al., 2012; Xue et al., 2020). At the same time the literature documents consistent structural challenges: fragmented responsibilities across governance levels, short programme cycles driven by political budget rhythms, resource constraints that force prioritisation trade-offs and the risk that the very act of geographically targeting an area reinforces the territorial stigmatisation it seeks to overcome (Andersson & Bråmås, 2004; Stjernberg et al., 2020; Adolfsson & Brorström, 2020).

2.4 Stakeholder roles and multi-actor coordination

ABD processes are inherently multi-actor endeavours, bringing together organisations and individuals with different mandates, knowledge bases, resource endowments and accountability structures, and requiring them to work towards a shared spatial agenda that none of them could deliver alone. Stakeholder theory provides a foundational framework for analysing these relationships. Freeman's (1984) canonical definition identifies stakeholders as any group or individual who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of an organisation's objectives – a formulation broad enough to encompass residents, civil society organisations, public agencies, private businesses and political institutions alike. Bryson (2004) argues that stakeholder analysis is not merely a mapping exercise but a normative and strategic one: identifying stakeholders, understanding what they value and anticipating how their interests interact is a prerequisite for designing governance arrangements that are both effective and legitimate. A core challenge in multi-actor processes is that interests and priorities routinely misalign. Xue et al. (2020) observe that multi-sector partnerships significantly expand the pool of available perspectives and resources but also increase the complexity of coordination – more diverse actor constellations generate more potential for divergence. Effective stakeholder governance in ABD therefore requires actively managing these dynamics: clarifying where interests converge, surfacing where they conflict and designing processes that can hold productive tension without collapsing into either forced consensus or paralysis.

One widely discussed model for achieving productive collaboration in complex, multi-actor settings is partnering. Originating in the construction industry and subsequently applied in public sector and urban governance contexts, partnering is defined as a structured approach to project delivery based on shared goals, mutual trust, open communication and joint problem-solving (Chan et al., 2004; Khilji & Roberts, 2015). Rather than relying solely on formal contractual relations, partnering invests deliberately in relational foundations: building trust, establishing shared reference points and creating forums for early conflict resolution. Chan et al. (2004) find that trust is both a precondition for effective partnering and a product of it. Where initial project conditions are conducive to trust, through compatible incentive structures and transparent communication, virtuous cycles of deepening collaboration can develop; where initial conditions are marked by unclear accountability, resource competition or divergent professional cultures, however, negative cycles of mistrust and defensive behaviour can set in and prove difficult to reverse. In the context of ABD processes that pursue contested social goals across actors with very different institutional logics – housing management, social work, law enforcement, civil society – the conditions under which trust is built or eroded become particularly consequential.

2.5 Translation theory and boundary objects

Given that social inclusion is interpreted differently by actors with divergent mandates, institutional cultures and accountability structures, a central question arises: how does it move between them at all and what happens to it along the way? Translation theory offers a productive analytical framework for answering both questions. Rather than treating the diffusion of ideas, goals and policies as a neutral transfer – in which a concept travels intact from one setting to another – translation theory insists that movement always involves transformation. Czarniawska & Joerges (1996) argue that ideas must be materialised in order to travel: they must be attached to objects, practices, narratives or programmes that carry them across contexts. In each materialisation the idea is translated – meaning it is interpreted, simplified, combined with local knowledge and adapted to local conditions – so that what arrives at the destination is never simply what departed from the origin. Translation is therefore not a failure of communication but a structural feature of how ideas move through complex social worlds. Callon (1986) deepens this perspective by conceptualising translation as a process of interest alignment, enrolment and mobilisation, unfolding through four moments: *problematization*, in which an actor defines a problem in a way that makes their participation indispensable; *interessement*, in which they attempt to lock others into the roles defined for them; *enrolment*, in which those roles are accepted and stabilised; and *mobilisation*, in which the aligned actors act collectively.

Operationalisation – the process through which abstract goals are made actionable by being translated into specific instruments, priorities, roles and activities – is where translation becomes most consequential for planning practice (Argento et al., 2025; Saldert, 2024). These choices are never neutral: operationalisation functions as a filter that selects which aspects of a complex goal are made visible and actionable within a given institutional context and, by doing so, inevitably marginalises others. Argento et al. (2025), in their ethnographic study of Gothenburg’s River City programme, trace a chain of translations from vision documents through management directives to operational practice, showing how social sustainability becomes progressively more ambiguous at each step. They distinguish between theoretical translations, performed

by management-level actors to negotiate upward and maintain external legitimacy, and practical translations, carried out by operational actors who adapt goals to their specific project contexts. When decentralisation of control is not paired with strong central coordination, they conclude, social sustainability risks becoming “someone else’s problem” – lost in the translation chain rather than embedded as an organisational value.

A particularly effective tool for understanding how translation enables collaboration despite divergent understandings is the concept of boundary objects, developed by Star & Griesemer (1989) in their study of scientific cooperation across heterogeneous communities of practice. Boundary objects are defined as “objects that are plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites” (Star and Griesemer, 1989, p. 393). Actors do not need to share the same understanding of a boundary object in order to coordinate around it; the object holds the collaboration together precisely because it accommodates multiple interpretations simultaneously. In planning and governance contexts concepts such as “social sustainability” or “safe neighbourhood” as well as documents such as area plans or programme strategies frequently function as boundary objects in this sense (Elander & Gustavsson, 2019; Saldert, 2024). However, boundary objects have limits and identifying where they break down is as analytically important as understanding where they hold. The plasticity that makes a boundary object productive at the level of shared language becomes an obstacle when concrete action is required. Carlile (2004) argues that when actors must commit resources, prioritise competing demands or make decisions with real trade-offs, the divergent understandings that coexisted comfortably in a shared document suddenly produce divergent behaviours. A roadmap that all actors endorsed as a statement of shared intent may generate conflict when its implementation requires one actor to subordinate their own priorities to a collective timeline or when it becomes clear that different parties have been reading the same commitment in incompatible ways.

3 Method

The methodology chapter outlines the qualitative, interpretivist research design used to investigate how social inclusion is operationalised within the Bergsjön pilot project. It details an inductive, mixed-method approach combining literature review, document analysis, six semi-structured interviews as well as field observations to capture and analyse both internal and external stakeholder perspectives through thematic analysis. Moreover, the chapter addresses the study's research quality, ethical considerations and explicit boundaries, including reflexive practices, responsible generative AI use and methodological limitations.

3.1 Research philosophy and design

At the start of the research project a comprehensive kick-off meeting was conducted to provide a detailed overview of the municipal housing company's work in the area of social sustainability. This led to several potential research topics and ultimately the topic of social inclusion was chosen as this was a highly pressing issue that the company planned to address intensively in the coming months, offering the opportunity to be closely involved. Based on two informal preliminary discussions with the local contact person at the company an interpretivist research philosophy combined with a qualitative research design was selected for this study as this seemed highly appropriate for a study that would primarily deal with intangible values as well as including point of views from several stakeholders with different backgrounds.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

Data was collected using an inductive mixed-method approach, including literature review, interviews, observation and document analysis, and allowing us to circle back, enriching both upcoming interview guidelines with newly generated information retrieved from both scientific publications and previously held interviews as well as narrowing down literature search strings. The literature research was carried out on databases such as ChalmersLib, Scopus and Google scholar circling around key terms related to social sustainability, social inclusion, area-based development and management, stakeholder theory as well as translation theory and boundary objects; where possible, in the Swedish planning context. In addition to the literature review, six interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews from which three of them were held in-person and three of them online via Teams to allow for more flexibility in the given timeframe. The duration of the interviews averaged 80 minutes each and prior to the interviews an interview guide that served as a basis for posing the questions was created. This guide was reformatted and adapted according to who the following interviewee was going to be. Consent to record the interviews was verbally sought and the transcription was carried out with the aid of a built-in tool in the digital platform where the interviews were recorded. Beyond that, observation helped enrich the dataset and allowed to get a more comprehensive picture of the case study at hand. The field notes were primarily taken while observing two internal workshops and one public seminar related to the ongoing ABD project in Bergsjön. Moreover, the document analysis, primarily concentrating on internal company documents as well as publicly available information on the City of Gothenburg's masterplan and Framtiden directives

to the municipal housing company, helped to understand the broader context of which the ABD project takes place.

The sampling of interviewees was approached from two different procedures: first, an initial brainstorming and people research was carried out, mapping potentially relevant actors to the case study. In a second step these were refined and confirmed as the explorative research evolved naturally. In total three interviews were held with internal actors working inside the municipal housing company (= internal perspectives) and three interviews were held with external actors being, at some level, involved in the ABD process from the municipal housing company (= external perspectives). The three employees from the municipal housing company were accessed through their organisation, the employee from Social Services was found and contacted online and through interactive seminars and events contact with The Police as well as the local organisation was also formed. Table 2 provides an overview of the stakeholders relevant to the case study at hand.

Table 2. Overview of data collection.

Actor	Key person(s) / position	Data basis
Municipal housing company (strategy)	Social sustainability strategist and business administrator	2x interviews
Municipal housing company (operations)	Area manager and operational staff	1x interview + 2x workshop observations
Social services	Method developer	1x interview
Civil society	Business developer	1x interview
Police	Municipal police officer	1x interview
Tenants	No direct contact person	AktivBo Survey

The collected data was analysed through thematic analysis. One researcher of this paper conducted the interviews and transcribed the material whereas the other researcher was responsible for familiarising themselves with the material by reading it over and making annotations. After the initial familiarisation an initial coding was conducted where themes and subthemes were clustered together through a codebook. The codes were then categorised and used as a basis for the empirical analysis.

3.3 Research quality and trustworthiness

Credibility was supported by asking the interviewees clarifying questions and occasionally summary-backing during interviews to verify if what was being said was being correctly received and understood. As for the dependability a consistent interview-guide that served as the core and basis for all interviews was developed and analytical steps from coding to theme development was systematically documented. The confirmability was reinforced through recording and full transcription thus allowing statements to be traced back to the original data. Due to the authors' preceding knowledge pertaining to the industry, personal experience as well as socialisation, certain aspects of area-development context may be perceived as evident.

3.4 Ethics and AI use

During the study all interviewees were informed that participation was voluntary and that it was at any time fine to withdraw one's consent to take part in the study. Interviewees received information about the purpose of the study and how their data would be handled. All identifying information has been removed for the final paper and given the context of a vulnerable residential area the analysis avoided unnecessary details that could further stigmatize the area.

In this report GenAI tools were used in the scope of disposition suggestions, generating draft code labels from the researcher's own thematic descriptions and generating templates for tables. AI was also used for grammar and vocabulary and was, in combination Mendeley's with library tool, used to format references that were then verified manually

De-identified, GDPR-adherent excerpts from interviews were used together with AI tools to classify and cluster themes. These newly generated excerpts were then verified against the original audio recording as well as the transcript to ensure accuracy and credibility. Overall, AI generated content was treated as alternative pathways and not as definite truths and final coding, selection of themes and interpretations were made by the authors.

Internal documents provided by the company were solely used for context and none of this information was run through GenAI and as for the storage of said information it was handled in cloud-based Teams folder that only the researchers as well as their institution had access to. Files were separated in folders and sub folders and potentially sensitive data will be deleted after submission and final institutional assessment.

3.5 Methodological limitations

The study presents several methodological limitations all in varying degrees of impact on the study. One determining limitation was that the empirical data was only based on six interviews, one survey as well as two observational workshops. This means that although there was sufficient, for the intended study, amount of data to conduct analyses with, there exists potential for a higher cutoff rate in number of participants. Information and conclusions derived from empirical material should therefore be seen as analytically informative and not widely generalisable. Due to the research being conducted within the frames of a municipal housing company access pathways were already pre-defined and which unsurprisingly pose a larger possibility of distorting perspective and giving a larger platform to the in-house stakeholder. Interviews were conducted by a single interviewer which poses the risk for initial interpretations and probing styles, despite being unilateral. Finally, half of the interviews were conducted through a digital platform which allowed for ease but may have impacted interpersonal dynamics that can only be achieved in person.

4 Case Study Description

This chapter briefly introduces the empirical setting of the study and provides a factual frame for the empirical results presented in the following chapter. It describes the neighbourhood of Bergsjön, the municipal housing company's role and mandate there, the ABD process that forms the core of the case and the broader stakeholder and governance context.

4.1 Socio-spatial profile of Bergsjön

Bergsjön is a residential district in northeastern Gothenburg, partly constructed between 1965 and 1968 as part of Sweden's Million Program housing initiative. Built according to historical SCAFT guidelines, the physical layout prioritises vehicular routing over pedestrian connectivity, a design choice heavily criticised in urban planning literature for establishing persistent spatial barriers within the built environment (Hagson, 2004). The district is characterised by a dense concentration of multi-family housing where rental tenures overwhelmingly dominate the property market. According to municipal data, out of 3.977 total residential units in Bergsjön, 94,2 % (3.748 units) are apartments in multi-family housing structures (Göteborgsbladet, 2025). The municipal housing company, Familjebostäder, is a dominant structural actor in the area, owning and managing approximately 1.300 of these units near Bergsjön Centrum.

The demographic profile of Bergsjön exhibits pronounced socio-economic divergences from the wider municipality of Gothenburg, marked by depressed average incomes, elevated unemployment rates and lower rates of higher education eligibility as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Area facts 2025 (Göteborgsbladet, City Mngmt. Office, Göteborgs Stad).

	Bergsjön	Gothenburg
Population (ppl.)	10.439	613.278
ø people/household	2,7	2,1
Foreign background (%)	64,1	29,8
ø income (SEK)	244.400	382.600
Financial assistance (ppl.)	366	6.640
Unemployed (%)	14,6	6,3
High school eligibility (%)	64,2	81,5
>65 years (ppl.)	816	97.471
<13 years (ppl.)	2.019	83.092
Post-secondary education (%)	16,8	39,9

Compounding these socio-economic indicators Bergsjön is classified as a “particularly vulnerable area” by the Swedish Police Authority (Police Authority, 2025). This statutory classification denotes an urban zone where low socio-economic status intersects with systemic criminal influence, manifesting locally through open drug trafficking, localised violence and an institutional culture of silence that degrades resident trust in public authorities. Consequently, local administrative needs extend

beyond standard property upkeep. They require a continuous institutional presence, active cross-sector collaboration and coordinated, knowledge-based environmental design to reclaim public spaces (Police Authority, 2025).

4.2 Familjebostäder's mandate and the pilot vision

As a subsidiary of the municipal Framtiden company Familjebostäder operates under an expanded institutional mandate that dictates the company must combine traditional real estate asset management with targeted social sustainability goals. In alignment with municipal directives the municipal housing company is tasked with reversing localised socio-economic decline, reducing residential segregation and stabilising vulnerable urban environments. To rectify this institutional vulnerability Bergsjön was selected as the primary pilot area to test a revamped area-based planning process. As noted during the interview process the district serves as an ideal testing environment because of its status on The Police vulnerability list, which has made it a critical target for Framtiden's strategic mandates. Simultaneously, Bergsjön's local staff possess extensive experience navigating institutional performance measurements. The objective of this pilot is the generation of a formalised roadmap, an "area plan" visualised in a standardised A3. As indicated by internal project documentation this roadmap will function as an explicit interface posted openly across local district offices to link day-to-day property management directly with long-term, multi-scalar social goals over an evaluative three-to-five-year horizon.

4.3 The area-based planning process

The structural workflow of the pilot design transitions through an iterative, data-driven planning cycle managed jointly by centralised corporate strategists and localised operational teams (Figure 3). The formal process follows a sequential path:

- 1 *Baseline data synthesis:* The centralised support unit compiles an empirical profile of the target area, integrating socio-economic data, localised property metrics, and results from annual tenant satisfaction surveys called AktivBo.
- 2 *Operational co-creation workshops:* The support unit facilitates structured workshops with localised front-line staff. As a representative from the company observes, this mechanism was intentionally introduced because when front-line employees who meet the tenants daily and carry a lot of insider knowledge, get to be involved themselves, it creates the right conditions and commitment for the project's operational anchoring.
- 3 *Analytical synthesis (SWOT):* The support unit processes the qualitative insights from the workshops alongside empirical indicators to generate a formalised SWOT matrix.
- 4 *Strategic prioritisation:* Centralised strategists, district managers as well as operational staff collaboratively formulate explicit visions and select targeted social interventions.
- 5 *Roadmap institutionalisation:* The support unit compiles the final A3 area plan, which district managers anchor within local operational routines. Empirical observations of the ABP process reveal that this entire cycle is slated for a systematic revision every three years to systematically reassess area facts and recalibrate local interventions.

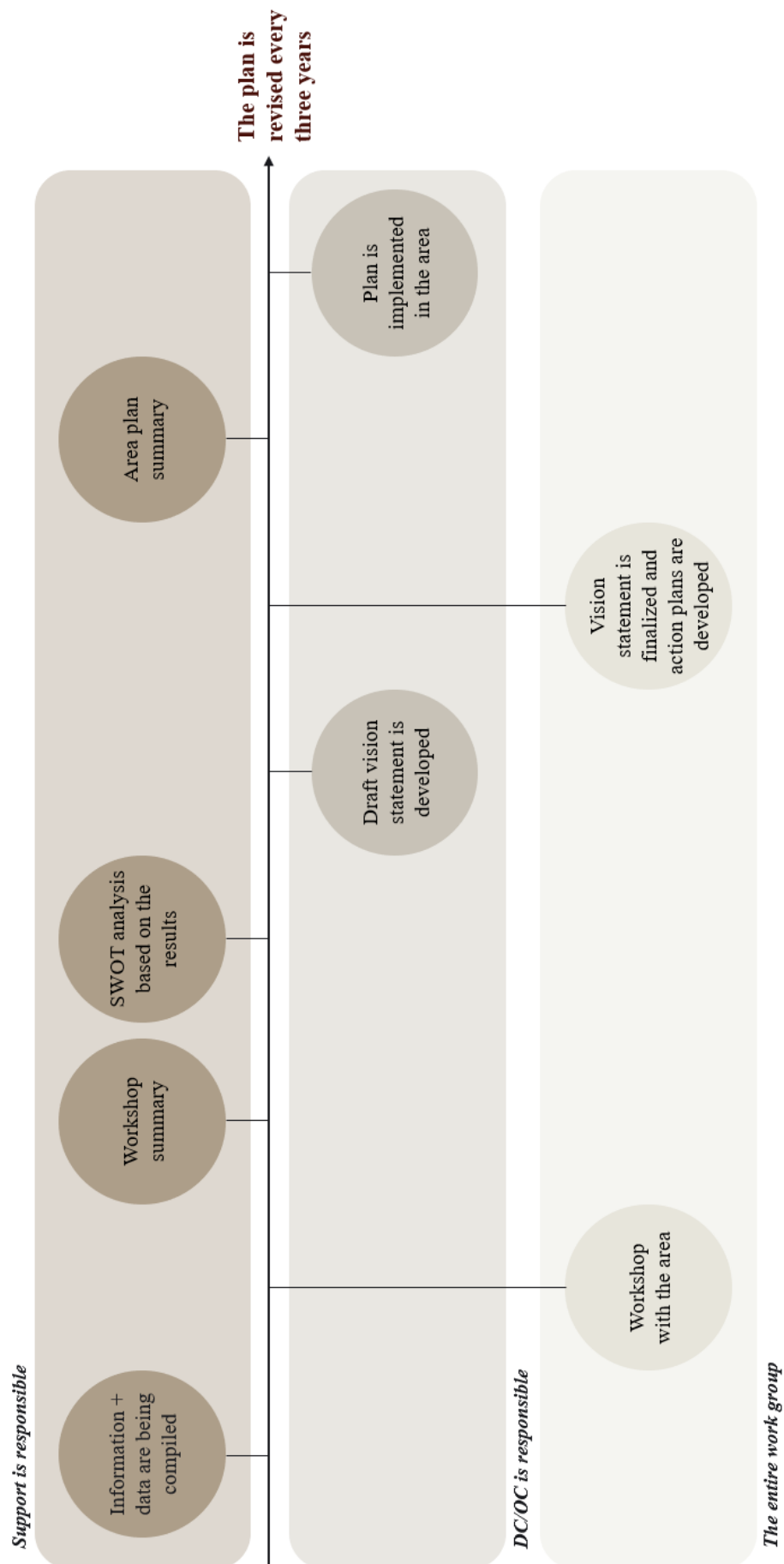


Figure 3. Familjebostäder's ABD process.

At the time of this study the Bergsjön area plan is under development to later be anchored internally. Once the nature of the plan has been concluded it is then to be integrated into everyday routines and follow-up structures. For the last five years the municipal housing company has primarily focused on security and socioeconomics and is now entering its second phase of area work emphasising urban development and neighbourhood development (Figure 4).

4.4 The stakeholder landscape

While Familjebostäder operates as the lead initiator of this area plan, its local operations intersect with a broader network of statutory and civic actors organised around informational exchange and joint collaboration.

The Police Authority operates at both a tactical and strategic level and maintain a dense, targeted presence in the area to disrupt local crime. They interface with Familjebostäder through quarterly management meetings, exchanging environmental intelligence and sharing safety assessments to guide environmental design. Social Services, under the framework of the new Swedish Social Services Act, focus on preventative outreach within the neighbourhood, utilising local schools as primary hubs to engage youth and counter localised anti-social behaviour. As a respondent from Social Services noted during an interview, their work in Bergsjön is complicated by a historical trust deficit fuelled by external disinformation campaigns, underscoring the need for visible, trust-building coordination with the landlord. Grassroots entities and community organisations operate within the district to foster local democracy and cultural cohesion by managing central physical meeting spaces. As a representative from the company observes, the organisation intends to leverage these entities during Phase 2 to expand its outreach beyond traditional housing tenure boundaries, coordinating efforts with local associations, sports clubs, and potential faith leaders to capture a more authentic representation of resident voices.

Field observations gathered during local neighbourhood seminars reinforce that while these external actors overlap with the housing company's daily operations through ad-hoc contacts and shared property networks, they remain institutionally separated from the pilot's formal roadmap formulation process.

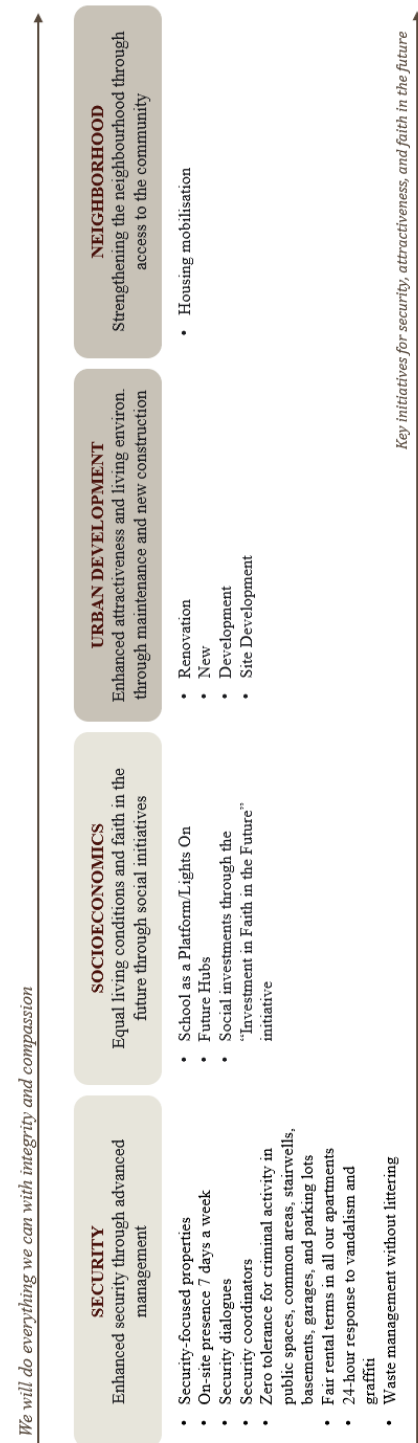


Figure 4. Familjebostäder's strategic ABD plan.

5 Empirical Results

This chapter examines how local stakeholders define and enact the concept of social inclusion within an ABD initiative. Additionally, it shows how exactly the translation process of Familjebostäder's definition of social inclusion takes place as well as how varying tensions arise and what they mean at large.

5.1 Institutional framing and fragmented understandings of social inclusion

The empirical findings, related to the first research question of how social inclusion is understood and essentially what its implications are, showcase that social inclusion is not a universally agreed upon objective, nor is it fixed. Rather, it is something regularly contested, plastic and a concept that is being progressively framed by actors in accordance with their particular institutional mandates, professional vocabularies as well as resource boundaries.

When mapping the interviewed stakeholders' sometimes varying perspectives against the five dimensions of the inclusive city, a fragmented landscape appears (Table 4). Individual organizations, rather than presenting a holistic view, selectively priorities subcategories that respectively align with their own core functions, in turn creating a chain of segmentation.

As seen in Table 4, Familjebostäder in this project, contextualise social inclusion through the property management lens, tenant satisfaction as well as social and spatial dimensions. The municipal housing company target tangible topics such as place-based physical security, maintenance of public spaces along with working to improve the quality of life for their residents.

The other interviewed actors, in contrast, exhibit a varying degree of focus areas according to their mandates. Social Services prioritise socio-political and economic vulnerability by focusing on equity, welfare and systemic support rather than physical urban spaces. The Police department works under a mandate that focuses on public order as well as crime prevention and risk mitigation and their inclusivity framing mainly address concerns regarding safety and security, where social interventions are seen more as mechanisms for reduction of crime. Lastly, one local nonprofit organisation has taken upon themselves to fill the gaps left by other actors by focusing resources on cultural inclusion, civic life and fostering a localized sense of belonging, while simultaneously operating under resource constraints that imposes limits in reach.

Table 4. Understanding of social inclusion-matrix.

	Key terms of dimension	Familjeb. Int. 1	Familjeb. Int. 2	Familjeb. Int. 3	Social Services	Police Authority	Local Organism.
Social	Safety and security	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Demographic diversity	X			X		X
	Cultural and civil life inclusion	X			X		X
	Open and welcoming social attitude	X	X	X			X
	Social equity				X		X
	Quality of life	X	X	X	X		
	Anti-discrimination				X	X	X
Spatial	Affordable housing	X	X	X			X
	Access to basic infrastructure (public space, public transit)	X		X	X		X
	Access to public services (healthcare, energy, water and sanitation, information)	X			X	X	X
	Spatial justice				X		X
	Climate change mitigation and adaptation						
Environmental	Urban ecosystems						
	Green spaces	X					
	Air quality						
	Solid waste management	X					
	Energy efficiency and renewable energy						
	Reduce water loss and conserve water						
	Equal political rights and obligation before the law				X	X	X
Political	Political participation	X		X			X
	Media inclusion and press freedom	X		X			X
	Perception of corruption	X				X	
	Sense of belonging to the state			X	X		X
	Income and distribution				X		X
Economic	Education and training	X		X	X		X
	Work and employment	X		X	X		X
	Inclusive growth	X					X
	Shared prosperity	X			X		X
	Diversion of economy						
	Microfinance						

5.2 Operationalising social inclusion in area-based work

This section describes how Familjebostäder translates social inclusion ambitions into action within its area-based work in Bergsjön. It traces three interconnected dimensions of that process: how priorities are defined and decisions are made, how the company organises its relationships with external actors to support that work and what concrete activities have resulted from those collaborations.

5.2.1 Defining priorities and determining actions

In Phase 1 Familjebostäder's prioritisation of area-based work was primarily driven by external classifications and quantitative data. The company drew on a combination of several top-down inputs – police statistics, city-level data from the City of Gothenburg and directives from its mother company Framtiden – covering indicators such as unemployment and school results. These were complemented by the company's own internal statistics about disturbance cases, payments defaults and rental debts, collected at property level, forming the factual foundation from which area plans were developed. The Police's classification of Bergsjön as a particularly vulnerable area played an important role in that process. According to the interviewee from The Police, this classification is produced by the National Operations Department based on the degree of criminal influence in the area, accounting for structural factors such as segregation, rates of gainful employment and a culture of silence. The classification carried substantial political weight: Familjebostäder notes that “the City of Gothenburg's political level and our board see it as very important that areas leave The Police's list” while simultaneously underlining the need to balance this external measure against internal goals relating to service quality and tenant experience. Bottom-up input was integrated through two instruments. The annual AktivBo survey provided a yearly snapshot of tenant satisfaction across the portfolio. In addition, a real-time measurement pilot was introduced, enabling more responsive, property-level prioritisation based on ongoing tenant input and making it possible to direct resources to a specific property or stairwell where something was not working. A notable challenge was limited internal anchoring. Initiatives were often developed at the strategic level without sufficient reach into the operational organisation, resulting in a tendency towards person-dependent rather than structure-dependent priorities, where investments were tied to specific individuals rather than embedded in stable organisational routines.

Phase 2 introduces a structural change in how priorities are set. The central new instrument is the management pyramid. It is a conceptual framework organising area work across three levels: daily property management as the base; area work involving squares, courtyards, outdoor environments and events as the middle level; and individual-level initiatives relating to school, employment and health at the top. Area plans use this pyramid as a starting point, ensuring that prioritisation takes place in a consistent analytical logic. Alongside this, Phase 2 extends the knowledge base to include the experiential knowledge of operational staff through interviews and workshops, asking for example how staff experience safety and insecurity, which places feel problematic and what is characteristic of the area. This bottom-up input is framed explicitly as a corrective to top-down planning: “the idea with the area plans is that the movement should instead come from below”. Tenant survey data now feeds more directly into strategic decisions. A concrete example is the decision to install security

cameras: both an internal Familjebostäder survey and a city-wide survey of Bergsjön residents showed over 80 % support, providing an evidence base and participatory mandate for the initiative.

Figure 5 below provides an overview of all the inputs Familjebostäder considers when setting priorities and deciding on a course of action as of early 2026.

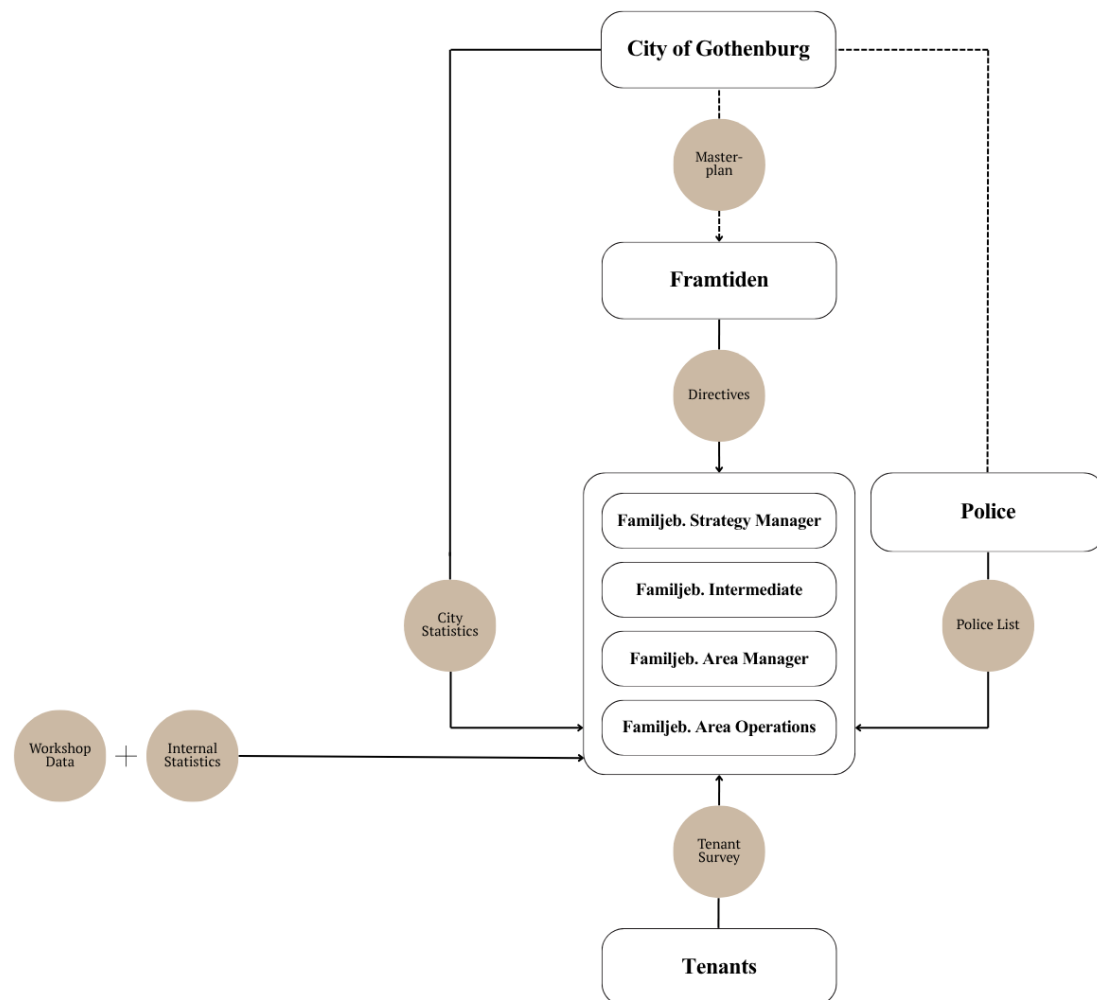


Figure 5. Familjebostäder's ABD related inputs for defining priorities.

5.2.2 Area-based work-related organisational arrangements

Familjebostäder cooperates with a range of stakeholders whose roles and relationships can be categorised as either collaborations or exchange (Figure 6). Collaborations result in concrete activities which will be addressed in the following subchapter. Exchange refers to more informal or informational contact such as meetings held to keep each other updated on situational developments; it does not necessarily mean that the involved parties work jointly to implement measures.

During Phase 1, Familjebostäder's stakeholder network in Bergsjön was primarily oriented around actors already institutionally present in the area. Among the most central partners were other property owners, both public and private. Next to seven other municipal housing companies, Familjebostäder is part of the same Framtiden group and meet regularly in group-wide processes and strategist networks. Private players such as Balder are also important. The Police, for example, invite all major property owners to joint management meetings approximately four times a year, providing a shared situational picture of the area. Beyond the property sector, The Police represent a key partner in Familjebostäder's network: both through formal meetings and ongoing informal exchange, they share intelligence about emerging issues and, in return, receive input from the municipal housing company about what residents observe and report. The Social Services constitute another important node in this network, connecting the municipal housing company indirectly to schools, leisure services and vulnerable families. Local organisations hold public partnership agreements with Familjebostäder alongside Bergsjön 2031, Social Services and the democracy and citizen services. They also serve as a channel between Familjebostäder and the wider civil society, relaying information to and from local associations. The Tenants' Association has also been a counterpart on housing influence issues throughout this period, though its local activity in Bergsjön has been described as limited.

Now in Phase 2, Familjebostäder aims to expand this network in order to obtain a broader and more diverse picture of residents' voices. The goal is to move closer to the actual population base of the area. For this, the local Tenants' Association will play an even more important role. Cultural communities and sports clubs are also being considered as partners to be integrated more strongly into the work. This reflects a recognition that social sustainability work requires reaching communities organised around identity, faith and shared interests, not just around housing tenure alone. This broader outreach might, for example, result in collaborating with a local imam – an actor embedded in community networks that formal institutions have historically had little direct contact with but who can serve as a trusted intermediary for residents whose voices would otherwise remain outside the conversation.

5.2.3 Area-based work-related concrete activities

Concrete activities that have resulted from collaborations stemming from Familjebostäder's area-based work in Phase 1 are illustrated in Figure 7. As shown, the municipal housing company distinguishes between activities relating to school, security, employment, health, leisure and other initiatives.

One of the most direct ways Familjebostäder has contributed to supporting school-related outcomes in Bergsjön is through the financing of homework help. Recognising that children in the area often live in overcrowded apartments with limited space and quiet for study, the municipal housing company has co-funded homework helpers alongside other actors. Education is treated as a key upstream indicator of long-term area development and low school results are listed alongside unemployment and crime statistics as defining challenges in Bergsjön. Security is the domain where Familjebostäder's presence as a property owner is perhaps most directly felt by residents in their daily lives. The company has deployed safety personnel in Bergsjön on a consistent basis: every evening, all year round. In parallel, significant effort has gone into securing the physical properties themselves: access control systems, secured basement passages and stairwells, and environmental improvements to places identified

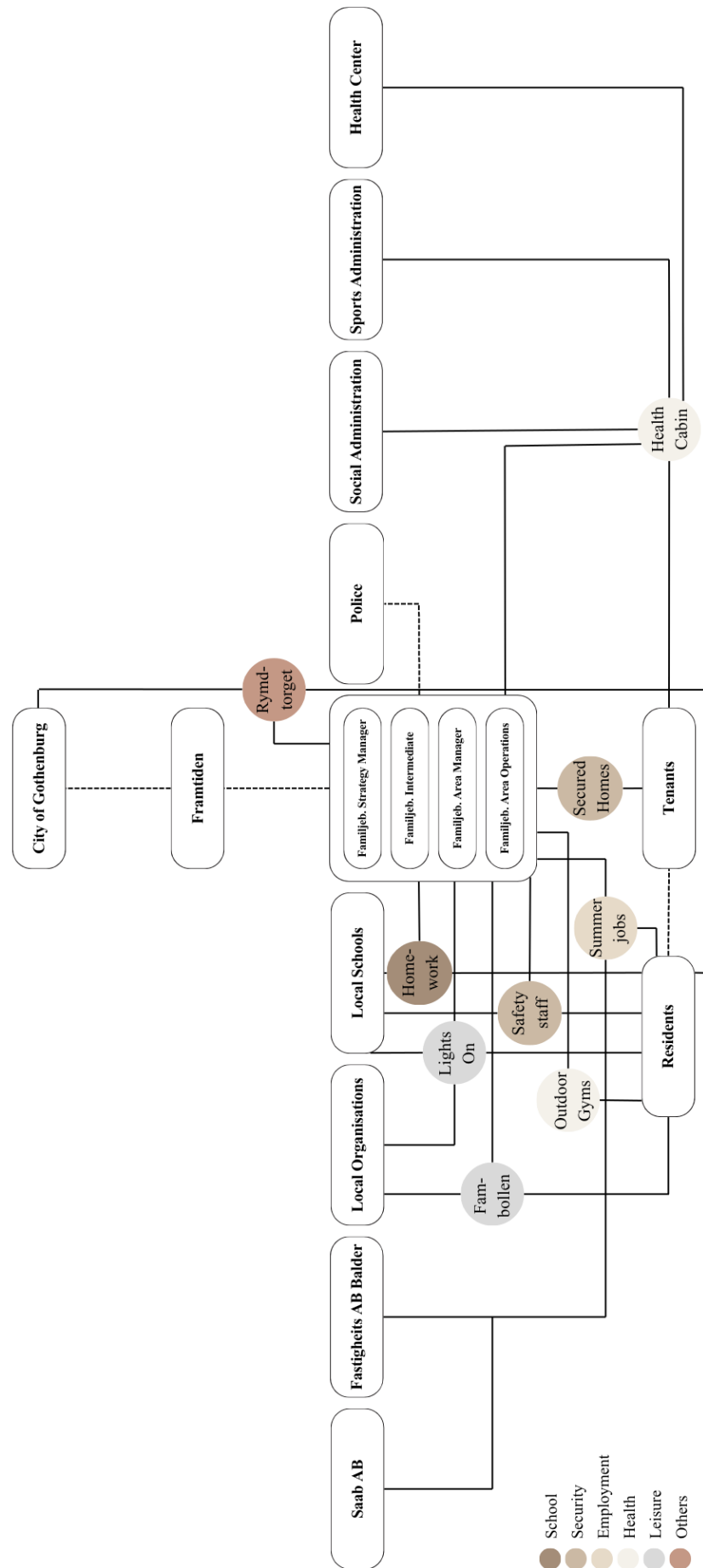


Figure 7. Familjebostäder's ABD related concrete activities.

as hotspots. Beyond this Familjebostäder's social sustainability portfolio includes, for example, its in-house cleaning programme which constitutes the municipal housing company's employment model. Rather than purchasing cleaning services externally, Familjebostäder took cleaning in-house and actively recruited residents of Bergsjön to fill those roles. The first cohort consisted of fifteen people and has since completed the full two-year programme which includes professional Swedish, vocational training, practical placement and regular employment.

The model is designed with explicit exit logic: participants are expected to move on into the broader labour market after two years, supported by references and contacts, freeing capacity for new recruits. Next to this, the company offers summer jobs, particularly for young people, with approximately 450 summer workers taken on across the portfolio and a structured programme for their supervision and introduction. Furthermore, Familjebostäder's health-oriented activities include the installation of outdoor gyms in residential areas, making physical activity accessible directly within the neighbourhood without the need for gym membership or travel. A health cabin has also been established in the area as a local health resource, contributing to the company's broader ambition to create infrastructure for everyday wellbeing in residential environments. Apart from that there are two activities in the leisure domain which have been mentioned by several interviewees. Lights On is a programme that extends the presence of adults around schools during afternoon and evening hours, operating at the intersection of leisure, school support and security. Fambollen is Familjebostäder's football initiative for children and young people in the area, providing a structured and recurring leisure activity with continuity. Beyond these categorised domains, Rymdtorget represents a broader place-based initiative at the centre of Bergsjön. It functions as a hub for community activity, hosting events, markets and cultural activities involving multiple actors. Rymdtorget embodies Familjebostäder's ambition to create life and movement in the residential area more generally and serves as a physical anchor point for the community.

5.3 Structural tensions around the realities of execution

In this section the structural friction points that emerge, when abstract social sustainability policies are operationalised within area-based management frameworks, are examined. By looking at the vertical and horizontal alignment of actors in the Bergsjön pilot project, three core institutional systemic conditions have been identified.

5.3.1 Strategic ambiguity and operational strain

The translation of high-level urban policy into local action reveals a misalignment between strategic ambition and operational capacity. Overarching corporate directives from Framtiden outline high-ambition social priorities, yet these are frequently handed down without corresponding resource allocations or localised project anchoring which forces their subsidiary, Familjebostäder, to absorb unbudgeted operational costs to meet strategic mandates. Compounding this vertical disconnect is the horizontal saturation of parallel initiatives. Local districts face severe implementation overload where multiple social plans are rolled out simultaneously, consequently stretching local staff and resulting in a deficit of systematic follow-up. As a result, initiatives frequently dissipate into open-ended projects without structural finality.

This strain on the operations brings to light a fundamental ambiguity in the institutional prioritisation process. Because corporate directives from Framtiden remain abstract, the local team at Familjebostäder is forced to construct the final interpretations and directives autonomously. Ergo, this lack of a clear hierarchy in decision-making creates friction regarding immediate operational trade-offs which are then exemplified by conflicts over whether to prioritise capital-intensive physical maintenance, such as balcony renovations, or long-term social sustainability initiatives involving residents. While Familjebostäder's internal workshops, in preparations for the ABD plan, position local operational staff as critical proprietors of neighbourhood knowledge, the institutional time allocated to tap into this expertise is severely constrained. Furthermore, this localised interpretation model creates geographic asymmetry across the wider municipality where non-prioritised urban areas fall entirely under the radar, missed by both targeted problem definitions and positive resource allocations. This, in turn, triggers structural competition between neighbourhoods faced with the same challenges, making equitable municipal prioritisation increasingly complex.

Finally, this strategic ambiguity alters how outcomes are contextually packaged. In multi-actor, city-wide frameworks, evaluating success shifts toward performance metrics that are vulnerable to selective interpretation. Data, then, is often framed primarily to validate the initiative itself, prioritizing institutional narratives of success over complex local realities.

5.3.2 Expansion of mandate and functional stretching of the corporate role

As Familjebostäder develop their area-based interventions, they experience significant mandate expansion, pushing its operations far beyond traditional property management. Driven by an internal philosophy of doing “everything we can”, the housing company has expanded into sectors traditionally governed by the welfare state, including children and youth homework support, community leisure programming, and target-group employment creation for youth as well as individuals outside the labour market. This can be likened to a functional encroach and has drawn critique from external stakeholders who question whether a municipal housing company is systematically overstepping its legal and institutional boundaries.

A critical structural condition limiting the efficacy of area-based management is its deep person-dependency and subsequent lack of structural continuity. Field observations reveal that professionals operating on the ground, across the municipal housing company, Social Services, and local networks, frequently exhibit exceptionally high levels of intrinsic motivation. This empirical observation aligns with institutional critiques highlighting that local projects and social initiatives are predominantly catalysed by the energy of isolated individuals. Because these efforts frequently lack a formalised organisational setup or an embedded structural foundation, they remain fragile to the point of risking immediate collapse when key individual exit the framework.

Conversely, this visible presence has exponentially heightened expectations from residents and local partner organisations. Operational staff observe tenants seeking non-traditional interventions, such as mediation in rent disputes or personal financial advice and this institutional blurring is exacerbated by vague directives from the municipal council, which declare that all statutory actors must “help” Familjebostäder realise

these social goals. However, the council fails to define what “help” operationalises to, leaving the boundary between statutory public responsibility and corporate social accountability completely undefined.

5.3.3 Asymmetries of institutional stigma and lived experiences

A profound friction exists between external institutional classifications and the micro-level lived experience of the neighbourhood. Administrative tools, most notably the Swedish Police department’s classification of areas as “vulnerable” or “particularly vulnerable”, more commonly known as “The Police list”, serve as a primary trigger for political attention and financial resources. While institutional actors universally leverage this classification to secure funding, internal data reveals a striking paradox in how tenant satisfaction surveys show that residents in the labelled area of Bergsjön report the highest satisfaction and well-being levels compared to all other non-labelled areas within the company’s portfolio. This paradox highlights a sharp power asymmetry in how urban problems are formulated. The actors that define what constitutes a “problem” in Bergsjön, i.e. the politicians, housing strategists, and law enforcement, do not live in the community or experience the material consequences of these stigmatising labels. Consequently, resident-defined structural needs, such as affordable, self-managed community gathering spaces for cultural events, fall entirely outside the specialised scopes of these formal organisations.

While the voice of the residents is strategically championed as the foundation of the area plan, its empirical inclusion is heavily restricted by operational constraints, including language barriers and tight planning timelines. The bottom-up input is predominantly limited to standardised, pre-designed tenant surveys that capture property satisfaction rather than direct structural agency and institutional asymmetry is further reinforced by external media representations. Even when reporting objectively positive local achievements, media narratives consistently filter stories through an exoticizing lens of “the other”. By continuously highlighting an entrepreneurial founder's nationality or explicitly juxtaposing individuals' success against a Bergsjön background, media coverage subtly reinforces the area as a deviation from an unexamined institutional norm.

5.3.4 Linguistic discrepancies and systemic continuity

The administrative language utilised by authorities as well as the public exerts a powerful, stigmatising influence on how residents perceive themselves and their future outlooks. The systemic labelling of neighbourhoods as “development zones” or “vulnerable areas” create direct psychological friction for local youth, who explicitly question their societal prospects when their home environment is codified as structurally deficient. While institutional actors and law enforcement defend these nomenclatures as structurally objective tools designed to evaluate systemic under-resourcing rather than individual character, the labels are quickly co-opted by media narratives, in turn solidifying public stigma.

In addition, professionals within the field actively contest and problematise these top-down framings. The operational discourse reflects an ongoing debate over whether the population itself is inherently vulnerable, or if the geographic area has been made vulnerable over time through systematic political prioritization and resource

deprivation. This distinction is critical when comparing socio-spatial dynamics to high-crime inner-city areas, which, despite comparable crime statistics, lack the parallel social structures and institutional isolation found in peripheral neighbourhoods. Ultimately, these combined structural frictions reveal that area-based management mustn't be deeply constrained by person-dependency and a lack of structural continuity. Major social initiatives are frequently driven by the high intrinsic motivation of isolated individuals within the housing company or Social Services. When these individuals exit, the lack of an institutionalised organisational foundation risks the collapse of the initiative, however at Familjebostäder they aim to counter this by creating area-based plans to be revised every three to five years, independently of who is heading the project.

Furthermore, this reliance on individual actors exposes a deeper, unaddressed dimension regarding how safety and belonging are conceptualised within ABP frameworks. While institutional tools treat “safety” as an objective neighbourhood metric to be restored via physical upgrades, the empirical data underscores that spatial belonging is fundamentally dictated by positionality, specifically, who a person is and how they look, which subsequently ties into feelings of perceived versus actual safety. For residents of peripheral areas, navigating the wider municipal landscape, more commonly the inner cities, often entails an immediate experience of being “othered”, so where a person feels secure or out of place is not determined by abstract area plans, but by systemic socio-spatial boundaries that dictate who is allowed to fit the baseline urban norm.

Therefore, area-based management relying heavily on highly motivated, individual professionals to bridge these deep societal divides merely stabilises a fragmented system rather than transforming it, if the underlying structural architectures of exclusion are not changed. Because systemic urban issues like crime and economic exclusion are naturally mobile and interconnected, targeting them through sequestered, localised property interventions fails to generate systemic change. To achieve lasting urban transformation stakeholders such as The Police, Social Services as well as local organisations all carrying a vital voice of the people and the city, need to come together to form a sustained, multi-decade operational horizon that outlasts short-term funding cycles. This reality raises a fundamental concluding question: *Under what institutional conditions can a municipal housing company function as an effective lead initiator for social inclusion when its budget remains tied to rigid crime classifications and restricted temporal frameworks?*

6 Analysis and Discussion

This chapter interprets the empirical findings through the theoretical framework established in Chapter 2. It is organised to follow the logic of the empirical material: it begins with how social inclusion is understood and defined, moves through how those interpretations are operationalised across organisational levels and into concrete activities, examines why tensions and contradictions are structural rather than incidental.

6.1 Social inclusion across institutional positions

This section examines how social inclusion is understood across the actors involved in the Bergsjön planning process and how those understandings shape what the process can and cannot see.

6.1.1 Goal shift and the limits of mandate

The empirical material shows clearly that understandings of social inclusion are not fixed: they have changed as Familjebostäder has moved from one planning phase to the next and they continue to differ across organisational levels and institutional mandates. Understanding this variation requires beginning with the goals that frame the ABD process itself.

At the strategic level of Familjebostäder, the overarching aim of the area development work in Bergsjön has been formulated around counteracting selective migration. The ambition is that residents should want to stay because the area is genuinely worth staying in. This formulation is significant because it signals a move beyond the narrower objectives that dominated Phase 1 of the planning process where the primary political and institutional priority was to get Bergsjön removed from The Police's list of particularly vulnerable areas. Security indicators and socio-economic KPIs were the dominant measures of progress and the framing of the area problem was largely defined by external classification systems. This close alignment between the housing company's Phase 1 priorities and those of the City of Gothenburg's Equal Programme, which centres economic inclusion as a prerequisite for social inclusion, reflects the institutional environment in which Familjebostäder operates in. Goals are set at the political level and flow downward through intermediate governance structures to the individual subsidiaries, applicable to the entire city. Safety and security priorities similarly echo the criteria underlying The Police's classification, which primarily focuses on the degree of criminal influence in an area rather than residents' lived experience of it.

Phase 2 represents a reframing. The language of "sustainable migration" and "sense of belonging" has emerged as Familjebostäder has increasingly recognised that market repositioning is not something the housing company can produce on their own alone. This recognition connects to a broader tension that has been reflected on explicitly: the company has come to understand that it lacks both the mandate and the capacity to deliver the kind of social change that would make selective migration sustainable on its own. This resonates with Andersson & Bråmås's (2004) finding that traditional area-based initiatives do not in themselves lead to market repositioning, and with Liang et al.'s (2022) identification of sustainable migration as a core dimension of "the inclusive

city”. The goal shift is therefore understood as a structural recalibration of what the housing company believes it can and should be responsible for.

6.1.2 The management pyramid and selective mandate adoption

The management pyramid that is used to structure social sustainability work at Familjebostäder gives this recalibration a concrete organisational form. The three-tier structure is a normative device that determines which forms of social inclusion fall within the housing company’s mandate and which do not. The pyramid maps closely onto what Liang et al. (2022) and Zhao et al. (2025) describe as a common pattern: organisations tend to select the dimensions of “the inclusive city” framework that align with their existing mandate rather than adopting a comprehensive programme. Familjebostäder’s pyramid does exactly this: placing labour market inclusion and school outcomes at the top as visible but secondary ambitions, while locating the most consistently resourced work at the base, in property management. This also reflects what Troje (2022) conceptualises as the expanding hybrid mandate of Swedish municipal housing companies, which increasingly straddle commercial viability and public welfare functions.

6.1.3 Differing definitions across organisational position

Within this institutional frame, individual actors construct their understandings of social inclusion in ways that reflect their proximity to day-to-day management, their institutional mandate and their political positioning. These variations form a coherent map of how a concept is interpreted differently depending on where in a system one stands.

One respondent from Familjebostäder, handling operational responsibility, defines social inclusion through three concrete and experiential dimensions: belonging, the ability to influence one’s everyday life and safety throughout the whole residential environment, on the way to the bus, in shared spaces. This grounding of inclusion in everyday life and physical security is consistent with a mandate that is fundamentally place-based and operational. His definition emphasises what Espino (2015) calls “real inclusion”: the kind where real people, in their actual situations, are given a say in what happens in their surroundings. Familjebostäder’s operative staff carry tacit knowledge of this everyday dimension: they see which places people avoid, which courtyards are empty and which are alive, which families are in difficulty long before any indicator system captures it. These staff have a high operative mandate within the area but have limited formal channels through which their perceptions can travel upward into the planning process. The workshops associated with the area plan offer one such outlet though their scope and frequency remain constrained. The potential of this ground-level knowledge to inform what the planning process can and cannot see is real but not fully realised.

Social Services operate with a more structural definition. Social inclusion means offering equivalent services regardless of where in the city a person lives and attending to the gaps that are produced by spatial inequality. The tram line 11 example illustrates this point: the problems that manifest in areas like Bergsjön are not necessarily produced in those areas. They are produced at the level of the city and at the national level. This perspective resonates with Zetterberg et al. (2023) who argue that

neighbourhood-level problems are often the downstream effects of decisions made at much larger scales. For the representative from Social Services, social inclusion requires attending to the structural conditions such as housing policy, school funding and labour market access that determine whether residents in northeast Gothenburg have genuinely comparable life chances to residents elsewhere in the city.

Compared to the two perspectives described above, the local organisation bring in a more explicitly political framing. Referring to Bergsjön as a “politically disadvantaged area” is a deliberate attempt to relocate the problem from the area to the system that produced it. The language of “particularly vulnerable area” would imply that the area is exposed by its own residents, positioning those who live there as the source of a problem that is in fact structural. When local organisations speak of social inclusion, they speak of power: of who has influence over their area, of whose definition of problems gets taken seriously and of whether the work being done is still genuinely connected to the needs of residents or has begun to follow its own institutional logic. This framing connects to Espino’s (2015) emphasis on dismantling structural barriers as a prerequisite for genuine inclusion, and to Zhao et al.’s (2025) distinction between transforming exclusionary norms and merely integrating marginalised groups into existing structures.

6.1.4 A policy chain held together by plasticity

What stands out is that these divergent understandings do not produce overt conflict in the collaboration around Bergsjön. Actors from different organisations coordinate around common activities, share situational pictures and pursue broadly aligned goals. A key reason for this is the conceptual plasticity that runs through the entire policy chain: from the City of Gothenburg’s overarching vision of the “cohesive city” through the Framtiden directives to the individual company’s area plans. Each of these documents functions as what Star & Griesemer (1989) term a boundary object: robust enough to anchor shared reference and coordinated action, yet sufficiently open in its formulations to accommodate divergent local interpretations. The “cohesive city” concept is a particularly clear case. It can absorb the focus on safe everyday environments, the concern with citywide equity and the emphasis on political representation without requiring any of them to formally resolve their definitional differences. Familjebostäder themselves reflect a related tension: the desire to speak positively about Bergsjön without sugarcoating the area, to use language that is honest without reinforcing stigma. It is a communicative balancing act that mirrors, at the level of individual speech, the structural ambiguity that the concept of social inclusion is made to carry institutionally. This plasticity is structurally produced by governance arrangements in which goals are deliberately formulated at a high level of generality so that they can be operationalised differently by actors with different mandates. The boundary object quality of the policy chain is an important feature: it is what allows the municipal housing company, The Social Services, the local organisations and The Police to all claim alignment with the same overarching vision.

6.1.5 The logic of conceptual translation

The concept of social inclusion narrows as it travels from broader political and civil society framings toward the concrete mandates of housing management. It shows how a normative concept acquires operational meaning through the institutional contexts in

which it is used. At the level of civil society, social inclusion carries an explicitly political charge: it is about power, representation and the dismantling of structural disadvantage. At the level of strategic management within the municipal housing company, it is about mission scope, which dimensions of inclusion the organisation can legitimately claim and resource. At the level of operational management, it becomes a set of measurable KPIs: satisfied tenants, stable tenancies, safe environments, reduced disruption rates. Each translation captures something real about what inclusion means in the contexts in which these actors work. But the variation matters for the ABP process because that process must aggregate and act on these different understandings. When it does so, it tends to privilege the understandings that are easiest to formalise and measure: in practice this means the operational and institutional ones. The more structural and political dimensions of inclusion remain present in the broader conversation but are harder to translate into the two-to-five-year plans and operational targets around which the planning process is organised.

6.2 Instrumentalising inclusion through area-based development

To evaluate how a municipal housing company functions as the lead initiator of local social sustainability, this section analyses how Familjebostäder translates abstract, high-level corporate goals into neighbourhood-level organisational arrangements, priorities, and concrete activities. This translation is structured through the analytical stages of the UNDP ABD framework, mapping the trajectory from initial problem formulation to localised execution and iterative follow-up.

6.2.1 Problem definition and prioritisation in an explorative phase

Empirical observations of Familjebostäder's ABP reveal that problem definition and prioritisation do not operate as distinct, sequential steps. Instead, because the organisation is in an explorative phase, these two processes are deeply intertwined. The baseline imperative for intervention stems from broad corporate owner's directives, which mandate that the company must go beyond property maintenance to reduce socio-spatial segregation and cultivate stable living environments. As a representative from the company observes:

"The owner's directives are basically an assignment about what we should do. They are often formulated at a fairly general level. It is about high-quality housing, that we will renovate as needed and that we will contribute to the city's development... But there are also formulations that we should reduce segregation and create good living environments. When you look at areas such as Bergsjön, Tynnered or Hammarkullen, you clearly see things like greater overcrowding. And then you have to translate the directive into what it actually means in everyday life."

The primary operational vehicle for this translation is the area plan process. Methodologically, the creation of these area plans attempts to combine top-down institutional mandates with bottom-up localised inputs, acting as an intentional "enrolment moment" where disparate priorities are bound into a singular, aligned

strategy (Callon, 1986). To build a shared reference point across different departments, the company utilises visualisation techniques, specifically the development of an integrated A3 roadmap poster, which will function as a scenario planning and visioning instrument to establish common operational goals (Lee, 2017). According to the UNDP, an evidence-based problem definition is an absolute enabling condition for effective ABD (UNDP, 2025; Santini et al., 2012).

However, the empirical evidence reveals that Familjebostäder's foundational problem definition is heavily dominated by a singular external indicator: The Swedish Police Department's classification of Bergsjön as a "particularly vulnerable area". Rather than building an independent, organic assessment of neighbourhood needs, the company adopts The Police list as one of its primary motivational tools. The overarching prioritisation is explicitly driven by an institutional urgency to get the neighbourhood off The Police list. The reliance on a crime-and-risk framework creates a structural tension that compartmentalises specific local priorities and is highly complex because socio-spatial problems are inherently interdependent and cannot be easily isolated from one another. This dependency on top-down administrative metrics brings to light an information deficit of how interviews with local stakeholders universally emphasise that deep, cross-sector collaboration is the single most vital factor for neighbourhood "success", all while external stakeholder voices are visibly absent from Familjebostäder's formal list of operational priorities. This omission raises critical questions regarding whether the ABD process actually possesses the holistic approach required to design a truly cohesive area plan (UNDP, 2025).

If the underlying, long-term strategic objective of the parent group is to re-position the peripheral neighbourhood on the broader housing market (Andersson & Bråmås, 2004), a highly localised, property-centric approach proves insufficient. Cultivating an inclusive city requires an integrated, multi-scalar, and holistic strategy (Liang et al., 2022). As one local practitioner sharply observed, targeting isolated aspects yields little systemic impact because "crime moves around" and true structural transformation cannot be achieved by merely treating localised symptoms while leaving the broader socio-economic system unchanged. This tension is deeply bound up with the unique institutional position of public housing within the Swedish welfare model, which places immense "pressure to take the lead" on municipal housing companies. In this context, routine property management is often conceptually elevated and understood as an act of social inclusion in and of itself (Troje, 2022).

Nonetheless, how a problem is defined depends entirely on the professional positionality of the actor defining it. This is visible in the contrasting vocabularies used by local staff. While some managers position themselves adaptively within the community, attempting to envision innovations from the residents' perspective as co-equals, other actors frame their role more paternalistically. They position themselves as external institutional agents who must explicitly design mechanisms to "include" the local population into the company's predefined frameworks, rather than embedding the company into the existing social fabric of the neighbourhood.

6.2.2 Coordination, roles and the limitations of local implementation

When moving from strategy into coordination and implementation, Familjebostäder actively deploys parallel top-down and bottom-up mechanisms, a dual approach conceptually aligned with the UNDP's guidelines for local mobilisation (UNDP, 2025).

In practice, however, this coordination model faces severe internal and external structural limitations. Internally, the bottom-up input is gathered almost exclusively by conducting workshops with the company's own operational staff, who are treated as the definitive experts on the area. This institutional boundary completely misses the “other” vital class of experts: the residents themselves. By failing to directly consult the community during the strategy-finding phase, the company overlooks a fundamental principle of inclusive planning: the individuals who live with a perceived problem are frequently the ones who own its most viable solution. Dropping an intervention into a complex neighbourhood without deep contextual understanding yields highly fragile outcomes, a fragility that could then be severely compounded by a high staff turnover rate within the housing company’s local teams. When the motivated individuals who hold the trust and localised knowledge exit the organisation, the entire area-based framework might risk losing its tacit knowledge or continuity.

Furthermore, Familjebostäder significantly restricts local civic power by relying on standardised tenant satisfaction surveys (such as the AktivBo survey) as their primary coordination instrument. These surveys consist almost entirely of pre-defined, closed-ended questions, precluding open-ended, organic dialogue with the broader neighbourhood. Such a restriction can be observed during local urban seminars and planning meetings: because participation is narrow, the actual residents of the neighbourhood rarely secure a genuine say in shaping the decisions that impact their environment (Espino, 2015). Thus, by relying heavily on rigid, top-down consultation models, the company severely limits its local legitimacy and risks reinforcing resident alienation (Wijitporn & Tansukanun, 2023).

Over-reliance on tenant surveys functions as a problematic performance measurement mechanism because as social sustainability goals are translated into corporate practice, organisations naturally prioritise what can be easily quantified and tracked (Argento et al., 2025). Standardised metrics are then systematically favoured over physical, environmental, and spatial dimensions such as property maintenance, lighting, and immediate safety upgrades, because they are highly visible and simple to audit. Concurrently, the fundamental but less measurable dimensions of social sustainability, such as genuine political participation, structural equity, and systemic civic empowerment, are filtered out of the operational plan (Argento et al., 2025). Because capturing the true success of social inclusion is notoriously difficult, the housing company consistently falls back on superficial customer satisfaction data to validate its institutional performance. This premature narrowing of scope during problem definition (Steps 1 & 2) directly undermines multi-stakeholder coordination in the implementation phase (Steps 3 & 4). It is structurally impossible to execute effective, multi-stakeholder collaboration or mobilise diverse community networks when those actors have been systematically excluded from the initial strategy-finding process.

Instead of an integrated ecosystem, implementation becomes deeply person-dependent, relying at large on the high intrinsic motivation of isolated employees who choose to reach out and manually bridge institutional gaps. Within the specific lens of the Swedish welfare state, this dynamic risks transforming systemic social rights into a form of corporate “charity thinking”. For example, when public housing companies simply pay external entities or private firms to participate in neighbourhood events, they inadvertently bypass local capability-building, displacing organic community agency with managed corporate programming.

This structural limitation is clearly visible when evaluating the concrete external activities implemented in the neighbourhood. While real social inclusion requires that

residents hold a direct, tangible stake in planning decisions (Espino, 2015), Familjebostäder's Phase 1 activities were largely delivered to the area rather than developed with the area. Although representatives from the municipal housing company note an ambition to more deeply involve the local Tenants' Association and the broader resident base during Phase 2, the exact operational mechanisms to achieve this remain entirely undefined. Without explicit structural pathways for co-management, the implementation of youth employment models, homework support, and localised leisure initiatives risks operating as top-down property management tools designed to secure the environment, rather than vehicles for structural socio-economic integration.

6.2.3 The follow-up phase and the temporal paradox of success

The final stage of the UNDP ABD framework, the follow-up and evaluation phase, exposes a profound temporal paradox regarding how urban transformation and "success" are defined. A striking example of this tension is found in Familjebostäder's primary security intervention. It is a year-round, almost 24/7, as operational staff themselves call it, deployment of safety personnel across its residential properties. While this intervention is framed internally as a successful response to immediate tenant anxieties, it raises a fundamental contradiction for long-term evaluation: Can a neighbourhood truly be understood as safe, stable, or socially inclusive if its ongoing functionality requires the continuous, permanent presence of private safety personnel?

By treating the visible presence of safety personnel as a metric of success, the evaluation framework conflates temporary risk mitigation with systemic urban development, revealing a lack of structural indicators for deeper social cohesion. This deficit highlights the reality that meaningful socio-spatial change is a non-linear process requiring an extended temporal horizon. In Bergsjön, a formal collaborative platform called Bergsjön 2031, has since 2011 actively been operating to foster long-term institutional alignment. Evaluating these initiatives from a field-observatory angle confirms that building shared understandings across fragmented organisations requires immense time and that even after intensive joint workshops, some conceptual discrepancies persist among local staff regarding the core objectives of the area work. This goes to show that lasting urban transformation cannot be achieved through short-term, cyclical testing and that if an institutional actor initiates a localised project only to disappear once the initial funding or political attention shifts, the local trust collapses and the progress is undone. Without embedded, long-term testing and iterative follow-up frameworks, ABD remains a series of fragmented, temporary interventions that stabilise neighbourhood stigma rather than dismantling it.

6.3 From productive ambiguity to structural friction

As earlier mentioned, social inclusion functions as a boundary object in the Bergsjön planning process: robust enough to anchor a shared agenda, open enough to accommodate divergent institutional interpretations. This subchapter delves deeper into the question of what happens when that ambiguity meets the hard edges of mandate, resource and accountability. The argument is that the tensions surfacing in and around the Bergsjön process are not communication failures or individual shortcomings. They are structural features of a governance arrangement in which social inclusion goals have expanded beyond the institutional infrastructure designed to deliver them.

6.3.1 The vertical translation chain and the classification problem

The Bergsjön data reveal a clear vertical translation chain: the City of Gothenburg's masterplan generates overarching goals, translated into Framtiden group-level directives, translated into Familjebostäder's management pyramid and finally materialised in the area plan's A3 poster. This is precisely what Czarniawska & Joerges (1996) theorise: ideas must be attached to objects and structures to travel across organisational contexts, and at each step of materialisation, something is left behind. Callon's (1986) concept of problematisation is visible in how the management pyramid frames the problem of area development in a way that positions the housing company as the natural lead actor. It is a legitimate but consequential move that organises the coordination network around what a housing company can do rather than what the stated goals require.

The three-classification-system problem illustrates where this translation dynamic produces its most concrete friction. The Police list, the city statistics and Familjebostäder's AktivBo data each classify the same area using different criteria and different logics. As Andersson & Bråmås (2004) show, area labelling is a resource allocation mechanism: when different systems produce different problem definitions for the same area, resource triggers become misaligned with actual conditions. Zetterberg et al. (2023) reinforce this: different spatial scales and assessment frameworks systematically yield different pictures of the same phenomenon. The resident satisfaction paradox sharpens this argument empirically: Bergsjön residents report the highest AktivBo satisfaction scores in the entire Familjebostäder portfolio, yet the area remains classified as particularly vulnerable by The Police. This classification measures the degree of criminal network influence; the AktivBo data measure how residents experience their everyday environment. These are categorically different phenomena and a budget tied to the former will generate interventions systematically misaligned with the needs captured by the latter.

6.3.2 Mandate overreach and the accountability question

Familjebostäder has expanded well beyond traditional property management into homework support, leisure programming and targeted employment creation – sectors traditionally governed by the welfare state. The observation of that “the roles have shifted” and that high expectations are placed on the municipal housing company for functions that are not formally its task is a structural diagnosis. Troje (2022) documents this expanding hybrid mandate as a general trend in Swedish municipal housing companies; the Bergsjön data show what it looks like at ground level. Quotes such as “Who do you answer to? And who are you being held accountable by?” names the governance gap this creates. The vague municipal council directive that all statutory actors must “help” Familjebostäder without specifying what this operationalises to amplifies the problem: it expands the institutional expectation on the municipal housing company without clarifying the corresponding obligations of anyone else. As Troje (2022) argues, expansion without corresponding accountability design produces exactly the jurisdictional ambiguities that the Bergsjön actors describe.

6.3.3 Coordination without structure and person-dependency

The coordination architecture holding the multi-actor effort together is informal and fragile. The school, central to every actor's definition of social inclusion in the area, has no formal role in the planning process. The school voucher system creates legal barriers to area-specific school investment, making school-housing company collaboration structurally complicated regardless of local will. The Framtiden inter-company network, designed to align group subsidiaries, functions as a meeting place without agenda or binding decisions. The absent tenant association is the most consequential gap. All workshop groups independently confirmed it does not exist at the local level. Its absence removes the structural mechanism through which residents can consistently enter the planning process. The resident-defined need for affordable, self-managed community gathering spaces – a priority that falls outside every formal organisation's mandate – illustrates exactly what the no-man's-land gap produces: a concrete need that is described as landing nowhere because “neither does anyone see it as their responsibility”. As Espino (2015) argues, genuine inclusion requires structural channels through which residents define the problems, not consultative processes that validate pre-formed plans.

Underlying all of these gaps is person-dependency. Across every level of the system, social inclusion work is driven by individuals with exceptionally high intrinsic motivation whose roles lack institutionalised foundations such as formalised handover structures, embedded routines, dedicated resources independent of personal initiative. When key individuals exit, initiatives do not survive as organisational routines but as person-shaped projects requiring reinvention. Troje (2022) identifies this as a structural feature of the hybrid mandate's expansion: the social role has grown faster than the institutional architecture needed to sustain it. Elander & Gustavsson (2019) document the same pattern at the programme level: implementation organised around project-bound issue networks rather than integrated policy communities is inherently vulnerable to individual exit. Familjebostäder's development of area plans revised every three to five years independently of who leads the project is a deliberate response to this fragility although it addresses the continuity of the planning document rather than the continuity of the relational and operational infrastructure that gives the plan its substance.

6.3.4 Asymmetries of stigma, positionality and geographic equity

A final set of tensions concerns the relationship between institutional classifications and lived experience. The Police classification functions as the primary resource trigger in the Bergsjön process, which means the actors defining what constitutes a problem are categorically distinct from those living with the material consequences. As Zhao et al. (2025) observe, ABP risks reinforcing exclusionary norms when transformation is defined by institutional actors rather than by communities experiencing exclusion. The youth labelling dynamic makes this concrete: administrative codification of the neighbourhood as “structurally deficient” creates psychological friction for local young people who internalise this as a statement about their own prospects. The professional debate – whether the population is inherently vulnerable or whether the area has been made vulnerable through systematic political deprivation – is not merely academic: it determines whether interventions aim to change residents or to change the structural conditions that produced the area's situation. Espino's (2015) call to dismantle

structural barriers rather than integrate marginalised groups into existing structures points in the same direction.

Safety and belonging further resist area-level solutions. For residents of peripheral areas, feeling safe is not determined by the physical environment of their own neighbourhood but by who they are and how they are perceived when moving through the wider city. Young people from Bergsjön frequently report greater insecurity in the inner city than at home – met with suspicion, subjected to racialised exclusion that no area plan can address. As Zetterberg et al. (2023) argue, these socio-spatial boundaries are produced at the city and national level, not within the area. An area plan that improves local satisfaction indices while leaving intact the structural conditions that make residents “others” elsewhere in the city has addressed the symptom without the cause. Finally, the selective targeting logic of The Police classification creates geographic asymmetry: areas on the list receive resources; structurally similar areas that are not on the list fall outside resource allocation entirely. This triggers competition between neighbourhoods facing the same challenges and making equitable city-wide prioritisation structurally impossible within the current design.

7 Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter synthesises the empirical and theoretical findings of the thesis, answers the research questions, identifies the study's contributions to the fields of urban governance and DCPM, and outlines its boundaries alongside directions for future research. It closes with strategic recommendations for practice, drawn from the analysis of the Bergsjön pilot.

7.1 Answering the research questions

In the Bergsjön pilot, social inclusion is operationalised through a layered translation process across strategic, programme and operational levels. As the concept travels it is progressively narrowed and reshaped by mandate boundaries, existing performance frameworks and resource constraints, so that the most tractable dimensions – housing management, service quality and safety – are made actionable while harder-to-measure aspects, including power, belonging and structural integration, remain largely rhetorical. Challenges and tensions around roles, mandates and resources arise as these translated goals encounter a governance set-up in which expectations placed on the housing company exceed its formal authority, key actors are only loosely connected through informal coordination and long-term commitments are vulnerable to shifts in group-level and political priorities.

Stakeholders understand social inclusion differently, in ways that reflect their institutional mandates, accountability structures and external pressures rather than a shared substantive definition. The municipal housing company operationalises inclusion primarily as satisfied tenants and well-managed housing; other actors emphasise belonging, equal service delivery, structural power or crime reduction. These divergent interpretations shape the planning process in two ways: the police classification and the company's internal satisfaction indices privilege certain framings over others before formal planning begins and the relative absence of resident voices from the framing process means that the problem definitions embedded in the roadmap are generated by professionals rather than by those whose inclusion is at stake.

The municipal housing company translates broad social inclusion goals into practice through a sequence of internal negotiation, workshop-based knowledge gathering and programme design: strategic ambitions are broken down into measurable targets, area priorities and operational activities calibrated to the company's mandate and resources. This translation is grounded in both staff knowledge and tenant satisfaction data and has produced sustained improvements in core housing management dimensions such as security, responsiveness and building quality over an extended period. The translation is nonetheless partial: it captures what the company can directly control while leaving interdependent goals that depend on schools, social services and civil society actors weakly specified and weakly coordinated, so that these goals persist as strategic intentions without corresponding operational programmes.

Tensions around roles, mandates and resources arise through a consistent mechanism: expectations placed on the municipal housing company expand beyond its formal authority, coordination rests on informal relationships rather than structural governance arrangements and commitments made at strategic level are not always matched by capacity or mandate at operational level. Together they reveal that effective area-based management requires more than a well-crafted plan: it depends on honest mandate

mapping, structural coordination mechanisms that survive changes in personnel and political priorities and a long-term commitment architecture that aligns what is asked, what is resourced and what is formally shared across actors.

7.2 Research contributions

The thesis offers an in-depth qualitative account of an area-based planning process led by a municipal housing company in a Swedish welfare-state context, focusing on the early stages when social inclusion ambitions are translated into priorities, organisational arrangements and concrete activities. It provides process-level evidence of how a contested concept travels – and is transformed – across multiple organisational levels in a single case study.

The study adds empirical specificity to largely conceptual debates on translation, operationalisation and boundary objects in collaborative governance. It shows concretely how social inclusion is reinterpreted across strategic, programme and operational levels and how this process narrows and reshapes the agenda under mandate and resource constraints; contributing to the literature on social sustainability as a bridging concept in Swedish urban planning and to broader debates on why area-based initiatives struggle to move beyond rhetoric.

The thesis demonstrates that managing social inclusion goals in collaborative, multi-actor area development is a project management problem as much as an urban planning problem. The case surfaces mandate–capacity misalignment, coordination gaps, role ambiguity and fragile long-term commitment as structural features of the task rather than incidental implementation failures – features that are directly recognisable in complex construction and infrastructure projects. This contribution is deliberately modest in scope: it is specific to early-phase, municipal-housing-company-led pilots in a Swedish municipal housing context and is offered as an analytical lens rather than a universal model.

7.3 Recommendations for practice

The tensions analysed in this thesis are produced by a governance design in which social inclusion goals are formulated at a generality no single actor can operationalise, assigned to a lead organisation whose mandate is narrower than the goals require and delivered through coordination that is informal, person-dependent and fragile under resource pressure. Four conditions emerge from the analysis as prerequisites for more effective area-based management.

- 1 *Mandate transparency at goal setting.* Planning documents must name explicitly what the lead organisation can deliver within its own mandate, what requires formal coordination with named partners and what lies beyond reach without governance changes above the district level. Leaving this implicit generates overextension and disappointment rather than ambition.
- 2 *Structural rather than relational coordination.* Roles, information flows and joint decision-making procedures must be explicit enough to survive changes in personnel, funding cycles and political priorities. Resident voice in particular must be embedded through formal rather than purely consultative mechanisms.

- 3 *Long-term commitment architecture.* The continuity that social inclusion work requires cannot rest on individual motivation or single programme cycles. It requires multi-year operational agreements, rolling funding and the deliberate embedding of practices into organisational routines that outlast the individuals who created them.
- 4 *Alignment between classification criteria and organisational goals.* A resource allocation logic tied to a crime-based classification that the housing company cannot influence, and that measures something categorically different from tenant experience and resident agency, will systematically generate misaligned interventions. Correcting this misalignment is a decision above the level of any single municipal housing company, but it is the condition on which the coherence of the entire area-based planning logic ultimately depends.

7.4 Limitations and future research

The study is a single qualitative case anchored in one neighbourhood and one municipal housing company; findings are analytically generalisable rather than statistically generalisable. It is temporally bounded, capturing the early planning and initial implementation stages; longer-term outcomes such as changes in segregation, safety or residents' sense of belonging lie beyond its scope. External actor material is limited to three interviews, making findings about the wider stakeholder landscape indicative rather than comprehensive. Access was shaped by the housing company's gatekeeping role which enabled rich process insight but centres organisational rather than political or market perspectives. Resident voices are not systematically included; the thesis examines how social inclusion is framed and operationalised from the organisational side without a direct account of how residents experience these efforts.

A longitudinal follow-up tracking the Bergsjön roadmap over time would allow examination of what is actually implemented, how the tensions identified here evolve and whether coordination and conceptual innovations become institutionalised or fade. Comparative studies of other municipal housing companies in Sweden or the Nordic countries could identify patterns and variations in governance models, mandate configurations and coordination structures. Resident-centred studies in Bergsjön and comparable areas would provide the complementary perspective most conspicuously absent here – how social inclusion is experienced at ground level and where organisational priorities diverge from residents' own needs. Finally, focused research on formal and semi-formal coordination arrangements such as joint boards, shared performance targets, long-term partnership agreements would help identify under what conditions organisations choose to invest in the structural coordination that this thesis shows is currently missing.

8 References

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