

Johannisson, Bengt; Sundin, Elisabeth

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# Societal Entrepreneurship as a Lever to Sustainable Local and Regional Development – the Case of the ALV Theme park<sup>1</sup>

Bengt Johannisson, Linnaeus University/Jönköping University  
(bengt.johannisson@lnu.se)

Elisabeth Sundin, Linköping University (elisabeth.sundin@liu.se)

## 1. The challenge

Among practitioners as well as researchers there is an increasing awareness of the need for sustainable development. This concern for endurance encompasses firms and other organizations as well as localities, from communities and regions to nations and the globe as a whole. In the public discourse sustainability then covers, besides economic, also social and ecological dimension. Now when creativity and diversity have been recognized as major triggers of change and development, see for example Florida 2002, culture, both as a way of life based on a concern for the cultural heritage and as an aesthetic challenge, as well must be considered as a dimension of sustainability. These four contributors to sustainability are expected to jointly create organizations and localities that are able to create a better world. Here we want to add a fifth concern that in a way incorporates and anticipates the very reason for creating a sustainable world. How to make the importance and wellbeing of the children the focus of soci(et)al improvement?

There are two major strategies to cope with an increasing call for sustainable development. One is to perceive and organize the challenge as a problem that calls for a (re)active solution. This usually is about creating a corrective to the negative consequences of a too strong economic focus in ongoing business activity. The practice of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) may be considered as such an adjustment. CSR is based on the view that economic

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actors have pay attention to their impact of their operations on society outside the market. However, non-economic forces, from institutions to activist initiatives, are still considered as restrictions on entrepreneurship as business venturing. The alternative, integrated, strategy is an approach to the making of a sustainable organization/locality that invites economic as well as social and ecological and cultural forces and pressures to interactively build a texture where economic activity gains its legitimacy and strength by collaborating with other societal forces. This means that the proposed integrated approach considers social or societal entrepreneurship as the appropriate point of departure for the creation of a sustainable society, cf. e.g. Steyaert & Katz 2004, Steyaert & Hjorth 2006. This view originates in the conviction that the different dimensions of sustainability are not competing about the same limited resources but rather enforcing each other. Stronger beliefs and hope, more energy and commitment, feed entrepreneurial processes.

The purpose of this paper is to, first, further conceptualize an approach that makes soci(et)al entrepreneurship a proper framing for local and regional development. Then we apply our tentative conceptualization on an empirical case from the creative industries – the Astrid Lindgren theme park, an event arena in southern Sweden.

Next we provide a brief report from the empirical landscape, that is the Astrid Lindgren World. In the third section we elaborate on some conceptual ideas in the borderland between entrepreneurship and regional development, ideas which end up in a proposed comprehensive, yet tentative, framework. The major argument is that since a location provides an arena for agents and activities associated with the public, private as well as the voluntary sector, the enactment of soc(ie)tal entrepreneurship call for intersectoral initiatives. In the fourth section we reflect upon the Astrid Lindgren Park as it has evolved since its inception. We consider the creation of the theme park as the materialization of societal entrepreneurship across sectors a major contribution to the making of a sustainable local community. In a final fifth section we reflect upon our findings. Particular focus will then be on the relationship between the park and its financial and symbolic ownership on one hand, the Vimmerby municipality on the other.

## 2. The empirical setting – Introducing ALV

Vimmerby is a small Swedish town, the dominant centre of a municipality with altogether 15,500 inhabitants in rural southern Sweden. Going there you pass tiny fields surrounded by stone walls, once built by the people living there in order to get at least a some farming land that could be protected from the cattle. Obviously this hard work was one of the major reasons why so many from this region in the 1800-ies and early 1900-ies emigrated, mainly to North-America. The tough living conditions were kept alive in the local story-telling and thus familiar to the world-famous author of children books, Astrid Lindgren (although her own family was privileged as the tenant of a farm that was owned by the Swedish church, located just outside what was then the town Vimmerby. This is where Astrid Lindgren (born in 1907) as a child was inspired although most of her books were written in Stockholm. Her books are sold all over the world and have ever since been loved by children across national and ethnical boundaries. Pippi Longstocking, The Children of Noice Village, Madicken, Karlsson on the Roof and Ronia, the Robber's Daughter are known everywhere. For Astrid Lindgren the children, all children, are the most important human beings. Accordingly children are always at the centre in her stories and her public statements caring for the children are well-known.

Astrid Lindgren had a unique position in Sweden and many artefacts and discourses echo her legacy. When she made a public statement everyone listened. Let us provide an example! She wrote and published a short story about the bad situation for laying hens – and soon enough a law on a perch for every hen was taken by the Swedish parliament. Her 90-ies birthday was celebrated in the Swedish public television on prime time with herself on a throne on the scene where artists, politicians, industrial leaders and others were parading. When she died in 2002 her funeral was a national concern and in order to honour her, the Swedish government instituted and financed an international child literature award, the biggest of its kind in the world.

The great interest in Astrid Lindgren's books about former life in rural Sweden made three entrepreneurial families create a miniature of the worlds that accommodated some of her stories told. The initiative mainly addressed the families' own children but soon enough neighbouring children joined in. Over time the family business emerged into a spectacular

arena in the Swedish creative industries, the World of Astrid Lindgren (Astrid Lindgrens Värld), here addressed as ALV. In the new millennium almost half a million people come to Vimmerby every summer in order to visit the theme park. This makes ALV one of the major tourist attractions in Sweden and its competitors are with few exceptions located in metropolitan areas. ALV itself is also very international with many visitors from e.g. Germany, The Netherlands and Denmark. Accordingly the signs in the ALV are not only in Swedish but also for example in German (the first foreign language in ALV) and English. Some of the local stores in the centre of Vimmerby as well have signs in German, for example telling that they offer “Lebensmittel”. Today ALV is also locally recognized as an attractor of domestic and international visitors and thus important local trade. But it has not always been like that and why it is like that is what our story to a great extent is about.

Telling the story of how ALV was constructed as a major force in the making of contemporary Vimmerby and its ALV into a major contributor to the Swedish creative industries by necessity includes how the event park interplayed with its local context. Hundreds of thousands of visitors invading a small town like Vimmerby mean a lot of challenges. The municipality has to provide an appropriate local infrastructure while the local business community is offered a lot of opportunities and so are the teenagers in Vimmerby who can find themselves a job for the summer in the theme park. This is thus a story characterized by entrepreneurial processes of different kinds, sometimes energized by collaboration, sometimes by creative tensions between ALV and local stakeholders or between the latter and agents outside the municipality.

Reflecting upon ALV as an evolving outcome of entrepreneurial processes we will consider how different forms of capital has made entrepreneurship materialize. Besides financial capital also human and social capital as well as the cultural capital carried by the stories told and retold in ALV have been needed to make the enactment of the park possible. Several issues concerning the ALV and its development have been very emotional to many of the stakeholders involved and triggered action accordingly, which makes the notion of ‘emotional capital’ relevant as well. These different kinds of capital are carried by a variety of actors such as the entrepreneurs who initiated the construction of ALV, commercial stakeholders, representatives of the voluntary sector, the local political organization and the municipal administration and, above all, Astrid Lindgren herself and her family.

### 3. In the beginning was societal entrepreneuring

In his seminal 1985 article 'The Social Embeddedness of Economic Activity' Mark Granovetter questions the foundations of the neoclassical economic theory. He argues that economic activity is incomprehensible if its social setting is not considered. Elsewhere we have used this view as a point of departure for studying small firm clusters as being enveloped in different institutional layers (Johannisson et al. 2002, Becattini 2009). This embedding of local business activity makes self-organizing possible, invites shared responsibilities and makes evident that entrepreneurship is a collective phenomenon.

As indicated we want to push this argument for contextualizing the traditionally economic branding of entrepreneurship a bit further. We thus argue that in order to comprehend and enforce local/regional sustainable development, entrepreneurship must be recognized as a generically societal phenomenon. There are at least two foundations for such a proposition, one that presents entrepreneurship as soci(et)al phenomenon without any direct reference to economic activity and one that uses the economic dimension of entrepreneurship as a foothold. If entrepreneurship on one hand is associated with mundane coping in everyday life (se Steyaert 2004), on the other with the 'making of new worlds', that is radical change in values and practices (Spinosa et al.1997), its original societal features become obvious. Alternatively, entrepreneurship as emergent (economic) activity, as business venturing, may be considered to crystallize, sediment, out of personal networking originating in genuine relations between the initiator and her/his associates (Larson & Starr 1992, Johannisson 2000). Such social interaction is also the foundation of social life and society.

Entrepreneurial activity, or rather inter-activity since entrepreneurship is about creative organizing, typically means crossing boundaries and building bridges in physical, mental or social space. In an economic, a market, context such boundary-crossing may be between technologies (Schumpeter 1934), producer and consumers (Kirzner 1978 (1973)) or localities and the global setting (Barth 1963). Considering society as the proper context for entrepreneurial processes, their traversing of boundaries may as well be outlined in the three spaces whether the processe concern the creation or renewal of firms or of institutions or even the founding of a new worldview.

In our quest for making sense of the forces that have created ALV we are obviously particularly concerned with reporting and reflecting upon how (societal) entrepreneurship transcends the private, public and voluntary sectors. There are a number of reasons for this. First, any welfare economy, certainly including Sweden, accommodates social action that originates in either of these sectors. In Sweden the public sector is particularly well developed. Yet the voluntary sector, carried not the least by major popular movements such as the labour movement, the sport movement and the temperance movement have been very important organizing civic life in Sweden. All three sectors have over time been owners, in the formal, (legal) sense, of ALV. Eventually the three pioneering families incorporated their initiative into a formal business operation. Soon enough large corporations became interested in the flourishing business and acquired it. When the corporate owners failed in the recession in the beginning of the 1990ies, a new owner constellation including major Swedish actor in the third, voluntary sector took over. When their organization withdraw the municipality became the major owner. Only recently the Astrid Lindgren's family, the majority of which is living in Stockholm, succeeded the municipality as the majority owner. In between there has even been an attempt to make ALV into a genuinely local company with a widely distributed ownership in the town and its vicinity. On the initiative of a local businessman the local newspaper organized a campaign in order to enact this vision of community entrepreneurship. However, this venture failed and besides the Astrid Lindgren family only the municipality remains as an owner with a minority of the shares. The emergence of ALV will be further elaborated in the next section.

Already business ventures do not only need financial capital but human and social capital as well in order to overcome liabilities of newness, see e.g. Winborg 2000, Davidsson & Honig 2003. We here associate human capital with the intellectual capabilities that people have in term of formal and personal knowledge that may be actionable in (business and social) venturing processes. Social capital refers to the resources that people access through (personal) networking and, when condensed and formalized, make organizations. Katz & Kahn (1966) illustrates how occasional local organizing (they use the example of fire fighting) over time becomes institutionalized, demonstrating how spontaneous and voluntary human interaction is the origin of formal structures also in the private and public sectors. Elsewhere we generally argue that business ventures sediment out of the personal network of the entrepreneur and her/his associates (Johannisson 2002).

While financial, human and social capital and their interrelationships are reasonably well covered in the literature, emotional capital is more seldom identified as a form of capital (as our way of presenting resources) and neither is care as a trigger of entrepreneurship. However, not the least entrepreneurship research reports the power of emotions when it comes to initiate and withhold initiative and (inter)action that opposes existing values and behavioural norms are enacted. Here we thus associate emotional capital with the ability of people to commit themselves to a cause whether getting passionately involved in the enactment of an own business (see Cardon et al. 2009) or the collective mobilization needed to hinder a local community from being closed down because the failure of the dominant employer Johannisson & Nilsson 1989) or generally being threatened (Stryjan 1987). Care for the local community is often one of the incentives for creating organizations (Borch et al. 2008, Sundin forthcoming). But there are also others like the ones described by Malin Gawell (2006) in her thesis on the establishing of the Swedish branch of the Attac-movement. The initiators, the entrepreneurs, said they had to do what they did in order to save the world. The expressions used are almost the same as one Astrid Lindgren's characters used when explaining why you have to intervene to protect the small and vulnerable – "if you don't you are not a human being, you are just some small dirt" (from the novel *Bröderna Lejonhjärta*, the *The Lionheart Brothers*).

A generic capability of (social) entrepreneurs is to amplify their personal emotional capital by making others commit themselves to their cause as is discussed both in the business (Gartner et al. 1992) and in the social venturing literature, see e.g. Johannisson & Nilsson 1989. In the context of ALV Astrid Lindgren herself was firmly committed to the cause of avoiding making ALV into a commercial playground, literally and symbolically. Because of her assets in terms of cultural capital and financial capital (including property rights, she owned all the trademarks associated with the different characters staging in ALV), a kind of symbolic ownership, she was not dependent on the commitment of others. She had veto on any initiative taken in the context of the theme park, a power that was beyond any formal contract and that she often exercised.



#### 4. Social concern as a basis for business venturing in ALV

Obviously it is impossible to outline how an entrepreneurial venture as an act of creation will emerge. Coincidence and serendipity as well as spontaneity and improvisation will craft its trajectory. Only very close process studies will make it possible to track the emerging pattern of (inter)actions close enough to identify its characteristics, see Steyaert 2007, Johannisson 2009. While such qualitative research is feasible when researching business or social venturing, it easily becomes overwhelming when used for studying societal entrepreneurship that usually is both more complex and enduring. Many agents are involved and the change processes take time to take off and mature. Here we thus content ourselves with a retrospective field study that demonstrates the long-term effects of the creation of Astrid Lindgren's World (ALV). Both the messages communicated by Astrid Lindgren's books/stories and her personal and deep involvement in the management of the park reflect a concern for more generic values than the making of a business venture. As indicated, we here associate the notion of 'sustainability' with the values and associated practices stated by Astrid Lindgren herself. As stated, the care for children as a generic characteristic of sustainability in her mind but she also communicated moral standards in a wider perspective expressed in the three words "courage, responsibility and imagination", certainly related both to the author herself and many of her characters.

Below we present the development of ALV as the outcome of the standpoints and actions taken by key stakeholders. We have chosen a stage model since we do not have information that is close enough to adopt any of the other process models provided by Steyaert (2007). In each phase we try to identify who the initiator and the driving forces have been, that is where the entrepreneurial initiative belongs and where the entrepreneurial energy in terms of different forms of capital is located. The variety of entrepreneurial initiatives taken and the diversity of capital used to enact it will be presented below as a base for analyses and discussion

### ***Phase One: Three entrepreneurial families guided by a social vision (1979-1989)***

In this early phase, three agents play the main parts:

- three families with social intentions,
- the municipality of Vimmerby and,
- Astrid Lindgren herself

The origins of the Astrid Lindgren theme park goes back to three families building small houses from one of the Astrid Lindgren stories (Emil in Katthult) for their own children to play in and around. The small houses were built close to the families own places that were close to where Astrid Lindgren herself was brought up.

Every year the families constructed a new miniature milieu originating in the stories told by Astrid Lindgren. Many children living in the neighbourhood joined in and soon enough the families found themselves administrating an operation that was very much like a business with an expanding demand for facilities like toilets and parking places as well as for coffee and ice-cream. Accordingly the families registered a commercial company and borrowed 30.000 Swedish crowns to make needed investments. They used their social capital to get white goods from the local stores and many other things they needed at favourable prices. They also asked the municipality to make investments in needed infrastructure such as roads and parking lots for visitors. The municipality did so – but too late and too little according to the families.

At this point the families were anxious to follow the instructions of Astrid Lindgren. She knew the entrepreneurial families and expressed her trust in them and “blessed” their initiative. She wanted her name to be connected to the benefit of *all* children and that no one should be excluded because s/he could no afford to come. Whatever that was offered at the ‘Village of Tales’ (Sagobyn) should be free for the children. At this point in time the pioneering families were taking all the initiatives and the municipality was just reacting to the propositions made. The key-actors and the capital they used are presented below. Astrid Lindgren herself is the sustainable entrepreneur. The column “human capital” summarizes the family members insights into the making of the milieux due to their tight personal relation to Astrid Lindgren.

<b>Agent</b>	<b>Capital</b>	Close relation to Astrid Lindgren	Economic	Social	Cultural	Emotional
Entrepreneurial families	X		Limited	X	x	X
The municipality			Restricted			
Astrid Lindgren herself	-		(X)	x	X	X

The three families creating the milieu inspired by the stories told in the books of Astrid Lindgren are entrepreneurs in more than one respect. They have an idea and they act. They invest some money and they use their local connections to realize their vision. They have good personal contact with Astrid Lindgren herself who in turn possessed the cultural capital that can be ascribed a person like her in the Swedish society. At this stage the municipality gives a minor (financial) support and plays only a minor part in the emerging soci(et)al venture.

Astrid Lindgren herself has social, cultural and emotional capital connected to the expanding operations. She also has the possibility to support economically as she is a wealthy person at this point in her life. She also can put economic restriction on others – therefore an (x) is used above and below.

***Phase Two: The market invades the village, turning it into a park (1989-1992)***

The initiative in Vimmerby soon enough was communicated all over Sweden. In 1988 the target 100.000 visitors was reached. The number of children and accompanying families who went to Vimmerby called for further investments in public facilities, far beyond what the three founding families could finance. Instead commercial firms saw the great potential in ALV and a national conglomerate entered the scene and became the majority owner. Since the entrepreneurial families got “a considerable amount of money” and still kept a minority of the shares they at the beginning were quite pleased.

With the new financially strong owners the ‘village’ was turned into a professionally run theme park. The small houses that made the core of a theme park were further elaborated. Big

investment plans were presented to the municipality and it supported the new owners in a pliable way – mainly with infrastructural investments. Again – the (new) owners are the proactive agents while the municipality is reacting. Yet, the one really in control was Astrid Lindgren herself. Whatever change being done she had to accept it. This called for time-consuming negotiations since the author, who had the legal rights to all her characters, never wanted to sign any contract. She preferred to build trust in the old-fashioned way and confirm an agreement with a handshake. Before the take-over the leading local politicians had asked for her opinion and she met the new owners and “blessed” them. In practice her principles held the owners back, prevented many initiatives that would have increased their financial payback on the investments in the park. She eagerly withheld her opinion that ALV should be run with social intentions. This third phase, as illustrated below, is dominated by commercial pressures.

<b>Capital</b>	Close relation to AL	Economic	Social	Cultural	Emotional
<b>Agent</b>					
Entrepreneurial families	(X)	X		x	X
Municipality	X	x			
Astrid Lindgren	-	(X)	x	X	X
National corporation	X	x			

Now the founding families were not any longer operating ALV but they kept their hearts as well as some shares in the ALV-company. They think that they are the only ones that really maintains the intentions of Astrid Lindgren. The municipality was mediating in these changes not the least in order to avoid a situation that would confront Astrid Lindgren’s own interest. The new commercial owners were however not as submissive as the author wanted.

***Phase Three: The private and the voluntary sectors appear as rescuers of the park (1992-1994)***

The recession in the beginning of the 1990ies played into Astrid Lindgren’s hand and helped her to preserve the social profile of the theme park. The commercial majority owners had to leave - not because of any financial problems in the operations of ALV itself but because other units in the conglomerate ran into problems. In 1992 the theme-park was hit by an acute financial crisis. Astrid Lindgren herself was very upset. “I do not want my name to be associated with a bankruptcy!” she said and she demanded that the municipality should do something about it: “Now it is time for you to act. Do not just use me!” One of the leading municipal politicians who was personally very close to Astrid Lindgren, was chosen to convince the stubborn author that whoever the new owners would be they would have to be able to run the park according to her values. He came to the conclusion that the municipality itself had to be one of the owners. New owners were an insurance company with its roots in Swedish social movements and a voluntary organization, a branch of the Swedish temperance movement. The latter was persuaded as one of Astrid Lindgren’s main characters (Emil in Lönneberga) as a young boy joined that very organisation. The new owners were all triggered by the ambition to prevent a destruction of the economic, social and cultural values embodied in the theme park and they also wanted to contribute to its further development. Representatives of all three new owners had close personal relations to Astrid Lindgren as a basis for their strong financial and social commitment.

<b>Capital</b>	Personal relation to AL	Economic	Social	Cultural	Emotional
<b>Agent</b>					
Entrepreneurial.families	(X)	X		x	x
Municipality	X	x	X		x
Astrid Lindgren	-	(X)	X	X	X
National company	-	-			
Temperance movement	x	x	X		
Insurance.company	x	x	X		

***Phase Four – The public sector takes further responsible action 1994 - 2010***

The turmoil caused by the exit of the commercial company triggered a lot of further action within and between the other stakeholders Astrid Lindgren herself established a council, including only women who she knew very well, with the task to examine every activity that was taking place at ALV. She used the council to declare that she wanted no advertisements, no plastic toys and no junk food associated with ‘her’ theme park.

The voluntary organization and the insurance company had no intention to stay on as majority owners and the author’s restrictions and associated tight control definitely eroded their commitment. When the acute financial crisis had been dealt with they wanted to withdraw and thus new ownership again was needed. The zoological park Kolmården was very interested but Astrid Lindgren refused to accept them. She stated “you know what I feel about animals in cages” – and that was it. The leading local politicians therefore decided to make the municipality itself the dominant owner. The municipality had finally learnt to fully appreciate the cultural values carried by Astrid Lindgren as a person and as a symbol/icon. The municipality realised that the time for both enthusiastic amateurs as well as market-oriented capitalists was gone and that ALV needed professional management that was able to unconditionally accept and build upon the unique values associated with the theme park. - The most remarkable changes are summarized in the table below. All non-local actors have left leaving the municipality and Astrid Lindgren as the main stakeholders.

<b>Capital</b>	Personal relation to AL	Economic	Social	Cultural	Emotional
<b>Agent</b>					
Entrepreneurial families	(X)	X			x
Municipality	X	X	X	X	X
Astrid Lindgren	-	(X)	X	X	X
National company	-	-	-	-	
Temperance movement	-	-	-	-	
Insurance company	-	-	-	-	

***Phase Five – Incorporated personal interests of Astrid Lindgren take over (2010 -)***

Astrid Lindgren died in 2002 and was inherited by a daughter and a number of grandchildren. At present (2010) public ownership seems to have come to an end since the daughter and her family now argue that they should take over the ownership of the theme-park. The family and their incorporated interests see themselves as the “natural” owners and the only legitimate protectors of Astrid Lindgren’s legacy. The municipality shares this view and has thus decided to sell their shares to the Lindgren family. Then the three pioneering families will have to sell their shares too, a decision which they consider to be an outrageous proposition. According to the local newspaper this decision has also been heavily criticised “by everyone”. At the end of this final (?) phase the entrepreneurial families, building the first houses, thus have nothing left – except disappointment. They are dissatisfied because their original entrepreneurial initiative was, according to themselves, never fully acknowledged. The municipality has lost its ownership control but has realized that with the Lindgren family as the owner the cultural capital that ALV represents will remain in the municipality. Even if the municipality itself will have restricted control over the future development of the theme park, and even if the involvement of the family members who live in Stockholm will be limited, the legacy of Astrid Lindgren will be preserved as safe as possible. - The fifth phase is summarised below.

<b>Agent</b>	<b>Capital</b>	Personal relation to (AL)	Economic	Social	Cultural	Emotional
Entrepreneurial.families	(X)			x	x	x
Municipality	X	x			x	x
Astrid Lindgren family	X	X	X	x	X	x
Others...	-	-	-	-	-	-

Tracking the shifting ownership alone has demonstrated that the development of the Astrid Lindgren theme park has been a very complex and dramatic process that over three decades several times has crossed the boundaries between the private, public and voluntary sectors. The making of the park into a remarkable living tribute to a great author and her imagination is the outcome of multiple agencies where representatives of the three sectors have taking

turns as leaders of the process.. There is a tight relationship between the park and its financial and symbolic ownership on one hand and the mainly reacting Vimmerby municipality on the other. However, the municipality has finally realised the potential of the park an important contributor to the emerging Swedish creative industries and has also managed to match this commercial and cultural potential with the municipality's own responsibilities. The municipality has even managed to institutionalize the generic message of Astrid Lindgren in her stories - responsibility, courage and imagination - by making them the basic values on which its general development plan rests. The municipality pays this tribute to its most recognized citizen even if it has lost the formal influence over the theme-park that ownership provided. Instead the park has become an integrated part of the local business and cultural life. The municipality has demonstrated its responsibility towards its citizens by guaranteeing the sustainability of the theme park. This leadership has meant bridging between different entrepreneurial initiatives and ownerships as they turned out to be incapable of running ALV in a way that made it pass the Karybdis of raw capitalism and the Scylla of the strong-willed Astrid Lindgren.

In contrast to all the other owners and stakeholders the municipality has been and will remain stuck to, even synonymous with, the locality of Vimmerby. This may in a raw economic perspective be considered as a drawback but appears, when it comes to the soci(et)al dimension of entrepreneurship, as a strength. Even if the local attachment means limited access to financial capital it mobilizes the emotional capital, including pride, that a shared history and everyday life produce. The relations between Astrid Lindgren and the municipality is emphasised in the branding of Vimmerby as a protection against other organisers of activities and establishments referring to Astrid Lindgren or her characters (Syssner 2010). Today ALV contributes to the making of an integrating collective self-identity, based on the insight that the Vimmerby community makes a difference that harmonizes with the image of the municipality that outsiders have.



## 5. Concluding discussion

Since its inception a third of a century ago the Astrid Lindgren World theme park has accommodated multiple tensions, not only those associated with its ownership and related organizational challenges. ALV's attractiveness was for many years considered to be a threat to other local service industries. As many other small towns in Sweden Vimmerby used to enter a lethargic state in summer time. The tourist invasion caused by the attractive theme park has, though, forced the town and its service industries, actually all its citizens, to reconsider their values and everyday practices. At the beginning of a long process ALV was marginalized. The theme park's own financial adventures added to the construction of it as an ugly duckling in the traditional small-town context. However, after decades of struggling the relationship between, on one hand, ALV, its owners and management, and the municipality, on the other, finally seems to have become normalised. Now it provides a basis for a local and regional development that is sustainable both in a narrow economic respect and in the broader sense, even in the ultimate meaning that Astrid Lindgren proposed – creating a community in the interest of the children as the next generation of citizens.

The case of the Astrid Lindgren World demonstrates how painful the making of a sustainable community may be if there is no consensus on the importance of, and the balance between, contrasting aspects of sustainability. Could it be that it is harder to reach a shared meaning when cultural events as the core of creative industries co-exist with traditional industries than in industrial districts where the local culture, then as a way of life, and the manufacturing industry live in symbiosis? Drawing a parallel with alternative images of organizational cultures and their change potential, cf. Meyerson & Martin 1987, the Vimmerby municipality before the creation of the theme park was an industrial town with strong rural traditions including traditional gender regimes (Forsberg 1997). As ALV matured into a visible representative of the emerging Swedish creative industries dormant tensions between the usual values of a local rural community and the values reflecting a cosmopolitan worldview were activated. Part of this new worldview is modern gender regimes which reflect the strong girls portrayed by Astrid Lindgren in her stories. There the girls are often very adventurous, entrepreneurial, challenging existing power-structures and also dominating ways of conceptualizing entrepreneurship (Ahl 2004).

The tensions in the Vimmerby community that have crafted its development over the last decades have been considerably energized by a debate orchestrated by the local newspaper. Initially this triggered dysfunctional behaviour where adherents from both sides combated each other. At present these tensions are not neutralized but rather operate as countervailing forces that guarantee dynamism. We propose that they have created an atmosphere of ambiguity which invites further initiatives as regards bridging between the original local life, to a great extent supported by what the stories told in the theme park communicate, and the messages brought by all the national and international visitors to Vimmerby and ALV. This state of ambiguity invites entrepreneurship since it guarantees responsiveness to a variety of stimuli and thus opens up to new initiatives, see for example Hjorth et al 2003. It also invites a more dynamic view on local and regional learning than that which usually is proposed, see for example Maskell & Malmberg 1999. Similar ideas have been presented by Grabher (2001) who introduces the notion of 'heterarchy' in spatial settings in order to provide a vocabulary that can deal with the increased need for dynamism in localized business activity that has to cope with the challenges constantly being proposed by a globalized world.

Our generic argument thus is that however irresolute the identity of ALV as reflected in its varying ownership may appear it reflects a generic way of practising soci(et)al entrepreneurship, whatever definition of sustainability as the ultimate objective may be. The changes in ownership itself have made the local community aware of that ownership goes far beyond property rights to include also cultural and moral considerations. The final positioning of the theme park is the outcome of a process where not only all three sectors have been participating but where also the local citizens have been more or less directly involved. This seems to guarantee not only that further developments will be anchored locally, see Hjorth and Johannisson 2003. It also means that the absorptive capacity for influences from the environment will be increased and further enhance the sustainability of the community where self-organizing becomes a basic principle. Indicators of this alertness to external influences are the creation of a special knowledge centre (at Näs) close to ALV, a more intense collaboration with universities, different projects to make the youth more involved in development processes and an increasing number of business that directly and overtly relates to ALV.

The future is however not just positive. There are also threats related to the sustainability of the key-concepts of Astrid Lindgren – the importance of wellbeing of children in a traditional

trust-context. These threats are both associated with the Lindgren family and with market forces. The sustainability is, considering the family, dependent on how credible they are as financial and symbolic owners of the theme park and its messages. The market threat comes originate in new ideals and the need for new heroes.

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