

Learning from MACA Alumni

Insights into Current Practices and Discussions in Applied Cultural Analysis

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The Masters of Applied Cultural Analysis (MACA) programme at the University of Copenhagen and Lund University was established in 2008, combining ethnological and anthropological approaches to solve concrete problems in corporations, the public sector, and non-profits. Over the past decade, this Scandinavian collaboration with an annual uptake of around 50 students from all over the world, has produced close to 500 “applied cultural analysts”. Cultural analysis as a practice and discipline is now used in many fields and varied constellations to solve problems via qualitative and ethnographic research methods. Our aim has been to conduct the inquiry with the help of invested practitioners of Applied Cultural Analysis. Through interviews, we have invited academics who designed and teach the educational programme and alumni who practise Applied Cultural Analysis professionally, to share personal experiences and dilemmas emerging from performing the discipline.¹ Our intention is not to discuss what Applied Cultural Analysis should be, but to explore it as what in philosopher Donna Haraway’s terms can be described as “situated knowledge(s)” (Haraway 1988). This article aims to reflect on where the discipline is today and contextualize MACA as a practice via its vast network of alumni.

In addition to the aforementioned, we do not solely focus on the MACA programme as is, but the larger field of cultural analysis as a distinctive and highly specialized discipline. We, one MACA teacher and three alumni, review multiple facets of the discipline, by examining how alumni of the programme practise cultural analysis after graduating and the larger impact and purpose of the discipline in professional

contexts. By grounding our research in the roots of the programme and its educational objectives, we account for what it means to enter a field and conduct cultural analysis outside academia and what is inferred when using the word *applied* in cultural analysis. We thus diverge into a discussion of how cultural analysis is formed by the external party for whom the research is conducted, and how this *other* is ultimately an integral part of understanding and shaping the discipline. Lastly, we explore the tools that enable professional practices of cultural analysis and illuminate how the discipline is commodified by discussing the nature of the end product.

Material and Framework

The research for this article was conducted in 2020–2021 and consists of participant observation and interviews with eight faculty members, thirteen alumni of the MACA programme, and a focus group of current students (2021). We also included documents that were given to us by participants, including course descriptions, the funding application, and programme flyers. In Donna Haraway’s terms, these documents, such as the InterReg which funded the programme, spark actions, set boundaries, and are agents taking part in defining what MACA is and has become for the participants (Haraway 1988).

We actively used our own understanding and experiences as teacher/alumni of the programme to conduct our research, employing a deliberate insider approach to our means of communicating and interviewing. This, in turn, gave us a unique opportunity to compile a comprehensive body of material. Those interviewed were faculty and alumni from the University of

Copenhagen and Lund University, and our informants were located in Scandinavia, Asia, North America, and South America. The bulk of our material consists of hour-long interviews conducted both in person and remotely.

We interviewed our informants in stages, first the teachers and then the alumni. This was done in order to familiarize ourselves with the core objectives and intended teachings of the programme of Applied Cultural Analysis. We interviewed faculty members who are currently associated with the MACA programme, as well as a few of those who established the programme initially and who are no longer associated with it to the same degree. We did so, as following the chronology of the programme provided us with insight into how the collective knowledge, atmosphere, and discipline itself has developed over the past ten years. By interviewing the faculty, we were able to map out the objectives of the programme and thus how they have transcended into concrete application via the alumni as practitioners. As the focus of this research is to explore applied cultural analysis as a discipline, we draw primarily on the alumni and their active implementation of what they have learned from the master's programme itself. However, in order to do this adequately, it is imperative to provide and solidify an overview of the origins of MACA, via accounts provided by its founding members and associated teachers.

From Programme to Discipline

The MACA programme is a subsidiary of ethnology and is founded on its basic principles as an academic programme. Scholars in the same field (Fredriksson & Jönsson

2008; Graffman & Börjesson 2011; O'Dell 2017; Sunderland & Denny 2007) highlight how ethnology, ethnography, and anthropology have experienced and continue to experience great change. According to the former MACA teacher, Tine Damsholt of the University of Copenhagen, the new labour market for ethnologists emerged from the hype around the notion of user-driven innovation. The drive to become more integrated into the labour market emerged from the fact that ethnologists not only possess the methodology to explore "hidden" aspects of everyday life (Löfgren 2014) but simultaneously are able to make it relevant to others outside the realm of humanities and social sciences. The practice of amalgamating ethnographic methodologies in businesses, organizations, and industrial practices, has been on the rise the past decades (Cefkin 2010; Jespersen et al. 2011; O'Dell & Willim 2015). In order to accommodate this tendency, the ethnology department in Copenhagen began to organize projects and partnerships reaching beyond the university under the label Center for Kulturanalyse (CKA) (Krogh & Damsholt 2008).

CKA, however, was neither a mandatory nor a formal educational component in the ethnological study programme and thus a collaboration with the ethnology department at Lund University was established via a grant from Interreg Europe. Interreg Europe "offers opportunities for regional and local public authorities across Europe to share ideas and experiences" (Interreg 2021), and the grant which funded the MACA programme adhered to the pillar "Everyday Integration". The idea of the collaboration between the two universities consisted in promoting border crossing and

commuting within the Öresund Region. The regional development taking place at the time would eliminate geographical limitations that hitherto made such a collaboration unattainable (Nauwelaers et al. 2013) and it would drive the interest in the collaborative aspect of the MACA programme as well as its international objectives. Knowledge sharing and capacity building was also signified by making the formal language of the programme English, which also opened the door for international applicants. The programme also aims to address capacity building and impactfulness, not only between universities and an international cohort, but also between those graduating in the social sciences and the labour market by including external companies and organizations in the advisory board. Lastly, the ethnology department in Lund did not have a master's programme, and because teachers and faculty members had a specific interest in the applied nature of ethnology, there was space to introduce a new degree within the faculty.

The collaboration was set in motion, not only to broaden the scope of ethnology but also to do so in alignment with the path set by students and alumni. The first Master's programme in Applied Cultural Analysis (MACA) commenced in September 2008. MACA consists of seven blocks of courses extending over two years. The students are provided with practical ethnographic fieldwork experience, knowledge of prominent socio-cultural theory and abilities to apply their skills in collaboration with external actors. The latter is unfolded in the second semester, where students collaborate with external organizations, businesses, or NGOs. The course requires students to familiarize themselves with an unfamiliar

field, to develop and execute a project for a client. The external involvement and collaboration with stakeholders is what makes the programme unique and sets it apart from others. According to Tom O'Dell, a current teacher on the programme, "there are no other educational programmes like MACA in Scandinavia" that he is aware of. However, a brief summary of other programmes within Scandinavia that touch on similar approaches of amalgamating ethnographic methods into business and institutions outside academia would be appropriate. Scandinavia has been particularly strong in approaches in ethnographic human-centred research (Pojed et al. 2016). Starting with Denmark, there are other educational institutions that offer curricula linked to business anthropology/ethnography including Roskilde University, Aarhus University, Southern Denmark University, University of Copenhagen, and Copenhagen School of Design and Technology. Expanding to Sweden, and Norway there are programmes at Umeå University (Sweden), Stockholm University (Sweden), University of Gothenburg (Sweden), the University of Oslo, and Trondheim Norwegian University of Science and Technology (Norway) (Pojed et al. 2016).

The interest in user-driven innovation and ethnographic insights has spread to many professions and sectors (Voldum & Havelund 2008). It can be argued that a growing number of scholars deeply respect the role ethnography can play beyond academia via its ability to reshape social and cultural life (O'Dell 2017). The trend of involving European Ethnology in the works of corporations, public institutions, and NGOs has been covered by au-

thors in the same field (Pojed et al. 2016). Furthermore, co-developers of the MACA programme Fredriksson & Jönsson (2008) have collected accounts and discussions from researchers and practitioners in applied ethnographic work. The contributors outline challenges and opportunities “related to work tasks outside academia” (ibid. 2008:9). In this article, we aim to explore the MACA programme not only as a university programme but as a distinct and specialized discipline, and through this will account for its transcendence outside academia. We distinguish between academic traditions and professional practices whilst simultaneously approaching MACA as a discipline that represents both. Interviews with alumni provide perspectives on what is learned in the university programme and how it is practised afterward. Alumni are the agents (Haraway 1988), who with their acquired skills, carry or bring MACA into the labour market beyond the boundaries of the programme. They bridge the academic traditions of the programme and the professional practices in the labour market, and it is thus feasible to explore the MACA programme as a discipline of applied cultural analysis. In the following section, we will delineate the notion of “applied”.

Unfolding “the Applied”

Teachers and founders of the MACA programme recall that knowledge of the discipline in many areas both inside and outside academia, such as the labour market, is rather limited. Ambiguous definitions of the discipline are often condensed to more well-known descriptions such as business anthropology and qualitative research. However, as also pointed out by another founder of the programme, Tine Damsholt,

the MACA programme was always intended to be something else.

As Tine Damsholt explains, the intent in calling the programme *Applied Cultural Analysis* was to broaden the scope of cultural analysis and direct it towards public institutions, NGOs, and social organizations, which was broader than Business Anthropology. The term “applied” is often hard to define as it is multifaceted and implies a different trajectory than other similar disciplines. This raises questions such as: What does “applied” mean in the context of cultural analysis? How does it take shape as a discipline? And finally, who and what needs to be at play for a cultural analysis to be applied? In the following section, we will dissect the professional practices of applied cultural analysis to see how the concept is situated.

Taking a Step Back

Whether an applied cultural analyst is doing freelance research for a food manufacturer or working in the HR department of a large corporation, the understanding of their positions is always linked to interpretations assessed by other peers of different backgrounds and disciplines. Being an applied cultural analyst in this context requires one to navigate between varying perspectives, fields, and changing positions according to different agents involved in projects. In an interview, a MACA alumnus James explains his emic approach to the places where he has worked:

I learned that until I learned the language they speak [...] with talking to let’s say Novo Nordisk, Leo Pharma, Grundfoss, Danske Bank – the more experience you have in talking to all these different tribes, the more you know how language translates; “right strategies”, “strategic concepts” they throw

[them] around like crazy. I think the strongest tool is that you're able to position yourself in whatever language they speak and then sort of launch that "MACA satellite". (James)

James explains how he is positioned in a field where similar terminology is used. He picks up on clients' words and interactions that they use without shared definitions. He then elaborates on the strength of positioning oneself and launching the MACA satellite. But what does he mean when he refers to the MACA satellite?

The MACA satellite is his metaphor for stepping back from the specific situation in order to examine its broader context. Taking distance by re-positioning oneself, he argues, the applied cultural analyst is able to separate terms of subjugated knowledge that are at play in the context in which they are situated. Distance in this case implies questioning shared and mutually understood concepts ingrained internally within an organization. This distance allows one to notice inconsistencies in the use of concepts and to question unfounded assumptions. When James is assigned a project, he utilizes the MACA satellite approach, as a tool for deconstructing existing structures of subjugated knowledge. He uses his experience with the fluctuating preconceived notions to reposition himself from where he is situated. The ability to take distance does not position James in a god-like gaze, as criticized by Haraway (1988), rather, it is a tool for fuelling the satellite to gravitate and explore other visions. Knowing their language, he positions himself and deconstructs clients' various definitions by asking them questions and thus constructs new consensual meaning. This is summarized as follows;

A project, right [...] what is that? So, if you deconstruct that, the word project, what it means ... how to understand what we now call a project. But the way of understanding each project in and by itself – because each project is different – they don't adhere to the same structure. [...] So the way Noël thinks of a project is not the same way Michelle thinks of a project. [...], if they both have different definitions of it. So I think this is super powerful in MACA. (James)

When James "returns to the ground" he carves out a space for a new perspective. In this example, he explains how we can question the existing structures of "a project" and thus deconstruct the notions of different representations belonging to his colleagues and clients. Often, as Haraway (1988) claims, one language is enforced as standard and the difference in representation and situation – and events like projects – can thus carry similar meanings yet be indeterminate depending on the actors involved.

James does not take the perspective from one discipline; rather, he outlines the differences in perspectives from different disciplines. Scholars in social sciences and humanities highlight how epistemic differences can create junctures as knowledge categories are drawn from dissimilar origins (Verran 2013; Oliveira 2012). Networks of meanings are formed between agencies with different backgrounds of knowledge, and one strength of the applied cultural analyst is to recognize the epistemic nuances in the network of these agencies. Not only does James use the language to position himself to gain recognition by colleagues and clients, but he also points out differences in the field in which he is positioned.

In another example, Leah, a MACA alumna and current senior consultant, explains how a part of her work is to question core concepts:

instead of just asking the leaders, or the ones defining the strategy, we are also doing interviews with all the employees at different places within the business to say, okay, so if your strategy is to be more agile, whatever that means, but if that's your strategy, what does agility look like, for your employees in this part of the business? What does it look like in this part of the business? (Leah)

Leah draws in more perspectives from employees and challenges the customary understandings that her clients have. She must learn about their field, their company, and employees – before challenging it. She uses methods to get knowledge and overview of the field, she brings in other perspectives to expand the conceptions of her peers and stakeholders. This is essentially a derivative of the practices that are taught in the MACA programme.

The MACA programme is founded on the existing disciplines of ethnology and anthropology. The usual practice of these disciplines is that the researcher enters the field as an “outsider” (Jordan & Lambert 2009) with the intention to study a culture of set beliefs, epistemes, and languages. Both James and Leah employ this approach to the field in which they work, but they practice it with some form of variation. Rather than inserting themselves into an unfamiliar field – or culture if we may – they proceed from the specific context in which they are already situated. They become a part of the field from which they establish exteriority and deconstruct what is already there. The professional practice of the applied cultural analyst is thus to use their experience and position to deconstruct preconceived notions.

The education in applied cultural analysis aims at bridging disciplines from the humanities in practice to given institutions,

businesses, or organizations, and by doing so there must be an acknowledgement of where and how different knowledge is situated. Cultural analysis is an instrument to navigate in these different knowledges. The objective of deconstruction with applied cultural analysis implies that it will lead to a form of improvement or transformation. Other disciplines might avoid transforming the field in which they work, but the premises for applied cultural analysis is transformative.

Applied as Active

Applied Cultural Analysis is often credited with the ability to “point out hidden factors” (Löfgren 2014). In the previous section, we have illustrated how applied cultural analysts strive to put themselves in a position in which they can deconstruct the notions of a concept within a field. In these examples, we can see that applied cultural analysis is about pointing out differences and discrepancies rather than revealing hidden factors. The discipline takes up different ways in which people ascribe meaning to shared concepts. Furthermore, with the premise as being transformative, the practice also plays an active role in impacting and educating businesses and organizations. Catherine explains how she broadens public and private sector leaders' perspectives by sending them out to do ethnographic fieldwork themselves:

I send them on a case study [on a bridge and] I asked them to do interviews with people they meet there. [...] When I send them there, I tell them: “you have two target groups, you have people that walk on the bridge, and you have people who ride bikes on that bridge.” And when they come back, they see that “oh, there's also a tourist and there are commuters that use the bridge to go back and

forth.” [...] I make them question the different categories that you can put people in. Take them out of one box and put them into another or they can be multiple boxes at the same time. (Catherine)

Not only does Catherine question representations and concepts of the stakeholders, but she also brings the stakeholders out of their own preconceived notions by inviting them with her to conduct fieldwork. Through fieldwork, they get to deconstruct their thinking by embodying new discoveries which indicate that there might be “multiple boxes” in which bridge users fit simultaneously. Here she employs what James describes as the “MACA satellite”, in order to drag them out of their habitual understandings to make them see the world from a different vantage point. Returning from this hopefully transformative experience, they can now approach their employees in a more comprehensive manner. Through this exercise, they are taught to think as cultural analysts, which can aid them in the development of new strategies. Cultural analysis in practice thus becomes not only a position that challenges but also an active role in change and development.

It is important to note that all applied cultural analysis is not necessarily done for a client. Many practices identified in the interviews include interactions with colleagues and other actors on a daily basis. A common characteristic of most alumni working with applied cultural analysis is that they work in an interdisciplinary way. While Zoe, a design researcher, tells us how bringing people from different disciplines together is a driver for innovation, Mia, an alumna and current post-doc who is working with interdisciplinary research,

points out how it can also cause contradictory standpoints and clashes of ideas.

Any cultural analyst and anybody who is working with qualitative methodology tends to be a little bit more broadly observational about what they see in the world, I think. And because we have to be, and that’s part of our training is that we have to be critical, and we have to look for these nuances in people’s practices or in what are the differences in what they say versus what they do. (Mia)

Mia explains how the cultural analyst has to be increasingly “observational” in how they see the world. This goes back to the concept of stepping out of the position in which one knows, and into the position in which one questions. By using theories and methodologies, the applied cultural analyst is able to launch the “MACA satellite” and deconstruct and look for nuances and differences in people’s practices.

Among other things, the examples above have highlighted attributes and various forms of practice throughout the interviews with alumni. Defining specific ways of directly applying cultural analysis can be difficult, as the workplace, industry, or area of research plays a large role in the manifestation of its application. Therefore, the examples do not define *how* cultural analysis is applied; more so, they define commonalities and parameters through which applied cultural analysts meet across different fields and industries. To further explore the work of applied cultural analysts, we turn to the meaning of Applied Cultural Analysis as a discipline.

Applied Cultural Analysis: One Discipline

Drawing on the aforementioned examples, the broader context provided by the

name “applied cultural analysis” has introduced alternative ways of practising the discipline. Indeed, the contextual setting of the programme is broad as it is applied in many different ways in many different fields. This is reflected by alumni moving from education to the labour market where they experience distinct practices of cultural analysis in different contexts. Luka explains:

Applied doesn’t mean what I thought it meant, everyone can apply something and everything is applied [...] it’s what lies beyond the applied not just applying it to a business or putting it in the right context or understanding but what applied really is, [...] It’s not a new branch of the humanities, it’s a reinterpretation of what already exists. (Luka)

Luka does not see the discipline as something “to be applied” but rather a form of practice relating to what is already there. He argues that it is a reinterpretation of existing disciplines, such as ethnology, and the term reaches further than its “applicability” so to speak. Seen as a single discipline by many, applied cultural analysis is also seen as a facet of an existing tradition by others. Attaching “applied” to “cultural analysis” does not change the practice, rather it changes the *form* of the practice. Applying the practice thus becomes dependent on cultural analysis and the meaning of “applied” changes form in its symbiosis with the discipline.

Viewing the two terms as one discipline, rather than two independent processes, allows us to reconsider the meaning of applied cultural analysis. Thus, we argue that there is a difference between doing cultural analysis with the objective to *apply* it and doing *applied cultural analysis* as a professional practice. The latter involves being in

a field of actors and meanings from which the applied cultural analyst will establish a distance that enables detecting difference and draws consensus between what already exists. This is a practice that refers back to what is taught in the MACA programme and has a different form from that taught in other disciplines, i.e. (business) anthropology and ethnology. Whereas the disciplines of ethnology and anthropology are based on the researcher inserting themselves into a field with the intention to study others in that field, the discipline of applied cultural analysis is founded on a professional being already situated in a field, with the intention to study differences within that given field. The MACA satellite described by James and practised by Catherine is a prime example of this. Thus, applied cultural analysis practised by MACA alumni is not practised alone, rather it involves co-dependent actors and agents that partially make up the *form* of the practice. Without meaning and representations from others, there is nothing to deconstruct.

Applied by Whom? – The “Other” Others

Historically speaking both anthropology and ethnology are studies of others (Hastrup 2020; Damsholt & Mellemegaard 2017). These others are prominent figures and appear in titles of many classic cultural analyses, ethnographies, and monographs (The Nuer/Evans-Pritchard, We the Tikopia/Firth, Tuhami/Crapanzano) (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Firth 1936; Crapanzano 1980). They constitute the academic foci and their ‘otherness’ plays a significant role in the development of core methodologies. Thus, fieldwork, participant observation, ethnographic interviewing all represent ap-

proaches aimed at facilitating encounters with people considered objects of study due to their status of being others.

Especially within anthropology, the implications of approaching people as others have informed vivid and critical discussions regarding representation. To what extent are representations acts of dominance? What are the implications of taking otherness as a point of departure? How do we address our positionality as researchers and participants? Who or what constitutes an “other” and how should researchers write about them? (Clifford 1983; Clifford & Marcus 1986; Geertz 1989).

The MACA programme draws from the two fields of anthropology and ethnology. When researching user experiences, target groups are typically approached as anthropological others. For many alumni, and as we have exhibited in the previous section, knowing these others, understanding their actions, preferences, and values, constitutes their professional purpose as applied cultural analysts. One alumna, Emily, explains how her approach to studying users of the services provided by her workplace is what differentiates her from her colleagues. She recalls showing up to a client workshop wearing *a raincoat and rubber boots*. The purpose of the workshop was to improve municipal waste management and part of the programme included site visits and ride-along with garbage trucks.

A visual example of how we as cultural analysts have to try and fit into different contexts. And this project and this context, and this target group (the garbage collectors) that I had to work with, was just so different from the people that *they* (the workshop participants) were used to working with. And I was out in the street. Normally when we did things like a workshop, it would be in an office. (Emily)

While the other workshop participants stayed in the trucks, she was out emptying garbage containers with the garbage collectors. Although providing ethnographic insights through participant observation and ethnographic interviewing is what defines Emily’s professional position as an applied cultural analyst, there is a fundamental difference between her practice and that of academia. This difference, which will be discussed in the following section, relates to the intended audience of her work.

The Intended Audience

One aim of academic work is to be published and made accessible to a general audience. However, this is not to say that academic texts are produced without taking their readers into account. A standard requirement for texts published in academic journals is peer review. The reviewers are crucial gatekeepers determining whether the text will meet and engage its audience. The highest standards within peer reviewing are the so-called double-blind review, where neither reviewer nor author is privy to the identity of the counterpart. The goal is to ensure impartiality and a strict focus on the scientific and/or academic validity of the work. In other words, authors of academic texts have to meet the expectations of very specific and highly specialized others, but the audience of their work is still regarded as a broader community of researchers and in principle the general public at large.

Because it is supposed to be available to all, an implication is that the text may be subject to legal restrictions. Sensitive information may have to be removed or anonymized and ethical concerns regarding exposure of individuals to potentially

harmful audiences, e.g. hostile regimes have to be taken into account (AAA, Code of Ethics 1998). Thus, regarding academic work, all can be readers but not everything can be shared. Unlike academic work, the general public is not always a potential recipient of applied research. In the case above, exemplified by our informant Emily, the intended recipients were the invited representatives of the funding municipality. The purpose of the workshop was to make them aware of how to improve their waste system by providing them with direct and unfiltered insights into the work of their employees (the garbage collectors).

Compared to the intended audience of academic work, this group of recipients consists of specific stakeholders who represent what in the MACA programme and among alumni is referred to as clients. Clients in the context of MACA are understood as specific others entitled to the outcome of a given cultural analysis. In this case, they represent a funding public institution, in other cases, clients are representatives of companies or NGOs but technically, any person or organization that for their own purpose and benefit chooses to hire or employ a cultural analyst to research a topic can be defined as a client.

Access to Insights

The designation of clients can be more or less exclusive and more or less excluding. While participation in the workshop on waste management was by invitation only, the generated material, reports, and municipal strategies were intended to be available to the public. Nevertheless, the aim of the event was to share all the nuances of the landscape with an exclusive audience.

Issuing invitations is not the only way to control who gets access to insights provided by applied cultural analysis. Sometimes strong efforts are made to actively prevent applied cultural analysts from sharing their work with a wider audience. As shown below, such efforts can manifest in confidentiality clauses and non-disclosure agreements:

I can give you a very general description because I have signed something and it is confidential. (Chloe)

Yes, I think I could give you this example with (company) because the case was published on the website. (Zoe)

In the first quotation, the applied cultural analyst's work is confidential and as a result can only be described in very general terms. In the second, it can only be shared because it has already been published by someone else. In both cases, the applied cultural analysts are bound by restrictions and are thus not entitled to the outcome of their own work. This illustrates how dependent they are on the client as a counterpart, and shows that there are varying degrees of accessibility.

This aspect of limited access differs greatly from that of academic research and relates to a particular relationship with the second category of others mentioned earlier. Unlike the others of academic anthropology/ethnology, these others are not the subjects of representation, and unlike the intended recipients of academic work, they are often identifiable and have a direct impact on the distribution of the cultural analytical product. Although not all applied cultural analysts are subject to contractual restrictions, those who are, are subject to

the impact of others on their analyses. This impact can be quite significant and by far exceed that of reviewers of academic work.

Sometimes it would be difficult when I thought that I found something that I thought was very interesting. And they would say, no, this is not interesting. And then you kind of have to go back and find something else or rephrase it. So, it was all about pleasing them. And at the end of the day, it was about business and profits. (Sarah)

In this example, the influence exercised by others does not explicitly concern when or with whom to share insights but relates to the content of the analysis itself. According to the informant, it is business and profit that determines what, in Sarah's case, a cultural analysis must contain in order to please the client. This resonates with a more general point made by a MACA teacher Frida Hastrup, who argues:

But I think rather than explaining and arguing and defending it's all about actually trying to do those cultural analyses that make you worth the investment. (Frida)

If the investor or client cannot see the cultural analysis as work leading to their desired outcome, then regardless of other potential qualities, it may be considered irrelevant at best or at worst a waste of time and resources. However, what a client needs and what they desire is not always the same, and thus, ensuring them a return on investment, in the long run, is not necessarily as simple as pleasing them by giving them what they deem compelling or relevant.

Managing clients' expectations regarding applied cultural analysis is a prevalent concern among many alumni. To some ex-

tent, it involves striving to please the employer, as in the example mentioned above, but it also involves getting to know them well enough to provide them with what they need to meet their own aspirations. This point is elaborated as follows:

The thing with the clients is that they are very curious to learn, but they don't interpret things in the way that cultural analysts or we as qualitative researchers do. But the thing is, that we need to know what things they care about and what they're thinking. If I'm able to narrate the whole story to them, in a way that makes sense, that has represented their aspirations and their relationships to their customers, that adds enrichedness to the client, because it's also a way of helping them to understand their own culture. [...] if they're able to be part of that, they're able to make more changes back at their company, and they're able to innovate things from what I find. (Zoe)

As Zoe points out, it is important to uncover the different factors apparent within the given field of research whilst simultaneously ensuring that the client is engaged. However, sometimes providing the client with what they need is not enough, especially if it requires a long story or narrative. As described by an alumnus whose job is to facilitate company leaders in transforming their businesses, the needed product has to be easily acquired and put into use.

I mean, they don't spend that much time digging into it, you know, deconstructing notions, or what do they say? concepts? So, it's, that it doesn't need to get too theoretical. But it's very much about the client, I mean, they don't have time to sit and discuss what you mean when you say leadership, right? They need to have tools that they can apply, and then execute, and then they can drive their teams. (Ben)

As intended tools for leaders to execute and lead, the outcome of this analyst's work is often a tool for others, and as such, the result of their work must also prove its worth in the hands and minds of the receiver.

Like cultural analysis, applied cultural analysis is about others, but in the "application" hides the essential fact that it is performed for and is intended for specific others. It is not just about who, what, how, or why, but also *to* and *for* whom. Thus, unlike the otherness addressed within anthropology, the important questions sparked by the otherness of employers and clients relates not to representation but to affiliation.

Therefore, when dealing with cultural analysis in its applied forms, alumni must, in addition to matters of representation, also consider who they are doing the analysis for, and not least, how doing it for others impacts the analysis and outcome. Within applied cultural analysis, such a dual enquiry has been allocated the term "the double cultural analysis" (O'Dell 2017; Damsholt 2011). Like the anthropological others (e.g. the garbage collectors in the project on waste management), these "other others" of applied cultural analysis have to be interpreted and understood in order for the applied cultural analyst to successfully produce their work.

In line with this, we must, along with the questions regarding representation we posed at the beginning of this section, ask: To what extent is affiliation a matter of dominance? What are the implications of taking a joint project with designated others as a point of departure? Who or what constitutes an employer, a client, a stakeholder, and how should applied cultural analysts relate to them?

As outlined in this section, the analysis is partly constituted by the presence of others, their different ways of ascribing meaning to concepts, and their varying agendas and aspirations. Thus, how we answer and address the aforementioned questions is crucial when taking the quality and ethics of applied cultural analysis into account.

The End Product?

In the final section of this article, we will shed light on the part of applied cultural analysis that ultimately defines the discipline, namely, the end product, the commodified aspects of the trait. Throughout this article we have highlighted how cultural analysis as a discipline aims to both deconstruct certain notions of concepts within a field and to question the affiliation and the role of the other when defining our discipline and the work we do. As we have demonstrated, many alumni work for large institutions and companies or in the realm of consultancy, and therefore offer a specific service often tailored to the clients' desired outcome. In this section, we discuss the tools that applied cultural analysts use in their profession, and how the field becomes commoditized via the application of these tools and thus their transformative capacity regarding concrete problems. We will then diverge into a discussion of the sometimes invisible nature of the end product that we produce as cultural analysts.

When exploring the term commodity or the commodification of something, one usually has an object in mind that has been attributed value in some form or another. The classic Marxian understanding of a commodity is often applied when referring to commodification, namely, an entity detached from ourselves that serves a

specific purpose which satisfies a human desire (Marx 2002:145). Especially the latter part of this definition lends itself to a broader interpretation that is also viable for applied cultural analyses. When viewing commodification in terms of applied work, the “object” becomes the analysis itself, as it is essentially the entity of exchange. As highlighted in the previous chapter, in academia, there are often a set of prescribed guidelines that inform the means of distribution of material. Applied work, on the other hand, does not abide by the same set of guidelines, and thus accepts the premises of analysis and research being able to take on a form of exchange value, which in turn enables commodification of such material. The ethnographic practice does not change in itself, but the audience does, and when cultural analysis is requested or needed for a specific purpose, it becomes a form of commodity.

When talking about a product or a commodity, it is also essential to acknowledge the existence of a market. In order for something to become commodified, there must be a need or demand for it. It has been shown through our interviews that such a demand for applied cultural analysis exists. This was highlighted by Tine Damsholt and Orvar Löfgren, and in addition to this our informant Susan exemplifies it when explaining her role in a multidisciplinary consultancy;

What we have seen in the last couple years, is that our clients want insights, and when we position ourselves in relation to other consultancies offering similar services, we can see they are also starting to offer this on their shelves. Our competencies are a commodity in the market as it is right now. (Susan)

Here Susan explains that there is a demand for cultural analysis, and that her compe-

tencies as a cultural analyst are needed in order to provide insights. The final result of a project is often compiled into insights, which are often presented as solutions or small points which the client can build on or ponder on. In her interview, she further iterated that companies often want qualitative insights in addition to digital solutions or quantitative insights, as it provides depth to the final deliverable. To further pursue what is meant by depth in the product the clients buy into, a discussion of work and labour comes into play. In *The Human Condition*, Hanna Arendt distinguishes between the notions of work and labour, inferring that a product of work is meant for consumption whilst labour, although also geared for this, does not have any permanence in the form of a finished product and thus its value is found due to its continuous and interchangeable nature (Arendt 1958:143). The way in which cultural analysis is commodified as a product is rarely in the shape of an “end product”. What a cultural analyst provides is attributed value, a tool or an analysis that when applied improves the end product, not due to its finiteness, but due to its applicability to something else. The core objective of applied cultural analysis is not consumption, but its *application*. A good analysis should live beyond its conception and ultimately bring forth further utility and merit to its recipient.

Tools as a Commodity

When regarding utility, a common notion often used by teachers and alumni alike comes to mind, namely, *tools* or a sort of toolbox we use as applied cultural analysts. Tools can be many things, as we will exemplify below, but their commonality lies

in their use as transformative entities. Tools in a MACA context are often a plethora of things, whether they are physical objects, methods or notions presented in a concrete form. When regarding cultural analysis as a commodity, it is often the tools they use that yield the most intelligible exchange value.

Our informant William explains this very adequately when referring to the way in which he learned the language and terminology of his clients over time, and is now skilled in positioning himself when communicating to different parties. This means of understanding his clients' vernacular is essential, but the way in which he passes on the acquired knowledge is where the specific tool he utilizes becomes apparent.

I use these different tools. For example in alignment meetings, I ask what's the most important thing in this project? And then you'd say, well, it's energy. Then I write energy on this card. Then I asked the group, What's your idea of this word? What do you read when you read energy off this? And then you bounce it back and forth in the room and it becomes it becomes alive. (William)

Here the tool is very concrete in its form, namely, the cards which our informant uses to initiate discussion and communication in alignment meetings with clients. In our interview, William showed us how he explores concepts with the use of cards and post-its, as he explained how small exercises like this often take clients by surprise, but ultimately create an atmosphere that enables open communication and transparency regarding terminology. This can be related back to the MACA satellite example presented in the first section of this article, as this type of tool also creates the effect of taking a step back and examining the basics before undertaking comprehen-

sive analysis. The tools are used in processes in which the final product is developed. Therefore, they are not exposed as final products of analysis, but they have an impact on "a" final product.

The idea of a tool, however, is not always so concrete and they often manifest themselves in many forms. Another informant uses theory itself as a tool, boiling certain notions down into translatable notions in order to engage her clients.

I realized that theories were not only to be read, but they could be transformed into methodologies. And I think this is a huge difference from other approaches, or even traditional social sciences. So, when I'm talking about creating methodologies, I mean that I shape, for example, Victor Turner's liminality into business methodology to transform businesses. (Marcella)

Marcella explains Turner's liminality or liminal phase to the companies and businesses she works with so they understand the notion of being in a state of "in-between" and relates it to their specific business cases, as she often works with companies who are in the process of transformation. Here the tool becomes the theory itself, which she has moulded into specific methods that her clients can not just understand, but also engage with. Marcella has a highly nuanced understanding of the various theoretical points of departure she employs and she is able to transfer this knowledge by utilizing theory as a tool to aid in transformation by condensing theory in a way that her clients are able to relate to its premises.

A final example of a tool used by an alumna in order to convey a perspective and knowledge can be exemplified by reverting back to our informant Leah, who

sends companies out to try cultural analytical methodology first-hand.

I think that one of the things that I've learned is that the more you let people try and do these methods, the more they will learn how difficult it actually is to do a good interview. (Leah)

Here, the tool becomes the methods themselves, as she often experiences how clients gain a sense of the complexity involved in gathering qualitative data. This is a specific strategy she uses in order for her clients to gain a better understanding of the landscape they seek to apprehend, and thus the outcome is often a transformative experience. By making them engage with ethnographic research, she is also successful in showing them how challenging it can be. By doing this, she adds value to the commodity/product she is exchanging.

Cultural analysis tends to aim at being applicable, not consumable, and the tools produced thus have to be useful to specific others. We have shown that the discipline is bound by a reciprocal relation to the client, as the skills applied cultural analysts develop derive from the constant navigation of new problems presented by them. The work produced by applied cultural analysts is ascribed value by these others, and therefore they become an integral part of the outcome. Value can be defined by the way in which an action becomes meaningful to the actor or audience when embodied in a larger context (Graeber 2001:xxi), and when relating this to applied cultural analysis, it is often certain aspects of the analysis that are desired depending on the project or client. The end product of applied cultural analysis is most often unseen, similar to that of Arendt's description of labour

(Graeber 2001:143). When implemented or applied, cultural analysis is often embedded as it is seen in the way in which others utilize the insights. The same can be said for labour, as it is not visible; however, our informant Susan highlights this in the following example, where she worked with a large company on a project tackling sexism in the workplace. In this particular example, her job was to uncover insights that would otherwise not be communicated internally.

If you are a human resources boss in a huge company, you cannot ask your female employees about sexism in the workplace. But when you come from outside, and tell them that this is an analysis to better the industry, they are more likely to point out what the issues are. (Susan)

The end product that is then delivered to the client is insights, as in Susan's case, often written up as a report. It is the ethnography itself that ultimately holds value, as its aim is often to aid or improve a specific problem process or product for a client. Here the end product is not tangible, as it is continuous but unseen when implemented.

Unless you are a consultancy that sells hardcore facts and numbers, what you are selling as a cultural analyst is invisible, because how do you sell knowledge? But in the good projects, the knowledge that we provide an organization can lead the organization to dig deeper. For example, with the sexism project, the company was able to use our insights and dig deeper into the problem. (Susan)

A defining aspect of applied cultural analysis is thus not so much that it produces a tangible concrete solution. Instead, the practices of the discipline are incorporated in solutions that become someone else's.

Conclusion

This article has explored the larger field of applied cultural analysis as a discipline and opened the discussion of how alumni see and practice the discipline. Drawing on interviews with alumni, we have outlined some of the professional practices that are linked to the MACA programme at the University of Copenhagen and Lund University. This article has outlined how the practice of ethnographic research and analysis does not change from one discipline to another, but the audience does and thus the form of the practice changes accordingly. In line with Donna Haraway's notion of situatedness (Haraway 1988), practising applied cultural analysis implies consciously taking positionality into account. The applied cultural analyst seeks to offer transformation and plays an active role in development within its given context. This form of practice often involves what we have called the "other" others, whom the researcher or practitioner must understand and negotiate with. As the MACA programme just passed ten years it is a good time to discuss what is applied, who the others are, and how the discipline is shaped by commodification, to produce a distinct product. Both in academia and in private/public sector research, cultural analysis is intended for designated *others*, and it is thus important to question, not just the representation, but also the affiliation and reciprocal relation to the client. The discussion brought forth by this article not only addresses those who have graduated from the discipline and are practising it now but also expands these points for the larger discipline of ethnology in Scandinavia and others in the field.

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Notes

- 1 In line with confidentiality clauses and non-disclosure agreements signed by MACA alumni, all research participants except teachers on the MACA programme will appear under pseudonyms.

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Fieldwork

List of interviews & dates

Master's students

- | | | |
|---|---|-------------|
| 1 | Focus Group: Anna,
Henry, Mathilde,
Jacob | 27 Oct 2020 |
|---|---|-------------|

Teachers

- | | | |
|---|--------------------|-------------|
| 2 | Robert Willim | 11 Nov 2020 |
| 3 | Tom O'Dell | 11 Nov 2020 |
| 4 | Tine Damsholt | 18 Nov 2020 |
| 5 | Frida Hastrup | 23 Nov 2020 |
| 6 | Håkan Jönsson | 24 Nov 2020 |
| 7 | Orvar Löfgren | 27 Nov 2020 |
| 8 | Charlotte Hagström | 2 Dec 2020 |
| 9 | Mark Vacher | 12 Dec 2020 |

Alumni

- 10 William 28 Jan 2021
 11 Sarah 2 Feb 2021
 12 Zoe 2 Feb 2021
 13 Ben 3 Feb 2021
 14 Leah 4 Feb 2021
 15 James 4 Feb 2021
 16 Mia 4 Feb 2021
 17 Marcella 8 Feb 2021
 18 Susan 9 Feb 2021
 19 Catherine 15 Feb 2021
 20 Chloe 15 March 2021
 21 Emily 15 March 2021
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Downscaling Climate Change through Local Sustainability

Everyday Climate Activism in a Suburban Neighbourhood in Bergen, Norway

By Lone Ree Milkær

“Someone has to do something”,¹ some neighbours said to each other one evening in 2010 in the suburb of Landås in Bergen, Norway. No one really did anything about climate change on an everyday basis, they thought. “What if we’re *someone*?”² they wondered (Tvinnereim 2019). This was the beginning of the organization *Sustainable Lives*. With the increased focus on climate change in public discourse, a new form of activism has emerged, primarily in the Western part of the world, which is based on cultural imaginations of possible everyday life in a climate-changed future. This article will focus on some of the “some-things” that make the construction of an everyday climate activism community viable in a suburban neighbourhood in Bergen. The focus of the article is how downscaling of the complex concept of global climate change takes place in the kind of activism that blends into everyday life. The article is based on studies of the Norwegian movement *Sustainable Lives*, more specifically the local branch *Sustainable Lives Landås*. As a movement, *Sustainable Lives* has as an explicit goal to change everyday practices and norms to “reduce the ecological footprint and strengthen the quality of life”, as their slogan went.³ With this statement, *Sustainable Lives* moves the notions of sustainability into an everyday setting, and this article will investigate the conceptualization of climate change and sustainability that arises at the intersection of everyday life practices and everyday climate activism as part of local community building.

Global climate change is, according to folklorists Anne Eriksen and Kyrre Kverndokk, an abstract phenomenon (Kverndokk & Eriksen 2021:6). Drawing on Timothy Morton, they remark that it is characterized

by non-locality; it is everywhere but cannot be localized (cf. Morton 2013). Climate change becomes an explicit and observable object through statistically defined scientific definitions and practices, and becomes visible through numbers, graphs and texts. Eriksen and Kverndokk state that:

The numbers, graphs, or texts by which climate change becomes a defined object are not just representations of an intangible phenomenon; to a certain extent, they *are* the phenomenon. This implies that to make “climate change” a meaningful object for science, politics, public debate, and everyday life requires different linguistic and semiotic practices. To make it meaningful is not merely a matter of translating scientific knowledge about something into more broadly understandable language. The “something” in itself – climate – needs to be conceptualised, expressed, narrated, and materialised to acquire substance and meaning (Kverndokk & Eriksen 2021:6).

The aim of this article is to examine such a process of making climate change a meaningful object in vernacular culture. Following Eriksen and Kverndokk, the process of sense making as *something someone* should do something about is not just a matter of downscaling the problem of climate change to a local vernacular setting. It necessitates a process of transforming the abstract notion of climate change into quite concrete practices and cultural expressions. The article investigates how such a downscaling and concretization of the notion of climate change takes place. Specifically, how is climate change made meaningful as *something* people might relate to in local everyday life?

In the case of *Sustainable Lives*, the term *sustainable* works as one important vehicle in the process of downscaling climate

change as a global challenge into a local issue that *someone* could relate to. While *sustainable development* is a macro-term referring to societal development on a large scale (cf. Kverndokk 2017), *sustainable* is an adjective, which often indicates a practice. Here I will study the process of making sense of climate change by following the notion of sustainability in the practices of *Sustainable Lives*, and I ask how climate change is downscaled to a local concern through the practices of the movement. The analysis of how this downscaling is done will be structured according to the three classic dimensions of everyday life, or what ethnologist Nils-Arvid Bringéus, with reference to Sigurd Erixon, termed the three ethnological dimensions, *place*, *time* and *social environment* (Erixon 1938; Bringéus 1976). In other words, the article will examine the social practices included in *Sustainable Lives*' notion of sustainability by first describing and analysing how and where sustainability is located, and then how the temporal dimension becomes a part of the practices of sustainability.

Everyday Climate Activism

Studying everyday environmental activism as a cultural analytical practice field from an everyday life perspective is not new, nor is it new in Nordic cultural analyses. Previous Nordic research in everyday activism has dealt with how political activism merges with the everyday life of the activist and becomes a question of morality (Rickardson 2000:68). It has seen personal dreams and ambitions of the "alternative peasants" in Norway in the 1970s as part of the activism (Rickardson 2000:41). Studies of specific protests have discussed how social and cultural identity became a

component of the activism in protesting fossil gas thermal power plants in the late 1990s (Kapstad 2001), and how activism became a part of life for people who didn't see themselves as activists as part of the protest against Norwegian membership of the European Union preparing the ballot in 1994 (Esborg 2008). Esborg, in particular, uses an explicit emic perspective and sees the activism in a context of broad theoretical constructs such as national identity. In this article, I want to emphasize the emic perspective and see the movement *Sustainable Lives* in the context of the broader concepts of sustainability and climate change. Both Kapstad and Esborg analysed specific actions and political positions related to individual cases, which can be linked to larger abstract complexes, including environmental policy and national identity. Rickardson's analysis dealt with a form of activism in which political and moral arguments are explicitly intermingled in notions of the good life, as is mirrored in the imagined sustainable life of *Sustainable Lives*. This article will elaborate on the tension between the specific and the abstract, between the political and moral arguments of activism. In the focus of the practices of everyday life lies perhaps not as much a shift from politics to morality as an emphasis on the floating limits of the definition of political position (Zackariasson 2006:22, 33). The 1970s feminist slogan "the private is political" comes to mind. The proximity to everyday life and connection to abstract phenomena and concepts linked to activism which characterizes Nordic Ethno-folkloristic activism research is the guiding perspective of the article. Activism is seen as a kind of condition, integral to everyday life, and as an embedded part of groups

and local communities. Moreover, political activism is seen as a field not solely about elections, protests and parties, but as much about the power to change the world, and about the shift from explicit political goals to the values of everyday life that happens as an effect of everyday activism.

The connections between political activism and everyday life practices lead me to the use of the term *everyday climate activism*. The geographers Paul Chatterton and Jean Pickerill use the designation *everyday activists* to describe activists who use everyday activities as building blocks in the creation of a desirable future, which is enabled as a result of the activism (Chatterton & Pickerill 2010; also Walker 2017:14). The field of *everyday climate activism* thus has its starting point in everyday life and the practices that exist there, specifically in the practices of everyday life which are based on the challenges arising in the wake of everyday experiences and practices connected to a perception of climate change (also Barr & Gilg 2006:910; Dowling 2010:489; O'Brien, Selboe & Hayward 2018). The connection of *climate* to the term *everyday activism* specifies the context in which I use it, while the *everyday* prefix emphasizes that it is not about activists who take to the streets with banners and catchphrases. The activists in this article are people in a middle-class suburb of Bergen, who continuously work to interweave activism into their notions of and practices of everyday life and the connected formation of communities and attribution of meaning and values.

Method and Material

The empirical basis of this article is fieldwork done in and around *Sustainable Lives*

Landås' various activities during the period 2017–2019. The initial purpose of the fieldwork was to explore vernacular understandings of climate change, especially its implications for the notions of temporality. It primarily revolved around a small restored mansion – Lystgården – where the movement has its offices and where the majority of the events and meetings take place. For more than two years, I have conducted interviews and collected observations in connection with events as diverse as workshops on edible plants or the making of Christmas ornaments, 17th of May celebrations, which is the Norwegian Constitution Day, and Landåsfest, a one-day festival with hundreds of attendees.

For this article, I draw mainly upon the observations at Landåsfest which I attended in 2017, 2018 and 2019. I have walked through the festival area on the day of the festival itself, taken photos and talked to participants and volunteers. Additionally, I have participated in the preparations for the festival in several ways: in meetings in the months and weeks before, especially in 2018, and in building the site and making the decorations in the days before the festival in 2018 and 2019, while I talked to activists and employees. It ended up being a mix of participatory and non-participatory observations, with a tendency more towards participation at the end of the fieldwork compared to the beginning, primarily because I got to know the volunteers and they got to know me. In a busy environment, I was sometimes seen as an idle pair of hands and was put to work laminating pricelists or bringing change to the people manning the entrance at the other end of the festival area. The interview part of the fieldwork has primarily been

semi-structured qualitative interviews and I have interviewed several of the founders and employees of the movement, as well as particularly active activists.⁴ Only one interview is analysed directly in this article, and the remaining interview material is primarily used as references and background. This particular interviewee and his partner had lived in the same house in Landås for more than 30 years and he cared very much about the sense of community in the neighbourhood in general. His children had grown up here and he had previously been involved in neighbourhood initiatives. In this one interview, the conversation of the neighbourhood was foregrounded due to the special interests and extended experiences of the interviewee, but questions on networking in the neighbourhood have been a part of the interview guide and have been touched upon in all of the interviews.

In addition to the field material, the article analyses texts produced by *Sustainable Lives*. The movement has produced a substantial amount of text as part of e.g. the movement website, dissemination of experiences in print, and the advertising of workshops or events on Facebook. These texts convey the attitudes, values and perspectives of the organization and are treated as empirical material in the article, which means that some of the material analysed will figure in the article as quotations from a text with a named author. The interviews and the texts occasionally address the same topic or are used to analyse different aspects of an issue, since some of the writers are also the interviewees. This means that interviews and texts are analysed as complementary empirical material at the same level in the analysis of the perspectives in the article. The use of com-

plementary types of material – interviews, observations, texts – has been a way for me to approach the construction of meaning in *Sustainable Lives* as an organization-based community. I have talked to members of the community, observed and participated in practices of the community and read text produced with different purposes by members of the community to access different ways of constructing meaning.

Sustainable Lives in Landås

As an everyday climate activist movement, *Sustainable Lives* is an example of a widespread international environmentalist phenomenon that in a broad sense is concerned with the development of sustainable consumption patterns and the development of local communities that are less vulnerable to, for example, fluctuations in global markets and production.⁵

Sustainable Lives as a movement can be seen as part of this, which also includes phenomena with a focus on locally produced foods such as urban gardening, the cultivation of tomatoes on balconies, harvesting of wild plants in gardens and local parks and beehives on the rooftops in big cities. These phenomena can be said to have the asymmetrical relationship between nature and urban everyday life as their focal point. This kind of activism primarily takes place in major cities, focusing on the increased integration of nature and natural resources into everyday life in the city. Moreover, the field reflects a varying degree of direct political posturing as part of the activism, which moves on a scale from an explicit critique of capitalism to resignation to climate change adaptation. Around the year 2020, *Sustainable Lives Norway* was a national umbrella movement, with

an office, a manager and several part-time employees funded by a mixture of public and private funds. *Sustainable Lives* consisted of subgroups primarily in neighbourhoods in Bergen, but in several other places in Norway as well (in Stavanger, Trondheim and Oslo).⁶ Activities of the typical *Sustainable Lives* groups consisted of e.g. garden cultivation courses, seed and clothing exchange markets, clothing repair workshops and lectures on how to raise chickens or which local plants are edible. The national umbrella was administered from an old mansion house in Landås in Bergen that also housed the local Landås branch.⁷

Landås is a suburb about five kilometres from the centre of Bergen. It is a mixed neighbourhood with both high rises and terraced and detached houses.⁸ It is placed up the side of the Landås mountain and was built primarily as part of the post-war expansion of Bergen in the 1950–60s (Johnsen 2004:249, 255). It was in this specific part of town that some people around the year 2010 had the idea of doing something about “the great global challenges that were so crippling”, as one of the founders of the movement said to me in an interview. She told me of an evening when a group of people sat around a kitchen table, drinking a cup of coffee or a glass of red wine, talking about the terrible state of the world, the advancing reality of climate change and the general apathy of society. She told me that they all knew each other because several of them worked in the same office at the local church,⁹ but also because they lived in the same neighbourhood and therefore had children in the same schools and institutions. They were approximately the same age and at the same place in life,

with a house, jobs, young children and a busy everyday life. After agreeing that the world was generally heading in the wrong direction and that someone should do something, they looked at each other and acknowledged, what if we’re *someone*?

Before going home that night, we had come to a kind of realization: The world needs more examples of someone who proves that change is possible. And we couldn’t find the phone number of someone. We had to do the job ourselves. Someone was simply ourselves (Nilsen & Tvinnereim 2018:12).¹⁰

In this origin story of *Sustainable Lives*, changing the perception of climate change is closely connected to the ability to act and to a network of like-minded neighbours who are part of an everyday community. Furthermore, the activism is placed inside the household, around the kitchen table. This ties the idea of the neighbourhood, the household and *Sustainable Lives* together from the onset of the movement.

The Neighbourhood as a Special Place

The focus on the neighbourhood as the place of everyday climate activism presented in the *Sustainable Lives* origin story implies a notion of the neighbourhood as a special place. In the *Sustainable Lives* groups of Bergen the geographical designation attached to each group indicates affiliation to a specific district or neighbourhood, such as the district of Nordnes, Løvstakken or Landås. All of these places are to some degree integrated in the larger city of Bergen, and outsiders do not notice the boundaries between the different parts of the city. This makes the geographical indications emic boundary markers in their own right. But

a place is more than just a geographical delineation. Places are assigned cultural and social significance through practice, or as the philosopher Stephen Casey put it, places are not something that is, places are something that happens (Casey 1996: 26, 27). Performance and narration of the neighbourhood, not just as a significant place but as a place with specific values, are a central part of the practice of *Sustainable Lives* (cf. Buccitelli 2016:7).

The Countryside in the City

The notion of the neighbourhood in contrast to the large-scale society and the “big city”, and at the same time an integrated part of it, is significant in the practices of *Sustainable Lives*.

On the movement’s website, it reads:

In 2008, we began the search for climate-smart solutions in a neighbourhood of Bergen. About 6500 people live in the school district of Landås, in around 3300 households. We’re like the countryside in the city. In this “rural area,” it is important to belong, to be able to contribute and to experience meaningfulness.¹¹

In this quotation Landås and *Sustainable Lives* are linked in a practice, a “pursuit of climate-smart solutions”, which is both precisely located and quantifiable. In close connection to this relocation of climate-smart solutions to a very specific neighbourhood in Bergen, a qualitative understanding of the countryside is presented as a place where individuals contribute to the community they belong to and thereby experience meaningfulness. The countryside metaphor frames the meaning of contribution and meaningfulness, by drawing on the notions of the close-knit local community. There is no apparent need for fur-

ther elaboration than the ascertainment that “we’re like the countryside in the city”. The text continues to provide a more accurate description of what contribution and meaningfulness can be thought to be in this countryside in the city:

We share angle grinders and sea kayaks, pass on children’s bikes and jointly own trailers, while reducing private consumption and experimenting with local sharing economy. We learn about edible plants, cutting up wild sheep and how to grow vegetables in the kitchen garden, while also taking back the knowledge we’re losing.¹²

The ideal of the social life portrayed in this quotation implies a longing for a close-knit community often associated with perceptions about rural life. The countryside creates quite specific images connected to an understanding of traditional rural society, where everyone knows each other and everyone helps each other out when necessary. The imagery points back in time and out of town, where community on a small-scale contrasts with society on a larger scale. It draws on notions of a pre-modern society in which the community was automatically defined by geographical affiliation and seen as a social unit because of geography. This notion of the countryside establishes a figure that can generally act as a metaphor for all that modernity isn’t, both the negative and the positive (Eriksen 2009:8), but from the perspective of *Sustainable Lives*, the metaphor of the countryside is unconditionally positive.¹³ The designation “the countryside in the city” is used by *Sustainable Lives Landås* to create an image of a close-knit community-based neighbourhood.

The social form that is imagined could be characterized by what Tönnies termed

a *Gemeinschaft*, a community first and foremost based on personal relations, often associated with traditional pre-modern societies, in contrast to the impersonal, transaction-based life in the modern city, or what Tönnies terms *Gesellschaft* (Tönnies 2001 [1887]). In that regard, the quotation also implies a temporal dimension, or a longing back to an ideal society based on a more or less imagined and undefined past. In *Sustainable Lives*' understanding, such a *Gemeinschaft* ought to characterize the middle-class everyday life in a Norwegian suburb, where sea kayaks and angle grinders are shared. In this specific articulation of the countryside in the city, two incompatible notions are juxtaposed. To borrow and to share is countryside, but the specific items being borrowed and shared – sea kayaks, trailers, and angle grinders – are a part of modern suburban life. The aim of the sharing is to reduce private consumption, but the sharing and borrowing are not instigated by either surplus or shortage in the local community. On the contrary, it symbolizes the general surplus of modern capitalist consumer society.

The use of the metaphor of the countryside further shows a longing for the *Gemeinschaft* of an undefined past era and for a knowledge, represented by a practice, which at first glance does not match everyday life in a middle-class suburb of Bergen. The cutting up of wild sheep or the harvesting of wild plants are both related to an idea of a simpler everyday life in the countryside and perhaps allude to the asymmetrical relationship between nature and culture generally displayed in the everyday climate activism as such. The coupling between the notion of life in the countryside and a modern environmental movement

is far from new. In the 1970s and 80s, as Heidi Rickardson writes, ecologists and so-called alternative-farmers found “their room for political action in the countryside [my translation]” (Rickardson 2000:42). They moved their urban everyday lives outside of the city, into the countryside, where they acquired small farms and cultivated them. *Sustainable Lives Landås* finds and uses the same type of political space built on the notion of life in the countryside as the road to a better (and sustainable) society, but moves “the countryside”, as a metaphor, into the suburbs. Common to the two strategies is the notion that the path to a sustainable society goes through practices linked to the notion of everyday rural life in the countryside as inherently sustainable. The environmental policy and moral arguments merge into everyday life practices that are meant to lead the way to a good (sustainable) life. The metaphor of the countryside in the city plays an important role in imagining the sustainable *Gemeinschaft* of *Sustainable Lives* and thus has an important position in the downscaling and localization of sustainability.

The metaphor of the rural or the countryside is additionally a cohesive part of how the neighbourhood is constructed in *Sustainable Lives Landås*. Vebjørn is a retired craftsman volunteer who primarily helps out with practical things, he tells me. I met him on an afternoon of voluntary work painting the walls at the first floor of Lystgården and now we are sitting in his living room drinking tea and eating bread with goat cheese and jam. To Vebjørn, the neighbourhood is created as a place by the participation and actions of the people who live there. If nobody does anything, the community disappears, he thinks. That is

why he always joins if someone asks him to participate in any local activities, if he has the opportunity to do so. Part of Vebjørn's perception of community contains a clear sense of the boundaries of the neighbourhood and who thus is part of the neighbourhood and who is not. In an interview, Vebjørn talks of some of the new activities that *Sustainable Lives Landås* have initiated at Lystgården. The activities are not necessarily directly linked to sustainable issues but are a mix of community-building activities as such and sustainable-centred activities in particular. In this quotation, he talks about a choir that rehearses in a room at Lystgården, and about the members of the choir.

Vebjørn: But it was people who [...] knew about each other and maybe greeted each other and stuff but like, they're not together necessarily at leisure otherwise. But you connect the rural Landås, this part of Landås mind you. Because it can only apply to this part, it cannot apply to the others.¹⁴

In the quotation Vebjørn articulates *Sustainable Lives Landås* as a framework which creates a community based on personal relations. He does so by designating the neighbourhood as "rural Landås," and when he tells me that the choir members didn't really know each other, he paints a negative picture of a modern society marked by alienation and of a local community with no close relationships. Without further explanation, he immediately thereafter uses "the rural Landås" as a counter image to the impersonal relationships, where you might nod to the neighbour when walking between the front door and the car in the garage in the morning, but where no one really knows each other. Part of the transformation of sustainability from

a large scale to a smaller scale in the everyday activist practices relies upon is the explicit and exclusive demarcation, which is embedded in the notion of the neighbourhood as the countryside in the city. It is a demarcation that simultaneously excludes the ones on the outside from the sustainable life. In the same breath that Vebjørn weaves Landås as neighbourhood, he also delineates it by stressing that it can "only apply to this part; it cannot apply to the others." When I ask him who "the others" are, he replies by pointing outside the walls of the cosy living room where we sit, to the boundaries of Landås as he experiences them. He explains that here is the school and here is Fridalen and there is Sletten, which is not Landås, and concludes by noting that "Okay, they are there, [...] and we are here." To Vebjørn, the understanding of a clear geographical boundary marks who is part of the community and who is not, but the "local" is both something specifically geographical with the reference to "there" and "here" and a negotiation of boundaries of the *Gemeinschaft* with reference to "they", "we" and "the others". The combination of geography and of a sense community makes *the local* an emic adjective which denotes the special quality and sense of homeliness and reassurance which is considered to belong to the small-scale local close-knit community (Blehr 2000:151).

Landåsfest as Performance of the Present and Future

The festival *Landåsfest* has taken place every year, since the very beginning of *Sustainable Lives* in 2010, until it was cancelled due to the corona pandemic in 2020. The festival is curated by *Sustainable Lives*

Landås, which invites participants and plans the physical lay-out of the festival site. Landåsfest is constructed as a classic festival located around a street in Landås which also houses Lystgården. The festival usually takes place in late August. It is a one-day festival and has a stage for performances placed centrally in the area, as well as the associated stalls for sales and activities. Landåsfest fits perfectly into the definition of a festival, which is a planned, public cultural performance, limited in both time and space and constituted by a combination of participation and performance (Stoeltje 1992). The festival makes use of the cultural grammar of the local festival and, through the form of the festival, displays what in the anthropologist Don Handelman's terminology could be termed a *model* of the local

community. At the same time, the form provides an opportunity to present an ideal of how the local community should be, or what Handelman terms a *model for* the community (Handelman 1990). The cultural grammar of the typical local festival makes it possible to emphasize the neighbourhood both as the ideal close-knit everyday life community in the present and as a sustainable close-knit everyday life community in the future.

"Residents of Landås are welcomed to the second Landåsfest in history. On Sunday 28 August at 2 p.m., the party is on again with local musicians and entertainment in various forms",¹⁵ the invitation 2011 read, and in 2014, "we invite you to a large-scale street party for all of Landås, young and old! As usual, there will be food



1. The Landås festival mirrors the imagery of almost any other local festival: banners, flags, stalls and a myriad of people walking amongst each other. Landåsfest 2019. Photo: Lone Ree Milkær.

and music, activities and environmental information.”¹⁶ The festival can be seen as an almost tangible manifestation of the neighbourhood, and *Sustainable Lives Landås* as an integral part of the neighbourhood. The slogan of the Landåsfest is “Better, funner, greener”,¹⁷ and when seen on the big banner 2019 next to the *Sustainable Lives* logo it connects sustainability, quality of life and everyday life. It is *Sustainable Lives*’ general ambition to “take the climate battle from protest to party” as seen in the slogan used by the organization up until 2021.¹⁸ With the emphasis on fun and party in both slogans, sustainability and climate change activism are moved from the political sphere to the everyday life sphere.

Many activists from *Sustainable Lives Landås* participated in some form of activity during the preparation of the festival and on the day of the festival itself. I talked to a young couple who had recently moved to the area. They knew of the festival and activities before they moved there and they had signed up as practical help for the festival as a kind of gateway to the movement and through that to the community of the neighbourhood. To them, as to Vebjørn quoted earlier, participation created a sense of belonging.

I attended Landåsfest in 2017, 2018 and 2019. Although the specific line-up of stalls and activities has varied slightly from year to year, the set-up has largely followed the same pattern. As a tangible preparation, the festival is first announced geographically by physical signs, which visibly limits the audience to residents of the neighbourhood. Brightly coloured A4-sized posters are hung on lampposts in different streets in the area, and a giant banner hangs on a wall located by a driveway central to Landås.

These signs announce the dates of this year’s festival. The posters symbolically mark the borders of a sustainable life, a border that, incidentally, fits nicely within the neighbourhood delineations that Vebjørn designated in the interview referred to earlier in the text. Posters and banners emphasize the boundaries of the local community in the weeks leading up to the party. By hanging the posters only in Landås, despite the organizers knowing that a segment of the participants in the festival comes from other parts of Bergen, they made explicit the symbolic demarcation of the sustainable neighbourhood of the festival.



2. A4 posters like this are placed around Landås by “an army of dog walkers”, as one organizer said in an interview. By labelling the volunteers that help with the hanging of the posters in this way, this practice is linked closely to activities of everyday life, such as walking the dog. Photo: Lone Ree Milkær.

The Festival, the Family and the Neighbourhood

The stage area at the festival site is centrally located. During the day, the on-stage programme consists mainly of performances by local artists: an orchestra with exclusively local members or soloists who reside in the neighbourhood, accompanied by local musicians.¹⁹ The programme starts with a performance by the local school band, as a very recognizable Norwegian cultural manifestation of everyday life and the neighbourhood in a festival frame. In Norway, there is a strong tradition of local musical (often brass or janitshar) bands, especially in schools.

These bands, which are independent programmes involving children at primary level schools, are closely associated with the performance of both local and national identity. Since the early twentieth century, when the first school bands were established (Korpshistorien 2018), they have especially been associated with the local celebrations on the Norwegian Constitution Day on 17 May (Blehr 2000:124, 132; Karlsen et al. 2013:51, 52). The connection to twentieth-century history and national identity blends into the local identity at the opening of Landåsfest and alludes to the past as an anchor. Landå school band has performed at every single festival since the first one in 2010. “Of course, we open with the school band,”²⁰ “they sort of get the party started at the Landåsfest every year,”²¹ some of the activists explained during a planning meeting I attended. Adding the “of course” emphasizes that the element of the school band is an integral part of the cultural grammar of the local festival. Additionally, the hosts on stage introduce the band in an ironic way that shows that everyone knows

the genre “school band at a local festival”. They present the band with the designation “the originals” and say, with a twinkle in their eyes, that they have played at the festival for several generations, which of course they haven’t because the Landåsfest has not existed for generations, but it underscores the traditional values associated with it. School bands are a powerful metaphor in Norwegian society which connects family, tradition and neighbourhood and symbolizes belonging and interdependence amongst these. Opening the festival with a performance by the school band underscores that this is a local community event, with children and family at the centre of attention.

A walk through the festival area shows the neighbourhood as a place for children to play and for people to enjoy themselves with their families and neighbours. At the busiest time, there are several hundred people at the festival area, parents walking with baby carriages and strollers, children running back and forth and adults and children talking and laughing, standing in line at the food stalls and sitting in groups of grandparents, children and grandchildren, eating at the benches and tables. At one end, there is a lawn with activities for small children such as a plastic udder on a green-painted wooden rack, filled with milk, so they can try to milk a sheep and two tents connected with a small tunnel for crawling through.

Toddlers and their parents use this area, but it seems that the lawn itself attracts them as much as the tents and the wooden sheep. In the first two festivals I attended, the highlight was box-climbing at the tall pines on this lawn. Mostly tween-age children compete over who can build the tallest tower of plastic milk crates. The tower

must be built while the child itself stands on top of it, properly secured with a harness and lines attached to the closest trees.

This activity has the longest queue in the festival area and some of the children get right back in line when they have had their try at the tallest tower, to have another go. Two boys, around ten years of age, wait eagerly in line with their heads close together, assessing the current competitor. The local library has a stall where you can print your own badges and buy discarded books. The participation of the library in particular signals a local integration of family life and everyday life. In Norwegian communities, the library is a gathering point for young families, e.g. for a Sunday activity. Typical children and family activities which could be found at any local festival, like face painting, apple baking and clowns entertaining, dominate parts of the festival area and underline that families' and children's activities are a very significant part of the festival area. A model of the neighbourhood as focused on everyday family life is presented and the role played by the family as the central unit in the presentation of the model of the local community is emphasized.²²

The everyday life focus is expanded with an association of food and neighbourhood. Right past the lawn with the play area, the festival continues with a row of stalls selling food and cakes. Parents and children from the school band sell homemade chocolate cake and cupcakes, and activists from *Sustainable lives Landås* make "sveler" (which is a kind of thick pancake from Western Norway eaten with jam or cheese) in the adjacent stall. The "sveler" is made on the spot on big electric pans and they are in high demand. People buy them hot

right off the pan and eating them off paper plates. At the festival in 2019, there was a stall where you could buy food – sambosa from Somalia and börek from Turkey – made by local residents with roots in countries other than Norway as well, but the sveler and the homemade cake have been for sale every year. These are all typical dishes that are homecooked or if produced commercially, they are often handmade and produced on a small scale. And just as important, all these dishes are regarded as traditional. The combination of sveler, homemade cake, sambosa and börek presents a Handelmanian model of a culturally diverse neighbourhood which is united through traditional homecooked food in an everyday household. Putting such dishes on display indicates family traditions as a part of the neighbourhood, as well as connections to a notion of traditional societies.

Displaying a Sustainable Local Everyday Life for the Future

In Landåsfest, the model for a desirable sustainable and liveable climate-changed future is performed alongside the model of the everyday life of the close-knit diverse countryside neighbourhood. Next to the food stalls with the sveler and börek, one can buy food from three or four professional sales stalls. The vendors have been invited by *Sustainable Lives Landås* to be part of the festival area and they all advertise the use of organic and sustainable produce in the dishes they sell at the festival. In the sveler and börek stalls, there is no mention of the status of the produce as organic or not, because the emphasis is on the local and home-made, while the food consumption is re-presented in a sustainable form in the professional stalls.

The re-presentation of the sustainable local community is present at the festival through much more than food stands. Next to the children's area on the lawn, we find a stall with "the environmental agents", an environmental organization for children that focuses on sustainability and environmental awareness through information and activities in local groups such as beach clean-ups and recycling of batteries.²³ A girl around the age of ten sits on her knees on the asphalt beside a tarp with recycling symbols printed on it. She reaches into a bag and pulls up a light bulb that she then tries to place on the right symbol on the tarp, in a kind of recycling picture lottery. A younger boy and his mother are interested bystanders. After a while, the girl invites him to reach into the bag himself and try to place a piece of plastic in the right spot of the tarp. In the church car park, which is an integral part of the festival site, three male activists man an information stall on *Sustainable Lives Landås'* transport group. They are eager to inform festival-goers about their work on sustainable solutions to local transport issues. They have, perhaps in line with the focus on food consumption mentioned above, produced a "transport menu" on a roll-up, which is a list of alternatives to driving your car such as co-driving, biking, biking on an electrical bike and using public transport. The transport group stall is a table with an opportunity to talk to the activists and a lot of adult passers-by stop to have a chat, especially about the bikes. Beside the table at least four different electric bikes are parked for people to try for a spin around the car park. A young woman is sitting on a parked long john-like cargo bike that has seating for two small children in the front. She seems a little hes-

itant, but she is trying the bike on and is talking to a man from the transport group. Because of the hilly terrain in Bergen, biking is not a normal means of transportation for longer commutes, and commuting by electric (cargo) bikes points towards a more sustainable commuter everyday life in the suburb. The kind of sustainability linked to electric bikes relies on supporting sustainability through new technology. Even though seemingly opposites the use of technological solutions and the longing for the *Gemeinschaft* of the countryside co-exist without difficulty in the idea of the local community displayed by *Sustainable Lives Landås*. In another kind of activity communicating technological innovation, you can make a smoothie by operating the blender with a bicycle to get an understanding of the concept of energy and production and to illustrate the use of sustainable energy with a starting point in food consumption. This is a very popular activity and adults and children alike line up to try the bicycle and see the fruits turn into a pink smoothie in the blender on the rack on the back of the bike. Even though questions regarding transportation and technology are an integral part of the climate change consideration on both a larger and a smaller scale, the *Landås* transport group's stall and the activities at the festival are focused on transportation linked directly to local communities and have no mention of other transportation issues, for example freight related to consumer products.

In a stall at the centre of the festival area some of the activists who are part of the *Sustainable Lives Landås* project The Food Forest (Matskogen) sell herbs and vegetables grown further up on the *Landås* mountain. They talk to passers-by about the prin-

ciple of permaculture that the Food Forest is built upon.²⁴The stall is dominated by the green leaves of the herbs that you can smell if you walk by, and the activists in the stall all look weathered and sunburned. You can see that they spend a lot of time outdoors. The project is run primarily by a hired project manager and a group of activists on funds raised by *Sustainable Lives Landås*. The idea of the project is to show that locally grown produce is achievable even in a suburb in Bergen. The sale of locally produced honey is a visible part of the stall, even though the activists manning it tells



3. The honey on sale is from the hives in Matskogen. Landåsfest 2018. The first sign says “Honey for sale” and the one below says “Honey from Landås, 80 crowns”. Photo: Lone Ree Milkær.

me that they are not the actual beekeepers. The hives are at the Food Forest, but caring for bees is a specialist assignment, and a few dedicated activists have that as an interest. Several crates of honey in the back of the stall indicate that the sale is expected to go well. The honey and the beehives are important parts of the illustration of local produce in one aspect in particular. Bees are assigned a very special role in everyday climate activism, especially in major cities where they are seen as a refuge from industrialization and as a symbol of the city as an alternative to the industrialized society that has eradicated the habitats of bees (Sherfey 2020:159ff.). Bees can be said to symbolize a kind of prototype of sustainability, both in the sense that they live in networks and create what they need from the environment (Moore & Kosut 2014:517) and that they have been assigned a special role in the human-animal interactions of anthropocene urban farming. Bees as pollinators have been at the forefront of the climate change discourse (Sherfey 2020:153), and honey has come to symbolize a feeling that everything might be all right and that by selling and buying the honey, we’re all able to contribute to that on a very local scale. When the honey is seen as a part of the cultural grammar of the local festival, it underscores both the local and the sustainable aspect of the festival, as the added sign in the picture from the honey sale reminds us by specifying that the honey for sale is not just honey, but honey from Landås. The sale of honey from the Food Forest is a good example of the performance of the intertwining of the conceptualization of sustainability in *Sustainable Lives* and the metaphor of the suburban neighbourhood as the countryside as part of a solution to

the global challenges of climate change through very local sustainability.

Running through the festival site the close-knit neighbourhood meets the desirable sustainable neighbourhood in a domestication of sustainability. School band, sheep udders and box-climbing, commuting and “sveler” mirror the everyday life lived in the familiarity of the neighbourhood. It showcases the neighbourhood as a place where children play and go to school and parents commute and spend their free time. Simultaneously, the environmental agents, recycling, the Food Forest with the bees, electric bikes and sustainable transportation solutions show how *Sustainable Lives Landås* would like the community to be, in order to be more sustainable and future-oriented. In this way, the festival becomes both a recognizable model of the local community, which presents an image that feels like home to the neighbourhood, and a model for the present and the future desirable sustainable local community in the climate-changing world (cf. Handelman 1990).

The Downscaling of Climate Change

In the everyday climate activist movement *Sustainable Lives Landås*, climate change as a global phenomenon is downscaled into *something* meaningful in local everyday life. Climate change is scaled down from large- to small-scale, towards a local entrenchment more than a global understanding, becoming more associated with the values of everyday life. In the shift from one scale to another, climate change is not just conceptualized, but transformed into something else. In the downscaling process, the concept of sustainability is an important vehicle as climate change becomes relatable in everyday life through the social

practices of *Sustainable Lives*. In this article I have studied some of the ways climate change is concretized and downscaled to a local concern through some of the practices of the movement.

By literally placing sustainability in a community of individual households, via Landåsfest and the establishment of the neighbourhood as the central arena, and by pointing to values of the past countryside as an ideal, sustainability and subsequently climate change can be seen as domesticated. In the domestication process, the responsibility of the climate-changed future is tied specifically to the individual and the local community. The ethnologist Lars Kaijser pinpoints that one of the essential effects of the downscaling of climate change through the domestication of sustainability is the reduction of the threat of the climate-changed future (Kaijser 2019:87). The downscaling of global issues of climate change and a sustainable future additionally implies a shift from an explicitly political issue to an emphasis on the ethical responsibility of individuals in everyday life. This has the consequence that processes connected to climate change mitigation or environmental sustainability become associated with quality of life and consumer choices in everyday life in a neighbourhood like Landås.

The very foundation of *Sustainable Lives* is based on localizing climate change activism by placing sustainable life in neighbourhoods and constructing them as finite entities, demarcated by both geography and cultural values. With the use of the metaphor of the countryside in the city as an ideal, the notion of the sustainable neighbourhood is tied to a notion of community and linked to a certain extent to an



4. The neighbourhood is framed in the garden of Lystgården. Landåsfest 2018. Photo: Lone Ree Milkær.

imagined past. The metaphor of the countryside emphasizes values such as family, household and personal relations as well as forms a connection between the imagined future and the perceived past. Both in the name *Sustainable Lives* and in the explicit purpose of the movement, as it is articulated in the slogan of the movement (to reduce the ecological footprint and strengthen the quality of life), a notion of continuity is established between the models of the life lived now, the life lived in the traditional past and the life we have the opportunity to live in the future. The notion of continuity highlights an understanding of sustainability connected to the preservation of society as we know it today (also Kverndokk 2017:40, 41). If the present sustainable

life is lived with as small an ecological footprint as possible, there will also be a sustainable life in the future, seems to be the logic. In the practices of the everyday climate activism of *Sustainable Lives* this notion of continuity exists as a part of the process of downscaling and thus becomes part of the transformation of the intangible phenomenon of climate change into something meaningful in part of the everyday life of a group of activists in a suburb of Bergen.

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Notes

- 1 “Nogen må gøre noget”. My translation. Norwegian quotations will be translated in the text for the remainder of the article, and the original will be added as a footnote.
- 2 “Hvad nu, hvis det er os, der er nogen?”
- 3 “Bærekraftige liv jobber for å redusere vårt økologiske fotavtrykk, samtidig som vi øker livskvaliteten”, <https://www.facebook.com/barekraftigeliv> (accessed 29 December 2021).
- 4 Twelve interviews in all.
- 5 This focus is also seen in the international Transition movement, which has arisen approximately at the same time as *Sustainable Lives*. In the Transition movement, the potential of local areas and the close community are seen as an essential part of a sustainable transition to a climate-changing future (also e.g. Felicetti 2013:563, 564, 565; Russi 2015:94–99; Boudinot & LeVasseur 2016:382).
- 6 Facebook lists at least 31 pages using “Bærekraftige liv” (*Sustainable Lives*) in the title, often with a geographical tag/reference, such as “Bærekraftige liv Voss” or “Bærekraftige liv in Bø”, enumerated 10 May 2021. The Facebook pages have between 23 and 6100 followers. The page just called “Bærekraftige liv” (with no specific geographical denotation) has the most followers. The level of activity on the pages fluctuates. Some have multiple posts per week and others have not had a post for several years. Seventeen of the “Bærekraftige liv” groups on Facebook are linked to boroughs, suburbs or smaller towns in and around Bergen: Arna, Flaktveit, Hellen, Kronstad, Landås, Løvestakken, Meland, Minde, Nordnes, Nygård, Sydneshalvøen, Sandviken, Sletten, Ulset, Fylingsdalen and Søreide, Nattland and Sødalen and Alpetun/Skjold. An overview of Sustainable Life Groups is also available at www.barekraftigeliv.no/bli-med#map, which includes 24 groups (accessed 11 May 2021).
- 7 The manor house was formerly known as “Landås manor house”, but has been renamed by *Sustainable Lives Landås* and is now called “Lystgården”, which is a Norwegian designation of a smaller mansion used for leisure purposes.
- 8 The lower parts of Landås are dominated by four-storey concrete buildings. Further up the mountainside is mostly two-storey wooden houses, either as vertically partitioned terraced houses or horizontally partitioned with 2–4 apartments dependent on the type of partition (Fonn et al. 2004:285).
- 9 The fact that these people knew each other through their employment at the local church is significant, but will not be elaborated in this article.
- 10 “Før vi gikk hjem den kvelden, hadde vi kommet til en slags erkjennelse: Verden trenger flere eksempler på noen, som beviser, at forandring er mulig. Og vi kunne ikke finne telefonnummeret til Noen. Vi måtte gjøre jobben selv. Noen var rett og slett oss” (Nilsen & Tvinnereim 2018:12).
- 11 “I 2008 begynte vi jakten på klimasmarte løsninger i et nabolag i Bergen. I skolekretsen Landås bor det ca 6500 mennesker, i rundt 3300 husstander. Vi er en bygd i byen. I denne “bygda” er det viktig å høre til, å kunne bidra og oppleve mening”, <https://www.barekraftigeliv.no/om> (accessed 10 June 2020).
- 12 “Vi deler vinkelslipere og havkajakker, gir videre barnesykler og eier tilhengere sammen samtidig som vi reduserer det private forbruket og eksperimenterer med en lokal delingsøkonomi. Vi lærer om spiselige vekster, partering av villsau og hvordan man dyrker i kjøkkenhagen samtidig som vi tar tilbake kunnskap vi holder på å miste”, <https://www.barekraftigeliv.no/om> (accessed 10 June 2020).
- 13 Perceptions of modern life in the countryside may also be intertwined with industrial agriculture and loss of biodiversity, and thus the link between modern life and the idea of the countryside are not exclusively positive (Sherfey 2020:160). The metaphor as used by

Sustainable Lives disregards the hardship of life in the countryside, both in the past and in the present.

- 14 “Men det var folk som [...] visste om hverandre og kanskje hilste på hverandre og sånt men som, men de er jo ikke sammen nødvendigvis på fritid ellers og sånn. Men du knytter bygden Landås, denne delen av Landås vel og merke. For det er jo denne delen det må gjelde, det kan ikke gjelde for de andre.” (Interview with Vebjørn).
- 15 “Landåsbeboere er velkommen til den andre LandåsFesten i historien. Søndag 28. august kl 14.00 braker det løs på nytt med lokale musikere og underholdning i mange former”, http://www.barekraftigeliv.no/nyheter/41-landasfest_2011 (Wayback machine, 25 August 2014, accessed 30 April 2021).
- 16 “[...] inviterer vi til storstilt gatefest for hele Landås, unge og gamle! Som vanlig blir det mat og musikk, aktiviteter og miljøtorg”, <http://www.barekraftigeliv.no/landasfest> (Wayback Machine, 23 August 2014, accessed 30 April 2021).
- 17 “Bedre, gøyere, grønnere”, should be translated to “Better, more fun, greener” to be grammatically correct, but then the rhythm of the phrase would be lost.
- 18 <https://www.barekraftigeliv.no/landas/om> (accessed 31 May 2021). Slogan of Sustainable Life Norway: bring the climate battle from protest to party.
- 19 Each year there was a performance by a main artist, who was not specifically from Landås, but from the greater area of Bergen.
- 20 “Vi starter jo med skolekorpset.” Observation, planning meeting Landåsfest 6 June 2019.
- 21 “De laver ligesom sit eget liv i Landåsfesten hvert år.” Observation, planning meeting Landåsfest 6 June 2019.
- 22 There is no explicit focus on the heteronormative nuclear family in the set-up of the festival, no mentioning of “mum, dad and children”, but diversity isn’t articulated explicitly either. Exceptions to this are seen in individual cases, such as the festival that featured traditional food from places other than Norway.
- 23 <https://miljoagentene.no/> (accessed 31 May 2021).
- 24 The permaculture principles is built upon the studying an imitation of natural ecosystems, “in order to design human and ecological systems based on these patterns naturally found” (Aiken 2017:177, 178).

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Fieldwork

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