

– GOVERNING ‘SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT’ THROUGH SELF-BUILD GROUPS AND CO-HOUSING: The Cases of Hamburg and Gothenburg

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Abstract

This article critically examines the governing of ‘sustainable urban development’ through self-build cohousing groups in Gothenburg and Hamburg. The two case cities have been selected because both are currently involved in major urban restructuring, and have launched programmes to support self-build groups and cohousing as part of their emphasis on promoting urban sustainable development through this process. Departing from a theoretical discussion on advanced liberal urban governance, focusing in particular on the contemporary discourse on sustainable urban development, we examine the interaction between political institutions, civil society and private actors in the construction of cohousing as a perceived novel and alternative form of housing that may contribute to fulfilling certain sustainability goals. Questions centre on the socio-political contextualization of cohousing; concepts of sustainability; strategies of, and relations between, different actors in promoting cohousing; gentrification and segregation; and inclusion and exclusion. In conclusion we argue that, while self-build groups can provide pockets of cohousing as an alternative to dominant forms of housing, the economic and political logics of advanced liberal urban development make even such a modest target difficult, particularly when it comes to making such housing affordable.

Introduction

On 25 September 2015, the United Nations adopted its new sustainable development agenda, comprising 17 sustainability goals to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all. Goal 11 specifically targets sustainable cities and communities, addressing both social and ecological aspects including access to ‘adequate, safe and affordable housing’, participatory planning and management, and reducing ‘the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities’ (UN, 2017). The discourse on sustainable urban development (SUD) is not new; it has been a major concern for municipalities worldwide for three decades now. But what does it actually mean in practice when urban governance is increasingly guided by sustainability goals?

A number of critical analyses of the discourse on SUD have been offered in the context of critical urban studies. They are often theoretically driven (e.g. Marcuse, 1998) or based on analyses of municipal policy declarations or statements made by planners and policymakers (e.g. Davidson, 2010a; 2010b). This article is intended as a contribution to an emerging body of in-depth analyses regarding how SUD is put into practice (e.g. Metzger and Rader Olsson, 2013), linking up with work on local and regional sustainability noteworthy for having both critical and empirical orientations

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(e.g. Agyeman *et al.*, 2003; Gibbs and Krueger, 2007; Krueger and Gibbs, 2008). We will analyse the governing of self-build cohousing groups, which are perceived to offer novel and alternative forms of housing that may contribute to fulfilling sustainability goals in Hamburg (Germany) and Gothenburg (Sweden), two cities currently involved in major urban restructuring processes with SUD as a guiding principle.

Since the turn of the millennium, cohousing has attracted increased interest and support from municipalities and city planners, who have identified it as an avenue to realizing sustainable cities. In this context, encouraging cohousing often takes the form of support extended to self-build groups. By no means do all self-build groups choose cohousing projects. In the context of the housing shortage prevalent in many European cities, however, forming a self-build group represents an opportunity for an increasing number of cohousing projects to realize their aspirations. In Europe, one of the most ambitious programmes supporting self-build groups (*Baugemeinschaften*) and cohousing (*Gemeinschaftswohnprojekt*) has been launched in Hamburg. Our other case city, Gothenburg, is the second-largest city in Sweden, a country which (together with Denmark) is often regarded as a pioneer in the history of cohousing (Vestbro, 2010a; McCamant and Durrett, 2011; Larsen, 2016). Gothenburg has some of Europe's pioneer cohousing units, dating from the early 1980s, and the municipality has begun to offer support for cohousing (*kollektivboende*), partly linked to self-build cohousing groups (*bogemenskaper*) inspired by Hamburg's model. In the next two sections, we will provide the theoretical framework for our analysis of self-build cohousing and SUD, including a brief review of analyses of the current 'second wave' of cohousing. The subsequent three sections present our case study of self-build cohousing projects in Hamburg and Gothenburg, emphasizing the context of urban transformation by advanced liberal urban governance, and the role of intermediaries in linking city strategies and cohousing practitioners. This is followed by a section highlighting some key contradictions of SUD in the context of advanced liberal governance, based on our empirical investigation.

Self-build cohousing as SUD in the context of advanced liberal governance

As a starting point, we define cohousing in descriptive terms as a collective housing project that also involves 'a stress on collectivity in everyday life' (Droste, 2015: 79). Such an open definition serves the purposes of our empirical examination of the different meanings ascribed to cohousing in the context of urban governance, particularly concerning SUD. It should also be made clear that the interest in self-build groups—people coming together to form an intentional community with the purpose of managing the building of their own homes (i.e. commissioning bespoke homes)—in this article emanates from our interest in cohousing. In policy documents, and in our interviews with politicians and city planners in Hamburg and Gothenburg, it has also become clear that support for self-build groups in both municipalities is also intended as support for cohousing (Gothenburg Planning and Building Committee interview, 8 October 2015; Hamburg Agency interview, 19 October 2015).

Self-build cohousing projects represent only one of several forms of cohousing, but we argue that our findings and analysis provide insights for cohousing research and theorizing more generally, and not only because this particular form of cohousing is under-researched. We will demonstrate how self-build cohousing groups engage in close interaction with the economic and political logics that condition any form of housing in advanced capitalist countries. We find these contextual aspects under-theorized in contemporary cohousing research, which tends to be normative in the sense that it usually starts from the assumption that cohousing, if successful, is a positive thing in itself because it is practiced with the intention to counteract the unsustainability of contemporary urban development. Our approach is different in that it is defined by a critical perspective, providing explanations and interpretations based on a structural analysis of contemporary global urban transformation. While critical analysis of the

role of the sustainability agenda in contemporary urban governance is no longer a rarity, it remains uncommon in current research on cohousing. Even if we as researchers, like many others, see great potential in cohousing, it is important not to idealize it by disregarding the problems and conflicts that can emerge from this form of housing.

Our theoretical contribution to the field of cohousing research thus comprises providing analytical tools to integrate empirical research on cohousing with a structural analysis of contemporary urban governance, particularly concerning how agency is structured by the economic and political logics that define this context. We argue that an empirical analysis of municipalities' support for self-build cohousing groups—as an element within larger projects of urban transformation—provides an excellent case to advance analytical understanding of how SUD is governed in urban restructuring processes.

We argue that the proper context in which to situate contemporary cohousing is that of advanced liberal urban governance. This mode of governance is defined by symbioses between local government and private capital in public–private partnerships, producing urban development defined by de-regulation and re-regulation of housing markets, and rising property values that produce gentrification and deepen socio-economic segregation. We use 'advanced liberal' (Miller and Rose, 2008; Larsson *et al.*, 2012) to underscore that, while contemporary urban governance is heavily influenced by the political philosophy of neoliberalism, it does not necessarily mean less politics, less regulation or less government in the way that neoliberal dogma stipulates. This is clearly demonstrated by our two case cities; in both Hamburg and Gothenburg, de-regulation has been combined with packages of re-regulation to support market mechanisms—a process perhaps best defined as a liberal re-engineering of the welfare-state city. We discern four defining logics of this process (Thörn and Larsson, 2012): First, *marketization* involves principles of de-regulation and re-regulation to support privatization, which in the urban context has supported gentrification of inner-city areas and commercialization of its public spaces (Lees *et al.*, 2008). Second, a key element is the introduction of partnerships between public, private and voluntary organizations organized for *co-regulation*, a process which in an urban context has been conceptualized by David Harvey (1989) as a shift from managerialism to entrepreneurialism. Third, this mode of governance is performed according to a new form of *responsibilization*, emphasizing self-government and active involvement by civil society and business in political responsibilities previously associated with state agencies, something which involves 'encouraging' or 'offering individuals or collectives active involvement in action to resolve the kind of issues hitherto held to be the responsibility of authorized governmental agencies' (Burchell, 1993: 275–6). In the urban context, this is clearly visible in the shift to de-centralized planning (Swyngedouw, 2005). Fourth, this mode of governance also involves new forms of *disciplinary power*, i.e. the coercive disciplinary techniques introduced when civil society agents do not perform responsibilities imposed on them, such as the self-management of housing.

In our analysis, the concept of responsibilization is crucial; it signifies a rationality linking the agency of organizations and individuals to the economic and political logics of advanced liberal governance. Our contribution to research on responsibilization is to comprehensively address how the various actors involved in processes of governing (in our case including cohousing communities, politicians, architects, planners and civil servants) may be involved in both negotiation and tension around responsibilization—or what we would define as a politics of responsibility (Thörn and Svenberg, 2016). Empirically, we will also highlight how the function of the intermediary, taken on by private or non-profit organizations, is crucial to the responsibilization of self-build cohousing groups; intermediaries are the key agents of responsibilization. We will also demonstrate how governing through responsibilization, contrary to the rhetoric of advanced liberal governance, involves disciplinary power. Finally, we will address

questions regarding the possible effects of the governing processes that we are studying, focusing in particular on gentrification as a major feature of contemporary urban restructuring processes (Lees *et al.*, 2008). Gentrification should be understood as our second key concept in linking the agents of the cohousing project to the economic and political logics of advanced liberal urban governance; questions centre on if and how the governing of self-build cohousing groups address gentrification and segregation, and who is included and excluded in the projects.

The discourse on sustainable urban development

In a seminal article, Peter Marcuse (1998) argued that, when expanded from the ecological to the social, the discourse on SUD is inherently contradictory and constructs 'the social' in a manner that other scholars have termed post-political or 'de-politicizing' (Mouffe, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2007). It suppresses social conflicts since it rests on the assumption 'that there are social policies of universal benefit, that everyone, every group, every interest will or should or must accept in their own best interests' (Marcuse, 1998: 111).

Regarding economic sustainability, economic growth is included in official discourses' definition of sustainability, despite the critiques associated with the 'anti-' or 'post-growth' argument that there is a profound contradiction between growth and ecological sustainability. In the context of advanced liberal urban governance, the concept of 'smart growth' has been introduced in local and regional planning as a new market-based strategy for land and housing development that is supposed to be able to integrate economic, social and ecological sustainability (Krueger and Gibbs, 2008).

Nevertheless, the three dimensions of sustainability—the economic, the social and the ecological—have, contrary to the original intentions of the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987),¹ diverged so that particular programmes are designed to address one of the three aspects (Davidson, 2010a). In the process, the meaning of SUD has become increasingly ambiguous, perhaps particularly so regarding its social dimension, which is more often interpreted in terms of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and/or social cohesion than in terms of social equality. Examining both policy literature and municipal programmes, Davidson (2010a) discovered a multiplicity of definitions of social sustainability: social equity issues relating to access to services, facilities and opportunities; issues to do with the sustainability of community itself, social mix, liveability, affordable housing, tolerance, street life, or a more targeted concern with homelessness, the 'under-served' or 'under-represented' such as the elderly, young adults and children. In a more theoretically oriented elaboration on this subject, Davidson (2010b) has argued that 'sustainability' functions as the contemporary empty master signifier of urban planning ('empty' in that its meaning is not fixed). Due to its openness, an empty signifier works to embrace a multiplicity of different articulations, provide cohesion, work as a point of identification for a heterogeneous array of actors, and encompass diverse and sometimes contradictory strategies (Laclau, 2005).

While it is accurate (given the UN's sustainability goals) to view SUD as an empty signifier with global reach, empirical studies are needed to establish and understand how the discourse actually works in and varies between diverse local contexts. Consequently, this article examines the meaning ascribed to SUD in the context of self-build cohousing projects supported by local government. To what 'sustainability problems' are self-build groups and cohousing perceived as solutions? How is 'sustainability' conceptualized? What strategies do different actors use to promote and create self-build cohousing groups?

1 The Brundtland Commission, also known as the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), was chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland (appointed by UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar in 1983). Established to unite countries in pursuit of sustainable development together, it was dissolved in 1987 after publishing its report, which defined and popularized the term 'sustainable development'.

– The second wave of cohousing

As a part of the counterculture of new social movements, the first postwar wave of cohousing articulated a ‘living utopia’ (Melucci, 1989), embodying a critique of—and alternative to—welfare capitalism. The varying modes of organization responded to what were perceived to be the most problematic destructive effects of the dominant social order: wage labour exploitation, environmental destruction, alienation, commodification and patriarchal domination. In some cases cohousing projects involved a flight from the city, in other cases they were part of urban movements, including squatting communities. Jo Williams (2005) and Lucy Sargisson (2012) have identified a second wave of cohousing in the US, arguing that it differs from the first wave in Europe in the sense that it is anti-utopian as it does not challenge, but rather embraces, mainstream liberal values regarding housing. According to our research, a second wave of cohousing can also be identified in Europe since the turn of the millennium.² While this demonstrates a certain continuity with the counter-cultural elements of the first wave, it also includes the new mainstream elements seen in the US context.

In Europe, a significant aspect of this development has been a renewed interest in cohousing among politicians, city planners and architects. This is partly because cohousing activists and activist-researchers, using professional skills to create and promote interest in cohousing, have successfully utilized a political opportunity opened up in urban governance by the discourse on SUD. A significant example of this was the first international conference on cohousing, held in Stockholm in 2010. The conference report stated that, with the recent growth of interest in cohousing, ‘planning for sustainable lifestyles’ has emerged as a new dimension (Vestbro, 2010b). The new research field of cohousing largely reflects the sustainability agenda, as cohousing is examined and analysed in terms of low-impact-living affordable communities (Chatterton, 2013), self-managed housing (Tummers, 2016), social capital (Ruiu, 2016), as a desirable alternative for older people (Fedrowitz, 2010; Scanlon and Arrigoitia, 2015), an opportunity for municipalities to foster socially inclusive urban development (Droste, 2015), recreating a (lost) sense of community (Jarvis and Bonnett, 2013), energy conservation through use of common areas (Kido and Nakajima, 2012), a design for gender equality (Vestbro and Horello, 2012), living together privately (Chiodellia and Baglione, 2013), improvement of individuals’ health conditions, care demands and wellbeing, plus strengthening neighbourhood support and associational involvement (Kehl and Then, 2013), and as communities of care and security as a new form of urban reproduction (Schröder and Scheller, 2017). Finally, a 2012 special issue of the journal *Built Environment* devoted to cohousing discussed it both as contributing to urban renewal and as a way of achieving sustainability in a broader sense (Krokfors, 2012). Research focusing in particular on the effects of self-build cohousing groups in an urban context is conspicuously lacking. An exception is Lang and Stoeger (2017), who analyse cohousing communities and self-build groups (*Baugruppen*) in Austria as examples of collaborative housing. They state that further research that ‘critically investigates local authorities’ impact on collaborative housing sectors in other countries is encouraged’ (*ibid.*: 16), which is a key aim of our analysis in this article. This also explains our case selection. In contradistinction to most research in the field, we have not set out to study actual everyday life in cohousing, but the process that creates the conditions for that everyday life. From a wide range of cohousing projects studied in the research project on which this article is based, we have chosen to present and analyse two self-build cohousing projects at the moment when they are engaged in the process of constructing

2 The research on which this article is based was carried out as part of a larger project, ‘Cohousing and Sustainable Urban Development: Cases from Denmark, Germany, Spain and Sweden’, which ran from 2015 to 2017 and investigated the extent to which experiences of cohousing can contribute to our knowledge about socially and ecologically sustainable housing. The project deployed case studies of different cohousing forms in Denmark, Germany, Spain and Sweden. For this particular article, we conducted 25 interviews with politicians, planners, architects and cohousing activists, and also studied the relevant documents produced by these actors.

their new homes, because this is the phase when they are interacting intensively with local government and when they have to face, and make important decisions in relation to, the contradictions involved in urban transformation by advanced liberal governance.

City strategies

Hamburg and Gothenburg are two growing post-industrializing harbour cities experiencing major urban restructuring. In both cases, their urban development strategies are embedded in growth and crisis discourses. Both are second cities in their respective countries, Hamburg with 1.75 million people and (the region of) Gothenburg 1 million. Hamburg is expected to grow by about 100,000 inhabitants by 2030 (DUDE, 2014: 9), while Gothenburg is expected to grow by 175,000 (Västra Götalandsregionen, 2014: 1) over the same period. Both have a significant lack of affordable housing, which feeds a spiral of rising rents and gentrification. Each city is trying to tackle this housing crisis with heavy investment, subsidies and private–public partnerships, predominantly targeting former industrial areas and working-class neighbourhoods. While Hamburg has been constructing thousands of housing units in huge developments such as HafenCity and Wilhelmsburg during and after the International Building Exhibition (2006–13), and more recently Central Altona, the municipality of Gothenburg has been similarly engaged, rolling out its largest urban restructuring programme in 50 years. Its primary focus is the old harbour area, particularly the island of Hisingen, but the programme also involves the construction of tens of thousands of housing units in semi-peripheral districts that were formerly industrial, such as Gamlestaden and Högsbo. In addition, the so-called 'Million Programme'—an affordable housing scheme that created a million homes across Sweden between 1965 and 1975—has been subject to renovation, which has led to 'upgrades' and rent increases of as much as 80%, bringing with it the phenomenon of 'renoviction' (Molina and Westin, 2012; Sernhede *et al.*, 2016). For Hamburg and Gothenburg, this means that the space defined as the 'inner city' is expanding, shifting what Neil Smith (1996) has called the 'frontiers of gentrification'. In both cities, critique and mobilization against gentrification and renovictions have occurred in the 2010s (Füllner and Templin, 2012; Birke, 2016; Rinn, 2016; Sernhede *et al.*, 2016; Thörn and Despotovic, 2015).

In this process of urban redevelopment, sustainability is a key concept in both cities. The motto of the 'Hamburg 2030' development plan is a 'green, inclusive and growing city by the water' (DUDE, 2014). In the latest campaign, 'Living. Loving. Hamburg', the city is presented as an ecologically sustainable and socially vibrant cosmopolitan metropolis (Hamburg Marketing, 2014). At the 2016 UN Habitat III conference in Quito, Hamburg's second-largest development project, Central Altona, was presented as a cutting-edge best-practice exemplar for sustainable city planning (Tiedemann, 2016). In Gothenburg the sustainability agenda has been tied to the city's forthcoming quatercentenary—formulated as 'Vision 2021'—and is being implemented by local government institutions, business, civil society organizations and the university: 'In the year 2021 Gothenburg is internationally known as a bold model for sustainable growth' (Gothenburg Municipality, 2017).

While both cities thus claim to be world leaders in SUD, there is also official recognition that there are problems to be addressed, particularly concerning social sustainability. The challenges are quite substantial, which is why Hamburg has announced that it will build 10,000 housing units per year by 2030 (Hamburg Municipality, 2016), while Gothenburg officially states that it plans to build 45–55,000 units by 2035 (Gothenburg Municipality, 2014: 7). It is in this context that the two cities' interest in supporting cohousing and self-build groups should be seen. In both cities, the Green Party has been the main driver behind the programmes, emphasizing not just ecological but also economic and social sustainability goals in line with Green ideology (see Figure 1). Economic sustainability goals that are supposed to be addressed by self-build

cohousing are formulated according to the smart growth formula as ‘a way of organizing disparate elements of land use planning goals and approaches’ (Krueger and Gibbs, 2008: 1266), such as open-space preservation, regeneration, business improvement districts and the use of existing infrastructure. Social sustainability goals such as decentralization, self-government and small-scale development, are primarily led by ‘value-driven’ entrepreneurs and the non-profit sector. While support for self-build groups in Hamburg is a full-blown programme, with one in every five new apartments now constructed by self-build groups (Bürgener, 2016), in Gothenburg the programme is still in its infancy, with the municipality having officially established a goal that 5% of new apartments should be produced by self-build groups. However, the Gothenburg Property Management Office has a vision to reach the scale of ‘the Hamburg model’ (Svensson, 2013). In this sense our study of the two cities is a comparison of a particular model at the stages of political vision (Gothenburg) and actual administration (Hamburg).

	Economic Sustainability	Ecological Sustainability	Social Sustainability
Goal	Smart growth	Low climate impact	Social cohesion
Object	Land and housing development	Resource-saving housing and lifestyle	Social integration in housing, the neighbourhood and the city
Praxis	Use of existing infrastructure Business improvement	Collective form of living and sharing	Social mixing by inclusion of ‘under-served’ or ‘under-represented’ groups

FIGURE 1 Sustainability goals for self-build cohousing as formulated by the municipalities in Gothenburg and Hamburg

– Supporting cohousing and self-build groups to achieve SUD

The governance structure of self-build cohousing in Gothenburg and Hamburg is driven on three levels, which we will examine in this section: local government, intermediaries and the projects (see Figure 2 for a summary). Hamburg’s special programme to support housing communities started in 2003, when the Department for Urban Development and the Environment established Agentur für Baugemeinschaften, the Hamburg Agency for Housing Communities (referred to throughout this article as the Hamburg Agency), as a specific municipal authority to support self-build groups with advice and allocation of city-owned land. By early 2016 about 130 groups had been registered (Hamburg Agency interview, 12 May 2016). A committee of representatives, drawn from the Hamburg Agency, the Ministry of Finance, Hamburgische Investitions- und Förderbank and the respective city districts, decides which group gets which property based on specific assessment criteria. The selected group then gets a pre-contract for the land (*Anhandgabe*) in order to develop finance and construction plans for their housing. All the housing is self-governed and independent of the Hamburg Agency, with rents agreed for at least 20 years.

The Hamburg Agency’s assessment criteria for accepting groups onto to its programme include, most importantly, a financial plan; sufficient equity; a ‘social concept’; an ecology and energy concept; documented ‘stability of the group’ and an original architectural idea. For the Gothenburg programme, conditions are much less specific; the municipality can allocate land (*markanvisning*) to a group provided it fulfils the criteria of having ‘an overarching idea and a financial concept and has acquired relevant competencies and formed a formal association’ (Gothenburg Municipality, 2016). The lighter regulatory approach of Gothenburg Municipality can undoubtedly be explained by the fact that its programme is much less mature. But it may also be understood in relation to repeated statements—in public speeches and when

interviewed by us—by Gothenburg's leading Green Party politician and ex-chair of the city's Planning and Building Committee, that he perceives the primary role of politics in relation to self-build cohousing groups negatively, i.e. as a matter 'of not standing in the way' (Planning and Building Committee interview, 8 October 2015).

Hamburg's assessment criteria clearly reflect a sustainability agenda. Our interviews with officials in Gothenburg also confirm the significance of sustainability goals. But exactly what problems are the programmes for supporting self-build cohousing groups supposed to solve from the municipalities' point of view and how? What definitions of sustainability are involved?

In Hamburg, the programme's origins are to be found in the city's history of conflict between squatters and the municipality, around the famous Hafenstrasse and in Altona during the 1980s. While the programme was thus born out of a need on the part of the municipality to quell violent confrontation in central parts of the city, it was also, as argued by a Green Party politician with specific responsibility for urban development, designed to meet a justified demand for self-government: 'the movement for co-housing comes from the squatting movement in the 1980s, where the people wanted to create their own homes and their own living, and achieve self-determined, self-organized living' (Green Party Hamburg interview, 11 May 2016).

When asked about the origins of the programme in Gothenburg, city officials referred not only to influence from, and study trips to, Germany, but also to pressure 'from below' by one of Sweden's leading cohousing organizations, Bolhop (meaning 'Live Together') (Property Management Office interview, 8 October 2015). As in Hamburg, the emphasis is on the value of 'self-government', for example in the opening sentence of the municipality's invitation to citizens to participate in the programme: 'Do you want to have an influence on your own dwelling and do you wonder how you as a resident can have more influence on the building process? A self-build group or cohousing could be the answer' (Gothenburg Municipality, 2016).

The Green Party ex-chair of the Planning and Building Committee explained how promoting self-government can be a way of supporting both social and ecological sustainability goals, which may overlap in cohousing and self-build groups:

Another effect is that people become more committed to their dwelling, or their area, and if that happens in the context of some kind of community, then it spills over into other interests ... and it goes hand in hand with the reaction, the development of the economy of sharing and circular economy that more and more people are talking about (Planning and Building Committee interview, 8 October 2015).

In a similar manner, the Hamburg Agency emphasized social dimensions of sustainability, connected to an assumption that self-build groups and cohousing projects have positive effects on surrounding neighbourhoods: 'we do not have an analysis of this, but the feedback is very positive that self-build groups identify strongly with the neighbourhood and the property and their building, and so they interact with the neighbourhood and want to take it forward' (Hamburg Agency interview, 19 October 2015).

From the perspective of the municipalities, self-government thus equals responsabilization—the programmes for supporting self-build groups are designed to help these groups and cohousing communities to shoulder the responsibility of ensuring that the process of urban development meets sustainability goals. Self-build cohousing groups are accordingly classified as family friendly, an environment in which people are directly involved at various levels of inclusion in creating secure and stable neighbourhoods. In line with this, the notion of social mixing is integrated into the concept of a sustainable neighbourhood, which should ideally include various 'focus groups', i.e. the disabled, older people and migrants.

This is also reflected in the assessment criteria which, in addition to the above-mentioned requirements, reflect an inclusive orientation towards the disabled and children, as well as strategies for the community's integration into the neighbourhood (Hamburg Agency, 2015).

Reflecting the emphasis on social mixing in contemporary urban planning (Lees *et al.*, 2008), the Hamburg programme emphasizes the integration of housing with commercial enterprises and, more importantly, of groups with varying income levels. The Hamburg Agency provides support and, together with Hamburgische Investitions- und Förderbank, funding for three different forms of ownership: first, private ownership, with each household buying its own unit; second, a small cooperative constituted by the building community, with each household becoming part of the cooperative and enjoying the right to use its unit and collective spaces; and third, the building community can join an established large cooperative, with each household becoming a member. Depending on households' individual income, there are construction subsidies at varying rates and grants for monthly rent in respect of cooperative ownership. The Hamburg Agency is trying to implement a so-called 'third mix' (*Drittelmix*), comprising 40% privately owned, 30% small cooperatives and 30% part of a large cooperative. In 2016 the Hamburg Agency, together with Hamburgische Investitions- und Förderbank, introduced a fourth category of unrestricted income limits for 20% of households in small cooperatives. Furthermore, direct applications for special loans to finance personal cooperative shares from Hamburgische Investitions- und Förderbank have been introduced. This latest adjustment of 'instruments' aims to alleviate difficulties in financing the necessary cooperative shares for low-income households and support the realization of more projects. At the same time, it also marks a new strategy of responsabilization, counting on trickle-down effects in the self-build groups, with the more prosperous encouraged to shoulder greater financial responsibility.

In Gothenburg, the ex-chair of the Planning and Building Committee stated that he regards self-build groups and cohousing as instruments of mixing, 'breaking up' socially homogenous areas, whether low or high income: 'if you imagine an area with a lot of rented flats, cohousing projects could be an element that is different and makes a contribution. And if you place them in an area with a lot of owner-occupied flats and houses, they could also be a factor for change' (Planning and Building Committee interview, 8 October 2015).

Acknowledging that when introduced in Sweden, self-build groups were primarily about self-ownership, he admitted that self-build groups 'demand that there are people who on a kind of private basis can borrow money ... and only a few people can do that' (*ibid.*). However, in order to counter this, Gothenburg Municipality is looking at ways to support participation of low-income individuals in self-build cohousing groups by trying to facilitate ownership forms other than self-ownership (see further below) and applying conditions to the sale of land, reducing the price as a trade-off for affordable housing.

It has also taken measures to introduce self-build cohousing groups in the context of housing stock owned by the municipal housing companies.³ In 2015, the municipal government directed the municipal housing companies to look into the possibility of letting blocks of flats to cohousing cooperatives, reducing rents in exchange for handing over maintenance responsibilities through a model of self-government.

Allocating responsibilities and retaining control: the intermediaries

We found that a key role in the governing of self-build cohousing groups, particularly concerning the allocation of responsibilities, is played by intermediaries. The involvement of a building facilitator (*Baubetreiber*), appointed by foundations

3 About 55% of Gothenburg's population lives in rented flats, 53% of which are owned by municipal housing companies (Tenants' Association, 2017).

established for this purpose, is a compulsory component in Hamburg's programme for supporting self-build groups. Originally, these foundations were given this role because the city did not want to directly subsidize the activists in their squats (Lawaetz-Stiftung interview, 13 May 2016). *Stattbau Hamburg* emerged directly from radical tenant and youth associations in 1985, while *Lawaetz-Stiftung* was founded by the social-democrat-led city government in 1986.⁴ Both started out with the aim of supporting the preservation and renovation of affordable housing—a core demand of the squatters' movement. The principles of self-governed and collective housing remain the cornerstone of their work, although their contemporary clientele are now more likely to have a moderate middle-class background than radical autonomous roots.

While the intermediaries stress their independence, which was confirmed by the Hamburg Agency—both in relation to the municipality and to private companies—our interviews made it apparent that they largely identify with the sustainability goals formulated by the municipality, albeit with different emphases. *Stattbau Hamburg* still focuses primarily on the affordability aspect, mainly supporting groups with little economic capital to form small cooperatives or join an existing larger cooperative, and working on affordable housing options for homeless young people. Ecological sustainability is seen as a standard to be fulfilled for the benefit of the community and self-building shapes the understanding of social sustainability. The connection between these two dimensions has been a key concern of *Stattbau Hamburg* ever since the 1980s: permanent and affordable non-profit housing, socially focused renovation and self-governed living founded on principles of encouraging self-help (*Stattbau Hamburg*, 2014: 5).

Lawaetz-Stiftung's motto is 'innovative for the common good' (*innovativ für das Gemeinwohl*). Its support of self-build groups is explicitly described as a part of the solution for the sustainable future of housing. Its planning approach focuses on ecologically sustainable energy and family-friendly concepts in order to fulfil requirements for subsidies stipulated by the Hamburg Agency (*Lawaetz-Stiftung*, 2015: 4). Regarding social sustainability, it has formulated an aim to support people on lower or medium incomes, but in fact it currently primarily supports owner-occupied self-build groups (*Lawaetz-Stiftung* interview, 13 May 2016). It is also clear to *Lawaetz-Stiftung* that the programme means gentrification: 'it's gentrification and it changes the city of course' (*ibid.*).

Self-build groups constitute a very resource-demanding field—economically, culturally and socially—and the intermediaries perform a number of important tasks, as they 'accompany every group from the first moment through the whole process of building' (*Stattbau Hamburg* interview, 11 May 2016). As emphasized by *Lawaetz-Stiftung*, the task from an overarching perspective is to shoulder primary responsibility for advancing the whole process: 'the construction companies and so on, they of course need somebody who's professional ... that's our job; to be the responsible person, who is—yeah, the responsible professional person who's in the middle of everything' (*Lawaetz-Stiftung* interview, 13 May 2016). Importantly, this is a temporary responsibility, as the goal of the whole process is to responsabilize the group: 'we help you, if you help yourself ... we want a group who says "well, we wanna be responsible for our house" ... responsibility is what we want' (*ibid.*). The element of discipline was also clearly articulated and, moreover, linked to responsabilization mediated by trust: 'I'm the one who's telling you the deadlines ... on the one side, of course they want to discuss a lot of things, but on the other side, they want to move in ... Well, they need to trust me' (*ibid.*).

4 These two are the main partners of the Hamburg Agency but there are other smaller ones, such as *ConPlan* and *Privatbau*. *Stattbau Hamburg* was founded by the associations *Mieterhelfen Mietern*, *Autonome Jugendwerkstätten* and *Netzwerk Selbsthilfe Hamburg*. Today the first two, together with *Wohnungsgenossenschaft Schanze eG.*, are shareholders in *Stattbau Hamburg Stadtentwicklungsgesellschaft mbH*. *Lawaetz-Stiftung's* capital base is founded on 100 rental properties that have been transferred from municipality housing stock.

The mediating act is thus described as a transfer of responsibilities, closely linked to a disciplining function. This was also emphasized by *Stattbau Hamburg*—when explaining what the mediating role implies, they referred to the reason for their foundation: ‘to end this confrontation’ between squatters and the local state:

And that was when *Stattbau* ... and others in the city said, well ‘just think about accepting other ways of living together in cities, of other social kinds’. And to those groups [the squatters] it was the same as saying ‘please accept that there are rules. And you can live as you want, but if you go outside there are rules and you have to accept that there are other people’. And so, this mediation—that was the early years of *Stattbau*. And in a way, you can see it worked. There are a lot of these projects from those years that are still running (*Stattbau Hamburg* interview, 11 May 2016).

In Gothenburg, the role of the intermediary has to date been performed either by an architectural firm or a municipal housing company. A group of architects and planners at the Gothenburg Property Management Office has also been assigned the intermediating task of acting as a facilitator. When we asked these intermediaries about their intended role, we found that there was some confusion regarding the political intentions of the municipality’s programme. The leader of the team at Gothenburg Property Management Office stated: ‘we are politically governed. We do what the politics says, but from there, nothing is said about why, or whether there are any additional thoughts, or how far we should go. So we have nothing to go on at all’ (Property Management Office interview, 8 October 2015).

In a similar manner, a representative of a municipal housing company who has been heavily involved in the programme so far expressed some confusion regarding the political intention:

It [the political intention] is not crystal clear. It [the programme] demands a counterpart ... there must be more associations—or you have to think about a different plan. And then you have to ask: what is this kind of community really? Is it enough that we build a house where there is a common space that you don’t have to book in advance? (*Familjebostäder* interview, 1 April 2016).

Such scepticism was also expressed in interviews with representatives of other municipal housing companies. It was argued that there is insufficient demand for this form of housing on the scale at which they are operating (*ibid*; *Bostadsbolaget* and *Poseidon* municipal housing companies interview, 4 March 2016). A particular case in point is a failed project in the stigmatized Gothenburg suburb of Kortedala, in which the municipal housing company *Familjebostäder* cooperated with the cohousing association *Bolhop*. The idea was that the cohousing association, working with an architectural firm as a self-build group, would have a strong influence on the design of the housing; that the housing company would build and then let it to the cohousing association, who would manage the building through self-government. The project failed because the cohousing association could not find enough tenants, the reason being (as several of our interviewees confirmed) that those who wanted to live there could not afford it, and those who could afford it did not want to live in that particular (stigmatized) area (*Bolhop* interview, 16 February 2016; *Familjebostäder* interview, 1 April 2016; *White Architects* interview, 2 June 2016).

The absence of a clear political strategy felt by the intermediaries in Gothenburg is also a feature of the politics of responsabilization, because it leaves space for civil society organizations and/or private actors to shoulder initiative-taking responsibility.

This is precisely what happened when the architectural firm Okidoki, in cooperation with the cohousing association Bolhop, developed a concept called 'Self-build Groups for Everyone' (Bolhop, 2014) in relation to an application to the municipality for land in the Hösbo district (see below for further details). It mentions 'the German example' (referring in particular to projects in Freiburg and Tübingen)—as both an inspiring example and object of criticism (it risks producing gentrification because it is associated with owner-occupation): 'Self-build group projects in Germany have been tied to an ownership form similar to the Swedish owner-occupied flat. This has made self-build cohousing a type of project and a form of dwelling designed first and foremost for groups with significant social/economic capital' (*ibid.*). The concept then summarizes the programme in six points, strongly stressing the realization of social sustainability, both in terms of social mixing and affordability, with particular emphasis on the latter. In order to achieve affordability, it suggests a 'three-party model' and an ownership form that involves a 'long-term real estate owner' who should manage the rented flats, which are let to the cohousing association, organized as a cooperative (*kooperativ hyresrätt*). Addressing the issue of social and cultural capital, it stresses 'low thresholds for time and commitment' and, in order to achieve this, it is argued that a significant role should be played by an intermediary. Contrary to the Hamburg programme, a case is made for the architect and the architectural firm to shoulder this responsibility, by acting as project manager.

In the next section, we will take a closer look at how the governing of self-build cohousing groups turns out in practice, as we examine two strategically selected projects in districts projected for urban restructuring in Hamburg and Gothenburg: Central Altona and Hösbo.

	Local Government	Intermediaries	Projects
Hamburg	<i>Specialized agency:</i> Agentur für Baugemeinschaften (Hamburg Agency)	<i>Non-profit independent agencies</i>	<i>Small cooperative</i> <i>Large cooperative</i>
	Competitive group selection Allocation of city-owned land Financial support and control	Counselling during application Planning Building process	Community building finance
Gothenburg	<i>Municipal Property Management Office</i>	<i>Municipal housing companies</i> <i>Architectural firms</i> <i>Private housing companies</i>	<i>Small cooperative</i> <i>Municipal housing company</i> <i>Private housing company</i>
	Selection of applicants Allocation of city-owned land	Counselling during application Planning Building process	Community building finance

FIGURE 2 Governance structure of self-build cohousing in Gothenburg and Hamburg: actors and their tasks

Self-build groups, cohousing and urban restructuring—the cases of Central Altona and Hösbo

- Möwe Altonah self-build cohousing group in Central Altona
Central Altona is Hamburg's second-largest city development project, part of larger development plans to house between 10,000 and 12,000 people in the district of Altona, on sites including a former railway station and the old Holsten brewery. The planning process has been the focus of protests against neighbourhood initiatives, including demands for consideration of the 'common good' (*gemeinwohl*)—i.e. more

public spaces and social housing—in the rather functional and profit-oriented masterplan, as well as meaningful participation in the planning process (Rinn, 2016: 197ff).

Möwe Altonah is a self-build cohousing group currently planning an apartment block for about 90 people in Central Altona in its capacity as a member of an existing (small) cooperative. Its core group of about 35 people emerged from two circles of friends. When asked about the motivations for starting their self-build cohousing group, both affordability and a sense of community were mentioned—as well as a politically articulated intention to resist gentrification by not being part of it. Democratic self-government is also important to the group, with decisions made by consensus. Their funding model is solidarity-based, meaning that those who can afford to do so are asked to contribute more (Möwe Altonah interview, 19 October 2015). They are also successfully using crowdfunding. Ecological sustainability is equally important for the group. In response to the Hamburg Agency's demand for a unique energy concept in order to be accepted on the programme, they presented an idea for a co-generation unit as a decentralized power source. They also proposed using ecological materials for the building (*ibid.*).

The group consists largely of academics in their thirties, families, some former squatters and political activists, plus individuals with disabilities who will join the development process at a later stage; the age range extends from 0 to 60. There will be about 28 flats of varying size, from one-room units up to a ten-person shared apartment. A common space and office are also planned. Providing an indoor common space for the neighbourhood underpins the solidarity approach of the group, accepting responsibility for the neighbourhood beyond a purely residential focus:

We would like to be one of the residences in this new area that is just a place to be and a place to do things together and to develop the neighbourhood as a kind of a lively or ... nice place ... some of us are really looking forward to organizing punk concerts. We also want this to be a place for political groups or people who are organizing things (*ibid.*).

Being 100% social housing, which comes with strict legal obligations in order to qualify for subsidies, problems arose with financing the planned large common spaces. In negotiations with the city during the planning process, these had to be reduced in size: 'we started with lots of shared space' (Möwe Altonah interview, 12 May 2016). The group has also struggled with other financial challenges, especially requirements by the Hamburg Agency and Hamburgische Investitions- und Förderbank to include a low-income group in the programme while simultaneously financing the necessary shares in the cooperative.

The disciplinary side of the Hamburg Agency's regulations also touched upon the composition of the group, as it rejected plans to include refugees and young adults with special needs in the project, giving priority to accommodating people with disabilities. Furthermore, while the group is in favour of a car-free city, they need to have a garage because their apartment block shares the same lot with four other buildings—but with fewer parking places per household than the usual regulations stipulate. They also had to incorporate a business that served the neighbourhood, and found a partner to run a restaurant on the ground floor (Möwe Altonah interview, 19 October 2015). They faced some surprising requirements due to contracts already entered into by the municipality: for example the restaurant is only allowed to sell Carlsberg beer;⁵ energy for the whole development can only be provided by the Swedish government-owned power company Vattenfall, meaning that the idea of a co-generation unit as a decentralized power source,

5 When Carlsberg—as the owner of Holsten—sold the brewery site to the city, a covenant was written into the contract stipulating that any hospitality establishment on the property could only serve Carlsberg beer.

approved by the Hamburg Agency, had to be abandoned—'it's kind of a farce' (*ibid.*); and the construction company had already been chosen—'it's a compromise for each of us' (*ibid.*).

Work is divided among small working groups focusing on different aspects of the process; they have realized that this project work requires a significant amount of time and, moreover, social and cultural capital: 'because we have so much work to do on this project you have to have a really good job and good relations with your colleagues because you have to leave your job to handle so many dates and times' (Möwe Altnonah interview, 12 May 2016). One of the hardest aspects has been dealing with the question of how to recruit a further 55 people. Using email lists, they have also encountered criticism, both for being gentrifiers and for 'selling out' their autonomy to the municipality:

There are some people in Hamburg who compare every new project with the Hafensstraße. Which we don't think is correct, because the Hafensstraße is a really old project. It's from the 1980s ... and Hafensstraße is just like 'we did everything on our own'. So, if you want to be part of a project, everybody thinks you must decide everything. But it's the twenty-first century and you're not deciding anything (*ibid.*).

They felt that accusations of being gentrifiers were unfair: 'we don't think so because there's nothing we can gentrify' (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, they have realized that their closest neighbours have quite different ideas: 'we've got those two ownership projects, to the left and right of our residence and they do have comparatively expensive ideas about how the houses should be fitted out. And we are not able to spend that much money' (*ibid.*).

They also found that the owner-occupied residences in the area acquired the more prestigious sites next to parkland, while the social housing units face the railway line. Further, there is a realization that the project creates economic dependencies, partly due to the process of lending money privately and partly due to the solidarity principle. On one hand this has created problematic responsibilities within the group, on the other it stimulates the disciplining of personal plans for the coming years in order to deal with these dependencies:

And these financial dependencies, they are everywhere in this project. Many of us are borrowing or lending. The money comes from mama and papa and grandma and grandpa. Parents, they want to have the money back in 10 years and so everybody is just looking—okay, what is the monthly rent? What will I earn in five years? When can I start to give the money back? Should I ask for credit at the bank? But we as a group, we don't want people to go to the bank, because this is a very strong dependency ... so, yeah, I don't like this money thing (*ibid.*).

– Under the Same Roof self-build cohousing group in Högsbo

Högsbo is a partly industrial area south of Gothenburg's city centre, targeted as a 'prioritized development area' in the Planning and Building Committee's 'Development Strategy Gothenburg 2025' (Gothenburg Municipality, 2014). Previously mainly inhabited by a low-income population living in rented flats owned primarily by municipal housing companies, the new plan's goal of creating 'mixing functions' (*ibid.*: 15) involves an 'upgrading'. These developments have already brought gentrification to the area. In 2012, a rent dispute attracted nationwide publicity when private company Stena Real Estate announced plans to renovate its 776 Högsbo flats and raise rents by 65% (Sernhede *et al.*, 2016).

Against the backdrop of such heated public debate regarding the lack of affordable housing, especially newly built flats, in 2013 the Planning and Building Committee announced a competition in Högsbo, the main criterion of which was affordability. The winner was the architectural firm Okidoki, proposing that the plot of land in question should be given to self-build cohousing groups and presenting its concept for affordable housing communities (mentioned above). Today, three self-build cohousing groups are active in the area. The one closest to starting building is the cohousing association Under the Same Roof (Under Samma Tak—UST), with 140 members. Its programme for the Högsbo project strongly emphasizes sustainability: ‘The association will work for a sense of community and foster economic and social sustainable housing, and encourage residents to lead an ecologically sustainable way of life’ (UST, 2015).

In 2014, the municipality allocated UST land in the Högsbo area. A private housing company specializing in building ecologically sustainable housing, Trollängen, will build and own the property, and UST will rent it as a cooperative, letting the individual apartments to members.

Responsibilization seems not to have worked as smoothly as in the Altona case, partly because of the absence of an independent intermediary. Initially, in order to achieve the goal of affordability, UST made contact with a municipal housing company, but after a period of discussion they felt that the latter’s interest in the project was rather weak. UST also approached the municipal Property Management Office in order to involve an intermediary who would be ‘on their side’ in the process; however their request was turned down (UST interview, 14 December 2016). As a result, the private housing company has had a decisive influence on some of the decisions regarding issues on which different opinions have been expressed within the group (see below). In 2016, the architects presented a plan designed in cooperation with UST. This foresaw a building containing 55 flats plus several shared spaces: a dining room, hobby room, ‘play room’, laundry room, garden and roof terrace. Energy needs would be supplied by solar panels on the roof, with ecological standards comparable to a passive house (Ferrum Architects, 2016).

With similar visions as Möwe Altonah, UST has been facing fewer challenges: the authorities have accepted far fewer parking spaces per household than the norm stipulates (there will only be guest parking) and there has been no need to cut down on shared spaces, except for a gym. The reason for eliminating this was not, however, economic; the group felt it might increase the risk of the community becoming ‘an isolated bubble’. As an interviewee stated: ‘we shouldn’t live our whole life in this building, shouldn’t we go outside?’ (UST interview, 26 November 2015). There have, however, been tensions within the group regarding how to prioritize shared and individual spaces. The decision that the apartments should have their own balconies (the architects’ recommendation), plus approval for individuals to have their own washing machines,⁶ left some members feeling that the idea of a cohousing project was being compromised (*ibid.*). The biggest challenge, and disappointment, for the group has been the difficulty in fulfilling the goal of affordability. Having set out with a target of SEK 1,400/square metre/year—seen as relatively affordable in the Swedish context—they are now looking at SEK 1,900: ‘that is the most difficult thing, because new builds are not cheap and we stated at the beginning that we would build affordable and sustainable homes. Well, we can’t really say it’s affordable’ (*ibid.*).

The contradictions of sustainability

Hamburg and Gothenburg are in the midst of major urban restructuring; both claim to be world leaders in SUD and highlight their programmes for supporting cohousing and self-build groups as a way of realizing sustainability. In this article, one

6 In Sweden, shared washing facilities remain the norm in apartment buildings.

of our starting points was Davidson's (2010b) argument that 'sustainability' functions as the contemporary empty master signifier of urban planning. This argument is indeed supported by our empirical material. In the cases studied, SUD clearly functions as an empty signifier, understood as a discursive nodal point uniting the fields of urban planning and urban restructuring. It does so by integrating various ideas and strategies into a political order without making any profound changes in the power relationships that structure this order (Thörn *et al.*, 2017). In this sense it fulfils an ideological function of contemporary urban governance, its hegemonic operation consisting in closing off other possible articulations, in this case for example 'social justice' as an alternative principle of global governance. Such a general conclusion does not, however, imply that studies of the actual meanings ascribed to SUD are irrelevant. Because 'empty' in this context means that its meaning is not fixed, it is necessary to establish empirically how the discourse actually works—and varies—when it is translated into governing strategies and practices in the local contexts of urban governance.

Looking at the 'sustainability problems' that self-build cohousing groups were perceived to address according to the municipalities, and the definitions of SUD that this implied, we found that municipalities frame this support as experiments in economic sustainability through 'smart growth', also having strong potential to fulfil ecological and social sustainability goals. The meaning of economic sustainability as smart growth in this context is linked to a re-regulation of local planning and infrastructure; in both Hamburg and Gothenburg, support for self-build cohousing has been part of a more market-based approach to the planning of land use and housing.

The meaning of ecological sustainability in this context was quite coherent and shared by politicians, planners, architects and cohousing associations: the buildings constructed should have low climate impact and facilitate the resource-saving forms of living associated with cohousing as a collective form of living, emphasizing urban sharing. In contrast, social sustainability was ascribed a multiplicity of meanings, which can be grouped into four themes. Self-build cohousing groups are supposed to provide social sustainability through: (1) social cohesion, by creating a sense of community in housing (that may also increase the social capital of the group members) and promoting social integration with the neighbourhood and the wider city; (2) autonomous self-government of housing; (3) social mixing, including social inclusion of 'under-served' or 'under-represented' groups; and (4) affordability.

Although all these social goals were expressed by the different actors we interviewed, there were different emphases, which became particularly pronounced in the process of putting ideas into practice. Referring to the four goals of social sustainability above, we would like to highlight certain constraints regarding the realization of self-build groups looking to cohousing as an alternative form of housing formulated in the context of major urban development.

Regarding (1), social sustainability through cohesion, we found that both municipalities placed significant emphasis on the argument that self-build cohousing groups fulfil important aspects of social sustainability in the sense of social integration with the neighbourhood and the wider city. This assumption is not supported by the research of Kehl and Then (2013: 54) on cohousing in Germany, based on 222 households in five neighbourhoods: 'To the contrary, the respondents of the programme group were significantly less active in the associational life outside their community than their control group counterparts, and residents' benefits seem to appear at the expense of civil society returns'.

While (2), the goal of social sustainability through self-government, was universally emphasized, the dominant mode of governance, practiced through a combination of responsabilization and discipline, created tension and struggle over how the actual process should be governed and its content, i.e. the actual form the apartment building should take. We found that a key role in the governance of

self-build cohousing groups, particularly concerning the practices through which responsibilities are distributed, is that of intermediary, i.e. an actor performing the role of project manager, with the responsibility of mediating between certain government institutions, private actors and civil society. Compared to the Gothenburg case, the Hamburg programme demonstrated a much more clearly defined responsabilizing function, playing a key role in the actual practices that gradually responsabilize the cohousing group. We have also shown that in Hamburg the municipality, represented by the Hamburg Agency, has placed stronger emphasis on the disciplinary side of governance than has been the case in Gothenburg. As shown above this operates mainly through: the selection process, with specific social, cultural and economic criteria to be fulfilled; external funding obligations controlled by the Hamburg Agency and Hamburgische Investitions- und Förderbank; and detailed regulations concerning the construction of the apartment building and recruitment of members to the cohousing community (with requirements to include certain target groups). Gothenburg, on the other hand, puts more emphasis on neoliberal responsabilization by 'not governing too much' or, in the words of the ex-chair of the Planning and Building Committee, 'not standing in the way'.

In both cities, the cohousing groups demonstrated an experience that is common in programmes promoting self-government through responsabilization (see e.g. Thörn, 2016): the responsibilities assigned to them by the programme did not come with sufficient support in terms of financial resources or capacity building to allow the groups to exercise self-government with the degree of autonomy they strived for. In Gothenburg, the group felt that the absence of support from an independent intermediary left them negotiating from a relatively inexperienced and thus weak position with municipal and private actors possessing well-defined strategies and interests. In Hamburg, the group felt overburdened by both formal and informal financial responsibilities stipulated by the programme. They also felt that certain disciplinary measures significantly decreased their space for autonomy or at least necessitated a 'creative' handling of the requirements.

Regarding (3), social sustainability through social mixing, and (4), affordability, the municipalities tended to put more emphasis on the social mixing aspect than the self-build cohousing groups themselves, with the latter placing greater emphasis on affordability than the former. Clearly the Hamburg Agency programme focuses on middle-class applicants, on the one hand by acknowledging their specific demands for a safe and prosperous living environment, and on the other by incorporating their social, cultural and economic competencies in the processes of SUD. At the same time, these actors are rendered responsible for incorporating other underprivileged 'focus groups' directly in the self-build groups and, moreover, seen as drivers of a socially stable and secure neighbourhood. At the same time, it becomes clear that self-build groups also require cultural and social capital.

It should be noted that, while there was relatively strong consensus between municipalities, intermediaries and cohousing groups regarding the definitions of ecological and social sustainability goals, the cohousing groups did not share the municipalities' ideas on 'smart growth'. For the cohousing groups, economic sustainability was mainly defined as affordability. As noted above, however, the municipalities considered affordability as a social sustainability goal, defined as smart growth. For the municipalities, ecological and social sustainability are subsumed within economic sustainability. First, self-built cohousing essentially enables middle-class people to transfer cultural and social capacities through collective effort into an economic commodity with high ecological standards. Second, the self-build cohousing projects act to improve a specific neighbourhood, since they may have a positive social impact beyond the building as a result of residents' commitment and engagement; the social space and character of former industrial and working-class areas are thus

intentionally changed. Planned gentrification, legitimized as a by-product of 'urban restructuring', thus functions as a driving factor for economic growth. So the circle is closed as investments in social and ecological sustainability provide economic sustainability through 'smart growth'.

Conclusion

We have asked questions regarding how sustainability is defined in the context of cohousing projects supported by local government; what strategies and relations SUD involve in this context and with what effects, particularly concerning the extent to which they address gentrification. We have demonstrated how the key rationality in governing SUD through self-build cohousing groups, linking actors involved in projects to the economic and political logics of advanced liberal governance, is responsabilization, defining relations between the various actors involved. In conclusion, we argue that ownership form/finance is an extremely important factor for understanding the possibilities and constraints for self-build cohousing to function as an alternative, particularly in a context of urban transformation governed by advanced liberalism. Collective ownership forms, such as small and large cooperatives, imply a radical democratic dimension of decision making that tends to disappear in self-owned projects, where each household can independently decide to sell up at market price, without negotiating with other households. In particular, the distribution of responsibilities between residents differs in these two legal forms, something which first and foremost manifests in daily practices regarding social relations of mutual care and support. But this actually starts with the composition of the group based on the financial circumstances of its members, regulating inclusion and exclusion depending on available economic capital. The intermediaries here play an important role, because they link the municipalities' goals of SUD with those addressed in the applications made by the projects.

In Gothenburg, awareness of the logic of gentrification in connection with urban development led to a joint initiative by architects and cohousing activists to present to the municipality ideas and strategies for 'building communities for everyone' in the district studied (Högsbo). Nevertheless costs spiralled, so that rents had to be set at a considerably higher level than originally intended. While the groups in both Gothenburg and Hamburg argued that they saw their projects as seeking to counter gentrification and segregation, politicians, planners and intermediaries involved in the programmes had a more cynical approach, arguing that it is virtually impossible to avoid gentrification because new-build housing is too expensive—as summarized by one of the intermediaries: 'self-build groups bring gentrification, but they are not the cause of gentrification' (Lawaetz-Stiftung interview, 13 May 2016).

In this context, pockets of self-build cohousing can at best provide marginal alternatives to dominant forms of housing. But our examples also show how even such modest aspirations prove difficult to achieve, particularly when it comes to making housing affordable, considering the economic and political logics of contemporary urban development. This situation, heavily conditioned by capitalist land and housing markets, and driven by public-private partnerships promoting de-regulation and re-regulation to further strengthen market-based approaches through 'smart growth', has produced rising property values and increased housing-related costs. On the basis of our analysis, we argue that 'successful' cohousing can even contribute to processes of gentrification, with groups relatively strong in economic and cultural capital displacing weaker groups. Furthermore, in some cases, local or national governments may use their support for cohousing as a way to legitimize economically, socially and ecologically unsustainable large-scale urban restructuring. This is mainly due to the fact that the third pillar of the sustainability agenda, economic sustainability, is defined and practised in terms of 'growth first' (Mayer, 2017).

To sum up, through its function as an empty signifier, sustainable urban development plays a dominant role in processes of urban governance in both Gothenburg and Hamburg. Its translation into practice in the form of self-build cohousing groups reflects an intrinsic tension between the process of responsabilization and the struggle for autonomy.

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