

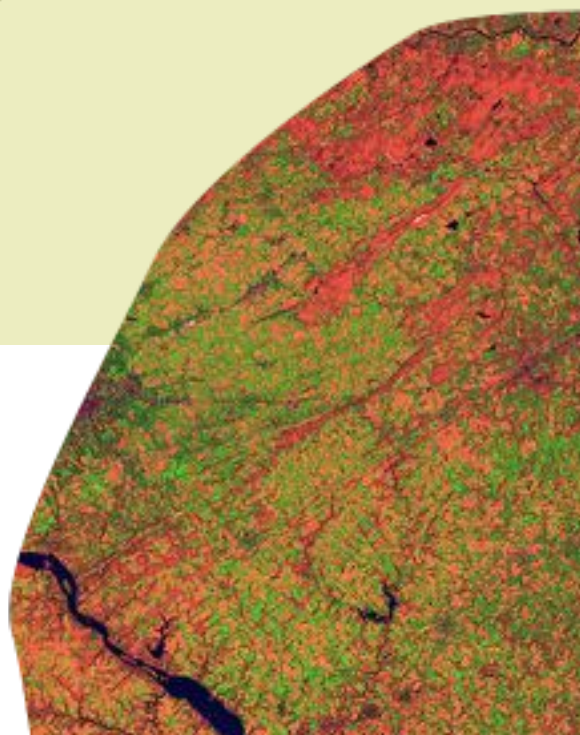
Title:

Author:

**Occupy Climate
Change (OCC!)**
*Grassroots initiatives
entry*



FORMAS



Preserve the Årsta forest

Greta Gustafsson



Gamla Göta landsväg på Årstafältet, september 2012 by "Jssfrk", licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 3.0.

Where is this grassroots initiative implemented?

In the borough Årsta, in the southern part of Stockholm.

Who are the promoters? Who are the actors involved? What is their background?

The grassroots initiative is called *Bevara Årstaskogen*, in this text translated by the author to *Preserve the Årsta forest*. The initiative was founded by a group of citizens who were living in Årsta or had a clear connection to the Årsta forest, such as an allotment garden in the surrounding area. However, as the work has progressed, the support from nearby communities has been clear in terms of petitions. Preserve the Årsta forest has a main workgroup consisting of around 15 people, which can be seen as the core of the network. They all have other professions; among them one can find environmental consultants, lawyers, biologists, kindergarten teachers, architects, and graphic designers, therefore everyone works with the grassroots initiative in their free time. Furthermore, the initiative can be seen as a network that this workgroup mobilises from time to time. The Facebook group has 2 215 members, however,

Eva Emell and Eva Lindahl could not say how many of them that are actually active, but guessed that it is around 50 people (Emell and Lindahl 2020).

The movement is a reaction of the municipality of Stockholm's suggestion of building 800-1000 new apartments in the Årsta Forest (Olesund 2017). The ruling parties of the municipality at the time of the proposal were the Labour Party, the Green Party, the Left Party and the Feminist initiative (Nilsson 2018). In the election of 2018, the Centre Party made the issue with the Årsta forest one of the elections main questions. The party said that they would work against the building of houses in the area and at the same time expand the borders of the nature reserve. This led to the party getting 20 percent of the votes in Årsta. At the time of writing, the party has fulfilled their promise of stopping the building of the houses, however broadening the borders is yet to be done (Fagerström 2018).

Who are the beneficiaries?

In the early 2018 the forest became a protected natural area and is now a nature preserve, due to its role as a recreation area for the inhabitants of Stockholm and importance in the Swedish history of culture (Miljöbarometern 2018). Further on, the forest serves as home for a number of rare species in different stages of their lives (Länsstyrelsen 2018), which according to the author of this text makes it an important area for the local environment of Stockholm.

According to Emell and Lindahl the beneficiaries are themselves, but also their families that use the forest. They also highlight the importance of the forest for people that are not able to leave the city to access nature. Since it is a forest in an urban environment, it is easy to access for a lot of people, not demanding a car or a lot of free time. Furthermore, the forest works as a dissemination corridor for several species, it lowers the local temperature, it is a popular recreation area as well as playground for local kindergartens and schools. Moreover, the conflict shows how important the local democracy is, according to Emell and Lindahl. It has shown how substantial the forest is to a lot of people, for different reasons. If the politicians were to ignore that, the social contract is lost (Emell and Lindahl 2020).

How this initiative engages with climate? Does it tackle mitigation, adaptation, both or other dimensions of climate change?

The reason for the movement is to stop a proposal from the municipality. The proposal is a suggestion on the building of houses in the outskirts of the Årsta forest, however, it would still be in the nature preservation area. As a consequence of the rollout, the borders of the forest

would decrease. Saving the forest can be seen as a way of mitigating the climate change, since it serves as a carbon sink and lowers the local temperature. It would also save the lives of many rare species and with that maintain the biodiversity. It could therefore be argued that the forest mostly works as a way to diminish climate change and preserve nature in the area.

What are the main objectives? What are the main values?

Emell and Lindahl say that the main value of the movement is to spread facts and information about the forest to politicians and the locals. They want to have a serious and respectful dialog with the stakeholders involved, and not promoting or supporting hearsay. They continue with saying that they do not accept disrespectful or unpleasant comments either on Facebook or in physical meetings. The information is spread through social media, handing out pamphlets and inviting stakeholders and locals to different types of gatherings regarding the forest (Emell and Lindahl 2020).

What is the timeline? Are there already visible effects?

In June 2017 the municipality of Stockholm decided to start the planning of building 800-1000 new apartments, as well as determining the borders of what would become the nature preserve (Olesund 2017). This would also be the starting point of *Preserve the Årsta forest*-movement (Emell and Lindahl 2020).

On the 4th of September 2019 the local newspaper *Mitt I Söderort* wrote that the plans of building new houses were cancelled (Göransson and Bonnicksen 2019). This is one of the main aims with the movement, hence one could say that there have been visible effects. On the 22nd of September 2020 *Preserve the Årsta forest* wrote on their webpage that the municipality's new plan was to extend the area of the nature preserve (Bevara Årstaskogen 2020). However, the movement wants the borders of the preserve to cover the whole forest, thus still having one of their main objectives unfulfilled.

At the moment of writing, *Preserve the Årsta forest* is not very active. A few members are having a dialog with the politicians about what will happen with the forest, and how the work with extending the borders of the natural preserve is going, furthermore their collaboration with the *Swedish Society for Nature Conservation* is still ongoing. When asked if their work can ever be finished, Emell and Lindahl answer that they are not sure. The group has talked about becoming more of a creative group that arranges gatherings where knowledge about the forest can be spread as well as enjoying the forest together (Emell and Lindahl 2020).

Which limits does it encounter?

When asked about limits that have prevented the work of *Preserve the Årsta forest*, Emell and Lindahl cannot come up with any obstacles that might have hindered their work. Although, if they were to have had more money, they might have done things differently. However, they have never felt limited by the resources they did have. On the contrary they have felt very privileged to have a group of people educated in different areas, all of them very important to reach their aim. Emell and Lindahl especially highlight the benefits of having several layers within their group, as well as a biologist, someone that has worked a lot as a project leader, and a graphic designer. These competences have been crucial since the group wants to be based on facts and not feelings (Emell and Lindahl 2020).

Are any shortcomings or critical points visible? What other problematic issues can arise from its implementation?

The issue about building apartments in the forest can be seen as one of the ways the house crisis in Stockholm is shown. The demand for houses is critical. By trying to stop this, the crisis is consequently ongoing. On the other hand, there are other areas where new houses can be built. It can be argued that it is a matter of where the municipality decides to build them. Which areas that are prioritised to stay green, and which are not. According to the author of this text, there are probably more suitable places than a forest that serves many purposes for the locals. Both humans and animals.

How would it be potentially replicable in other settings?

Since the group focuses on spreading facts about the forest and the surrounding area, the way of working can probably be adjusted to other issue. Although the group has benefited from having members with insight in how these processes are done, the core value is to have well-researched argument and deliver facts to the stakeholders. That does not necessarily have to demand a certain job or education.

Is this initiative conducive to broader changes (law, institutional arrangements, long-term sustainability or community preparedness, etc.)? If yes, which?

It is hard to say if this movement can lead to broader changes.

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