VGTU

LEIDYKLA
TECHNIKA

OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS – HOW IT IS ORGANISED AND WHY

Therese LINDGREN [1] **and Pål CASTELL** [2] ✉

[1] *Department of Landscape Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU),*
   P.O. Box 66, SE-23053 Alnarp, Sweden
   E-mail: therese.lindgren@ltj.slu.se; tel: +46(0)40 415148

[2] *Department of Architecture, Chalmers University of Technology, Sven Hultins gata 6,*
   SE-41296 Göteborg, Sweden
   E-mail: castell@chalmers.se; tel: +46(0)31 772 23 31

ABSTRACT. Housing companies manage a considerable proportion of urban open green space in Sweden. This article explores how 62 Swedish housing companies, municipal and private, organise their open space maintenance and the reasons behind organisational structure. Here, *organisational structure* covers three aspects of open space maintenance: (1) whether performed in-house or by a contractor, (2) whether performed by local managers or circulating teams, and (3) whether and how residents are involved in management. The organisational structures varied widely among the housing companies studied. Mixed structures were common. Formal resident involvement processes were almost only found in municipally owned areas with local managers. The arguments could be derived from two general management approaches, prioritising either customer relations more or economic efficiency. The conclusion was that management approach might be important in choosing organisational structure.

KEYWORDS: Green open space; Maintenance; Organisational structure; Rental housing; Resident involvement

1. INTRODUCTION

The maintenance of urban green spaces concerns not only local park departments, but also to a large extent housing companies. More than one-third of dwellings in Sweden are rental apartments (SABO, 2007) and the total amount of open green spaces that belong to these houses was estimated to total 28,000 hectares 20 years ago (Bucht and Persson, 1987), which is a considerable proportion of Swedish urban green space. The total area of constructed parks under municipal management has been calculated to be about the same: 27,400 hectares (Svenska Kommunförbundet, 1997). This makes housing companies important actors in the task of providing good quality green open spaces for urban residents. For tenants, these spaces are used on an everyday basis as part of their home.

Organisational structures and corporative management models have been issues for research for a long time, including those in housing organisations. However, very little attention has been given to the management and organisation of open space maintenance. There are many different opinions among housing

companies on how such maintenance should be organised. In this article we explore how a number of Swedish housing companies organise their open space maintenance and what arguments they give for the organisational structure they have chosen.

1.1. Current trends in open space management in Swedish housing companies

According to the Swedish Association of Municipal Housing Companies (SABO), there are approximately 4.2 million dwellings in Sweden, of which 42% are privately owned homes, 18% cooperatives, 17% privately owned rental apartments and 22% municipal rental apartments (SABO, 2007). According to Turner (1999), the traditional system with a generally high standard of housing is in transition to a more market-orientated system with growing socio-economic differentiation. Turner and Whitehead (2002) mean that Swedish municipal housing companies went through dramatic changes in the 1990s, mainly due to reduced governmental subsidies. Hansson and Nilsson-Hellström (1993) and Johansson (1998) mean that the organisation of open space maintenance has also been affected and increasingly diversified. However, this field is far from thoroughly explored and most previous studies have only concerned municipal/public housing. The literature points at three tendencies among housing companies over the past two decades that can have influenced their organisational structure in different directions: (1) outsourcing of maintenance services; (2) customer orientation; and (3) a growing interest in self-management and other forms of resident involvement. These tendencies are described more closely below.

One crucial tendency in the rental housing sector is the *outsourcing* of maintenance tasks. In some cases housing companies purchase all property management from another company, which in turn can use contractors for certain maintenance tasks (see Castell, 2005). In other cases only some parts of property management, such as open space maintenance, are purchased from another company. Outsourcing has been a major trend in housing management in Sweden and other countries, and the central motive discussed has been to increase economic efficiency (see e.g. Sirmans et al., 1999; Priemus et al., 1999; Saugeres and Clapham, 1999; Becker et al., 2001; Yik and Lai, 2005). In the United Kingdom, the public housing sector has even been forced into outsourcing from central government through Compulsory Competitive Tendering (Saugeres and Clapham, 1999). For the countries within the EU, general directives on the procurement process complement national legal systems, such as the public procurement act (LOU) in Sweden (see Ohno and Harada (2006) for an international comparison). A shared problem among several countries is that the legal system for procurement unfortunately often leads to contractors being chosen mainly on an economic basis, with less attention to quality and service issues (Zavadskas and Vilutienė, 2006; see also Becker et al., 2001). In the Netherlands, many non-profit housing associations have turned to performance-based maintenance partnerships, where the contractor is consulted not only for the maintenance tasks, but also for planning and strategic development (Straub and van Mossel, 2007).

A second major tendency is the change from a technical property orientation to a *customer orientation* in housing management (see e.g. Johansson, 1998; Högberg and Högberg, 2000; Blomé, 2006). Companies that emphasise their customer orientation place a higher priority on personal relations with tenants and on issues relating to the social environment in residential areas. Customer orientation also seems to be a general trend in the housing management sector in the United Kingdom (see e.g. Spink, 1998; Clapham et al., 2000). This tendency has

led to changes in the overall organisational structure in many companies. It has opened the way for more differentiated ways of organising maintenance tasks among Swedish municipal housing companies (Johansson, 1998), as well as in the European housing market as a whole (Priemus et al., 1999). One common implication of this customer orientation has been a changeover from a centralised to a more decentralised decision chain, giving higher responsibilities to management staff directly involved with the daily practical maintenance work. It has become more popular to have local area-based managers and their role has changed. The 'new' local manager role differs from the 'traditional' in having much wider responsibilities, e.g. for finances and in particular for contacts with tenants (Johansson, 1998; also compare Clapham et al., 2000). According to Johansson (1998), this change of orientation and organisational structure in Sweden has been led primarily by SABO, i.e. by the public housing companies.

A third tendency is the seemingly growing interest in *self-management*, i.e. when residents are involved in open space management and take over maintenance tasks themselves. Since the mid-1990s in particular, a number of self-management projects have been initiated. Such projects have gained considerable attention among housing companies and tenants' organisations. This tendency is partly in line with the interest in customer relations and social issues described above, but it is also frequently connected with other motives, such as revitalisation of declining urban areas (see e.g. Alfredsson and Cars, 1996; Delshammar, 2005), initiating grassroots democracy (see e.g. Bengtsson et al., 2003) and increasing environmental awareness (see e.g. Ericsson, 2002). Moreover, self-management has been promoted in government reports as a means of developing democracy (see e.g. Swedish Government, 1997, 2000). In other countries, small and larger programmes supporting resident involvement in open space management have been reported to be very successful (see e.g. Hawtin, 1998; Kurtz, 2001; Aalbers et al., 2002; Bartolomei et al., 2003; Glover et al., 2005). However, there have also been some critical voices suggesting that resident management is not necessarily accompanied by empowerment, and that it may be viewed as a way of housing companies escaping their responsibilities (see e.g. Peterman, 1996). With respect to previous research on resident involvement in open space management in residential areas, it could be claimed that the diversity and complexity of the issue have to a large extent been neglected. Studies have usually focused on rather well-organised and well-established self-management groups, ignoring numerous processes that are of a more spontaneous and/or temporary character (Castell, 2005, 2006). Moreover, such processes have not been mapped out systematically and they have not been related to the characteristics and motives of the housing companies.

To sum up, previous research has brought some clarity regarding tendencies affecting the organisation of open space management within housing companies and how this has developed over time. However, it has not provided knowledge on the frequency and distribution of different organisational structures, nor have the arguments for the choice of organisational structure been studied specifically. To our knowledge, this study is the first to actually map out the frequency and distribution of different organisational structures among housing companies, to study their motives and to analyse how these relate to different management approaches.

1.2. Design and implementation of the study

The organisational structures of housing companies were mapped out through a series of telephone interviews with managers and directors of 62 housing companies, located in the province of Skåne and in the city of Göteborg
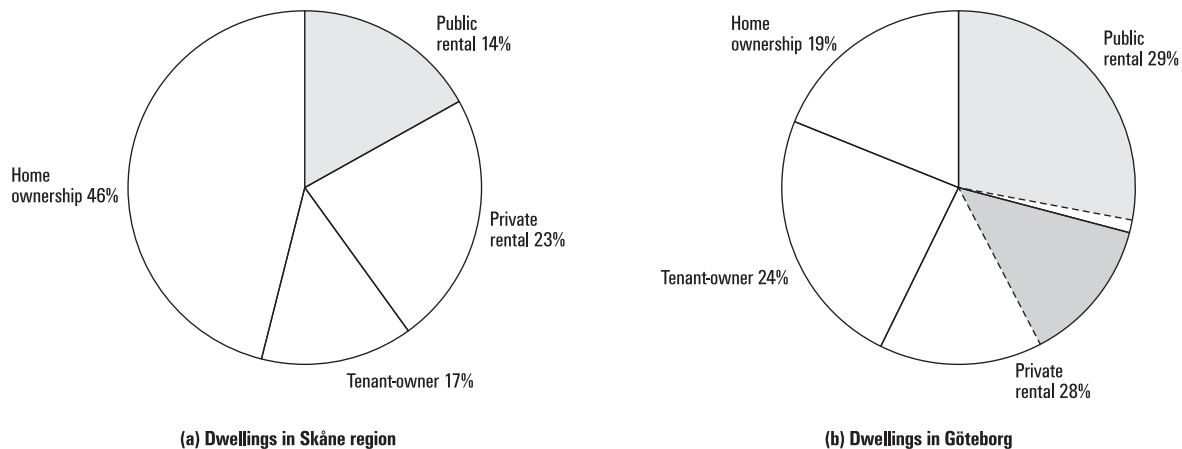
Figure 1. Total dwelling stocks in (a) the Skåne region and (b) Göteborg, divided into four categories Coloured parts are included in the survey

in Sweden. The sample reflected the changing conditions of a region with a variety of municipalities: small to medium; rural and urban; in decline and in growth. It also included two larger cities (Göteborg with more than half a million inhabitants and Malmö with almost 300 000), coping with rapid expansion and transition from a manufacturing to knowledge economy, as well as socio-economic segregation and stigmatisation of certain residential areas. The 62 companies included all members of SABO[1] in the region of Skåne and all companies – municipal and private – owning or managing at least 200 apartments in Göteborg. This amounted to almost 40% of the total number of rental apartments in Skåne and 75% of those in Göteborg, see Figure 1.

In the interviews, one or several employees (directors, managers and/or operational staff, depending on company size and structure) of each company were asked about how open space management is organised and about the benefits and disadvantages of different organisational structures. They were also asked whether there were any examples

of self-management or other forms of resident involvement in their housing areas, and how the company viewed such initiatives. Detailed notes were taken during these telephone interviews. The reason for not recording and transcribing the interviews in full was that we believed that recording would have risked making interviewees more reluctant to provide information and would probably even have discouraged some from participating. Instead, we attempted to include all companies listed in the survey and obtain information under rather relaxed circumstances. Each interview lasted for about 10-60 minutes. The information went through several steps of analysis, using spreadsheets. Each company's organisational structure was categorised in accordance with a model described in section two. Data on company size, ownership and geographical location were used to analyse the frequency and distribution of different organisational structures. All arguments were then listed, rearranged and grouped according to the kind of organisational structure they supported, after which different interpretations and possible thematisations were elaborated and discussed within the research team. These results can be seen in the last section of the paper.

---

[1] 90% of all Swedish municipal housing companies are members of SABO (SABO, 2007).
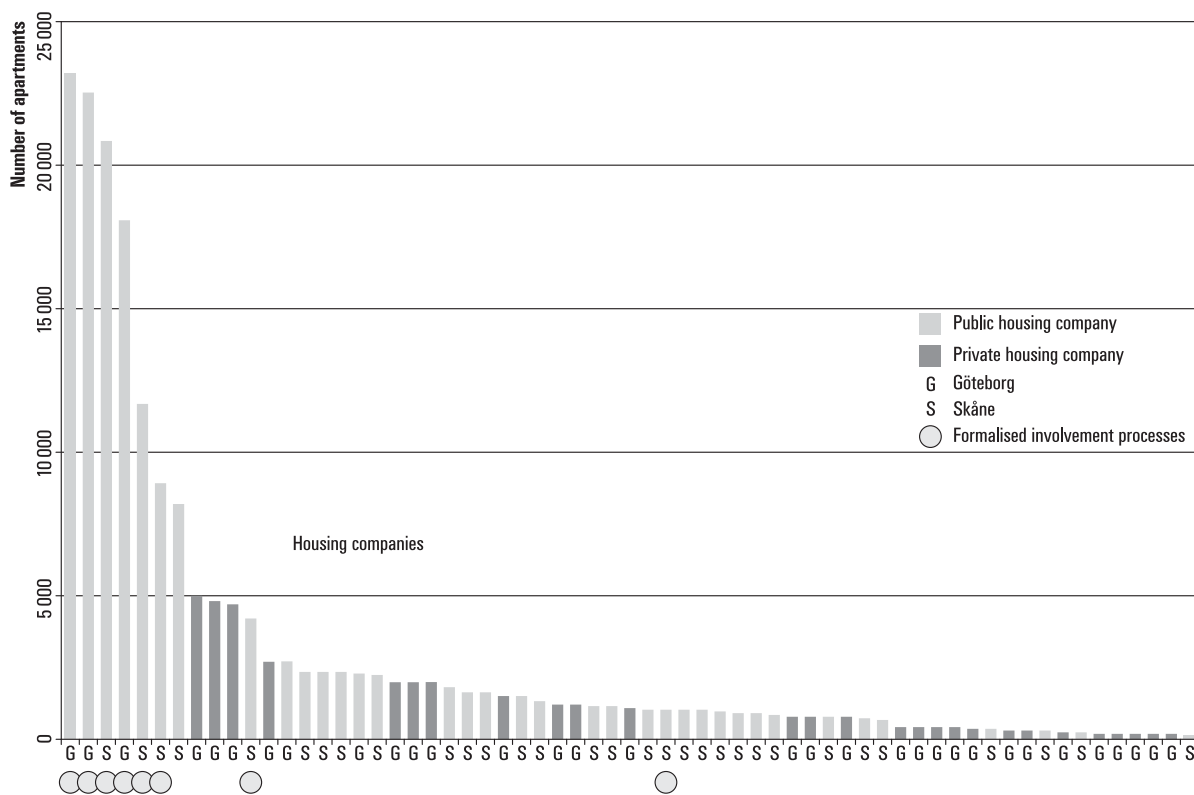
1.2.1. About the companies in the survey

Göteborg's five municipal housing companies work in the same corporate group and together they own about half the city's 139,000 rental apartments. The two smallest companies are organised to take care of one suburban district each. The other three each manage around 20,000 apartments, spread around the city. The largest municipal housing company in the Skåne region is of a similar size, while the smallest only has 130 dwellings to manage. The three largest private companies in Göteborg manage about 5,000 apartments each (although two of these have since amalgamated into one company that owns almost 10,000 apartments in Göteborg). As can be seen in Figure 2, the number of individual apartments per company varies from about 3,000 down to below 200.

1.2.2. Model of organisational structures

Johansson (1998) has pointed out that there is a strong differentiation among housing companies in the organisation of work. However, little has been done to conceptualise these differences and there have been no attempts to map them out. In this paper, *organisational structure* is used as a concept for how housing companies organise their open space maintenance. It covers three aspects:

(1) Whether the maintenance is carried out by in-house staff or by an external contractor;

Figure 2. Housing companies in the survey, each represented by a bar in the diagram, the length indicating the number of apartments owned. Colours indicate if publicly or privately owned, letters G and S at the bottom indicate which region, and dots indicate if there are examples of formalised involvement processes within the company.

(2) Whether there are locally based maintenance staff or a more centralised organisation with teams circulating between several areas;

(3) Whether or not there are examples of self-management or other forms of resident involvement.

These three aspects reflect the three tendencies in the Swedish housing market outlined in the introduction. The first aspect relates to a commonly described concern in practice – whether it is better to carry out the maintenance work within the company or contract it in from a separate firm. This has been discussed in relation to housing management previously (see e.g. Sirmans et al., 1999; Persson, 2005; Blomé, 2006). This aspect roughly describes the formal relations of the maintenance organisation but it gives little information on how the maintenance work is structured and carried out. It also provides no information on how responsibilities are allocated among the management and maintenance staff. These issues are better covered by the second aspect, which describes the geographical and task-wise distribution of responsibilities among the staff. It concerns levels of specialisation and decentralisation in the organisation. The third aspect included in the framework is the occurrence and forms of resident involvement in open space maintenance. Resident involvement processes are perhaps an area-based phenomenon rather than a part of a company's organisational structure, as they depend on much more than a strategic decision in the executive board of the company. Most obviously, they depend on the residents' will and engagement. However, it has been shown that it is not unusual for housing companies to have an explicit strategy to promote and support involvement initiatives and even actively initiate such processes (as the case reported in Lindgren, 2005).

2. THE PRACTICE OF DIFFERENT ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES

This section further describes the three main aspects of organisational structure, drawing on the empirical findings. It also provides a presentation of the frequency and distribution of different organisational structures among the companies studied and relates it to the size of the company and whether it is private or public.

2.1. (1) In-house and contractor management

The first aspect of the organisational structure is whether the maintenance tasks are performed within the housing company's own organisation or outsourced to a contractor. When the housing company's own employees perform the tasks, this is referred to here as *in-house* management[2]. The opposite situation, *contractor* management[3], is when maintenance tasks, or property management as a whole, are performed by staff from a firm of contractors. This is commonly known as outsourcing, even though the strict definition of this term is debated (see e.g. Bhagwati et al., 2004).

A mixture of in-house and contractor management can be used within the same housing company. For example, some of the companies studied had their own staff managing some housing areas and contractors managing other areas. Another common mixed form was when companies had their own staff, but hired contractors for certain tasks, such as lawn-mowing or hedge-trimming. Altogether, this gives rise to four categories: (1) in-house management, (2) in-house management but contractor

---

[2] In-house management, as used here, corresponds to what e.g. Sirmans et al. (1999) denote 'own management'.

[3] Contractor management, as used here, corresponds to what e.g. Sirmans et al. (1999) denote 'third-party management.

for certain areas, (3) in-house management but contractor for certain tasks, and (4) contractor management.

The survey revealed that there was a relatively even distribution between in-house management (24 companies) and contractor management (19). It was also common to have in-house management combined with contractors for certain tasks (15). It was less frequent to have contractors only in certain areas (4). There was no obvious connection between company size and in-house or contractor management (see Figure 3). Outsourcing was possibly the most common option for medium-sized companies, as in the size range 800-2000 apartments, 50% of companies used contractors for all their open space maintenance work, while the figures for the smaller and larger companies were 19% and 17% respectively. There was no apparent difference between municipal and private housing companies in this regard.

2.2. (2) Local managers and circulating teams

The second aspect is whether there are locally based maintenance staff or a more centralised organisation with teams circulating between several areas. The way of organising the management into rather decentralised, small and locally based units is here referred to as the *local manager* system[4]. The local manager (in Swedish often named *husvärd* or *bovärd*) is a representative of the housing company or the contractor who has full responsibility for a smaller area (normally 200 to 400 apartments). As the local managers work in the local area, they can be addressed face-to-face for different kinds of concerns by the tenants. The role of the local manager can vary. In some companies in the study, this role focused more on social issues and customer relations. In other cases the role was mostly technical, to plan and perform the maintenance tasks. Some companies had local area offices open for the residents to visit. Other companies instead had a central office for customer services. It was also common to have combinations of local area offices and central customer service.

Circulating teams of maintenance staff move around during the season between different housing areas[5]. This is a more centralised type of organisation. The staff are not permanently present in one area but visit the areas with various frequencies to carry out their tasks. A circulating team system does not necessarily imply that the management units are larger in terms of number of apartments than when there are local managers. Small housing companies that have the same number of apartments as the common local manager area may still use the circulating team option if the houses are spread out and do not form a coherent area unit. Having local managers would not be a relevant alternative for these companies since the units would be too small and therefore too costly to maintain.

Some companies in the study mixed local managers and circulating teams. One way of mixing was to have local managers in some areas and circulating teams in others. Another was that local managers took care of certain tasks and circulating teams took on other tasks in the same area. Sometimes the local staff performed regular everyday tasks, such as cleaning of open spaces, while the circulating teams mowed grass or did tasks demanding more specialised skills, such as tree-cutting.

More companies (although generally smaller in size) relied only on circulating teams (30 companies) than relied only on local managers (17 companies). Combinations were also com-

---

[4] The local manager system is comparable with what Sommerville and Steele (1999) define as the *building management model*.

[5] The circulating team system is more in line with what Sommerville and Steele (1999) call the area management model.

mon – about one-quarter (15) of the companies used both local managers and circulating teams. There appeared to be some differences between private and municipal companies (see Figure 3). Local managers, often in combination with in-house management, were more common among municipal housing companies, while circulating teams were more typical of private companies. Local managers dominated among larger municipal companies (with 8,000 apartments or more), while among the smallest companies (with 500 apartments or less), circulating teams were standard. This may be explained by the fact that most small companies had their properties spread out and not in coherent areas of appropriate size for a local manager unit.

2.3. (3) Self-management and other forms of resident involvement

The third tendency mentioned in the introduction was the interest in self-management, which has led to a number of local initiatives involving residents in open space maintenance. There are many diverse forms of resident involvement in open space maintenance. They range from informal, small-scale individual initiatives to thoroughly organised groups with full control over the entire management process. Regarding the responsibility and autonomy of resident involvement, three main types can be distinguished, as listed in Table 1.

Each of these three types can have sub-categories depending on the kind of compensation the residents receive and whether or not there are formal arrangements such as contracts between the group and the housing company (Castell, 2006).

The study revealed that there were a limited number of self-management processes of the high autonomy kind and likewise of the supervised self-management kind (see Figure 3). As there was a high uncertainty regarding the number of informal involvement processes

**Table 1.** Types of resident involvement[6] (drawn from Castell, 2006)

A	Self-management	High autonomy and comprehensive responsibility for maintenance tasks
B	Supervised self-management	Comprehensive responsibilities but lower level of autonomy
C	Garden group	Only complementing the housing company's default maintenance of the yard

(those processes were often not recognised by the central management staff), only formalised processes are included in the figures.

It was difficult to identify any specific area conditions that are prerequisites for or favourable for the presence of formal resident involvement processes. The areas where involvement processes existed showed a great variety in terms of building age and spatial configuration of the houses, as well as socio-economic indicators such as demographic structure, unemployment, income levels, ethnic distribution, education levels, share of households receiving social benefits, etc. (see Castell, 2005). One clear pattern, however, was that formal resident involvement processes existed exclusively in areas managed by municipal housing companies. Possible reasons for this are: (a) that the municipal companies in general are large, and that size is important for the ability to initiate and support different kind of local processes; (b) that there is a long tradition of collaboration between the municipal housing companies and the Union of Tenants, a collaboration that has resulted in central and local agreements

---

[6] Compared with to the typology of landlord-tenant agreements suggested by Somerville and Steele (1999), the self-management processes identified exemplify *cooperative tenant management*, while the processes of supervised self-management and garden groups are more of *partnerships*.
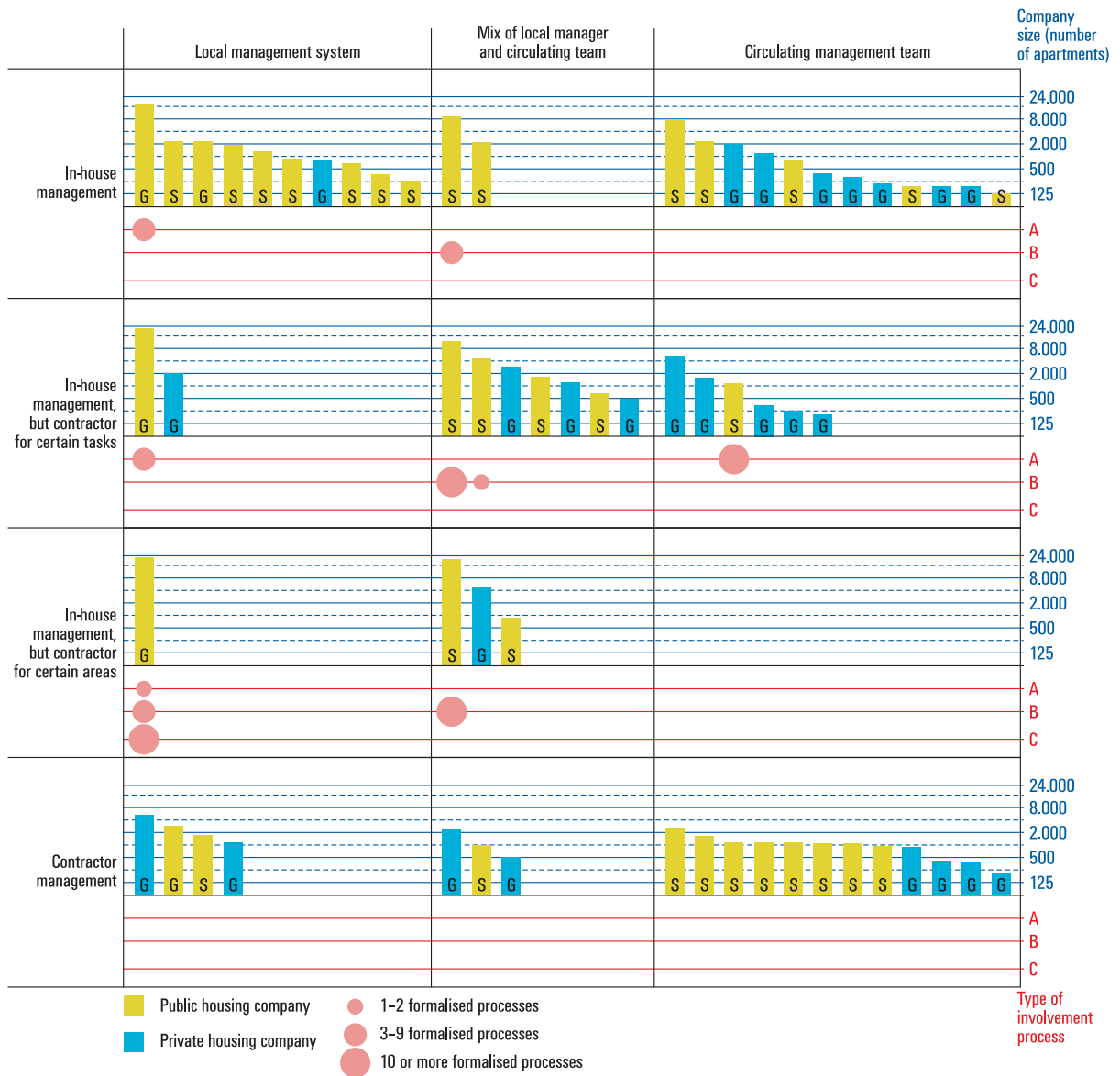
Figure 3. Summary of the number of companies in different categories
Bar height indicates the size of each company (logarithmic scale). Bar colour indicates public or private ownership. Letters on bars indicate location (S = Skåne; G = Göteborg). The red circles represent where examples of formalised self-management processes are found. A: Self-management; B: Supervised self-management; C: Garden group (see Castell, 2006).

on resident influence; and (c) that municipal housing companies, at least traditionally, have often had political commitments to social responsibility inscribed in their objectives.

Another finding was that formal resident involvement processes mainly appeared in companies with local manager systems. This supports what previous case studies have suggested – that local managers often play a crucial role in initiating and facilitating local involvement processes (see e.g. Alfredsson and Cars, 1996; Bengtsson et al., 2003).

3. ARGUMENTS BEHIND CHOICE OF ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

In this section, arguments for choosing certain organisational structures are presented, based on the interviews with directors, managers and maintenance staff.

3.1. In-house – for customer relations and control

Common arguments for in-house management were that it matters for company image and customer relations. One interviewee described it as a safety issue for the residents that the on-site staff wear the company brand on their working clothes. Another saw it as trust-building that there is continuity and clarity in contacts with tenants. Several other arguments can be associated with the possibility to control the management process. A very concrete example, which several companies brought up, was the advantage of being able to redirect the maintenance staff when an unforeseen situation occurs. It was reported that it is hard to demand other duties from a contractor than those defined in advance in the contract, but in-house staff can easily be given new tasks if necessary. Another advantage mentioned is that the decision-making chain is shorter with in-house operational staff working directly for the management executives. This may give a faster response to new directives. When it comes to economics, it was debatable whether in-house management is cheaper or more expensive than outsourcing. Some advocates of in-house management claimed that it is cost-neutral or even cheaper when the benefits of better control are included. These interviewees also believe that it gives better incentives for development of long-term cost-saving improvements, e.g. by changing the vegetation present or redesigning the area. Others stated that it is very difficult to calculate and predict the costs of an in-house management system.

Another disadvantage mentioned with in-house management is the problem of seasonal variations in workload. This has to be resolved by inventing a lot of tasks for staff during the winter or by employing seasonal workers during the summer.

To sum up, the main arguments for in-house management were that it gave good customer relations, a trustworthy image and a high degree of control of the management process. Opinion differed on whether it was economically efficient or not. The main challenge seemed to be how to deal with the seasonal variations in workload.

3.2. Contractor – for cost-effectiveness and calculability

The main arguments for outsourcing concerned saving money in different ways. One was that some costly investments could be avoided, according to some of the companies. For example, they did not have to buy machines for specialised tasks, e.g. lawn-mowing. Another saving mentioned was that that some employer obligations could be avoided. Instead, the contractor bears the costs and risks of employing the operational staff. Moreover, the task specialisation of the contractor may make it more cost-effective than in-house management, as some of the companies had concluded. According to some interviewees, the main disadvantage with outsourcing is associated with the contracting process. One problem is the difficulties involved in formulating good measurable criteria for open space quality. This was said to need high expertise and to be quite time-consuming. In-house advocates claimed that there is a clear pattern that money goes before quality in this process. Some complained over the legal system where public institutions, such as municipal housing companies, have to choose the cheapest tender if several meet their defined criteria

in the procurement process [7]. One interviewee claimed that a great advantage with contractors is that the client knows in advance what they are getting and exactly what it costs. Another interviewee was frustrated over the variable quality and the difficulties in knowing in advance what will be provided. It was also said that with a contractor, the staff could not be given new tasks outside the contract without extra payment being demanded. In contradiction to the lack of control argument, however, one manager argued that it is easier to put pressure on a contractor to get something done than to put pressure on in-house staff.

To sum up, cost-effectiveness was the main argument for choosing a contractor. Another argument was the avoidance of employer obligations. It was disputed whether contract work improved calculability, whether it was more flexible and how it affected the quality. The main challenge was clearly the contracting process, lack of expertise within the companies and the legal system, said to lead to low costs but poor quality. See Table 2.

3.3. Local manager – for personal contacts with tenants

Making closer contacts and being well-known among the tenants were the main motive for having local managers. The benefit with this, according to some interviewees, is that tenants know who is in charge with local manager and thereby they can easily address him/her over the telephone or by walking down to the local area office if such exists. Common arguments for having local managers were thus that it is trust-building and that it gives good service opportunities for the residents. One company that had changed to circulating teams said that this was not popular, since the tenants had been very satisfied with the local managers. Likewise, to be locally situated was said to be positive for the working situation of the operational staff. Some of the local managers interviewed expressed their content at being well-known and having frequent personal contacts with the residents. A couple of the housing companies also saw an advantage in having local managers as regards tenants'

Table 2. Summary of arguments for and against in-house and contractor management

	In-house	Contractor
Benefits	Continuity and clarity in contacts with tenants is trust-building	Avoids costly investments in own machines
	Important for the company's image	Clients know in advance what they will get and what it costs
	Own staff can be given new tasks	No employer obligations
	Better control of staff and work process	Reshaping and reorganisation easy
	Incentives for development of cost-saving improvements	Easier to put pressure on contractors than on in-house staff
		Better quality due to specialist skills
Disadvantages	Need to have seasonal employees or to invent a lot of tasks during the low-season (winter)	Needs time and expertise to formulate good contracts
	Harder to control the costs	Less responsibility-taking and loyalty

---

[7] As decreed in the public procurement act, *Lag om Offentlig Upphandling*, (Swedish Government, 1992).

opinions on the quality of services delivered. One white-collar employee reported that the tenants might have opinions on things but never complaints about the local managers. This suggests that having well-known local managers also gives an impression of better service, despite questionable technical quality. The other side of being well-known is that the company knows the tenants well. Some companies saw this as an advantage, as having known representatives may simplify contact with large groups of tenants. Thus, the local manager can contact the most interested tenants to provide information or feedback on certain questions, in the hope that this will spread to the rest through them. Another argument raised by an employee working in a team of local managers was that their presence brings some calm and safety to the area. For example, no young people dared to drive their motorbikes in the yards before the end of the working shift.

Arguments against having local managers were mainly economic, but also connected with the expected technical quality of maintenance. One opinion was that having local managers was costly and there were several different reasons given as to why. One reason was that local offices and maintenance equipment are needed in each area. Another was that the work often becomes inefficient due to the constant disruptions by residents who stop by to talk to the staff. However, one company made the point that local managers were good from an efficiency point of view, since they had an individual responsibility. After organising a local manager system, this company could easily relate every result to a specific employee's work. This, they said, was beneficial for their ability to manage efficiently. Continuity of the local managers was stated to be both positive and negative. One positive aspect, although only indirectly stated, can be that the continuity can give a more constant quality of maintenance than circulating teams, as mainte-

nance intervals can be shortened and there is someone continuously checking the conditions. Becoming well-known and trusted among the tenants was seen as positive from a customer relations perspective. The negative point was that it may lead to local staff getting bogged down in routines. This could lead to a loss of creativity and enthusiasm in their work, as one maintenance worker explained. Some companies claimed that it is difficult to find people with the right skills to employ as local managers. Several had experienced problems with keeping the same staff when the focus changed from technical issues and the physical environment to social relations with tenants and between neighbours. This suggests that the realisation of such a change is quite dependent on the individual local managers.

To sum up, arguments for local managers were first and foremost connected with the relations to tenants. Local managers were said to have a good effect on how the tenants experienced their services, the working situation of operational staff, the company's image among the tenants and the local social environment in the housing areas. The efficiency of local managers was disputed, as were the effects of having the same local manager in an area for a long time.

3.4. Circulating team – for specialisation and efficiency

Having a circulating team was said to improve efficiency in several ways. One argument was that resources are optimally utilised when individuals with various specialist skills work together in a circulating team. Others claimed that the efficiency of circulating teams was because they make it easier to direct efforts to where they are most needed, which gives flexibility in the prioritisation between different areas. The circulating team has the resources to 'give an extra hand' when needed, it was said. Another efficiency aspect raised was that

circulating teams may focus more on mainte-nance of the physical environment, as they are less involved in social issues in the neighbour-hood. Others believed that the maintenance levels might fluctuate more than with local managers, who can provide more constant maintenance. This can be seen as both posi-tive and negative. One informant reported that everything looked great just after the circulat-ing team had been there, but that the area of-ten got weedy before they came back again. A few of the companies that had chosen to have circulating teams saw working in a group as positive for the employees. For the group to function well, it was reported that the team leaders are particularly important. One com-pany claimed that it was hard to find the right person for this position. In their case, they took the risk of converting to a circulating team sys-tem because the team leader was well-known from working as a local manager. However, it was still considered a risk to have a circulating group, since that person could resign.

To sum up, efficiency was the most frequent motive for choosing circulating teams and there were several arguments given: specialist skills can be used in an optimal way, resources can be directed to where they are most needed, and there is less risk of time being wasted in discussion with tenants. Another argument was that it was good for the employees. There were different opinions on the risk of fluctuat-ing quality of upkeep. A stated disadvantage was the problem of finding good team leaders. See Table 3.

3.5. Self-management and other forms of resident involvement

In agreement with what several previous studies have concluded, the main arguments for involving residents in the management were about social issues rather than about improving the physical environment. Accord-ing to companies advocating self-management, this system can lead to a friendlier atmosphere in the area and increased social cohesion. As one chief manager explained, organised social activities can be very valuable for the resi-dents, especially for those who live alone and

Table 3. Summary of arguments for and against local manager and circulating teams

	Local manager	Circulating team
Benefits	Tenants satisfied with personal contacts Efficiency in the landlord's contacts with tenants Nice for staff to know and be known by the tenants Better order and reduced risk for vandalism during working hours Individual responsibilities facilitates performance control More constant upkeep	Efficient work with skills specialisation and flexibility Instant improvement when the team had been there
Disadvantages	Too many contacts with tenants slow up the work Difficult to recruit enough local managers with the right skills Managers get stuck in routines and lose inspiration Costly	Important to find skilled team leaders Might get weedy between maintenance occasions

lack strong support networks. However, some interviewees also pointed out that resident involvement may well trigger conflicts and conspiracies among neighbours. According to these interviewees, it is very difficult to reach consensus when residents are given the power to decide how the open spaces should be managed. There can be contradictory opinions and there might be those who feel disregarded. As people have different needs and preferences, it can be problematic to let a smaller group gain too much influence over the common resources, it was said. Some raised the issue that self-management can be perceived as the tenants stealing the job from maintenance workers, which was denied by others. There were also arguments for and against resident involvement in connection with the quality of the physical environment. Some claimed that the environment became more diversified and nicer and that elements could be added that were impossible if the company performed the maintenance work without the contribution of residents – it would cost too much replace the time and efforts invested by involved residents. On the other hand, others thought that the work of residents did not always contribute positively to the physical environment. The tenants might fail to live up to their ambitions due to laziness or lack of skills, it was said. Some had experienced that flowerbeds maintained by residents had become weedy and that shoddy fences had been constructed by unskilled tenants. It was also said that the tenants' ideas of how to redesign their yard could be in opposition to the overall design concepts of the area or the company. For example, one manager described it as horribly tasteless when a group of residents at one yard painted the grey concrete walls in blue. There were also different opinions among the companies when it came to the economic effects of self-management. Many of the interviewees argued

that there are great savings, since involvement initiatives may reduce vandalism. Money was also said to be saved by the housing company not having to do as much work in areas where residents were actively involved in the maintenance. However, others argued that it is very time-consuming for the staff to facilitate the involvement processes as it can involve a lot of meetings, discussions, encouragement and pressure. One stated problem was that the involvement processes often depended on a few real enthusiasts and that it was often difficult to recruit new people. The processes are thus sensitive to changes in the social composition of the neighbourhood and hard to formalise and sustain in the long-term. Some companies believed that professional project coordination is needed to make it work well, which they said only the largest companies can afford. One company pointed out that they used self-management as a successful branding of the company. This shows that resident involvement might be important for the image of the company. Some interviewees saw it as a goal in itself for the tenants to have more direct influence over their living environment. A point raised by some companies was that it can be very convenient for the managers to address the tenants involved as representative contact persons for the group of tenants.

To sum up, the main arguments for promoting self-management were connected with company relations to tenants and the relations between tenants. There were also arguments connected with economic efficiency, of which some were positive and some negative. Increased diversity of the physical environment and variation in maintenance levels following on from the involvement process were considered both positive and negative. The main disadvantage was the difficulty in initiating and formalising the self-management processes. See Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of arguments for and against self-management and management without resident involvement

	Self-management	Management without resident involvement
Benefits	Friendly social atmosphere Nicer and more diverse environment Reduced vandalism Reduced costs for the company – input of new labour resources Simplified contacts with tenants Tenants have more influence over their living environment Improves the image of the company	More professional results in the physical environment No resources wasted on unsuccessful involvement processes More predictable
Disadvantages	Risk for conflicts between tenants Risk for non-professional and mismatched changes Dependency on few real enthusiasts – hard to recruit enough people Takes time and commitment from managers Need for good facilitation – project leading The benefits of coordinated area planning are lost Risk for perceived stealing of work from employees	Difficult to know the residents' opinions

3.6. A comment on changing the organisational structure

Many managers interviewed in the study expressed satisfaction with their current organisational structure, even though there were also those who wanted to change the structures in different ways. In general, they raised both advantages and disadvantages with different organisational structures. Although there might be other organisational structures that may be more beneficial in the long term, change was considered a tough and costly process. Several interviewees argued e.g. that 'we have always done it like this and we see no reason to try something else'. However, for some of the companies interviewed, the change from in-house staff to contractor was rather described as a smooth and cheap solution, as they could avoid employing new staff or expensive investments. Still, any change can be seen as a risk investment, as it is difficult to know how a new organisation will function in practice.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study confirmed that the organisational structures among Swedish housing companies were very differentiated, as has been suggested by previous reports based on a few examples (see e.g. Johansson 1998; Blomé, 2006). The differentiation of organisational structures tells us that none of the tendencies presented in the beginning of this article (outsourcing, customer orientation and interest in self-management) dominates completely. All tendencies seem to have influenced some companies but not others. The practice of us-

ing contractors for open space maintenance is common in all kinds of housing companies, although the largest and smallest seem to favour in-house organisations. This can be taken as a sign that outsourcing is a widely adopted strategy. It can also be concluded that decentralised organisations with local managers are common, but not as common as circulating teams to take care of open space maintenance. Perhaps not entirely reflecting the tendency for customer orientation[8], local manager systems seem to be based on a belief in getting closer relations to the tenants. Even though there seems to be an increasing interest in resident involvement, this study shows that it is still a relatively marginal phenomenon. The overall impression is that the conditions do not exist for self-management to become a dominant organisational structure.

The previous section described how different kinds of arguments supported different kinds of organisational structures. Even though the informants in some cases had contradictory ideas of what outcomes could be expected from certain organisational structures, it was also possible to outline some general patterns. Two different general approaches to management can be traced through an analysis of the suggested motives:

(a) Optimising customer relations and focusing on social vitalisation;

(b) Optimising cost-effectiveness and the technical quality of upkeep and focusing on the physical environment.

The two approaches are not necessarily contradictory; instead they are often combined with varying emphasis. However, they may influence how the housing companies organise their open space maintenance (see Table 5).

---

[8] Customer orientation is not necessarily connected with decentralised organisational structures. It may also involve centralised structures, such as efficient call centre services and tenant questionnaires.

Table 5. The two general management approaches and their theoretical association to organisational structures

	(a)	(b)
General approach	Focus on customer relations and social issues	Focus on efficiency and physical environment
Organisational structures	In-house Local manager Supporting resident involvement	Contractor Circulating team

The key arguments for *in-house* management lie within the first general approach, with the focus on social issues and customer relations. In contrast, most arguments given for choosing a *contractor* are more in line with the second general approach, focusing more on cost-effectiveness and the quality of upkeep. However, the motivation arguments were not perfectly consistent. For example, some companies claimed that in-house management leads to both cost-effectiveness and good quality upkeep. Other studies support the conclusion that outsourcing of housing management services follows a logic of cost-savings and economic efficiency rather than social commitments and customer orientation (see e.g. Sirmans et al., 1999; Becker et al., 2001).

When it came to local manager versus circulating teams, there was a relatively clear differentiation in the two general management approaches. The main arguments for having *local managers* were mainly connected with the first approach. The companies with local managers often expressed a need to have a higher focus on social issues and close relations between company and residents. Those with *circulating teams* related their choice more to economic efficiency and the physical environment, which falls within the second approach. Johansson (1998) argues that local staff can be more cost-

effective than contracting specialists to do the tasks. Even though the specialists would do them faster, it costs more because of the time taken to contact them and for them to travel. In this study, however, efficiency was not a main argument for having local managers.

Supporting resident involvement, the third aspect of organisational structure, seems to be mainly about trying to optimise customer relations and social outcomes. Some companies did point out that there might be benefits in terms of cost savings and improvements of the physical environment. However, these arguments were not central for their decision to support resident involvement and were disputed by others.

The following aggregated model, developed from the arguments presented by housing companies in this study, can give a generalised understanding of the arguments for different organisational structures.

However, it is far from easy to separate the two general approaches as distinct strategies. In reality, both social/relations and economic/technical issues are important for every housing company. Most companies had organisational structures that involved combined approaches; mixes of different kinds were very common, among larger and smaller as well as public and private companies. Only a minor proportion of the companies studied used combinations associated exclusively with one approach, e.g. in-house/local manager or contractor/circulating team (see Figure 3). For small companies, in-house management with circulating teams was the most common organisational structure. In reality, the social/relations and economic/technical issues are also partly interrelated. Good customer relations and a friendly social environment can be seen as means for cost-effective management and tidy yards, just as tidiness and efficient use of available resources can be a basis for improved social relations. The social/relations and the economic/technical alignments can be interpreted as two rhetorical lines of argumentation rather than as motives. It is worthy of note that even representatives from municipal housing companies well-known for ambitious social engagement sometimes made the point that the only incentive for their social commitment was to make more profit. Every company seemed eager to express their concern about being economically profitable, independent of whether their general approach was more towards social/relation or efficiency/technical issues. In a way, profitability appeared to be the most fundamental motive, or at least the 'end-line argument' for all standpoints, whether about upkeep quality, customer relations, environment, social responsibility, democracy, etc. These approaches can also reveal deeper meanings when studied in more detail. In analyses of housing management policy and practice, British researchers have concluded that even though managers are encouraged to involve tenants in decision-making and management, there are also dominant paternalistic discourses on how to guide the tenants into appropriate behaviours (Haworth and Manzi, 1999; Saugeres and Clapham, 1999; Saugeres, 2000). In-depth studies could provide more knowledge on the deeper meanings behind these approaches in Sweden.

The many mixed organisational structures among the companies might also suggest that the choice of organisational structure is not only a matter of approach. The real situation is complex and diverse and the choice of organisational structure may depend on many different factors. The size of the company, the location and types of housing areas, the skills and routines among the staff may all be important. Even though such particular factors play a fundamental role, the choice of organisational structure may also be a matter of 'interest' or a general management approach. Such an approach may be weighted more or less towards customer relations or economic efficiency. Some questions raised during this

investigation that deserve more attention in future studies are how organisational structure for open space management relates to overall company organisational structure and its general objectives; how tenants view different organisational structures and how it affects their satisfaction; how organisational structures change over time; and how the process of choosing an organisational structure functions.

REFERENCES

Aalbers, C., Ekamper, T., Tjallingii, S.P. and Top, I.M. van den (2002) The Utrecht-Houten case study: Work Package 4. Wageningen: Alterra Green World Research.

Alfredsson, B. and Cars, G. (1996) *De boende som medarbetare: självförvaltning i Holma* [The residents as partners: Self-management in Holma]. Enskede: SABO Utveckling. (In Swedish)

Bartolomei, L., Corkery, L., Judd, B. and Thompsson, S. (2003) *A Bountiful Harvest: Community Gardens and Neighbourhood Renewal in Waterloo*. Sydney: The University of South Wales / NSW Department of Housing.

Becker, F.W., Dluhy, M.J. and Topinka, J.P. (2001) Choosing the rowers: Are private managers of public housing more successful than public managers? *American Review of Public Administration*, 31(2), pp. 181–200.

Bengtsson, B., Berger, T., Fransson, N., Lind, J-E. and Modh, B. (2003) *Lokal kontroll och kollektivt handlande: en utvärdering av självförvaltning i Bostads AB Poseidon i Göteborg* [Local Control and Collective Action: An Evaluation of Self-management in a Housing Company in Göteborg]. Uppsala: Uppsala University. (In Swedish)

Bhagwati, J., Panagariya, A. and Srinivasan, T.N. (2004) The muddles over outsourcing, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 18(4), pp. 93–114.

Blomé, G. (2006) *Kundnära organisation och serviceutveckling i bostadsföretag* [Customer-centric Organisation and Service Development in Housing Companies]. Stockholm: The Royal Institute of Technology. (In Swedish)

Bucht, E. and Persson, B. (1987) *Handelsgödselanvändning i Svenska flerfamiljshusområden* [Use of Fertilizers in Swedish Multi-family Housing Areas]. Lund: Swedish Institute for Building Research. (In Swedish)

Castell, P. (2005) Resident involvement in neighborhood space management; a survey among housing companies in Göteborg. Paper presented at the *International Conference for Integrating Urban Knowledge and Practice*, Göteborg, Sweden, 30 May–3 June 2005, DVD, pp. 1–13.

Castell, P. (2006) Space for Community: On the study of resident involvement in neighborhood space management. In: Mander, Ü. et al. (eds.) *The Sustainable City IV: Urban Regeneration and Sustainability*, Wessex: WIT Press, pp. 703–712.

Clapham, D., Franklin, B. and Saugeres, L. (2000) Housing management: the social construction of an occupational role, *Housing, Theory and Society*, 17(2), pp. 68–82.

Delshammar, T. (2005) Citizen participation in public park management and maintenance. In: Oliver, L. et al (eds.) *Proceedings of Cabernet 2005 The International Conference on Managing Urban Land*, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 13-15 April 1995. Land Quality Press, Nottingham, pp. 71-72.

Ericsson, U. (2002) Gårdar och livsstil i förändring; enkäter med innerstadsbor i Agenda 21-projektet "Grönskande levande gårdar" före och efter förnyelsen: Slutrapport [Courtyards and Lifestyle in Transition: Questionnaires with Inner-city Inhabitants in the Agenda 21 Project "Green Living Courtyards" before and after the Renewal; Final report]. Stockholm: City of Stockholm. (In Swedish)

Glover, T.D., Shinew, K.J. and Parry, D.C. (2005) Association, sociability, and civic culture: the democratic effect of community gardening, *Leisure Sciences*, 27(1), pp. 75–92.

Hansson, L. and Nilsson-Hellström, M. (1993) *Bostadsförvaltning i förändring: en studie av marknadsorientering i några SABO-företag* [Residential Yards in Transition: A Study of Market Orientation in Some Public Housing Companies in Sweden]. Lund: Lund University. (In Swedish)

Haworth, A. and Manzi, T. (1999) Managing the 'Underclass': Interpreting the moral discourse of housing management, *Urban Studies*, 36(1), pp. 153–165.

Hawtin, M. (1998) Estate management boards: Their development and significance. In: Cooper, C. and Hawtin, M. (eds.) *Resident Involvement and Community Action: Theory to Practice*. Coventry: The Chartered Institute of Housing, pp. 245–266.

Högberg, A-L. and Högberg, E. (2000) *Kunddriven fastighetsförvaltning* [Customer-driven Property Management]. Malmö: Liber Ekonomi. (In Swedish)

Johansson, U. (1998) *Om ansvar: Ansvarsföreställningar och deras betydelse för den organisatoriska verkligheten* [On Responsibility: Perceptions of Responsibility and Their Importance to the Organisational Reality]. Lund: Lund Institute of Technology. (In Swedish)

Kurtz, H. (2001) Differentiating multiple meanings of garden and community, *Urban Geography*, 22, pp. 656–670.

Lindgren, T. (2005) How can management of estate grounds make a difference to people's quality of life on brownfield sites. In: Oliver, L. et al. (eds.) *Proceedings of Cabernet 2005 The International Conference on Managing Urban Land*, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 13-15 April 1995. Land Quality Press, Nottingham, pp. 216–219.

Ohno, T. and Harada, Y. (2006) A Comparison of tendering and contracting systems for public works between Japan, the United States and EU countries, *Government Auditing Review*, 13, pp. 49–71.

Persson, B. (2005) An explanatory model for management of the urban outdoor environment – applied on the brownfield influenced urban landscape. In: Oliver, L. et al. (eds.) *Proceedings of Cabernet 2005 The International Conference on Managing Urban Land*, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 13-15 April 1995. Land Quality Press, Nottingham, pp. 306–311.

Peterman, W. (1996) The meanings of resident empowerment: Why just about everybody thinks it's a good idea and what it has to do with resident management, *Housing Policy Debate*, 7(3), pp. 473–490.

Priemus, H., Dieleman, F. and Clapham, D. (1999) Current developments in social housing management, *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 14(3), pp. 211–223.

SABO (2007) Swedish Association of Municipal Housing Companies. SABO in English. Stockholm: SABO.

Saugeres, L. (2000) Of tidy gardens and clean houses: Housing officers as agents of social control, *Geoforum*, 31(4), pp. 587–599.

Saugeres, L. and Clapham, D. (1999) The social construction of housing management discourse: Objectivity, rationality and everyday practice, *Housing, Theory and Society*, 16(3), pp. 93–105.

Sirmans, G.S., Sirmans, C.F. and Turnbull, G.K. (1999) Prices, incentives and choice of management form, *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, 29(2), pp. 173–195.

Somerville, P. and Steele, A. (1999) Making oneself at home: The mediation of residential action, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 23(1), pp. 70–87.

Spink, B. (1998) Housing management 1800 to 2000: A practice in search of a policy. In: Cooper, C. and Hawtin, M. (eds.) *Resident Involvement and Community Action: Theory to Practice*. Coventry: The Chartered Institute of Housing, pp. 38–66.

Straub, A. and van Mossel, H. J. (2007) Contractor selection for performance-based maintenance partnerships, *International Journal of Strategic Property Management*, 11(2), pp. 65–76.

Svenska Kommunförbundet (1997) Kommunernas parker 1997 [The parks of the local municipalities 1997]. Stockholm: Kommentus Förlag. (In Swedish)

Swedish Government (1992) Lag om Offentlig Upphandling [Act on public procurement]. SFS 1992:1528, Stockholm: Ministry of Finance. (In Swedish)

Swedish Government (1997) Självförvaltning [Self-management]. Governmental proposition 1996/97:119. Stockholm. (In Swedish)

Swedish Government (2000) En uthållig demokrati!: politik för folkstyrelse på 2000-talet: Demokratiutredningens betänkande [A sustainable democracy!: Politics for democracy in the 21st century: final report from the democracy commission]. SOU 2000:1, Stockholm: Fritzes. (In Swedish)

Turner, B. (1999) Social housing finance in Sweden, *Urban Studies*, 36(4), pp. 683–697.

Turner, B. and Whitehead, C.M.E. (2002) Reducing housing subsidy: Swedish housing policy in an international context, *Urban Studies*, 39(2), pp. 201–217.

Yik, F.W.H. and Lai, J.H.K. (2005) The trend of outsourcing for building services operation and maintenance in Hong Kong, *Facilities*, 23(1/2), pp. 63–72.

Zavadskas, E.K. and Vilutienė, T. (2006) A multiple criteria evaluation of multi-family apartment block's maintenance contractors: I-Model for maintenance contractor evaluation and the determination of its selection criteria, *Building and Environment*, 41(5), pp. 621–632.

SANTRAUKA

ATVIRŲ PLOTŲ TVARKYMAS GYVENAMOSIOSE TERITORIJOSE – KAIP IR KODĖL TAI ORGANIZUOJAMA

Therese LINDGREN, Pål CASTELL

Švedijos miestuose nemažą dalį atvirų žaliųjų plotų tvarko namų administravimo įmonės. Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjama, kaip 62 (savivaldybių ir privačios) namų administravimo įmonės organizuoja atvirų plotų priežiūrą Švedijoje ir kokios priežastys lemia organizacinę struktūrą. Čia organizacinė struktūra apima tris atvirų plotų priežiūros aspektus: (1) plotus tvarko pačios ar samdo kitus, (2) tvarko vietiniai vadybininkai ar laikinos komandos, (3) ar prie tvarkymo prisideda ir kaip prisideda gyventojai. Nagrinėtose namų administravimo įmonėse rasta labai skirtingų organizacinių struktūrų. Mišrios struktūros populiariausios. Formalūs gyventojų įtraukimo procesai aptikti beveik išskirtinai tik savivaldybėms priklausančiose zonose su vietiniais tvarkytojais. Įrodymų buvo galima gauti iš dviejų pagrindinių vadybos požiūrių, prioritetą suteikiant ryšiams su klientais arba ekonominiam efektyvumui. Prieita prie išvados, kad vadybos požiūris gali būti svarbus renkantis organizacinę struktūrą.