JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY
School of Education and Communication

Is this where I belong?

Young adults' participatory experiences in Falköping

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Abstract

Falköping, among other small cities, has a low population of young adults and research into their thoughts about leaving, meeting places and media communication in relation to this is limited. This case study seeks to deepen understanding of how young adults' experience of Falköping's real places and mediated spaces relate to their staying or leaving. In-depth interviews with 18-29-year olds in Falköping, at the bowling alley, the Pentecostal church youth group and elite interviews with the venue managers was the method. The study includes abductive coding and integrates a framework of mobile socialities, concepts of cultural citizenship, anchoring narratives and place and social interrelations. They valued communication with people at real activities most, while media communication was for contacting people. In-person conversations and recognizing each other were key in creating a sense of belonging. Instagram was preferred for event information. Paradoxically, they felt they belonged, yet still moved away. Job opportunities were key in returning. Learning what forms their sense of belonging and the importance of a narrative of staying, aids cities in retaining young adults and venues in catering to them. Its academic contribution includes studying mobility practices before leaving, interviews at favourite venues, among filling other research gaps.

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Introduction

"I am moving in the Fall to study… I still think that if I come back to Falköping, I'll say I'm going home." As this quote confirms, the young adult population in Falköping is low since young adults choose to move away despite feeling at home. Falköping does not stand alone in this dilemma of young adults who move away. In the Netherlands in 2022, a study described a similar situation writing as follows,

> "Rural areas increasingly face challenges of population decline and population ageing. Regional policymakers are worried about the net out-migration of young adults, aged 18–30 years old, because they fear that a lack of renewal of their population will undermine the viability of their regions" (Hofstede, et al., 2022, p. 148).

Falköping is aware of needing to focus on changing its image. For this reason, it encourages its inhabitants to participate in this image formation by sharing positively about it, participating in it and recommending activities to others (Falköpings Kommun, 2025b). It also knows it needs to improve its social sustainability and has a social sustainability committee (Falköpings Kommun, 2025b, 2025c) and a business strategy to "develop old and create new networks and meeting places… and increase the working together of businesses, the city, associations and inhabitants" (Falköpings Municipal Committee, 2025, p. 13). Global goals have been developed to improve social sustainability. The Sustainable Development Goals nine and eleven respectively, aim to "build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation" and to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" (United Nations, n.d.). If societies are committed to fulfilling these global goals, the issue of young adults moving away from medium and small cities must be dealt with.

The media and communication problem is that communicating with each other, not only with media, but in person at local venues run by people who care about the city, is key to the young adults' experiences. A paradox is formed by this as despite dedicated venue managers and recognizing and conversing with friends and acquaintances at locations, which build a strong sense of belonging in the young adults in the study, this is not enough for them to stay. The pull to leave to find work, study and meet more people is stronger, forming the belonging-leaving paradox.

Although a strong sense of belonging is not enough for them to stay, perhaps remembering Falköping positively will lead them to return. Learning what forms the young adults' sense of belonging through their cultural habits, including how they communicate, may also aid in understanding why they make this choice. Retaining this age group or inspiring them to return after studies, may help fulfill the city's goals of increasing its population, recruiting competent personnell and helping local businesses flourish. This also contributes to Global Goal eight, to "promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all" (United Nations, n.d.).

Societal Gap

What has already been done in terms of studies and projects in Falköping are a three-part-study about youth and social sustainability in Falköping carried out by Borås University from 2016-2017 and a project for a younger demographic called "Val för livet" (Choice for Life) (Orlenius, 2018; Skaraborgs kommunalförbund, n.d). The project in Skaraborg is aimed at motivating students to complete studies through knowledge of career options. Although the city is working toward improvements, none of these studies, committees or strategies has directly targeted 18-29-year-olds, except for a meeting place mentioned in the three part study, where 18 and 19-year-olds participate. What this study can contribute is input from young adults in the city as to how to communicate with them about what the city has to offer, what they value about the city and its venues and how the city contributes and can contribute to their sense of belonging.

Research Gap

Previous studies have covered an array of areas which provide some answers to the question of why the young adults move away from small cities and what is necessary for them to stay (Eriksson, 2017, p. 5; Hofstede et al., 2022, p. 157; O'Shea et al., 2019). Eriksson (2017), Hofstede et al. (2022) and O'Shea et al. (2019) have researched whether a sense of belonging is a factor in young people moving away from small cities and rural areas. This study adds to the literature by studying the relationship between belonging and moving. It also adds to literature such as Cuervo & Wyn (2017), Eriksson (2017) Gatti et al. (2026) Hofstede et al. (2022), O'Shea et al. (2019), and van der Wal et al., (2024), which include what creates a sense of community, by connecting anchoring narratives among friends to the results. They

have also applied concepts individually, such as Leccardi (2016) with cultural citizenship and Smith (2023) and Gatti et al. (2026) with place and social interrelations, while this study fills a gap by forming and applying a unique integrated framework for researching this area.

Chen and Lunt's study in 2021, about young adults moving to an urban environment and how they maintain relationships through social media also used in-depth interviews as well as two studies on young people in rural areas' plans to move and their sense of belonging (Eriksson, 2017, p.5; O'Shea et al., 2019). Camozzi (2016), Chen and Lunt (2021), Leccardi (2016) and Van Eldik et al. (2019) have studied placemaking habits in urban cities young adults move to and Eriksson (2017), Hofstede et al. (2022) and O'Shea et al. (2019) focus on habits which they apply to feel connected to people and nature in rural and less populated ares. In this thesis, the researcher has not only interviewed, it has filled a research gap by going to places in the community to interview people on location where they practice placemaking habits, ensuring more accurate responses about their experiences due to being in the context when responding. In addition, while studies by Gatti et al. (2026), Newson et al. (2021) and van der Wal et al. (2024) have found that face-to-face contact is a preferred form of communication, this study has filled a gap by finding the connection between face-to-face contact and a sense of belonging in a city and at venues.

This study fills a gap by approaching mobility by examining the young adults' mobility habits before they leave, as opposed to mobility plans for the future, as approached in Cuervo and Wyn (2017), Eriksson (2017), Hofstede et al. (2022) and O'Shea et al. (2019). This may aid in understanding their motives to leave in the future. Why the young adults prefer meeting at real places over in media spaces is another gap this study covers, since earlier studies have studied emotions connected to digital communication tools, however not the reasoning for preferring real places (Gatti et al., 2026; Newson et al., 2021; van der Wal et al., 2024). This is valuable in venues knowing what to continue providing to keep the young adults coming and perhaps encouraging them to stay in the city. Lastly, encouraging participants to suggest what can enhance a sense of belonging for other young adults in their city, after having the participants reflect on what they enjoy in their small city, is a new approach to aid in solving young adults leaving and not returning to a small city. None of the earlier studies have approached this aspect.

Research Rationale

To target the research and societal gaps, the methods, concepts, aim and research questions are strategic. Speaking directly with young adults at venues where they spend time is the first choice. For this purpose, in-person, in-depth interviews at venues are useful in hearing directly from the young adults at the moment they are experiencing the city and its places. By choosing to apply an abductive analysis, concepts aid in thoroughly interpreting the data obtained through the interviews (della Porta, 2014, p. 231, 235). Using concepts together in an integrated framework of concepts also provide new solutions and perspectives. How these concepts are applicable for analysing specific aspects of the data follows.

The Integrated Framework of Analysis

The researcher has formed a framework suitable for analysing the case by including the analytical framework of mobile socialities (Hill et al., 2021), concepts of anchoring narratives (Clark, 2021), cultural citizenship (Hermes, 2024) and place and social interrelations (Massey, 1994). To start analysing the problem, the researcher applies mobile socialities as the "analysis… of actual movement" in relation to young adults planning to move away, the significance of "social relationships" in their lives and "emerging forms of 'the social' in mobile times" as well as when and where these relationships thrived and thoughts about their future maintenance (Hill et al., 2021, p. 1). As the case is about the young adults in Falköping interviewed at the bowling alley and youth group, place and social interrelations further deepen the study to learn the specific actions and relations which were unique to them there in the city, at these venues and in their frequented mediated spaces (Massey, 1994, pp. 168-169). It also aids in studying what the young interviewees' perception of Falköping was, as well as its "connection to somewhere else" (Massey, 1994, p. 169) and its relation to mobility (Hill et al., 2021, p. 1). To learn about their sense of belonging in the city and at the venues, and how they practiced their identity, cultural citizenship is incorporated. Its aspects are practical for examining what the young adult participants considered formed their identity and how they practiced these aspects through "reflection" using "popular cultural practices, texts or forms" (Hermes, 2024, pp. 14, 25-26). Lastly, by outlining the young interviewees' anchoring narratives, as in what aspects of their identity were significant for helping them imagine their "future" selves, the reasoning behind their choices can become clearer and facilitate finding a solution to them moving and not returning (Clark, 2021, p. 86). This connects back to mobile socialities by imagining the future, to identity in cultural citizenship

and to place and social interrelations by how the narratives were present in those contexts and relationships.

Aim Rationale

Seemiller and Grace's (2024) study as well as Massey's (1994) found that the digital and physical, place and space were beginning to overlap and interrelate. To incorporate young adult's experiences in both dimensions, so as not to miss a significant aspect of how they consider life in Falköping, the aim encompasses both their experience of real places and mediated spaces in relation to their mobility choices.

Research Questions Rationale

To formulate research questions to best fill the research and societal gap, the concepts, aim and method are useful. Considering the source of the data is important in knowing what data is significant. The young adults are the source. Grace and Seemiller (2024) studied young adults. They found the age group considered social media and digital tools useful in finding and maintaining relationships. In addition, they valued time together, since "close proximity" was important to them (Grace and Seemiller, 2024, pp. 48-50). Combining these aspects into how to research the group, a question about their use of social media and mobile phones related to their sense of belonging can provide insight into what is important to them. Both cultural citizenship practiced digitally, and mobile socialities, are helpful in analysing the data to answer this question. To learn about how the paradox is formed in which mobility is practiced and planned, despite their social needs of proximity, a question about mobility and sociality connected to Falköping is necessary. Mobile socialities and anchoring narratives can target this question by interpreting their choices in terms of mobility and social relations and how sharing narratives in social contexts relate to their perspectives about mobility. "Having similar hobbies", "close proximity", "having a shared culture or background" and "being affiliated with a particular group or organization" are some of the top seven criteria for young adults to choose friends (Grace & Seemiller, 2024, p. 44). Learning about what the places where they meet mean to them and what they do there can be helpful in learning their motives for moving. Consequently, a question considering place and social interrelations and cultural citizenship is appropriate.

Case

The case is the experience of 18-29-year-olds at real and mediated places in Falköping in connection with their plans on staying or leaving the city. “The boundaries of this case” are firstly, twenty-three people in this age group as well as two venue managers (Yin, 2018, p. 31). Secondly, the young adult participants were regular guests at the local bowling alley or at the Pentecostal church youth group. Thirdly, they were interviewed at specific times and places at the venues, individually or in groups. The case parameters or “boundaries” are detailed in Table 1 in the Methods chapter (Yin, 2018, p. 31).

Aim

The aim of this case study is to deepen understanding of how young adults’ experience of Falköping’s real places and mediated spaces relate to their choice of staying or leaving.

Research Questions

1. What role does how young adults use social media and mobile phones play in their sense of belonging in the city of Falköping?
2. In what ways is a sense of belonging fostered among the young adults through place and cultural citizenship in Falköping?
3. How do young adults express their mobility and sociality in relation to the city of Falköping?

Context

The City, Venues and Managers

Falköping is a city in the region of Västra Götaland, Sweden, with a population of 32, 800 people (Falköpings Kommun, 2025a). Connecting Stockholm and Gothenburg by train, 17-20 minutes away from Skövde, which is the nearest city with a university, and one hour 15 minutes away from Gothenburg, it is a place marked by movement. Surrounding the city are fields of crops, cattle farms and small villages. At one end of the city is the train station and on the other end are the bowling alley and Pentecostal church separated by a street and a car parts store. This end of the city includes other locations for young adults such as the Upper Secondary School, the multisport hall, the swimming pool, the beach volleyball building as

well as the skatepark. The bowling alley includes bowling lanes, dart-throwing, Blackjack, Shuffleboard, a bar and a restaurant which sometimes doubles as a dance floor with a DJ. One of its managers is a successful competitive wrestler with a car interest and a passion for personalized customer service. These aspects help connect him to the visitors and make him a key person at the bowling alley. A hub for conferences, school ending ceremonies, a second-hand shop and its principal purpose, a church, is the modern building of the Pentecostal church. Here, the youth group manager who has been working with youth since completing his theological and leadership studies, creating an atmosphere in which everyone is welcome to participate and delegating the activity planning to different young adults each week, he strives for them to feel as though they belong.

Literature Review

Existing research has approached mobility, sense of belonging and social media and ICTs in activities and community. This research has provided a firm foundation for continuing to explore mobility, placemaking and communication of young adults in small cities. In terms of mobility and sense of belonging, some areas covered are habits practiced in placemaking and which emotions are connected to young adults moving from small cities. Some central features in studies about sense of belonging are the relationship between young adults' sense of belonging and moving from small cities and the role of feeling a sense of community for their sense of belonging. Studies about communication at real places and mediated communication focus mainly on which communication tools and contexts are preferred for maintaining relationships.

Mobility and Sense of Belonging

According to studies in rural areas of northern Sweden, Australia, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland and Germany, young people desire a high sense of belonging, a connection to nature and a sense of community, which is, however, not always present (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017; Eriksson, 2017; Hofstede et al., 2022; O'Shea et al., 2019). For young people in rural Australia and rural northern Sweden, place centers on relationships, and regular habits demonstrate how young adults are connected to other people and nature (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017, pp. 229-231; Eriksson, 2017, p. 11).

Moving is not only a change in location, it is also a change in relations (Eriksson, 2017, p. 8). Reasons for young people moving or planning on moving, despite these changes, are predominantly study, job opportunities, conveniences, as well as avoiding the shame of staying or coming back, which they believe is seen as failure (Eriksson, 2017, p. 5; O'Shea et al., 2019). This rhetoric of staying or coming back as shameful, is more influential in leaving, than having friends and family at a location are for staying (Eriksson, 2017, p. 11; Hofstede et al., 2022, p. 157). At some locations, their sense of belonging does not sway them to stay, while in places where leaving is not the norm, it can have an impact (Hofstede et al., 2022, p. 157). Places and the decision-making process of moving or staying leads to an array of emotions between feeling "excited", fearful, "safety", "failure", "success" and "belonging" (Eriksson, 2017, pp. 6, 8; O'Shea et al., 2019, pp. 6-7). To handle leaving being perceived as both negative and positive, studying at the closest university and studying a profession which is in demand in the hometown, is a compromise in rural Australia (O'Shea et al., 2019, p. 6).

Studies in Milan, Beijing and the Netherlands have focused on moving, placemaking and digital habits of young adults in urban settings (Camozzi, 2016; Chen and Lunt, 2021; Leccardi, 2016; Van Eldik et al., 2019). Establishing regular habits, activities and interactions, creating common moments, experiences and conversations with others and making time for hobbies are each ways young people practice placemaking (Camozzi, 2016, p. 52; Leccardi, 2016, p. 119; Van Eldik, 2019, p. 250). Leccardi (2016, p. 119) describes this as forming common time and space in the city through cultural citizenship. Some of these places are physical spaces, while others are digital. Maintaining social connection with friends and family from different locations through the internet and using social media, aids young people in feeling a sense of belonging to a specific city and specific groups of people (Camozzi, 2016, p. 54; Chen and Lunt, 2021; Van Eldik, 2019, p. 250). In Beijing, this contact is with family they have moved from and it helps them manage the balance between where they came from and where they have moved to (Chen and Lunt, 2021). While some young people prefer to move to different countries to take advantage of their time and enjoy a variety of situations, although not planning for the future, others prioritize staying in a city with people of similarly diverse backgrounds (Camozzi, 2016, pp. 55-56; Van Eldik, 2019, p. 250). Identifying with a city is at times a stronger identifier than a nation, such as for migrants, according to Van Eldik (2019, p. 250). They both identify with people from the city they have moved to and consider the city important in their move to the nation (Van Eldik,

2019, p. 250). In Milan, beyond making time for hobbies, they learn about the city using the internet to enhance their belonging (Camozzi, 2016, p. 56).

Social Media and ICTs in Activities and Community

Young people use a variety of communication tools, including face-to-face contact, to adapt to different situations (Luthar & Pušnik, 2020, pp. 1270-1271; Zhou et al., 2021, p. 1790-1791). The social media apps they prefer are Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok (Fernández-Ardèvol et al., 2022, p. 36; Luthar and Pušnik, 2020; van der Wal et al., 2024, p. 5). They are also more comfortable using social media to communicate than using other communication tools (van der Wal et al., 2024, p. 6). According to several studies, however, they prefer to meet in-person over meeting virtually and use social media apps to do so, among other uses (Gatti et al., 2026; Newson et al., 2021, pp. 442; van der Wal et al., 2024, p. 5-6). This is also the most conducive form of contact for their "wellbeing" (Newson et al., 2021, pp. 443-444).

A form of use which leads to people meeting in-person more often is People-Nearby-Apps (PNAs) such as Snapmap (Gatti et al., 2026; van der Wal et al., 2024, p. 6). Smith (2023, p. 63) adds that location apps have changed the relationship with place and space. Using communication tools produces a variety of emotions (Smith, 2023; van der Wal et al., 2024; Vincent, 2018). What influences which emotions users feel is the experience at that moment (Vincent, 2018, p. 214). Gatti et al. (2026, p. 13) describes the relationship with place and space as these apps creating the emotion of a "sense of community" by users perceiving their surroundings as "supportive" even when they do not meet in-person. The purpose of using social media or internet services may also centre on developing and maintaining relationships, although not being able to physically spend time together (Camozzi, 2016, p. 54; Chen and Lunt's, 2021; van der Wal et al., 2024, p. 6). When participating in "leisure" activities, "space and place are experienced as a mixed reality", such as online gaming (Smith, 2023, pp. 55, 66). Other uses of social media also help young people experience community, however, at times they lead to feeling disconnected from a group (Goldman et al., 2023, p. 480; van der Wal et al., 2024, p. 5-6). Those who are together, may show each other content on social media, adding to their connection with eachother. Experiences of disconnection may occur when young people see others sharing pictures of being together. Smith (2023, p. 63) also accentuates the antisociality of social media. When used in public without involving those who are there, he describes it as comparable to not being present.

Boyd (2026, p. 2), does not view social media as social either, since it is used for consuming content, and does not consider this form of use a way of sharing life and thoughts with friends.

A trend which may add to the preference to meet in person, is disconnecting from the digital. Young people are frustrated with their digital habits for a variety of reasons, such as excessive use and content, lack of privacy, and its effects of sadness, isolation and boredom (Jorge et al., 2023, p. 6786; Kim & Kim, 2026, p. 5; van der Wal et al., 2024, p. 6). Some young adults limit their online contacts to focus on "quality" of relationships (Chen & Lunt pp. 152-153). While some young people engage in partial disconnection, others continue their habits despite its negative effects.

Conclusion

These studies cover a variety of areas, while also providing gaps to research the area further. Although studies have highlighted friction with media and the use of both communication in real places and in mediated spaces, this study goes further by identifying that the sense of belonging was strongest when experiencing the city face to face rather than via media. While these studies have also found that what deters the young adults from returning to small cities is their perception of the lack of job opportunities, the aspects which they appreciate in a small city has not been studied. This is important since without these aspects, job opportunities in a small city would not suffice to keep them from moving or inspiring them to return.

One research gap which this study approaches is interviewing young adults in a small city in Sweden at specific venues where they meet and using this integrated framework of concepts. The integrated framework in this study enables identifying aspects which otherwise might not have been evident. Similar to other studies, this study examines media and real places in communication and relationships. The gap this study fills, however, is asking which role they have, not only which is preferred. Another gap is learning about the role of mobility in the young adults' habits before they leave and how this may form part of their identity. This study also approaches new angles by examining what formed the participants' sense of belonging and how they suggested the city, venues and activities focused their resources to build the sense of belonging of other residents their age. It was also unique in examining

what forms of communication were preferred by the young adults to learn about activities and venues.

Theory

Concepts in an Integrated Framework

Since the case is about young adults' attachment to a place, feelings of belonging, their communication and their mobility, to most effectively interpret the case, this framework includes Hill et al.'s (2021) framework of mobile socialities, Clark's (2021) concept of anchoring narratives, Hermes' (2024) concept of cultural citizenship and Massey's (1994) concept of place and social interrelations.

Mobile Socialities

Mobile socialities is "analysis regarding media and communications… actual movement… and social relationships" (Hill et al., 2021, p. 1). It also includes how "temporal and spatial relations form part of mobile socialities" and "emerging forms of 'the social' in mobile times and the challenging question of how we want to live and communicate both now and in the future" (Hill et al., 2021, p. 1).

Anchoring Narratives

Anchoring narratives, is a concept within the mobile socialities framework. Anchoring narratives are "the stories that we tell ourselves about who we are based on who we have been in the past that enable us to conceive of who we can be in the future" (Clark, 2021, p. 86).

Cultural Citizenship

Hermes (2024, p. 14) expounds that "Cultural Citizenship can be found when reconstructing what fuels ongoing conversation and discussion, and how, in those exchanges, we connect with others, with places and spaces, with stories and ideas". She defines identity "as how a person sees themselves and is seen by others" (Hermes, 2024, p. 14), and "identity construction" is formed out of "reflection" using "popular cultural practices, texts or forms" (pp. 25-26). This is how cultural citizenship is performed. Lastly, the setting in which a

person can practice “meaning making and identity formation” is “culture” (Hermes, 2024, p. 15).

Place and Social Interrelations

How and where social contact and relationships are carried out entail “social space” (Massey, 1994, p. 168). Place, then, is the location where specific “social relations” … “interact” (Massey, 1994, p. 168). What makes a place unique is how these interactions occur combining actions and relations which only take place there (Massey, 1994, p. 168). Massey (1994, p. 169) adds that some of the “social” will reach beyond the area in question. In fact, “the identity of a place” also depends on a conducive connection to somewhere else (Massey, 1994, p. 169).

Implementation

How each concept is applied is by relating to other concepts in the framework and by selecting relevant aspects of its definition. Mobile socialities is applied mostly to understand mobility. The narratives which define the study’s young adults’ identities in terms of moving and belonging to the city, is how anchoring narratives is used. In addition, how cultural citizenship is interpreted as the expressions and practices which the participants communicate and how identity is established. What identifies places and venues, mediated and real places and how they are unique in terms of both relationships and actions, is how place and social interrelations is integrated in the analysis.

Their usefulness together is as follows: Their perceptions of the city and their identity in connection to it is a combination of place and social interrelations and cultural citizenship. Young adults meet at real places and also communicate via mediated spaces (place and social interrelations and anchoring narratives). At these places and spaces, they engage in cultural citizenship through how they speak, write, act, etc and what they expect from these contexts and the city, is also a form of cultural citizenship. Their plans for leaving (mobile socialities) derive from anchoring narratives, norms which tie them to the city and which they embrace as part of their identity, hence cultural citizenship. The study wants to uncover what can keep them from leaving (mobile socialities) and what builds their sense of belonging (cultural

citizenship). Anchoring narratives also links to the interviews in how the adults express themselves.

By applying this integrated framework in the analysis, cultural citizenship is useful in identifying the role of how young adults use of social media and mobile phones plays in their sense of belonging in the city of Falköping. In addition, the framework is necessary for answering in what ways a sense of belonging is fostered among the young adults through place and cultural citizenship in Falköping, since concepts in the framework are included in the question. Lastly, to answer how young adults express their mobility and sociality in relation to the city of Falköping, anchoring narratives and mobile socialities are useful.

To answer the questions, the researcher applied the framework by formulating interview questions to learn about the young adults' perspectives and experiences of community, hominess, belonging, conversation, safety, friendship, digital and in-person communication, mobile phone use, places and mobility. These key words were derived from the concepts in the framework, while also appearing as answers without prompting, confirming the framework's appropriateness. Next, was finding these words and their connections in the responses. Last, was interpreting the relevant responses using the integrated framework.

Together the framework is useful in addressing the research gaps including mobility habits in young adults before moving, the role of mediated spaces and real places in communication and relationships, what young adults consider effective communication for informing of activities and the activities and venues they recommended for ensuring a sense of belonging for their age group, as well as what formed their sense of belonging.

Methodology and Method

Methodology

This is a qualitative case study. Some criteria which demonstrate the study's qualitative nature are "looking for (the) 'insider' viewpoint"; "data… in… words rather than numbers" and that the applied "theory" is "abductive" (Bazeley, 2013, pp. 27-28). It also "aims to generate deep insights… through… engagement with places and social actors" and "might include people" (Bryman et. al, 2026, pp 351). Since the focus is on learning directly from

the young adults about their experiences while they are at the venues, “the advantage of the case study is that it can ‘close in’ on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 235). One of the three possible “strategies of research” for a case study and since the research is through listening to participants, this study is “exploratory research” (Gerring, 2004, p. 349; Yin, 2018, p. 8). Whether or not the study deepens understanding of how young adults’ experience of Falköping’s real and mediated spaces relate to their choice of staying or leaving will demonstrate if the study’s exploratory nature achieved its purpose or not (Yin, 2018, p. 28).

As a step in facilitating replicability, the study includes a “quality criteria” applicable to case studies according to Bryman et al. (2026, p. 61) and Bui (2020, p. 139). This is presented in the case parameters which are detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Case Parameters

Participant	**Venue in Falköping**	**Setting at venue**	**Group or individual interview**	**Sex**	**Age**	**Date**	**Time**
Manager/ Leader	Pentecostal church	Table in Spiritual reflection Youth group room	Individual	Male	Irrelevant	March 5, 2026	9:43 a.m.
Manager	Bowling alley	Guest table in open area	Individual	Male	Irrelevant	March 6, 2026	2:17 p.m.
Young adult	Bowling alley	Rounded sofa beside betting machines	Group	Male	20	March 6, 2026	10:01 p.m.
Young adult	Bowling alley	Rounded sofa beside betting machines	Group	Male	23	March 6, 2026	10:01 p.m.
Young adult	Bowling alley	Guest table in open area	Group	Female	22	March 7, 2026	12:04 a.m.
Young adult	Bowling alley	Guest table in open area	Group	Female	29	March 7, 2026	12:04 a.m.
Young adult	Bowling alley	Guest table in open area	Group	Male	29	March 7, 2026	12:04 a.m.

Young adult	Bowling alley	Standing table by bowling lane	Group	Female	19	March 7, 2026	12:52 a.m.
Young adult	Bowling alley	Standing table by bowling lane	Group	Female	20	March 7, 2026	12:52 a.m.
Young adult	Bowling alley	Standing table by bowling lane	Group	Female	22	March 7, 2026	12:52 a.m.
Young adult	Bowling alley	Standing table by bowling lane	Group	Female	22	March 7, 2026	12:52 a.m.
Young adult	Bowling alley	Standing table by bowling lane	Group	Female	23	March 7, 2026	12:52 a.m.
Young adult	Bowling alley	Standing table by bowling lane	Group	Male	23	March 7, 2026	12:52 a.m.
Young adult	Bowling alley	Standing table by bowling lane	Group	Male	23	March 7, 2026	12:52 a.m.
Young adult	Bowling alley	Guest table along edge of bowling area closer to main entrance	Individual	Female	20	March 7, 2026	11:15 p.m.
Young adult	Bowling alley	Guest table along edge of bowling area closer to shoe room	Group	Male	25	March 7, 2026	11:43 p.m.
Young adult	Bowling alley	Guest table along edge of bowling area closer to shoe room	Group	Male	25	March 7, 2026	11:43 p.m.
Young adult	Bowling alley	Guest table along edge of bowling area closer to shoe room	Group	Male	25	March 7, 2026	11:43 p.m.
Young adult	Bowling alley	Guest table along edge of bowling area closer to shoe room	Group	Male	27	March 7, 2026	11:43 p.m.
Young adult	Pentecostal church	Sofa in room with ping pong and billiard tables	Individual	Male	20	March 13, 2026	10:49 p.m.
Young adult	Pentecostal church	Table in Spiritual reflection Youth group room	Group	Male	20	March 14, 2026	12:05 a.m.

Young adult	Pentecostal church	Table in Spiritual reflection Youth group room	Group	Male	20	March 14, 2026	12:05 a.m.
Young adult	Pentecostal church	Sofa in room with ping pong and billiard tables	Individual	Male	20	March 14, 2026	1:01 a.m.
Young adult	Pentecostal church	Table in eating area	Individual	Female	18	March 20, 2026	11:00 p.m.
Young adult	Pentecostal church	Table in eating area	Individual	Female	18	March 20, 2026	11:32 p.m.

Defining the case boundaries

Part of "defining the case" and setting its "boundaries" was about who and where (Yin, 2018, pp. 28-31). While the idea came from observation, the researcher ensured its relevance through prior studies, initiatives and discussed the possible participants with others (Yin, 2018, p. 31). Falköping's Head of Development confirmed both the low percentage of young adults in the city and the value of this study (Phone call, February 3, 2026). Another positive response from the city was Falköping's Culture and Leisure Developer who called the study "very interesting" and offered the department's help (Email, February 4, 2026). The researcher sought information on meeting places for young adults, not requiring a skill and those which were economically accessible, to find what the city provided for the general population in that age group. After calling the venues to corroborate that this age group met there and whether they would participate, the locations were decided on and interview dates in March were set. The exact dates and times are detailed in Figure 1 above.

Participants

The study includes three types of sampling. As della Porta (2014, p. 240-241) recommends, the study incorporates "informers" and "participants". The "participants" were those the study focused on, while the "informers", or elite, knew their venues and the participants, providing expert knowledge about them. At the youth group, one main leader agreed to participate, while of the bowling alley's two managers, the manager with more knowledge of the guests, participated. These elite interviewees were therefore chosen by "purposive

sampling", as in "to sample… participants in a strategic way" (Bryman et al., 2026, p. 377). Among other subjects, the elite interviewees were asked to recommend an ideal time to visit the venues and interview guests. The researcher also requested support in recruiting 18-29-year-old interviewees who were residents in Falköping and regulars at the venues. These are "snowball sampling" and "opportunistic sampling", which are types of "purposive sampling" applied in qualitative research (Bryman et al., 2026, p. 378). "Snowball sampling" is when an initial group which is interviewed recommends other interviewees who they believe are appropriate (Bryman et al., 2026, p. 378). "Opportunistic sampling" focuses on timing and choosing participants who can provide the information the researcher is seeking (Bryman et al., 2026, p. 378). These were strategic choices, appropriate for qualitative research according to Bryman et al. (2026), effective for selecting the participants the study aimed at researching, within the time allotted and at the chosen venues.

Data Collection Method

The data-collection method was in-depth semi-structured interviews. In-depth interviews are also useful as a data collection method since "case studies often contain a substantial element of narrative" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 84). Since "good narratives typically approach the complexities and contradictions of real life" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 84), allowing the participants to share their narratives in this way aids in obtaining "a more accurate picture of respondents' attitudes and behaviour" (Bryman et al., 2026, p. 236). Since this study focused on learning about the young adults' perspectives, this was appropriate.

Since the current study had a defined direction, although moldeable according to the gathered data, semi-structured interviews were appropriate to "address more specific issues" since interviewees could answer in detail (Bryman et al., 2026, p. 425). They were "face-to-face" interviews both to create a welcoming environment for conversation with the participants through body language (Bryman et al., 2026, p. 436) and because "the most advanced form of understanding is achieved when researchers place themselves within the context being studied" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 236). This method was also appropriate since why the young adults in the current study went to the venues, why they wanted to move from Falköping, why they belonged or did not belong, and other similar questions could best be answered in interviews, as della Porta (2014) expounds.

The interviews were both friend-group interviews and individual ones. This choice was strategic. It helped maintain the group dynamic and reaction in the context and the participants could inspire and remind each other aspects to mention (Have, 2004, p. 89). During the individual interviews, the interviewees had the opportunity to speak longer and more openly than in the group interviews, since they did not need to share the time or space with anyone else. In the group interviews there was a dynamic between the participants which kept the conversation going, triggered joint memories and created a relaxed and conversational atmosphere.

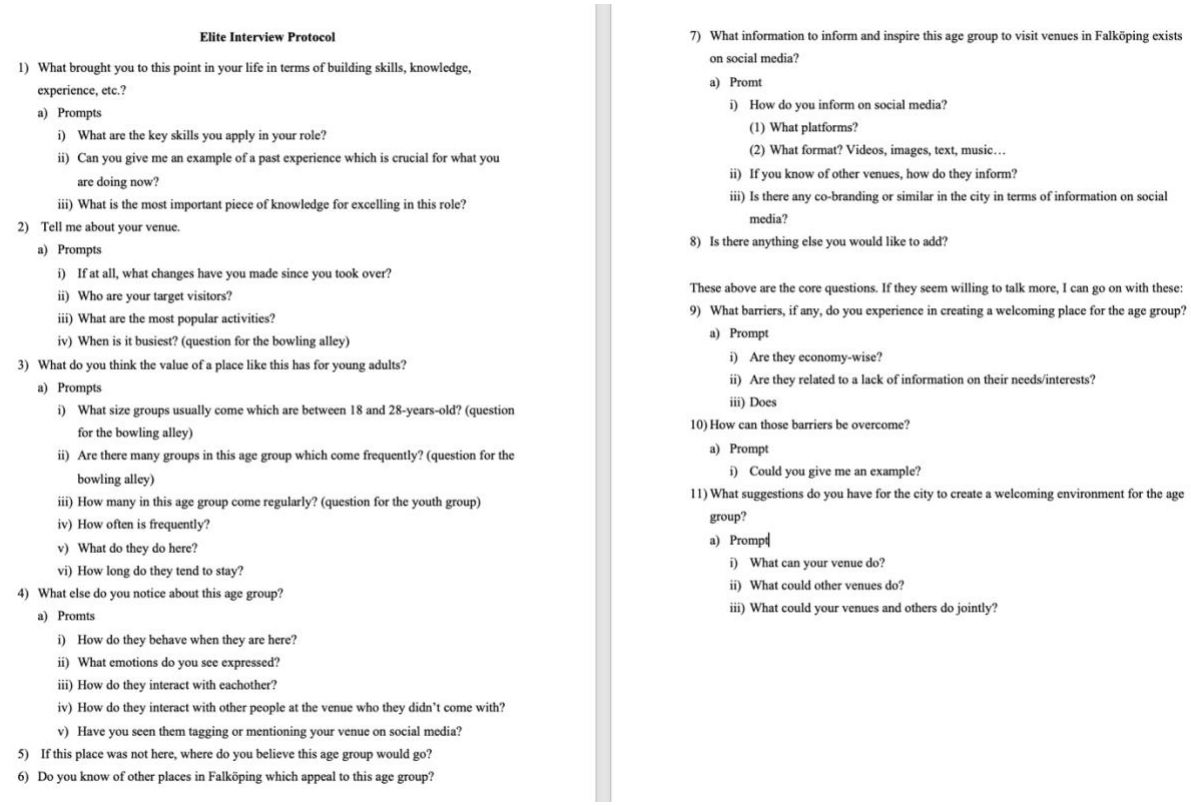
Interview Design

The interview guide combined an "open", "directive", "structured" and "flexible" format (della Porta, 2014, pp. 234-235). Since the depth of the interviews was more important than the quantity, and coding them was essential, this influenced including this variety of structures, although della Porta (2014, pp. 234-235) prefers a flexible format for in-person qualitative interviews, she also recommends adapting to the situation. Being an abductive study, the use of theory and "knowledge of the field" should be used in different stages of the analysis including in forming the "interview grid" (della Porta, 2014, p. 231, 235). To connect to the research questions, the interviews moved between questions about their experiences at the venue, on social media, in Falköping, their sense of belonging and their thoughts on mobility. Although the topics were maintained, certain types of questions which for example, clarified answers, triggered elaboration or followed new trails of information were adapted during the interviews, which follows Bryman et al.'s (2026, pp. 430-431) encouragement for flexibility. Some of these were "follow-up questions" for interviewees to "elaborate their answers", "probing questions" which are direct, assisting in obtaining clarity and detail and "interpreting questions" (Bryman et al., 2026, p. 426-427). "Initial open-ended questions" led topics and then the interviewer would ask "intermediate questions", labeled as prompts in the interview protocol, to ensure the conversation covered specific aspects of the topic (Bryman et al., p. 427). For the interviewees willing to engage longer, "ending questions" requested their suggestions in terms of meeting places and communication formats as the final questions of the interview (Bryman et al., p. 427). The core questions were placed in the middle, to ensure the participants had not lost interest and enough rapport was built (della Porta, 2014, pp. 236-237). In formulating the questions, no "why" questions were

included to avoid creating a hostile environment since this question formulation can sound aggressive (Yin, 2018, p. 118). The interview protocols are included in the figures below.

Figure 1

Elite Interview Protocol



Elite Interview Protocol

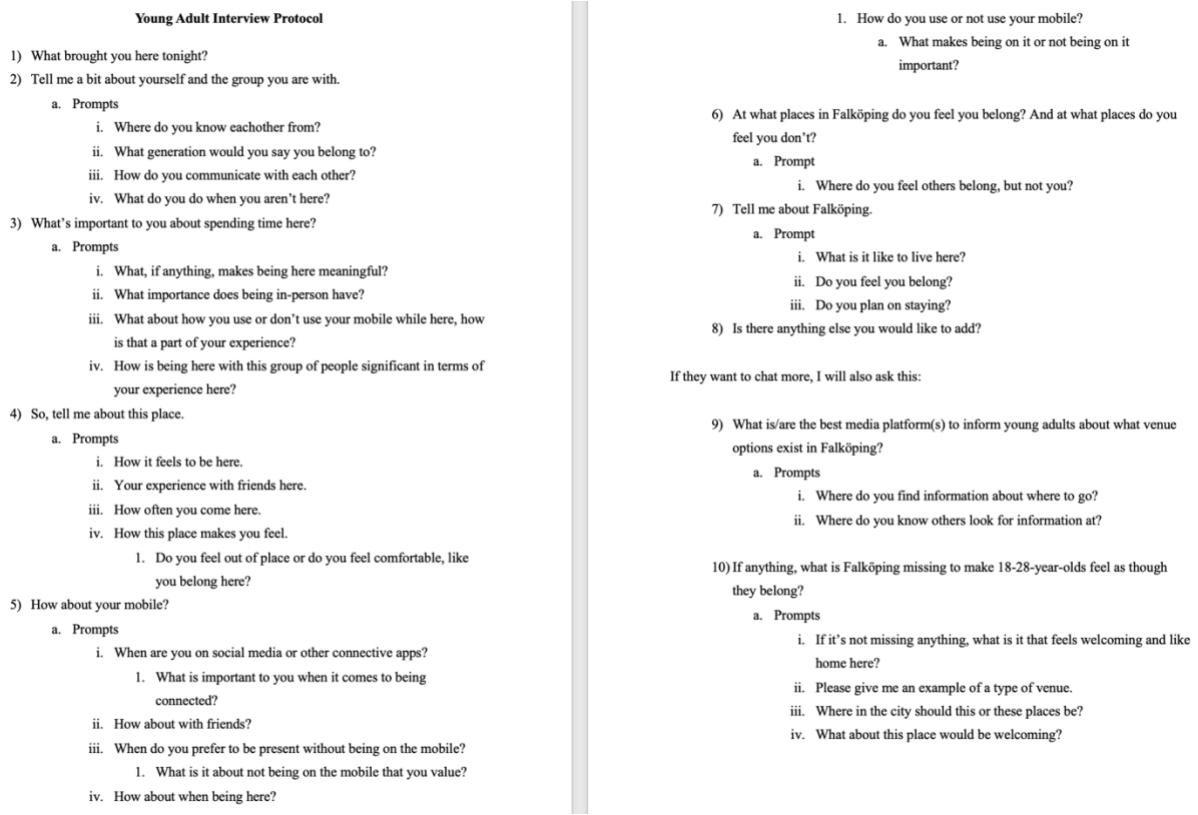
1) What brought you to this point in your life in terms of building skills, knowledge, experience, etc.?
   a) Prompts
      i) What are the key skills you apply in your role?
      ii) Can you give me an example of a past experience which is crucial for what you are doing now?
      iii) What is the most important piece of knowledge for excelling in this role?
2) Tell me about your venue.
   a) Prompts
      i) If at all, what changes have you made since you took over?
      ii) Who are your target visitors?
      iii) What are the most popular activities?
      iv) When is it busiest? (question for the bowling alley)
3) What do you think the value of a place like this has for young adults?
   a) Prompts
      i) What size groups usually come which are between 18 and 28-years-old? (question for the bowling alley)
      ii) Are there many groups in this age group which come frequently? (question for the bowling alley)
      iii) How many in this age group come regularly? (question for the youth group)
      iv) How often is frequently?
      v) What do they do here?
      vi) How long do they tend to stay?
4) What else do you notice about this age group?
   a) Promts
      i) How do they behave when they are here?
      ii) What emotions do you see expressed?
      iii) How do they interact with eachother?
      iv) How do they interact with other people at the venue who they didn't come with?
      v) Have you seen them tagging or mentioning your venue on social media?
5) If this place was not here, where do you believe this age group would go?
6) Do you know of other places in Falköping which appeal to this age group?
7) What information to inform and inspire this age group to visit venues in Falköping exists on social media?
   a) Promt
      i) How do you inform on social media?
         (1) What platforms?
         (2) What format? Videos, images, text, music…
      ii) If you know of other venues, how do they inform?
      iii) Is there any co-branding or similar in the city in terms of information on social media?
8) Is there anything else you would like to add?

These above are the core questions. If they seem willing to talk more, I can go on with these:

9) What barriers, if any, do you experience in creating a welcoming place for the age group?
   a) Prompt
      i) Are they economy-wise?
      ii) Are they related to a lack of information on their needs/interests?
      iii) Does
10) How can those barriers be overcome?
   a) Prompt
      i) Could you give me an example?
11) What suggestions do you have for the city to create a welcoming environment for the age group?
   a) Prompt
      i) What can your venue do?
      ii) What could other venues do?
      iii) What could your venues and others do jointly?

Figure 2

Young Adult Interview Protocol



Young Adult Interview Protocol

1) What brought you here tonight?
2) Tell me a bit about yourself and the group you are with.
    a. Prompts
        i. Where do you know eachother from?
        ii. What generation would you say you belong to?
        iii. How do you communicate with each other?
        iv. What do you do when you aren't here?
3) What's important to you about spending time here?
    a. Prompts
        i. What, if anything, makes being here meaningful?
        ii. What importance does being in-person have?
        iii. What about how you use or don't use your mobile while here, how is that a part of your experience?
        iv. How is being here with this group of people significant in terms of your experience here?
4) So, tell me about this place.
    a. Prompts
        i. How it feels to be here.
        ii. Your experience with friends here.
        iii. How often you come here.
        iv. How this place makes you feel.
            1. Do you feel out of place or do you feel comfortable, like you belong here?
5) How about your mobile?
    a. Prompts
        i. When are you on social media or other connective apps?
            1. What is important to you when it comes to being connected?
        ii. How about with friends?
        iii. When do you prefer to be present without being on the mobile?
            1. What is it about not being on the mobile that you value?
        iv. How about when being here?
            1. How do you use or not use your mobile?
                a. What makes being on it or not being on it important?
6) At what places in Falköping do you feel you belong? And at what places do you feel you don't?
    a. Prompt
        i. Where do you feel others belong, but not you?
7) Tell me about Falköping.
    a. Prompt
        i. What is it like to live here?
        ii. Do you feel you belong?
        iii. Do you plan on staying?
8) Is there anything else you would like to add?

If they want to chat more, I will also ask this:

9) What is/are the best media platform(s) to inform young adults about what venue options exist in Falköping?
    a. Prompts
        i. Where do you find information about where to go?
        ii. Where do you know others look for information at?

10) If anything, what is Falköping missing to make 18-28-year-olds feel as though they belong?
    a. Prompts
        i. If it's not missing anything, what is it that feels welcoming and like home here?
        ii. Please give me an example of a type of venue.
        iii. Where in the city should this or these places be?
        iv. What about this place would be welcoming?

Validity and Reliability

Both validity and reliability were sought. According to Bazely (2013, p. 403), to determine the "quality of data", two applicable questions to ask are "Have you obtained sufficient contextual information to allow you to interpret your data?" and "Did your methods provide you with necessary data to answer your questions?". Similarly Bui (2020, p. 153) defines "validity" as "the extent to which the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure". Validity was achieved since the interviews deepened the understanding of how young adults' experience of Falköping's real and mediated spaces related to their choice of staying or leaving. The difference with reliability is it "consistently measuring" and creating a format which can lead to similar outcomes (Bui, 2020, p. 154). The young adult interview protocol was used for all the young adult interviews and the elite interview protocol for the managers. What was unique to each interview were the spontaneous questions created in response to certain answers. The topics and specifics covered in the protocol remained, however, maintaining reliability.

To demonstrate attention as well as respect for the participants' time, the interviews were entirely recorded, not transcribed simultaneously, on a Samsung Voice Recorder app and then transferred to a personal computer (della Porta, 2014, p. 237). The researcher chose to transcribe all the interviews herself, which is common to the method (Bryman et al., 2026, p. 439). Translating from Swedish to English was not an issue since the researcher is native to both languages and has education in certified translating, although between Spanish and English, she has applied her expertise translating to Swedish as well. As Bazely (2013, p. 403) proposes a study should fulfill, the interview method, transcription and coding were not lacking in data to respond to the chosen inquiries of the research.

Procedure and Ethical Considerations

To optimize the interviews, the researcher tested the interview protocol for young adults on a 30-year-old family-member and requested feedback as well as requested feedback from a university representative, and then adjusted accordingly (Bryman, 2026, p. 430; della Porta, 2014, pp. 237-238). Before each interview, the researcher informed the interviewees what participating in the study entailed and what it was about. The documents presented to the managers were the Research Information Summary, a detailed information document and a consent form (della Porta, 2014, p. 242; Jönköping University, 2023). (See Appendices A-E) Before interviewing the other participants, the researcher introduced herself, informed the interviewees what the interview was about, their anonymity, the lack of renumeration, how the data would be stored and distributed as well as their right to recall participation (della Porta, 2014, p. 242; Jönköping University, 2023). (See Appendices C, D) They were provided with written consent forms which are in her storage. (See Appendix E) For the other participants, the identifying information was limited to their age and gender as well as location and time of the interview. No names were gathered other than those of the managers, and no public Wi-Fi was used in transferring the files, to follow Bryman et al.'s (2026, p. 441) recommendation of storing the data securely.

Data Analysis

In terms of analytical method, the researcher has applied an abductive analysis through demonstrating connections between the data and theory priorly applied to other cases (Bazeley, 2013, p. 336). Kim and Kim (2026) also identified themes in their interview data.

Descriptive coding

For the choice of coding, the study includes mostly descriptive codes (Bazeley, 2013, p. 126). Many of the codes are "in vivo" codes, using the exact words of the interviewees and are identified as direct quotes by applying quotation marks to them (Bazeley, 2013, pp. 166). Since the interviewees used similar wording and the researcher translated and transcribed the interviews, the wording was similar enough that "in vivo" codes were applicable. By coding descriptively, redundancy and friction were evident across interviews (Bazeley, 2013, pp. 128, 167). The demographics include "gender, location, role" and "age" (Bazeley, 2013, p. 141).

Top-level coding

Categorizing the codes under broader codes, was the next step. Applying Bazeley's (2013, pp. 182-183) suggestion of top-code names and definitions for qualitative research, the researcher identified eleven top-level codes in the data. (See Table 2 below) After examining the data in the Excel sheet, the researcher labeled each of the lower-level codes with the top-level codes they belonged to (Bazeley, 2013, p. 181). Next, she reorganized the top-level codes into broader sections by combining those with similar meanings into six categories listed in Table 2 below (Bazeley, 2013, p. 185).

Table 2

Top-Level Codes

Original Top-Level Codes	New Top-Level Codes
"context"	"context and cultural context"
"cultural context"	"context and cultural context"

“people/actors/players”	“people, actors, players and characteristics”
“personal characteristics”	“people, actors, players and characteristics”
“strategies”	“strategies, actions, impact, outcome”
“impact/outcomes”	“strategies, actions, impact, outcome”
“activities”	“activities and events”
“events”	“activities and events”
“attitudes”	“attitudes, beliefs, ideologies”
“beliefs/ideological position/frameworks”	“attitudes, beliefs, ideologies”
“emotional responses or states (feelings)”	“emotional responses or states”

Note. The names of the Original Top-Level Codes are quoted directly from Bazely (2013, pp. 182-183).

Themes

In this study, the researcher identified three themes. A theme, as described by Bazeley (2013, pp. 190-191) is “an integrating, relational statement derived from the data that identifies both content and meaning”. After identifying them, the researcher positioned the top-level codes under each theme, although some of them overlapped (Bazeley, 2013, p. 197). The three themes are “place is relational”, “people and communities” and “emotions”. What each theme entails is described in Table 3 below. Place is relational comes both from Massey (1994, p. 168) on places and social interrelations and was an area in the coding with most of the lower codes under it as a key finding. Communities are essential for connecting since “if there are no groups or communities to identify with, identities have no meaning” (Hermes, 2024, p. 19). This theme was also evident in every interview. Emotions, as the last theme, was represented in the low-level codes of “place to relax”, “fun”, “safety”, “loneliness”, “close friendships” and hominess. To understand cultural citizenship, “how safe or unsafe people feel. Where they feel ‘at home’ and where they are scared. What ambitions they have and what they hope for” must be identified (Hermes, 2024, p. 17).

Table 3

Themes

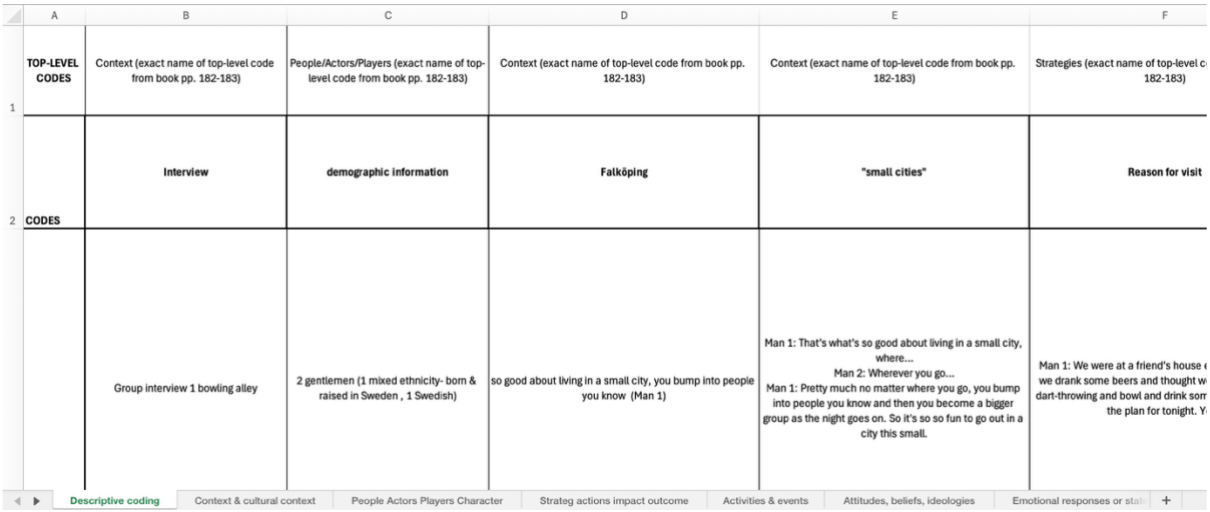
Themes	
Place is relational	Context in terms of what, where, when, as well as the social context.
	Mentions of something which occurs once, is carried out once, or is done on a regular basis.
	Factors which enable, block, complicate or expedite something.
	Attitudes and convictions which evidently influence location and behaviour (Bazeley, 2014, pp. 182-183).
People and communities	Ages and gender of people, their roles, as well as their characteristics.
	Repeated actions which centre on people rather than place.
	Factors which enable, block, complicate or expedite relationships.
	Attitudes and convictions which evidently influence behaviour (Bazeley, 2014, pp. 182-183).
Emotions	"…emotional responses or states" (Bazeley, 2014, pp. 183).

Coding tool

Due to its practical categorization features, Excel was the tool for organizing the coding (Bazeley, 2013, p. 135) (See Figure 3). The top-level codes were at the top of each column, followed by the next level codes. Since the first code furthest to the left was the contextual code of what interview it was, this marked the beginning of a set of data. (See Figure 3) The first sheet of the Excel file contained all the coding, including comments on codes for clarity and remembering reasoning.

Figure 3

Coding Tool



	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	TOP-LEVEL CODES	Context (exact name of top-level code from book pp. 182-183)	People/Actors/Players (exact name of top-level code from book pp. 182-183)	Context (exact name of top-level code from book pp. 182-183)	Context (exact name of top-level code from book pp. 182-183)	Strategies (exact name of top-level c 182-183)
2	CODES	Interview	demographic information	Falköping	"small cities"	Reason for visit
		Group interview 1 bowling alley	2 gentlemen (1 mixed ethnicity- born & raised in Sweden , 1 Swedish)	so good about living in a small city, you bump into people you know (Man 1)	Man 1: That's what's so good about living in a small city, where... Man 2: Wherever you go... Man 1: Pretty much no matter where you go, you bump into people you know and then you become a bigger group as the night goes on. So it's so so fun to go out in a city this small.	Man 1: We were at a friend's house we drank some beers and thought w dart-throwing and bowl and drink som the plan for tonight. Y

Descriptive coding | Context & cultural context | People Actors Players Character | Strateg actions impact outcome | Activities & events | Attitudes, beliefs, ideologies | Emotional responses or stat

Analysis

Although young adults in Falköping chose to move from the city, affecting its economic and social sustainability, being present at and listening to their experiences provided new insight into what they valued most. What was essential in young adults' experiences in Falköping was communication with caring people at physical places. The young adults in Falköping planned to move away, however, despite belonging: a belonging-leaving paradox. Considering where the young adults met and spent time with communities and how they spent this time was best understood by an integrated framework of place and social interrelations, mobile socialities, anchoring narratives and cultural citizenship. Their mobility practices and future plans were interpreted through mobile socialities, while how they viewed Falköping and related it to other places and how they maintained relationships using mobile phones and mediated spaces also applied place and social interrelations. Aspects from that concept together with cultural citizenship, were useful in analysing the unique actions and relations (Massey, 1994, pp. 168-169) and "popular cultural practices, texts or forms" (Hermes, 2024, pp. 14, 25-26) in places and mediated spaces, and how their identity was attached to the city, venues and communities. How others saw them and they saw themselves as well as how they expressed themselves revealed their sense of belonging was understood through cultural citizenship. Analysing what anchoring narratives formed their identity was a

form of combining this concept with cultural citizenship. This integrated framework allowed a broad approach to both confirm already researched conclusions and uncover others.

Identity and Community

Identifying with a Community Promotes Belonging

Communities offer a "sense of belonging" and "support" and without having them "to identify with, identities have no meaning" (Hermes, 2024, pp. 19-20). It was in Falköping, at the youth group and bowling alley that the young adults were able to form their identity because they had "communities… to identify with" (Hermes, 2024, p. 19). These places represent "culture", as they are the setting in which a person can practice "meaning making and identity formation" (Hermes, 2024, p. 15). While Hermes (2024) defines identity "as how a person sees themselves and is seen by others" (p. 14), "identity construction" is formed out of "reflection" using "popular cultural practices, texts or forms" (pp. 25-26). This is how cultural citizenship is performed. As they were able to relax and be themselves, they allowed themselves to be "seen by others" (Hermes, 2024, p. 14). In Falköping, seeing people they recognized was the main way the young adults' identity was confirmed in the city. It also made the young adults feel at home, part of the community and that they belonged, both to the city of Falköping and the bowling alley. One group felt nostalgia about always having gone to the bowling alley with friends and still having found someone else they knew there. So, both Falköping and the bowling alley, nostalgic spaces, made them feel safe. The importance of feeling safe is discussed further in another section. "That's just how it is. Falköping and the bowling alley, …you're almost never alone. If you come here, you're going to see someone you know. If you're for example, having a hard time". This exemplifies the paradox; they identify with the city and the places as home. As one man related

> "there's something amazing about knowing you have a home, no matter where you are. You can always come home to Falköping, cuz it's a small city and everyone knows who you are when you come home".

In continuation of how people are "seen by others", the venue managers had some thoughts about the young adults (Hermes, 2024, p. 14). The main descriptor for young adults was wanting to have fun, as the bowling alley manager expounded, "they're livelier… they hang out with each other and have fun, although in a different way than as teenagers". At the youth group, the leader explained, "They also think it's fun to play, but it takes another shape. The

conversation and fellowship are more important for them." The importance of relationships and enjoying themselves with friends was therefore confirmed.

How the young adults viewed themselves and whether they saw themselves in Generation Z varied. Several of them did not know what it entailed to belong to Generation Z. One interviewee described it as having grown up without the technology which exists now and it having come in the teenage years, while another described it as having had access their entire lives, while social media came later in life. In one interview at the youth group, the two men did not want to be related with what most of what the generation was perceived as. One of them said he identified with an older generation, while he remembered knocking on doors to play with friends when young. They did identify with Generation Z consuming less alcohol than other generations, however, did not want to be thought of as having a short attention span and being unintelligent, which were stereotypes of the generation. They also said the generation was the loneliest and the one with the worst mental health.

Cultural Practices as Identity

Identity Through Practices at Real Places

What venues the participants frequented and the activities they engaged in demonstrated their cultural citizenship. The young adults in Falköping said doing activities together in-person allowed them to feel less lonely. This confirmed the importance of community and how it provides a "sense of belonging… and support" (Hermes, 2024, pp. 15, 19-20). A woman at the bowling alley admitted that "you feel less alone when you're around your friends". Their activities included what they did together at the venues, playing on sports teams, playing sports for fun with the same friends from the venues and going to the gym. One group from the bowling alley, regularly played hockey together. The other mentions of sports were at the youth group interviews, including playing indoor beach volleyball every week with friends from the youth group, playing on a volleyball team and a handball team. Summer activities included were frisbee golf and swimming. To spend time with friends was the most common motive to visit both the bowling alley and the youth group.

Visiting the bowling alley at the most three times a month and always on Fridays or Saturdays was the norm. Meeting friends in person, relaxation, distraction, celebrating birthdays and drinking alcoholic beverages, mainly beer, were their main motives to come to

the bowling alley on weekend evenings. They also bowled, played Blackjack and shuffleboard, used the betting machines, threw darts, sat on the sofas and talked and sometimes danced. These were their forms of "identity construction" through "popular cultural practices, texts or forms" (Hermes, 2024, pp. 25-26). One man described it as "At Bowlingstället you can throw darts, what is it called? Shuffleboard, um, bowling! Um and dance, of course, drink alcohol and have beautiful fellowship". They described drinking with friends at a venue as a form of communication and relationship-building as well as an excuse to meet with friends. It was something to do in support of each other, whether celebrating or lamenting. In Group Interview 1, an interviewee described it as

> "It's a lot more fun to meet for real. Then we can talk about stuff we can't talk about online. If we're having a hard time, we can give each other a hug. If we're happy, we drink a beer and share that…".

Going every Friday they did not have work, was the youth group attendance habit. They also appreciated the set time to be there. At the youth group they engaged in "…a mingle… a game… a religious gathering… eating together… an activity…" and they finished with free time to spend how they preferred. What they valued most was being themselves, being accepted, deep conversation, spending time with best friends and the spiritual reflection. As one man stated, "the most important reason why I come on Fridays and Sundays is that I can come to a church service and participate in teaching and worship together, but also the fellowship, to have a nice and fun time with friends". Including everyone in activities and discussions created a place considered home.

Identity Through Practices in Mediated Spaces

Part of how they viewed themselves was about their mobile use, which relates to mobile socialities, cultural citizenship and place and social interrelations. There was a shame about social media being the default reaction to boredom and frustration over needing mobile phones for daily life. This friction is obvious in the following excerpt from an interview at the youth group,

> "Wood: When do you use social media and similar apps?
> …Man 2: More than we want to admit, unfortunately. … You can't brag about being super active on social media…
> Man 1: At the same time, people who make a big deal of getting rid of social media apps, you also kind of see that as strange. … Social media, in particular, you don't really need. However, when it comes to BankId and things like that, it's pretty difficult to function without them in current society."

Suggested Practices and Venues for Belonging

The young adults in the study differed between the youth group and the bowling alley, however, they suggested new venues to increase the sense of belonging in Falköping for the opposite group, suggesting a food festival, a car meet, places with activities, events and pubs on the street called "Ströget" and a mall. About the shopping mall, a man from the youth group described his suggestion as "a meeting place where everyone can feel they belong and feel a part of…". Another way of connecting across the groups was that sometimes people from the youth group visited pubs with friends who went there regularly to spend time together. The conversations were special since the inebriated friends would ask questions about Christianity which they would not ask otherwise, creating a common subject facilitating conversation across groups. Matching Hermes' (2024, p. 15) "meaning-making and "identity-formation", the youth group leader's suggestion of forums for young adults about existential questions, was to make them feel more valued in the city.

Identity and Mobility

The participants' identity is also attached to movement and moving away. An anchoring narrative shared by young adults in the study is movement both within the city and outside it. Schofield Clark's (2021) example when developing anchoring narratives within this framework of mobility in a city in USA, entails emotional hardship. Taking the study's participants' needs into consideration, relating to Hermes' cultural citizenship (2024, p. 17), is a way of avoiding emotional hardship. The perception of whether venues in Falköping took their needs into consideration was influenced by how accessible young adults believed a venue was without driving a car. Beyond cultural citizenship, how they perceive Falköping and distances also relates to mobility and places and social interrelations. The bowling alley participants wanted pubs to be on the main street nicknamed "Ströget", a few blocks from the train station, to be able to visit pubs in both Falköping and other cities such as Skövde and Gothenburg on the same night. This demonstrates their habit of visiting other cities frequently. These participants said places to spend time with friends in Falköping were not easily accessible, despite the city being small.

Although the youth group ended around the same time as the bowling alley closed and they were in the same area, the participants had different perspectives on how nearby the venues were for them to visit. At the youth group, an interviewee said he rode his bike across town to

the youth group. He also spoke of Falköping being small enough that it was possible to reach most places on bicycle. Some of the interviewees from the bowling alley shared similar perceptions of Falköping being small and easily navigable, except about the bowling alley and two grocery stores which had been moved to the outskirts of the city. Despite there being a bus stop beside the venue, the bus did not run at the hours they tended to leave the bowling alley. For this reason, though they were at the bowling alley during the interviews, some considered it far away due to the busses not being in service when they needed them.

Moving from Falköping

Most of the interviewees also spoke of eventually moving from Falköping. A woman in interview three at the bowling alley transmitted her thoughts saying

> "I feel that Falköping isn't a city for youth. There aren't many activities and as soon as you get older, you want to try more things and there's not that much to do here. Otherwise, Falköping is a super calm city. It's nice to grow up here and then when you've grown up, you can move wherever you want and live your life".

A woman who felt at home in Falköping, commented that her parents from Lidköping, encouraged her to move away from Falköping. Others said that if they were to return, most friends would have moved, which showed an unsaid norm of moving away. The interviewees had a strong sense of belonging, which did not deter their moving, a belonging-leaving paradox. So the anchoring narrative is rooted to growing up and moving away.

Despite Falköping's favourable aspects, the young adults' priorities were job opportunities, which were in larger cities and not in Falköping. Some interviewees said returning could be to raise a family in Falköping due to its peacefulness and affordability. One of the men at the bowling alley described the positive and negative sides to coming back.

> "…would you come back in that case?
> Man 1: Yeah. For my kids to grow up here, because not much happens, everyone knows each other. It's safe and comfortable. In the future, though, when you want a job and such, and more opportunities, then maybe you need to move to a bigger city."

This also demonstrates the paradox of belonging and leaving. They identify with other young adults who experience moving away as what is done when becoming young adults. One interviewee expressed it as, if he were to return, he would still see people he recognized, although not others who were his age. This confirms the breadth of who helps him feel at home, yet the resignation to not seeing his age group as the norm.

Belonging through Welcoming, Hominess and Safety

Belonging in the city of Falköping

To understand people's cultural citizenship, Hermes proposes two questions be asked and the answers will reveal "how safe or unsafe people feel. Where they feel 'at home' and where they are scared. What ambitions they have and what they hope for" (Hermes, 2024, p. 17). These questions, "what rights and responsibilities do people feel they have to others?" and "What are they willing to give up and what do they feel they are owed?" were implied in one of the interview questions (Hermes, 2024, p. 17). The question was how Falköping could be more welcoming for young adults. By suggesting something for themselves or for others, it was as though they believed they and others were owed and had the right to have places which they enjoyed. The youth group leader's suggestion was a sober activity for the age group,

> "… if… the only places they have to go to is to go drink (alcohol), I think they need to do better. So, creating forums where interesting speakers come… to get to be able to talk about meaning, purpose and life and meet up. We're glad to do that".

Both the bowling alley manager and participants there proposed variety and events with placement on the known street "Ströget" as well as the park along it and car meets to create a welcoming atmosphere which considered the age group's hopes. Their priority was for alcohol to be served since they said, "I don't know what's fun if you don't drink alcohol". They added ideas of a permanent dance floor and DJ, famous artist performances, a club with a restaurant, a pub, a club for young adults, events focusing on specific age groups, and "a venue where you can dance. Maybe Go-carts and the likes". One man insisted on the mention of Viltmat as an event organizer, also a Food-Festival, more sports such as American Football and a more central grocery store. One group said all that was needed was conversational skills for a person to find their place. Conversation was valuable for all of the participants, so this was insightful.

At the youth group, they said a place that was welcoming for everyone was essential and one man said, "I would say a shopping mall". They did, however, not consider the city needed more venues. A man at the youth group had a suggestion on how meeting places could adapt instead, to create as welcoming an atmosphere as the one he felt at the youth group, while avoiding alcohol.

> "…Be friendly, be considerate of each other's needs, be helpful, … it doesn't have to be about alcohol and … you can have fun anyways…positive fellowship builds good relationships..."

Informing young adults about activities and venues in a way which will reach them was another form of fulfilling what the young adults felt they were owed. A woman at the youth group considered that the problem was that information about the options was not reaching the target groups. She suggested using analogue methods of flyers in mailboxes, billboards, and going to workplaces and places of study. The remaining young adults in the study, told of how information about activities and venues reached them best and their recommendations for informing others. They mostly used Instagram for finding information, although some used Facebook since that is where they knew venues posted. Their recommendations were posting on Instagram in the first place, then TikTok, Snapchat and Facebook as well.

> "Instagram is a good platform to reach out with information. You can just open a simple account. Post about meeting places you want to recommend. Instagram, maybe TikTok. Young adults hang out there as well. A lot of social media, Facebook and what else is there? Snapchat. Those types of platforms where young adults hang out."

How secure the young adults felt, was also a topic the interviewees covered. They expresssed that Falköping was mostly calm and home and that the two venues felt safe, relaxing and homey. This is understood through both cultural citizenship in terms of feeling safe and place and social interrelations since it is their opinion about the city. About Falköping, one man said "Cuz this is home. You feel at home. You know everyone". At the bowling alley a woman expressed it as "Welcoming, home, there's always someone to talk to when you come here". Another woman described its safety as, "drug users and similar don't come here… So, it's a safe place". The youth group was additionally attributed with being a place which allowed vulnerability and being themselves. An expression of this was "You feel welcome. You can relax here. You can wind-down after maybe a week of not really being able to be yourself when you're at work and such". "It's been very safe" was another response.

Belonging at the Venues

How they treated each other at venues was also a significant factor related to place and social interrelations since it is about actions and relations there (Massey, 1994, pp. 168-169). The young adults at the youth group were delegated to be role models and to be welcoming. One described it saying "new (people) who come now, we try to help them feel like part of the

group". While being respectful if a visitor needed to be alone, they encouraged all visitors to participate in the activities. Since the youth group was aimed at young people and there was also a young adult group which had separate gatherings, staying in the youth group after reaching adulthood entailed being role models for the younger participants. "Who we invite are ages thirteen to nineteen. …we want those who want to stay, who get something from what we believe in or a leadership role from being here, also can stay and become leaders." A participant described it as follows,

> "So, when I was one of the youngest here, the older ones helped bring me into the fellowship. I feel like it's the same way for new (people) who come now. We try to help them feel like part of the group".

Friendships Formed

The friendships and conversations were both mediated and in person at the venues. Between these, what promoted friendship most was meeting in person. The anchoring was in the place, more than the mediated space of social media. This demonstrates the "need of closeness to each other" (Clark, 2021, p. 86). According to an interviewee in interview five at the bowling alley, "It doesn't really matter where we are, as long as we meet up".

Conversation Promotes Friendship at Real Places

According to Clark (2021, p. 86), being able to share a narrative, whether when speaking about it or when listening to it, "build(s) resilience" and sharing it with others creates a "strong community". Falköping's young adult respondents, also told of the power of conversation to build connection and community. This sharing "may help young people to draw connections between their own suffering and that of others", leading them to work together to improve the situation (Clark, 2021, p. 86). This was in the form of building a sense of belonging. Conversation was key in this.

Both at the bowling alley and at the youth group, they felt strong connections due to conversations with people. At the bowling alley, guests always began their visit with talking to the manager and always encountered people they knew. In this way, they practiced both anchoring narratives of sharing their experiences with others (Clark, 2021, p. 86) and cultural citizenship through how they practiced their habits and were seen by others (Hermes, 2024, p. 14, 25-26). Since he often shared the same interests, this enabled conversation. Both to

promote spending time with friends and making new friends, the bowling alley's furniture layout was designed to facilitate conversation by including an area with round sofas and several tables and chairs spread out in the venue and the manager talked with the visitors as well.

The young adults at the bowling alley valued having thorough conversation, talking about deeper subjects and being more honest than when communicating remotely. Some of them described it by saying "I mean you can say more face-to-face than you can on the phone. You can speak a little bit more openly. Find out what chicks he's with… and find out what's going on". Witnessing changes on each other, such as balding and new tattoos, and being able to joke and share about them, both possibly helped them process this stage in life and were some of the reasons they preferred meeting in-person. Their emotional wellbeing also improved by meeting their friends at the venues since both the physical contact of an embrace and understanding each other better helped they feel happier and less lonely. In their words,

> "I mean it's the physical contact, to leave home, meet up with people, you can talk with people face-to-face and not need to write or call. I mean, you understand a person differently depending on whether you talk with them face-to-face or write to them."

At the youth group, interviewees explained that meeting in-person made them feel a stronger connection to each other, enabled deeper discussion about the religious message at the gathering, allowed them to engage in physical activities together, was more fun, less lonely, felt more real and better than meeting remotely.

> "But if you have the opportunity to hang-out in-person, you should take it. It's hard to describe since it's such a special feeling. I feel better when I spend time with people than when I speak with them on Discord, for example because then the person is here and our souls are closer to each other."

They engaged in deep conversations and developed their closest friends in person, as they described saying "You can have really good friends outside of here, but here you can have the truly deep conversations. To me, the proof of an extremely close friendship is how deep our conversations are...". At times, they had silly conversation as well, to lighten the atmosphere.

Communication in Mediated Spaces Maintains Relationships

Connection, conversation and meeting spaces and places are also at the center of cultural citizenship (Hermes, 2024, p. 14). Massey (1994, p. 162), however, writes of a loss of "sense of place", affecting "social relations" now lacking a set place. "Space and place are experienced as a mixed reality" (Smith, 2023, pp. 55, 66). While mediated spaces are necessary for contacting each other to spend time together, the young adults prefered meeting at real places, contradicting that idea and separating space and place. Communicating in mediated spaces is a way of engaging in "popular cultural practices… using "texts or forms" which form their "sense of belonging" and "community" (Hermes, 2024, pp. 19, 25-26). At the youth group, one young adult posted about the coming Friday gathering, took pictures during it and posted the experience each week on Instagram. In the youth group's Whatsapp group, the young people could also confirm attendance, add anyone to the group and write about the group. They could communicate about their experience in the moment, after the moment and about their future experiences there.

Gaming and location apps have also changed the relationship with place and space (Smith, 2023, p. 63). Some interviewees told of what they did beyond work and studies, other than clubbing, "drinking" and/or attending the youth group. Playing video games together online while talking on Discord were ways for men in Falköping to spend time together when too tired to leave home on weeknights. Another way of using virtual space for forming relationships was when while at the bowling alley, one interviewee used Tinder to meet women, instead of approaching women there.

At the bowling alley, some of the interviewees used location apps to find friends and go there. Snapchat was the favored social media app of the interviewees. If the person they contacted did not answer, they called the person on a regular call. Other reasons for calling were that they felt more comfortable calling some people and writing others. One woman at the youth group recounted her habits. "If it's someone I'm close to, it's easier to talk on the phone, if we usually talk on the phone." A man at the youth group spoke about phone calls requiring a close relationship. "Yeah, someone you know better, so it's not awkward when you call. Some people I call because I know they're so bad at answering when I write to them, so, to get a hold of them."

There was, however, a scepticism to mediated spaces, while cherishing real places. At the youth group, they used social media sparingly, checking messages and scrolling toward the end of the night. During mealtime, however, they could show each other content or search for information related to their conversation. At the bowling alley they also limited their use, at times taking pictures and videos of funny and embarrassing moments. To share their enjoyment and encourage others to come, most of them posted on Instagram or Snapchat. One group interview with two 29-year-old interviewees and one 22-year-old, spoke about the change in their habits on social media compared to when they were younger. Priorly, they posted their activities, while now they merely photographed and deleted content, since they no longer valued sharing online. What they valued most about being virtually connected was contact with friends, and for some, family as well. “To have contact with my friends when I’m not with them in-person, … So, staying in touch with friends and family”, was how an 18-year-old at the youth group expressed it.

Community at Real Places Enhances Belonging

In cultural citizenship, an individual may have a community to identify with, as well as the liberty to choose which community that is (Hermes, 2024, pp. 15, 19). An example is that despite being at the bowling alley and its mix of ages, when 18-year-olds came at the same time as 29-year-olds, the 29-year-olds felt out of place. The same situation occurred for twenty-year-olds, when there were mostly middle-aged guests at the bowling alley. The venue’s size and layout facilitated their being there, despite them seeing someone they did not have a good relationship with, since they could keep a distance. This was a form of finding their community, by learning who they feel most comfortable with. They also visited other venues and cities to meet new people.

Two opposite communities were represented by the bowling alley versus the youth group interviewees. Venues which served alcohol were where the bowling alley participants wanted to be, and where the youth group participants did not want to be. This was the greatest dividing point. Who they befriended, what they did and where they spent time mostly revolved aroung their aversion or attraction to alcohol. This was not the only difference, as sharing in the same beliefs and practicing their beliefs was also a factor in choosing friends, venues and activities for the youth group participants.

Perceptions of Place

Perceptions of Falköping

Place and social interrelations, entails how a place is perceived (Massey, 1994, pp. 168-169). While all the interviewees described Falköping as small, other opinions were shared by some of the participants. The only three negative connotations with the label of the city being small was that if someone did something wrong or embarrassing, everyone knew about it, that there were few places to meet with friends and that meeting new people was a challenge since everyone already knew everyone. The good side was that if someone was a good person, that was also widely known.

Descriptors mentioned by some of the representatives from both venues were that there were nice people, that everything in the city was nearby, that it was safe and calm, that it had what someone could need, that some areas were less calm, that there were not enough activities or venues for young adults and that there were enough activities and venues. One of the interviewees at the bowling alley spoke of an aesthetically beautiful, although divided Falköping, in which racism was the norm. Despite other ethnically diverse interviews, this was the only interview mentioning this perspective. Other aspects attributed to Falköping solely at the bowling alley were that everyone recognized each other, that it was empty of adolescents and was not a city for them, that it was economically accessible and that it lacked jobs. The woman in interview four at the bowling alley expressed "It's cozy here. You pretty much get to know everyone who's your same age. You recognize everyone and that's quite fun.". At interview three at the youth group, a man relayed his thoughts on Falköping.

> "I think it's rather calm. It's nice. It's where I've lived most of my life, so I have friends and family here. It's safe, secure and fun to live here since I know people here. I feel I belong here. I have what I need here."

Actions and relations combined only at a certain place make it unique and some of those relations reach beyond that place (Massey, 1994, pp. 168-169). A connection to other places is also part of "the identity of a place" (Massey, 1994, p. 169). Falköping was compared to other cities, calling them better party destinations, calling Falköping a more attractive city, mentioning destinations to move to and large cities with opinions about smaller cities. A man explained "you can't compare Gothenburg and Stockholm, because they're big cities, but Falköping is calm, there are nice people here, there are seldom problems".

Perceptions of Venues

Both the bowling alley and the youth group were perceived as relaxing places to destress and have fun. Since the youth group participants had such a strong sense of belonging in their youth group community and Falköping, they did not consider more venues were necessary, as a woman responded to whether more venues were needed, “I would say no, because I feel at home here, but I don’t know what it’s like for people who don’t go to church. I think that they might be missing something”. By “feel(ing) at home” and receiving “what they hope(d) for” their identity was attached to Falköping (Hermes, 2024, p. 17).

Closing thoughts

In what ways is a sense of belonging fostered among the young adults through place and cultural citizenship in Falköping? Relationships are the red thread throughout the study. The young adults learn about their identity by engaging in conversation, which leads to friendships and expressing themselves through activities. Through the conversations and activities, they find communities. They learn who they are, what they enjoy doing, where they want to be and who they want to be with. As some interviewees said, conversational skills are all that is needed to belong and homeness and safety are what they value most at venues and in the city.

Anchoring narratives are expressed throughout the study. When thinking of the past, the participants remembered riding bikes to their friends’ homes to play with them, as opposed to planning on meeting using Snapchat. A role which social media and mobile phones played in their sense of belonging in the city of Falköping was using it to communicate with their loved ones, as the use for it they cared about most. How they used media was also based on who they were communicating with. Sharing about their experiences with others and having conversations with friends, built their sense of community, belonging and connection, demonstrating the positive effects of anchoring narratives. They also planned on moving away for a better future; however, they maintained a hope of providing their future family with the peacefulness they grew up in.

Conversations were the most mentioned factor for creating a sense of belonging. Having deep conversations, forming their closest friendships at the youth group and always having someone to talk to at the bowling alley are some examples. They also felt the freedom to

share their experiences with others. Even taking pictures at the youth group and posting them and inviting friends to the youth group WhatsApp chat group were relationship-based actions.

Being role models and welcoming teenagers were young adults' responsibility at the youth group. They continued learning about their identity by how they shared with others, as anchoring narratives proposes. To understand which communities they belonged to, hence part of their identity, conversations and listening helped them find commonalities and differences with others. Although the participants from the two venues knew they were two different communities, they had suggestions of new venues for each other. This demonstrated a sense of community as residents in the same city.

Meeting places, conversations and activities were meaningful as part of their cultural practices. Most of the activities they engaged in were with friends and their meeting places encouraged conversation. Feeling they belonged, as in understanding their identity as part of a certain community, was enhanced by conversation and seeing people they recognized.

Other roles social media and mobile phone use played in their sense of belonging in the city of Falköping were is maintaining contact with loved ones, especially to meet and spend time with them in the city. This clearly connects to how place and space are both connected and separate, since virtual contact promotes physical affinity. The young adults were able to spend time together on Discord and Snapchat, since space and place are not always connected. Finding ways to spend time together when they could not meet in-person demonstrates the value they placed on their time together. Place was significant because all the young adults preferred meeting in-person. In these places, they valued meeting with friends, having deep conversations, doing activities together and being able to relate by seeing the wear of time and experience on each other. These relationships establish who and where they are, who they are with and which community they belong to.

How young adults practiced their cultural citizenship through mobility in relation to the city of Falköping was however, not connected to relationships to the same extent. One anchoring narrative in terms of mobility in the present was living in a city in which the train station connected them to nearby cities with a wider variety of leisure activities. Another was longing for more physical meeting places which were in walking distance of each other and of the train station, to partake in activities with friends beyond consuming alcohol. This was

the aspect connected to relationships, since both the locations' placement and social and activity-based aspects were valuable for them. Relationships were a red thread between interviewees since those who did not consider the need for more venues or the distance to venues in the city as important, preferred meeting in person and performing activities together with friends. The most significant anchoring narrative was that despite meaningful relationships creating a sense of belonging in the city, most of the young adults maintained their plans to move away.

So the young adults had a "sense of belonging", "support", "community" and "identities" with "meaning," however, they still planned to leave (Hermes, 2024, pp. 19-20). They also told of their "ambitions" and "hopes" to move although they contradict the logical connection of people staying where they feel safe and feel they belong. Most of the participants in the study, were "willing to give up" their hometown and did not feel the "responsibility" to stay.

Identifying with a community did not entail staying in it. To form their skills in relating to people, becoming confident in themselves and maintaining relationships with friends are essential (Grace & Seemiller, 2024). Although they recognized people constantly, meeting new people their age was more of a challenge if they stayed in Falköping. The confidence built by having a sense of belonging might be what gives them the courage to fulfil the narrative of leaving to find work and study and go where they can form new relationships which can only be found where they do not recognize anyone. They are also able to maintain their community in the city of Falköping and via social media and mobile phone contact, since space and place are no longer always connected. As the young adults face life choices, knowing where home will always be is the strength they need to face what comes next (Clark, 2021, p. 86; Massey, 1994, p. 162).

Discussion

This study sought to examine the relationship between young adults' choices to move from Falköping and their experiences at real places and mediated spaces. Mediated spaces' role in their sense of belonging in Falköping was that they were used for contacting friends to meet at real places where they they built their sense of belonging. Meeting at real places and practicing cultural citizenship through, most importantly, conversations in-person and

recognizing each other, produced a strong sense of belonging. By visiting other cities to meet new people and engage in leisure activities and by considering distances to real places to meet with their friends in their own city, they expressed their mobility and sociality in relation to Falköping. What the study found was that their experiences at real places and mediated spaces were valuable in creating a sense of belonging, especially at real places, however, there was not a clear relationship between these experiences and their choice to leave. Beyond seeking job opportunities, what possibly aided in their choice to leave was the narrative that young adults move away and being accustomed to traveling to larger cities.

Other studies (Eriksson, 2017, p. 11; Hofstede et al., 2022, p. 157; O'Shea et al., 2019, p. 6) also found that belonging is not a strong enough factor for young adults to stay in small cities, especially when a narrative of moving exists. Leaving as the norm was the significant factor in making belonging influential, in Hofstede et al.'s (2022, p. 157) research. Where leaving was not the norm, sense of belonging could influence their decision. The results from Falköping supported these findings, since a narrative of moving existed. This contributes to place and social interrelations and anchoring narratives by demonstrating that, promoting a sense of belonging through real meeting places which enable conversation, must be combined with establishing a narrative of staying.

While other studies confirmed the study's finding that meeting at real places was crucial in a sense of belonging and wellbeing (Newson et al., 2021, pp. 443-444; van der Wal et al.'s, 2024, p. 5), one study found that meeting in-person was not more influential in the "sense of community" than meeting in mediated spaces (Gatti et al., 2026, p. 13). In another study, it was "social media usage" which increased belonging (Van Eldik's, 2019, p. 250). To cultural citizenship, place and social interrelations and mobile socialities, the contribution is that the role of mediated spaces has begun to loose its equal status to real places. Expressions of cultural citizenship in mediated spaces (place and social relations) using mobile phones (mobile socialities) have begun to take a supporting role for maintaining relationships and sense of belonging. A related original contribution is that conversations in-person are essential in creating a sense of belonging. Creating contexts which support this are therefore essential.

A new finding in this study was that the interviewees did not consider it shameful to return, as opposed to the results in other studies (Eriksson, 2017, p. 5; O'Shea et al., 2019). This

contributes to anchoring narratives, place and social interrelations and mobile socialities by emphasizing the importance of establishing and/or maintaining a narrative of pride in their city and positivity in moving back. This lack of shame in returning may be connected to valuing its hominess and safety. Both this study and earlier studies mentioned young adults considering their cities to be small, while hominess and safety as meaningful characteristics of places and cities is only found in the study in Falköping. This is a contribution to place and social interrelations and cultural citizenship. Since sense of belonging may be influential when there is no norm of leaving, beyond inspiring conversation and seeing acquaintances, establishing hominess and safety in small cities and at real places may be important for retaining young adults, since it is what the interviewees in Falköping appreciated most. These were also reasons to return as long as there were jobs as well.

In terms of mobility, similar to reasoning to move from small cities and rural areas in earlier studies, the Falköping residents' main reasons to move were to have more leisure, studies and work options (Camozzi, 2016, p. 56; Eriksson, 2017, p. 5; O'Shea et al., 2019). This adds to existing results in research within mobile socialities and place and social interrelations. A contribution to mobile socialities and place and social interrelations, to inspire further studies, is this study's inclusion of the mobility practices of young adults before they move. With further research, the role of these mobility practices in their choice to move or not could be valuable.

Relationships and Community were two other significant subjects. The sense of belonging and communication to achieve it, whether in mediated spaces or real places, centers on maintaining or developing relationships. Other studies concur in this finding (Camozzi's, 2016, p. 52; Cuervo & Wyn, 2017, pp. 229-231; Eriksson, 2017, p. 11). This contributes to existing research within place and social interrelations, mobile socialities and cultural citizenship.

The interviewees in Falköping experienced community mostly through recognizing people and being recognized by others, this was also central in their sense of belonging. Real places which enabled choosing a community were also helpful. This differs from earlier studies, in which sense of community and sense of belonging are not always connected (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017; Eriksson, 2017; Hofstede et al., 2022; O'Shea et al., 2019). In Falköping, location apps for finding and meeting with friends and sparingly using social media together aided in their

sense of community, however, they were not crucial. One study also found that when used together in-person, they added to a sense of community (van der Wal et al., 2024, p. 6). Another study, however, found location apps were more important in a sense of community and were what created it (Gatti et al.'s, 2026, p. 13). From both the study in Falköping and earlier findings, the contribution to mobile socialities and place and social interrelations is that while mediated spaces may aid a sense of community in some contexts, in others they are essential. The original contribution from the Falköping study is that small cities can promote the value of people recognizing each other in small cities to both build a sense of community and belonging.

Conclusion

Falköping and other small cities experience that most of their young adults move away. The social problem with this is that both social and economic sustainability are at risk if young adults continuously leave the city. The media and communication problem, the belonging-leaving paradox, is that caring communication in person at local venues is central in creating a sense of belonging for young adults, however, it does not suffice to keep them from moving away. This communication is by seeing people they recognize and by having conversations at real places, leading to strong sense of belonging however, they still choose to move away.

The societal gap the study contributes to is learning that young adults in the city prefer information on Instagram about what the city has to offer. It also informs that what they value most about the city is its homeness and safety. Speaking of the future, the safety of the city is something they mention as a reason to return. They feel safe at the bowling alley because there is a guard who keeps people who want to deal drugs and are aggressive out. At the youth group they feel safe because they can be themselves. What makes them feel at home in the city is that people recognize them. They feel at home at the bowling alley because people recognize them. At the youth group, it is due to having their closest friends there and being accepted. What builds their sense of belonging most is being recognized by others, recognizing others and conversations at real places. This is further described in the answers below.

The research gap which the study fills is a combination of several angles. Applying an integrated framework with mobile socialities, anchoring narratives, cultural citizenship and

place and social interrelations is one angle. It tells us that belonging is rooted in place, friendship and being seen. It also informs that the mobility of young adults leaving can be addressed through anchoring narratives for themselves as a group at these venues. For the city, this study highlights the importance of maintaining and developing physical meeting places. Also, that while it can adapt to informing the age group using the appropriate digital form, which is Instagram, even if it creates jobs and informs of them, this must be combined with ensuring the places and city do not lose their safety and hominess. Another gap is interviewing young adults while at their preferred leisure venues. Studying mobility habits before moving and why meeting at real places is preferred over media spaces are two others. Lastly, it asks young adults how to improve the sense of belonging for other young adults in the city through appropriate communication methods and venues.

Below is how the aim was addressed through answering the three research questions. What role does how young adults use social media and mobile phones play in their sense of belonging in the city of Falköping? Community and relationships playing a central role in the young adults' sense of belonging in Falköping, influenced their digital practices and their mobility, although not in expected ways. Although perceptions about young adults, according to the interviewees, were of them being incompetent and social media-addicted, their relationship-focus in the use of social media and mobile phones contradicted this. The central role of apps, mobile phones and social media in creating a sense of belonging in the city was to facilitate meeting with their friends at physical locations. Location apps facilitated finding each other, social media in contacting each other to plan on meeting as well as in finding which events and venues to visit. Their mobile phones together with social media were useful in posting pictures and videos of their experiences together at venues to inspire other friends to join them. This adds to literature on social media and mobile phones in relation to the sense of belonging. Similar to findings in some other studies, the central purpose is maintaining relationships.

Different to some other studies, this adds to literature by the sense of belonging merely being facilitated, not experienced, through media tools. It was relationships, whether acquaintances they recognized in the city and at the venues or close friends they went to venues to spend time with, which created the sense of belonging they experienced. Their sense of belonging was not mediated but rooted in places and friendship.

Despite experiencing a strong sense of belonging, most of them had aspects of the city and venues to critique and provided suggestions for optimizing them to cater to their preferences. These aspects are possibly not as important for the city to focus on improving, however, since the young adults already have a strong sense of belonging and their plans to move remain unchanged. Maintaining spaces which foster meeting in-person along with activities and facilitating conversation should, however, not be neglected so as to preserve the current sense of belonging.

In what ways is a sense of belonging fostered among the young adults through place and cultural citizenship in Falköping? What was most important to the young adults was not what they did, it was that they did it at a physical place together with friends. Place being relational was confirmed. Massey (1994, p. 5) also describes place as relational, writing that "the particular mix of social relations which are thus part of what defines the uniqueness of any place". At the youth group, forming their closest friendships and having their deepest conversations were the strongest factors to form their sense of belonging. They also felt they belonged because the rules were to include everyone there in all the activities. Specific to the bowling alley, was seeing people they recognized and engaging in conversations with the venue manager and with friends and acquaintances. They could have more thorough conversations than over social media and mobile phone and could understand each other better. The visual aspect of seeing changes in each other such as tatoos and balding, and discussing them was important to them. At both venues they felt safe, relaxed and felt they could be themselves.

Sense of belonging through cultural citizenship was experienced by how they participated at the venues. Hermes (2024, pp. 25-26) describes cultural citizenship as "com(ing) into being when popular cultural practices, texts or forms are used for reflection, whether critically or affirmatively. Such reflection is always also performative and connected with identity construction." The young adults use an array of cultural practices, texts and forms at the venues. How they choose to express themselves forms their sense of belonging (Hermes, 2024, p. 26). In connection to the youth group, they could write in the WhatsApp group, add participants to it or share about their experience on the official Instagram account. Sometimes they used their mobile phones to aid in their conversations, showing each other something or looking something up together. Games, conversations and shared values through spiritual reflections were other forms of cultural citizenship. At the bowling alley, finding each other

on location apps to then meet each other there was another form. They also wrote each other on Instagram and Snapchat to plan on meeting there. Some of them took some pictures and videos and posted them on Instagram to attract other friends to come the next time. Drinking beer together, hugging, bowling, playing blackjack, shuffleboard and throwing darts were the activities, although what meant the most to them was seeing each other in-person and talking.

With the title of the study being "Is this where I belong?", the sense of belonging seems crucial. What the study reveals, however, is nuanced. Whether the young adults chose to stay in Falköping did not rely on their sense of belonging. Maybe belonging does not have to mean staying somewhere. Although Massey (1994, p. 162) wrote of how space and place were no longer always connected, in this context they are. Having the narrative anchor to speak of the physical anchor of the place and the relational anchor of the space to return to, may be a security for young adults who are facing the uncertainties of adulthood.

How do young adults express their mobility and sociality in relation to the city of Falköping? Recognizing most everyone in the city limited them meeting new people. Consequently, they preferred venues in walking distance of transport connections to other cities, possibly encouraging their decisions to move. By telling their friends and the researcher "positive stories of identity…they negotiate(d) their social worlds and … how they … successfully made such negotiations" (Clark, 2021, p. 86). They also told "stories… of who they (could) be in the future" (Clark, 2021, p. 86) and moved from self-centeredness to wanting a positive future for others as well (Clark, 2021, p. 90). They believed moving away was part of their anchoring narratives. In addition, they considered that studying and obtaining a job were only possible elsewhere, while settling with their future family in a peaceful city they were not ashamed of was attainable in Falköping. Since the young adults did not consider moving back as shameful, achieving them returning could be a more plausible option. If the city keeps meeting places and focuses on creating jobs and communicating about them in a way which reaches the group, it could possibly attract them back to the city.

Future Research

This study focused on the relationship of young adults with digital and analog activities, places and people in Falköping and at the bowling alley and Pentecostal church youth group.

The societal gap the study contributes to is learning that young adults in the city prefer information on Instagram about what the city has to offer. A different angle would then be changing who the focus of the study is on, formulating a question such as: How do venues and municipal services in a small to medium city formulate and direct their communication to young adults? More specifically, since the lack of job opportunities is what the young adults mention as a hindrance for returning, an appropriate study could be about how small to medium cities can communicate with young adults about job opportunities for them in the future. Another possibility would be to apply the study in a different city and/or focus solely on the communication or sociological aspects. A study comparing between small to medium cities, why young adults' choose to move away and communication's role in their decisions could be appropriate as well.

Limitations

A challenge which affected the end result of the research paper was time management. The interviewees only being present two days a week, limited when the researcher could interview them. In addition, applying the in-depth interview method for the first time and translating the recordings, transcribing the 120 pages of interviews, consumed more time than was expected.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Research Information Summary for Elite Interviewee at Bowling Alley

Figure A1

Note: Checklist shown and emailed to venue manager of bowling alley before interview.

Appendix B

Research Information Summary for Elite Interviewee at Youth Group

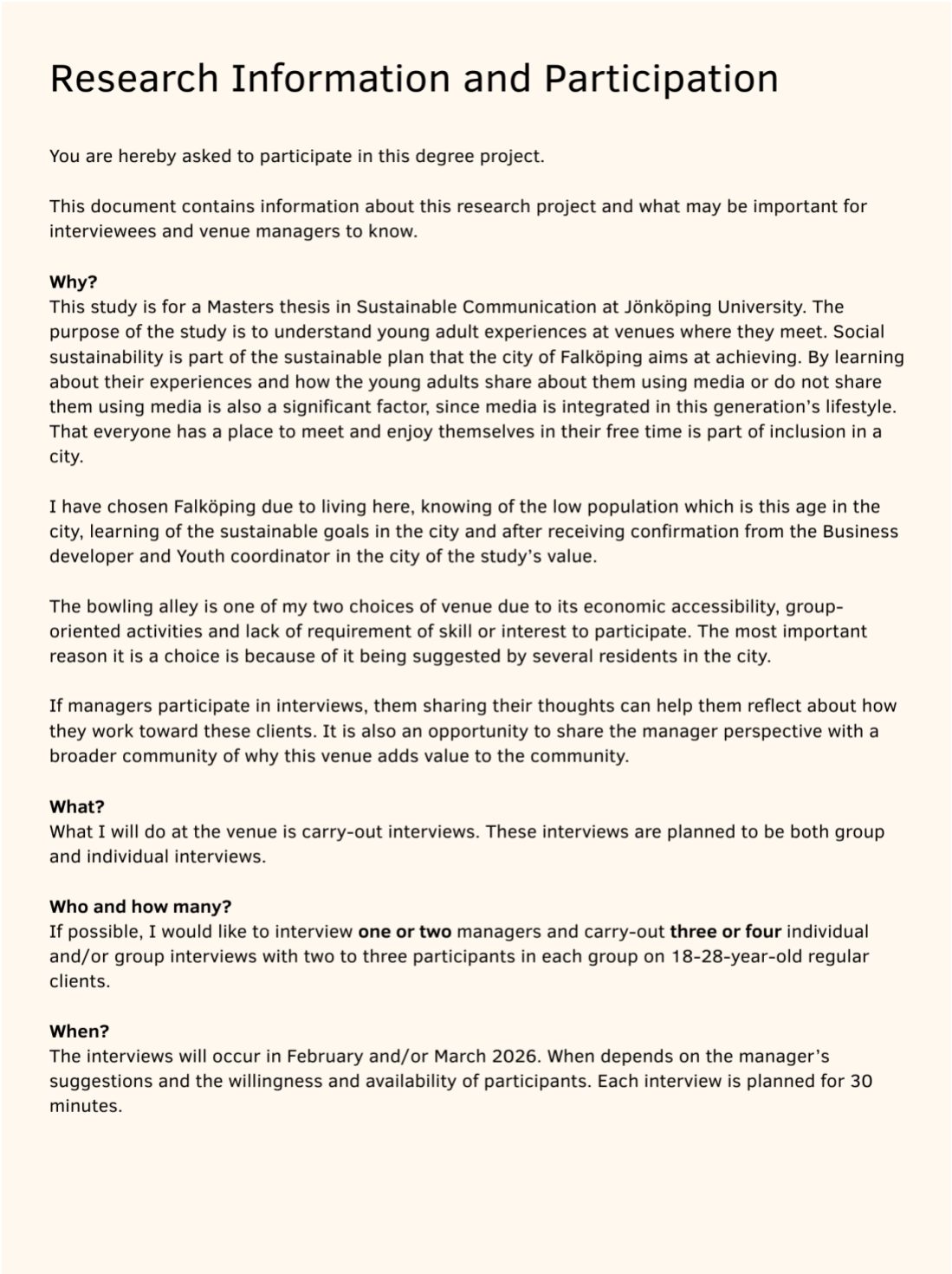
Figure B1

Note: Checklist shown and emailed to venue manager of youth group before interview.

Appendix C

Research Information for Elite Interviewee at Bowling Alley

Figure C1



Research Information and Participation

You are hereby asked to participate in this degree project.

This document contains information about this research project and what may be important for interviewees and venue managers to know.

Why?
This study is for a Masters thesis in Sustainable Communication at Jönköping University. The purpose of the study is to understand young adult experiences at venues where they meet. Social sustainability is part of the sustainable plan that the city of Falköping aims at achieving. By learning about their experiences and how the young adults share about them using media or do not share them using media is also a significant factor, since media is integrated in this generation's lifestyle. That everyone has a place to meet and enjoy themselves in their free time is part of inclusion in a city.

I have chosen Falköping due to living here, knowing of the low population which is this age in the city, learning of the sustainable goals in the city and after receiving confirmation from the Business developer and Youth coordinator in the city of the study's value.

The bowling alley is one of my two choices of venue due to its economic accessibility, group-oriented activities and lack of requirement of skill or interest to participate. The most important reason it is a choice is because of it being suggested by several residents in the city.

If managers participate in interviews, them sharing their thoughts can help them reflect about how they work toward these clients. It is also an opportunity to share the manager perspective with a broader community of why this venue adds value to the community.

What?
What I will do at the venue is carry-out interviews. These interviews are planned to be both group and individual interviews.

Who and how many?
If possible, I would like to interview **one or two** managers and carry-out **three or four** individual and/or group interviews with two to three participants in each group on 18-28-year-old regular clients.

When?
The interviews will occur in February and/or March 2026. When depends on the manager's suggestions and the willingness and availability of participants. Each interview is planned for 30 minutes.

Note. Document emailed to bowling alley venue manager and described and shown in print to venue manager and young adults.

Figure C2

How?
The researcher will contact the managers to learn whether it is possible to interview at the venue. In addition, the researcher will request support in the recruitment of participants and ask if the managers will also volunteer to be interviewed. If the managers do not agree to being interviewed and/or to supporting in recruiting participants, however approve the interviews of clients to occur, the researcher will approach the clients requesting their participation herself. The researcher will ask the managers where they allow the researcher and interviewees to sit and carry-out the interview. The interviews will be recorded on a sound file and stored on a USB. The interviews will then be transferred to text and analyzed according to similar themes and ideas of belonging and social sustainability. No questions which can cause harm will be asked. The only personal information of the young adults included will be age, gender, and the voice on the recording. The names of the managers will also be included. Only the researcher will have access to the sound files and they will be protected with a password. When the project is complete, the sound files will be destroyed.

Participation in the degree project is completely voluntary. Participants can cancel their participation at any time without further justification.

How results reported?
Some forms of how the results will be reported is already decided, while others are possibilities. The results will be included in the thesis. If the managers prefer, the results will also be sent to their emails. Other possibilities are that if the managers and participants approve, the results can be shared on social media. The researcher can also contact Falköpings Tidning, the local newspaper and Z-reklam, a printing company which publishes a monthly local magazine which goes to all the homes in the city, offering the study and results as possible content for them to publish. Lastly, since Falköpings Business Developer and Youth Coordinator expressed interest in the study, they will be informed of the results.

Other information
Jönköping University's School of Education and Communication is responsible for the study and the processing of your personal data in connection with the degree project. According to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), participants in the study have the right to receive information about how their personal data are processed. Participants also have the right to apply for a so-called register extract, as well as to have any errors corrected. For questions about the processing of personal data, participants can primarily contact Joanna Wood. If participants think that their personal data is being processed incorrectly, they can submit a complaint to JU's data protection officer dso@ju.se. They can also submit a complaint directly to the Swedish Authority for Privacy Protection (IMY).

The degree project will be presented in the form of a thesis at Jönköping University's School of Education and Communication. Further information can be provided by Annette Hill. The contact details are as follows: annette.hill@ju.se

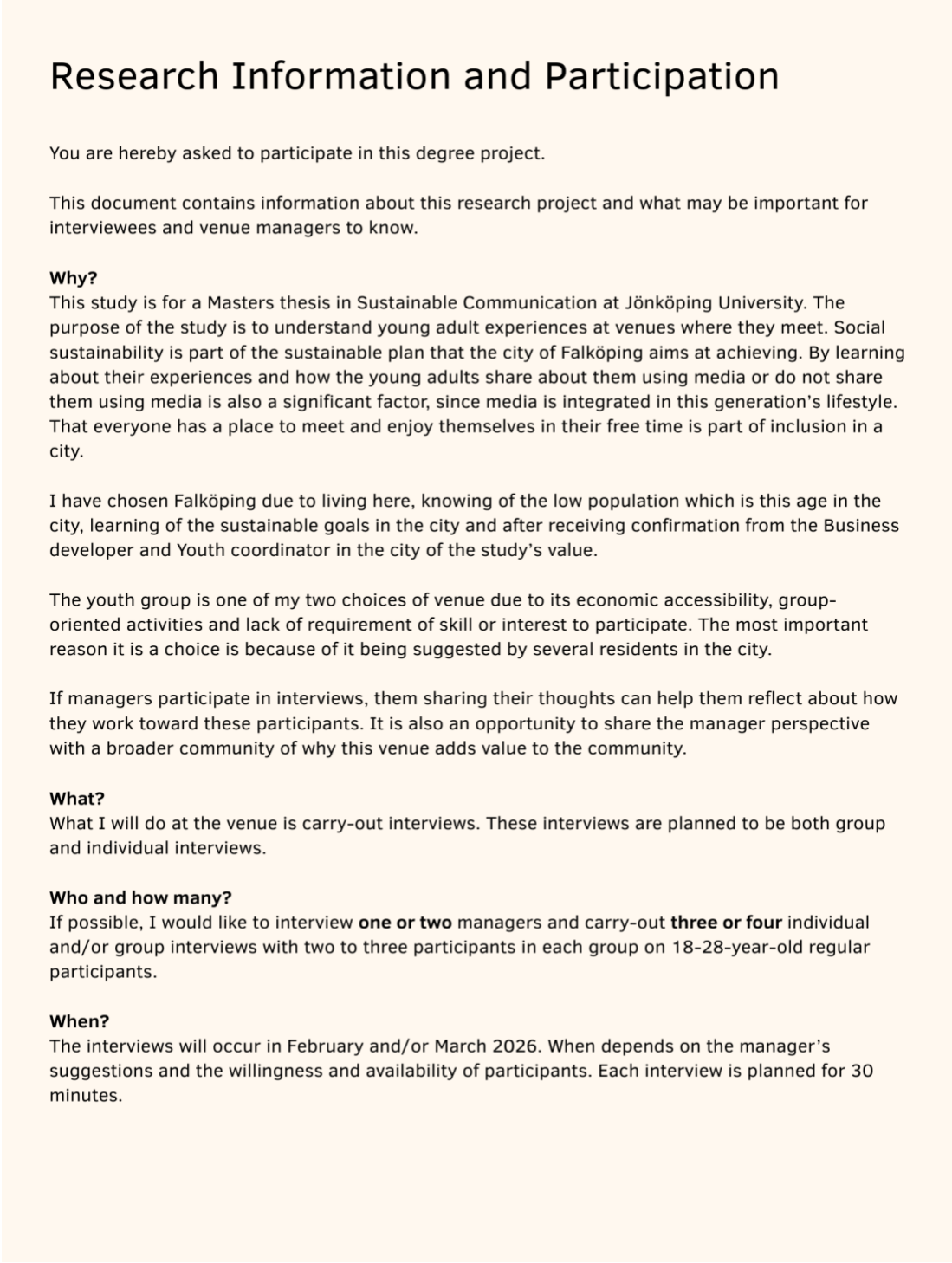
Kind regards,
Joanna Wood
Falköping, February 19, 2026
073 55 33 55 3 wojo21ti@student.ju.se and annette.hill@ju.se

Note: Second page of research information for all interviewees at bowling alley.

Appendix D

Research Information for Elite Interviewee at Youth Group

Figure D1



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I have chosen Falköping due to living here, knowing of the low population which is this age in the city, learning of the sustainable goals in the city and after receiving confirmation from the Business developer and Youth coordinator in the city of the study's value.

The youth group is one of my two choices of venue due to its economic accessibility, group-oriented activities and lack of requirement of skill or interest to participate. The most important reason it is a choice is because of it being suggested by several residents in the city.

If managers participate in interviews, them sharing their thoughts can help them reflect about how they work toward these participants. It is also an opportunity to share the manager perspective with a broader community of why this venue adds value to the community.

What?
What I will do at the venue is carry-out interviews. These interviews are planned to be both group and individual interviews.

Who and how many?
If possible, I would like to interview **one or two** managers and carry-out **three or four** individual and/or group interviews with two to three participants in each group on 18-28-year-old regular participants.

When?
The interviews will occur in February and/or March 2026. When depends on the manager's suggestions and the willingness and availability of participants. Each interview is planned for 30 minutes.

Note. Document emailed to youth group venue manager and described and shown in print to venue manager and young adults.

Figure D2

How?
The researcher will contact the managers to learn whether it is possible to interview at the venue. In addition, the researcher will request support in the recruitment of participants and ask if the managers will also volunteer to be interviewed. If the managers do not agree to being interviewed and/or to supporting in recruiting participants, however approve the interviews of clients to occur, the researcher will approach the clients requesting their participation herself. The researcher will ask the managers where they allow the researcher and interviewees to sit and carry-out the interview. The interviews will be recorded on a sound file and stored on a USB. The interviews will then be transferred to text and analyzed according to similar themes and ideas of belonging and social sustainability. No questions which can cause harm will be asked. The only personal information of the young adults included will be age, gender, and the voice on the recording. The names of the managers will also be included. Only the researcher will have access to the sound files and they will be protected with a password. When the project is complete, the sound files will be destroyed.

Participation in the degree project is completely voluntary. Participants can cancel their participation at any time without further justification.

How results reported?
Some forms of how the results will be reported is already decided, while others are possibilities. The results will be included in the thesis. If the managers prefer, the results will also be sent to their emails. Other possibilities are that if the managers and participants approve, the results can be shared on social media. The researcher can also contact Falköpings Tidning, the local newspaper and Z-reklam, a printing company which publishes a monthly local magazine which goes to all the homes in the city, offering the study and results as possible content for them to publish. Lastly, since Falköpings Business Developer and Youth Coordinator expressed interest in the study, they will be informed of the results.

Other information
Jönköping University's School of Education and Communication is responsible for the study and the processing of your personal data in connection with the degree project. According to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), participants in the study have the right to receive information about how their personal data are processed. Participants also have the right to apply for a so-called register extract, as well as to have any errors corrected. For questions about the processing of personal data, participants can primarily contact Joanna Wood. If participants think that their personal data is being processed incorrectly, they can submit a complaint to JU's data protection officer dso@ju.se. They can also submit a complaint directly to the Swedish Authority for Privacy Protection (IMY).

The degree project will be presented in the form of a thesis at Jönköping University's School of Education and Communication. Further information can be provided by Annette Hill. The contact details are as follows: annette.hill@ju.se

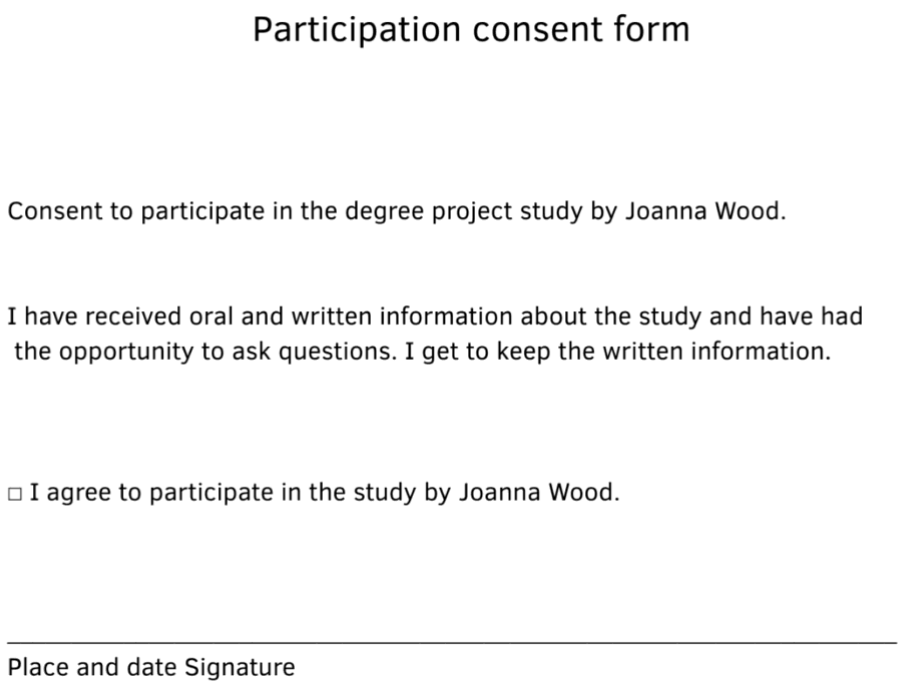
Kind regards,
Joanna Wood
Falköping, February 19, 2026
073 55 33 55 3 wojo21ti@student.ju.se and annette.hill@ju.se

Note: Second page of research information for all interviewees at youth group.

Appendix E

Consent Form

Figure C1



Note. Consent form signed by every participant in the interviews.