

# Social learning promotes collaborative action in community supported agriculture

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## Background

- Community supported agriculture is an approach to community based resource management that aims to deliver a sustainable approach to agricultural resource management, emphasising the cultivation of both agricultural and community assets.
- Members of a community, will have diverse needs, perceptions and capabilities, meaning plans that would be suitable for some might not be to others.
- The needs of the community and the agricultural resources they will utilise are subject to diverse changes as time progresses and new problems arise (Armitage et al. 2009).
- Understanding and communicating the different qualities of the community and how these will effect outcomes is important to consider when we organise, design and manage a successful and sustainable CSA.
- These characteristics point to the need for management approaches that can deal with the complexity and dynamism that will be encountered. (Pauca-Caceres et al. 2016, Pretty 1995)
- Using participatory methodologies can improve communication between members and increase the resilience of CSA. Lowering the cost of cooperation. (Pretty 2003)
- Methodologies help move focus from problems and onto process (Pauca-Caceres et al. 2016, Pretty 1995)

## Summary

- The defined participatory approach helped participants decide on relevant and appropriate action that reflected their capabilities as stakeholders.
- The methodology allowed some participants to attain all stages of Kolb's (1984) learning cycle
- The structure given by soft systems methodology promoted positive interactions and outcomes including:
  - Inclusive interactions
  - Structured communication
  - Constructive dialogue
  - Critical reflection
  - Learning
  - Community relationships
  - Social atmosphere
  - Empowerment (Innovations)
- Positive interactions and outcomes were limited by:
  - Intermittent attendance
  - Dominance
  - Disillusionment
  - Reluctance to organise and act
  - My own inexperience
  - Length of project engagement
- The investigation was limited to one cycle; further cycles are likely to continue to move participant focus from technical onto organisational and managerial aspects where the ability to know and act can be altered.

## Process (diagram 2)

Using Soft Systems Methodology (Checkland & Poulter 2006) participants were lead through an experiential learning cycle, the four key stages include:

- Analysing the existing problematic situation
- Making models using a diagramming technique known as rich picturing
- Engaging in a structured dialogue about ideas for change
- Taking action upon defined ideas

A structured dialogue was held based around the information gathered from two workshop events.

The aim for the structured dialogue was to develop plans to move the project forward.

Defined action took place based upon the action plan created

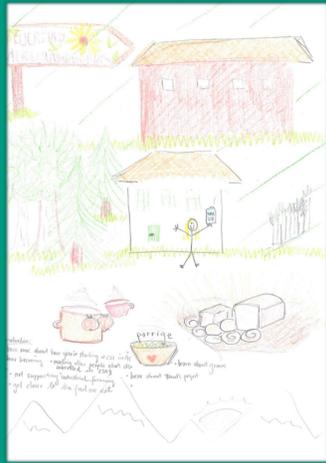
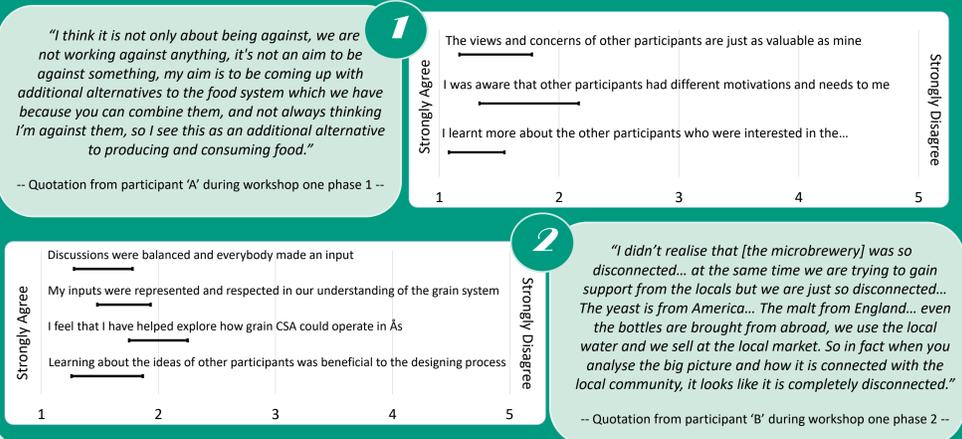


Figure 1. Participant portrait

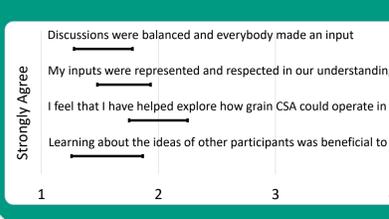
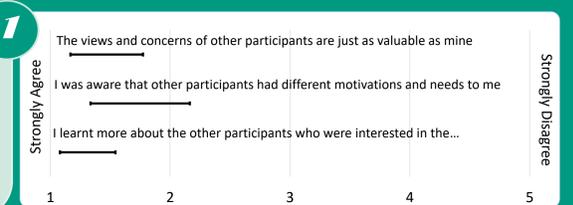
## Results

Moving from Stage 1-4 (diagram 2), prominent examples are given when participants demonstrated they had attained the corresponding learning outcomes of Kolb's learning cycle. These instances, and the efficacy of workshop processes are supported quantitative data from workshop evaluation surveys. (Likert scale 1-5)



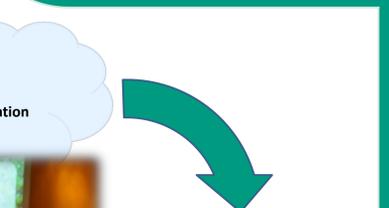
"I think it is not only about being against, we are not working against anything, it's not an aim to be against something, my aim is to be coming up with additional alternatives to the food system which we have because you can combine them, and not always thinking I'm against them, so I see this as an additional alternative to producing and consuming food."

-- Quotation from participant 'A' during workshop one phase 1 --



"I didn't realise that [the microbrewery] was so disconnected... at the same time we are trying to gain support from the locals but we are just so disconnected... The yeast is from America... The malt from England... even the bottles are brought from abroad, we use the local water and we sell at the local market. So in fact when you analyse the big picture and how it is connected with the local community, it looks like it is completely disconnected."

-- Quotation from participant 'B' during workshop one phase 2 --



"Our Ideas start with the people, our main goal was to try and involve as many people as possible. Ås has a really changeable community, so we have to involve the part of the community that is more stable here... We like the idea of letting people enter the process at any step they have most interest in, so there might be people who are interested in the farming part, some people may just be interested in buying the final product because they don't have time to participate."

-- Quotation from participant 'C' during workshop two, phase 3-4 --

Following a meeting which brought together all ideas from the previous two workshops participants were able to debate and have a dialogue around changes that were feasible given the resources available and the capabilities of individuals involved. The result was a plan to move the project forward, where a participant took strong initiative to create action and motivate others: "We have a great opportunity at the upcoming Green Festival in Ås. It takes place on the 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> of September. It will give us a chance to involve residences of Ås, local farmers, and promote any events we want to hold. To continue we need a core group who are willing to take on some responsibilities for the rest of the year."

**Asked why this individual had taken responsibility and took a proactive approach; the response demonstrated empowerment and the realisation that social attitudes had to be changed:**

"People are always looking for leadership, rather than taking action into their own hands. It's just the way we are taught to act in society."

-- Quotations from Participant 'D' during structured dialogue phase 4 --



## References

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Figure 3. Participant portraits