

Assessing the Meeting Places of Youth for Citizenship and Socialization

By

Lisbeth Lindström and Anna Öqvist

Lecturers (Education/Social Sciences) Department of Culture, Communication and Learning,
Luleå University of Technology, SE-971 87 Luleå, Sweden
E-mails: Lisbeth.Lindstrom@ltu.se, Anna.Oqvist@ltu.se

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to describe, explore and discuss whether meeting places for youth such as youth clubs support their citizenship in terms of gender equality, influence and participation. The following questions were of interest; what is the overall aim of the local councils regarding these clubs and meeting places? What kind of activities do they offer and what kind of citizenship do they support? The result shows that these places are more attractive to boys than to girls. Furthermore, these meeting places can, if developed, be places for the development of youth citizenship from the perspective of integration, gender equality and participation.

Keywords: *gender, citizenship, youth, case study, Youth Clubs*

1. Introduction

In this article we consider the relationship between gender equality and citizenship. Based on a case study of young people's meeting places such as youth clubs and similar meeting places time, space and place are explored and discussed from a gender perspective and from our value base as female researchers.

Gender equality is expressed as being a cornerstone of Swedish society. In theory it means that women and men have the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all areas of life. In the Global Gender Gap Report from 2008, Sweden was one of the world leaders in equality when measured in four areas: economics, politics, education and health. The teaching of gender studies is increasingly common in the Swedish educational system and the Swedish government has appointed a committee to plan and implement measures aimed at boosting gender equality throughout the whole school system, from preschool level to adult education.

Issues round gender and education are constantly discussed in public and a recurrent theme addresses the issue of boys being marginalized at school. Weaver-Hightower (2003) state that recent research in the United States and elsewhere has focused much more on the learning, social outcomes and schooling experiences of boys, a phenomenon that he call the "Boy Turn". It has been suggested that schools cater for girls and marginalize boys. The educational achievement of boys and the social and emotional aspects of their schooling experience have been of concern, as the assumption is that schools are more suited to female students. Gordon (2006) argues that the embodied use of space of girls is more controlled than the embodied use of space of boys. Furthermore, it is argued that the voice of girls is more strictly regulated than the voice of boys (Gordon, 2006). On average, educational results for girls in Sweden have been consistently higher than those of boys. In the past two decades, girls have caught up with boys in mathematics and science. In Sweden and in Scandinavia in general, this gender issue has become significant (Kimmel, 2010). One explanation is said to be that the world has changed enormously in the past half-century but the ideology of masculinity has not kept pace with these changes and the ideology of femininity – what women think it means to be a woman, has undergone a monumental revolution (Kimmel, 2010). Subsequently, Einarsdóttir (2003) asks why we do not see more progress in gender equality with all the knowledge we have acquired and Kimmel (2010) similarly claims and concludes that "males control a disproportionate share of the resources in every culture on earth" (p 10).

Young people's leisure time, their time outside school, and its contribution to the development of our society are frequently investigated in countries such as Sweden. Many young people spend their time at youth clubs, particularly boys who mistrust the school system. We know very little about their expectations of their visits, or those of girls' entering the leisure sector and attending youth clubs. We also know very little about what the attraction of these meeting places are, why they go there, the fulfillments of their needs as well as the development of their skills (Lindström, 2009).

Earlier research from the 1980: s has found that boys are more active and frequently engaged in more exploratory activities (Block, 1983; Eaton & Enns, 1986) and that they tend to be more aggressive. Compared to boys, girls were found to prefer manual activities like drawing, painting, and cutting and pasting and they were more often found to be in the arts and crafts area (Pellegrini & Perlmutter, 1989). Furthermore they were found to prefer singing, dancing and dressing up. Boys were found to use a greater degree of space and play outdoors more often (Pomerleau, Bolduc, Malcuit & Cossette, 1990). Shaw (1994) argues that leisure is not a gender-neutral aspect of social life and Connell (1987) claims that we need to understand the power relations between male and female in voluntary organizations such as clubs.

For Swedish authorities like the government, county councils and local councils, leisure is an important link in the process of encouraging young people to become democratic, participatory and active citizens. Resources have been put into the leisure sector, distributed by the National Board for Youth Affairs, for different projects aimed at supporting young people's initiatives. Swedish authorities have seen youth clubs and similar meeting places for youths as an arena for the development of young persons' citizenship and an interesting question is whether this contributes to the development of young people's citizenship, both male and female. Arnot (2006) states that the relationship between gender and citizenship is complex and needs to be debated more openly and thoroughly. For example Parkin (2000) argues that in order to actively participate in citizenship here and now, girls have to be able to take active positions in social, cultural, embodied and spatial relations.

Youth clubs and similar meeting places for youth

The main characteristic of the local council's youth clubs (fritidsgård) and similar meeting places such as the House of Youth or House of all Activities is that the leisure activities should be open for everyone whenever he/she wants to visit the club. Youth clubs, youth houses and similar meeting places do not require a membership card and there is no registration of who is present. These meeting places are open for all young people from the ages of 13-25 and they are almost free of charge. It is free for the young people to come and go whenever they want and there are no demands to 'do' things. They can just hang around or take part of the offered activities, such as table tennis, parlour games and so forth. The visitors may start activities related to their own interests, such as forming a film club or making outdoor trips. Open leisure activities are sometimes run and organized by the local councils themselves or alternatively, run by organizations and associations and run with funds from the local councils.

Drawing on a case study of a Swedish local council in the North of Sweden, instructed observations are carried out of all meeting places for youth in this particular local council. To get a holistic picture of the geographical location of the meeting places or youth clubs, studies have been done of the indoor- and outdoor environment, as well as of the equipment and facilities offered at the different places.

The purpose with this article is to describe, explore and discuss whether these meeting places for youth support their citizenship in terms of gender equality, accessibility, sustainability, integration, influence and participation.

Disposition

In this article we will address different perspectives of youth citizenship. Firstly, we will discuss the concept of citizenship and gender equality and facilities, spaces and voices of young people. We will also

present the research design and the methodological framework. In the discussions we argue that the case study has shown that visitors can, if they are interested, take a role in their own transition for citizenship.

The production of citizenship

Arnot and Dillabough (2000) have argued that an important aspect of schooling is the production of citizenship. However, Arnot (2009) claims that from a global perspective, educational systems are most likely to have embedded within them the conventional gender boundaries and hierarchies, producing and reproducing the hierarchies and power of masculinity that are associated with women's oppression as well as traditional forms of femininity.

A citizen may be described as a member of a political community or a state, who has certain legal, social and moral rights, duties and responsibilities. Citizenship is a political concept with a variety of rights and responsibilities in a given political community. These rights and responsibilities change over time as the result of social struggle, economic change and shifts in governing ideology. Meer and Sever (2004) argue that people define their citizenship in many different ways, in relation to the local, national or global community. Citizenship is both a status or an identity and a practice or process of relating to the social world through the exercise of rights/protections and the fulfilment of obligations. Like power relations, citizenship rights are not fixed, but are objects of struggle to be defended, reinterpreted and extended. Citizenship can be a concept incorporating negotiations over membership, exclusion, roles, values, power and equality (Arnot, 1997).

Schild, Pererva and Stockwell (2009) argue that young people coming from marginalised or disadvantaged backgrounds in particular often lack appropriate communication channels and access to information; they articulate their concerns and interests in many other ways, which are often neither heard nor understood by policy makers, institutional representatives or youth workers. Kovacheva and Pohl (2007), in a study of disadvantaged youth and social inclusion argue that a key factor for the success of policies is defining policy objectives in a way that begins from the individual's life perspective and needs, not from the institutional perspective or considerations. Measures in support of youth should build upon the biographical perspective of the young person and his/her subjective orientations, values and skills, and allow them to take a role as key actors in their own transitions and integration.

Citizenship and Gender

Much of what is written today about citizenship originates in the theories of Marshall in the 1950s (Marshall & Bottomore, 1996; O'Connor, 1993).

Marshall's conclusions have been criticised, however, primarily because the conception essentially describes men's citizenship (Torres, 1998; Arnot, 2006; Ahmad, 2006; Faulks, 2006; Lockyer, 2003). Another difficulty in respect to Marshall's theory is the question about whether there is a single version of citizenship or if there can be many diverse and different formulations of citizenship according to different social and cultural traditions (Turner, 1993). Mouffe (1992), argues that full inclusion is a process and Lister (1997) argues that women's' gendered interests need to be defined as a citizenship struggle and as a part of the common good. Hence, Gordon (2006) claims that notions of citizenship are connected to the idea of a rational individual making decisions, constructing aims, and choosing how to accomplish them.

Yuval-Davis (1997) criticises Marshall because social division and social position related to gender, ethnicity, class and so forth have not been problematized in his work. She stresses that these aspects are crucial to the construction of citizenship as well as individuality. Furthermore, she argues that Marshall's definition of citizenship as membership of a community rather than of the state is too vague. She contends that his notion of citizenship is too narrow because of people's membership in different communities wherein citizens can have different possibilities and positions depending on, for example, gender or ethnicity. Yuval-Davis (2002) states that ethnic, class and gender differences play particularly

important roles in construction and delineating spaces, especially urban spaces. She describes this as the space in which the theatre of citizenship is taking place on a daily basis. Similarly, Banks (2008) argues that group differences are not included in a universal conception of citizenship. Consequently, the experiences of groups that have experienced structural exclusion and discrimination such as women are suppressed.

Prina Werbner and Yuval-Davis (1999) contend that modern citizenship is inserted into a social field of competing, heterogeneous and partially overlapping discourses. For Werbner and Yuval-Davis, citizenship is a social and political construction that defines the limits of state power and where a civil society or the private sphere of free individuals begins. They are hopeful about the future of the concept and maintain that discourses of citizenship constitute horizons of possibility (Werbner and Yuval-Davis, 1999). They state that national and transnational citizenships constitute two coexisting and interrelated modalities of citizenship. In that sense, they argue, the work of citizenship becomes a work for the future, for generations yet to be born. Gender can be a major building block in people's citizenship. As a social institution, gender is a process of creating distinguishable status for the assignment of rights and responsibilities. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1995) and Shaw (1994) argue that gender is not a matter of two homogeneous social categories associated with being female and the other with being male. Gender constructs are embedded in other aspects of social life and in the construction of other socially significant categories such as those involving class, race or ethnicity. Lorber (1994) notes how, in almost every encounter, human beings reproduce gender divisions and behave in the ways they have learned are appropriate for their gender status.

Facilities, space and voices

Helve (2001) has investigated the value structure among young people in Europe in order to find out their ideological preferences. The ages she investigated ranged from 16 to 19. Her study showed that although different value structures can be found among young people, only a few clearly belonged to just one category. The values the youths preferred were in accordance with the situation in which they found themselves. Significant differences in boys' and girls' values were found. Girls valued environmental issues more than boys and the latter valued technology and science more than girls. With respect to gender differences, girls valued humanism and equality more than boys, who valued technology and economic welfare more (ibid). This means that the same young person may choose the position of an individualist in some situations and of a humanist in others. Helve, therefore, claims that it is worth asking what type of citizenship will suit young people with non-fixed values and a variety of sub-cultures.

Similarly, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1995) claim that during the course of people's lives they move into, out of and through communities of practice, continually transforming identities, understanding, and world view. Furthermore, they suggest that progressing through the life span brings ever-changing kinds of participation and non-participation, context for belonging and not belonging in communities. A single individual participates in a variety of communities of practice at any given time, and over time, such as the family, school or at the youth club. Shaw (1994) argues that positive and negative aspects and outcomes of women's leisure are related to the type of activity, the social context, the degree of self-determination or choice and to other structured power relations.

Hey (1997) claims that a girl's conception of herself as acceptable is dependent on the separation between mind and body, as well as a tight disciplining of the body. Furthermore, they suggests that girls at school are controlled by teachers and by other students, particularly by (some) boys and also by (some) girls. Frost (2003) argues that, in a devious link to consumer capitalism a prevalent notion in the West is that young people are experiencing a significantly different relationship to their bodies than previous generations.

Gordon, Holland and Lahelma (2000) state that bodies in space are constructed as female or male and, furthermore that different expectations are inscribed on them. The use of voice is, they argue complex for

girls. Research revealed that school girls were found to be more passive in space and their bodies were supposed to be more contained and their voices quieter. They state that the embodied activities of girls and boys in space are interpreted differentially. In order to exercise agency and to become individual citizens, girls were found to balance between the suitable speech of womanhood and the desire to talk back, as talking back is found to be a necessity if girls are to grow up to be empowered women. Girls tried to invade a physical space in an embodied way rather than be metaphorical space invaders. Silent girls were found to often mask pain and disappointments but could also enjoy an enabling space where they could concentrate on educational achievement or on their own fantasies.

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1995) state that language is a primary tool people use in constituting themselves and others as “a kind of” people in terms of which attributes, activities, and participating in social practices can be regulated. Furthermore, how people talk expresses their affiliations with some and their distancing from others. Within communities of practice, the continual modification of common ways of speaking provides a touchstone for the process of the construction of forms of group identity in the meaning and sense of belonging to a group.

In earlier research, West and Zimmerman (1987) argued in their groundbreaking article that an understanding of how gender is produced in social situations will afford clarification of the interactional scaffolding of social structure and the social control processes that sustain it. Twenty years later, Deutsch (2007) claimed that we need a shift from discussions about the creation of doing gender to illuminating how we can undo gender. She proposed the adoption of a new convention to use the phrase ‘doing gender’ to refer to social interactions that reproduce gender difference and use the phrase undoing gender to refer to social interactions that reduce gender differences.

2. The present study

To give a partial picture of how citizenship and gender relations are being mutually constructed in this particular setting – the youth club and similar meeting places - a case study was thought to offer the optimal research strategy.

An ambition was to find an answer to the question of what kind of environments and facilities are organized for young people within their real-life context of the youth club and the meeting place (Yin, 1994; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994).

The following questions were of particular interest; what are the overall aims of the local council regarding these youth clubs and meeting places? Where are these meeting places located, what kind of visitors do they attract and what kind of facilities do they have and how are they used? What kind of furniture and equipment do they have and how are these placed and located in space? What colours and decorations are used? Finally, what kind of citizenship do these meeting places support in terms of gender equality, integration, participation and influence, sustainability, accessibility?

Research design

The case study was conducted in an area which consists of thirteen local councils in the county council of Norrbotten in the north of Sweden. The county council has about 240 000 inhabitants and local council 73 000 and the geographical area is located in a coastal area. The choice of this particular local council was due to its number of meeting places for young people and its location in the north of Sweden. The research embraces all youth clubs and similar meeting places in the particular local council. In 2009, about 2 461 young people between the ages of 13-15 years old, 3 062 people between the ages of 16-18 years old and 7 176 people between the ages of 19-24, were resident there.

The research focused upon three meeting places, here labelled the Buttercup, the Magnolia, the Hibiscus, one house of youth labelled the Tulip and eight youth clubs here referred to as the Crocus, the Petunia,

the Bluebell, the Cactus, the Viola, the Begonia, the Marguerite, the Orchid and the Rose. Their opening hours were Tuesday-Thursday, 18.00-21.00 and weekends 18.00-23.00. In addition, they would occasionally open on special days; for example the Tulip opens on Christmas evening. All of them, with the exception of one particular youth club, are situated in the city centre, the others is situated approximately 30 kilometres from the city centre. The local council itself is responsible for three of the places; the youth clubs the Cactus, the Crocus and the Viola. Together with the church, the local council also runs the youth club the Tulip and one afternoon a week they are also responsible for activities at the Rose. The youth club the Rose is a youth club for citizens that have some kind of disability. The meeting place the Magnolia is run by the Swedish Hot Rod Association. The other two meeting places and five youth clubs are run by an economic association on assignment from the local council.

Data collection and analysis

To collect data, several study visits were carried out during a six month duration, during which all of the meeting places and youth clubs in this case study were visited. Each visit was several hours long; photographs were taken of the physical location and environment, together with facilities and equipment. Notes have been taken concerning the number of visitors, the use of the facilities and space, their accessibility and sustainability for visitors, the possibility to integrate visitors, the occurrence of spaces for participation and influence. The researchers' own reflections were, after each study visit, tape recorded. These activities together with the actual findings provided concepts and the content served as a background to the creation of the categories necessary for the subsequent analysis of the empirical data.

The photographs were selected and analyzed from the perspective of gender and citizenship. They were placed in different maps marked with the categories gender and equality, integration, accessibility, sustainability, participation and influence. In a similar manner, the research notes and reflections were analyzed in relation to the relevant questions and categories, as well as from theories of citizenship and gender.

Constructing meaning at youth clubs

The result of the empirical study is structured as follows; firstly the overall visions and aims of the local council are presented, followed by the meeting places the Buttercup, the Magnolia, the Hibiscus, the house of youth and the Tulip. Finally, the youth clubs are presented within the subtitles 'Familiar Youth Clubs' and 'Institutional Youth Clubs'.

The overall visions and aims for all youth clubs and meeting places within the selected local council are formulated in the following way on the local council's homepage:

Our vision is that open leisure activities in our local council, organized by the leisure board, shall contribute to all young people taking more place and influence in society regarding questions of concern. The target group for open leisure activities in our local council is youth between the age of 13 years and up (www.lulea.se).

The three meeting places in the local council, the Buttercup, the Magnolia and the Hibiscus are situated in different parts of the council's area of responsibility. The meeting place The Magnolia is situated in an industrial area and is a place for young people to go to as well as for citizens interested in vehicle mechanics, snow mobiles and/or motor cycles. At Magnolia there is a café where visitors can rest, take a cup of coffee, read magazines, play billiards or flipper games. More than half of the visitors are males of differing ages. Some of the visitors originally come from countries such as Afghanistan and India. The Magnolia is also visited by minority groups such as gypsies. Two male members of staff work at the meeting place. The Magnolia shares the facilities with the organization 'Swedish Hot Rod Association'. Visitors at the Magnolia are invited to participate in other activities that are run by the Hot Rod Association.

The meeting place the Buttercup is a place situated about four kilometres outside the city centre, close to a compulsory school and a sports auditorium. At the meeting place there are three large rooms. Most of the rooms, except for the one with a kitchen, are coloured in black, and furnished with black sofas and tables. In this particular room there is also a television. In one of the other rooms it is possible to play musical instruments such as drums and guitar. A table tennis table has also been placed there. A very small part of the room was decorated with graffiti. The kitchen was a part of the room in which there were three small round tables placed. At these tables visitors could paint or make cloth printing, and a sewing machine was also placed here. Most of the visitors to the Buttercup are males up to 18 years of age.

The meeting place the Hibiscus is situated in the centre of a smaller village in the local council area more than 15 kilometres from the city centre. The Hibiscus is located in the same building as the sports hall. The meeting place is located upstairs on the first floor of the building. To get there one has to take the stairs or the elevator. Most of the visitors to the Hibiscus are males up to the age of 18 years. It is very seldom that girls visit the Hibiscus. A few times a couple of girls can drop in for some minutes and then leave again. Staff have tried to invite girls to come to the meeting place but have not been successful. They have informed young people at nearby schools and information can also be found on the local council's homepage as well as on face book. At the meeting place they had a billiard table, in one of the corners of the room there were two sofas and a table placed. This was a room where visitors were supposed to sit down for casual discussion. Another corner was furnished with two sofas and a TV set. In this part of the meeting place visitors can play computer games and watch TV. At the meeting place, there was also a music room with guitars and other musical instruments that visitors can use.

The house of youth, the Tulip

The house of youth is situated in the middle of the local council's city centre. It is located in a building of three floors. Its location close to stores, sports centers, the church and transportation means that they have visitors from all over the local council area. Most of the visitors are males, many of whom consist of different nationalities. A few times a year the house of youth has evenings that are only for females or males. At the Tulip, four staff are always on duty; 2 male and 2 female, of varying ages.

On the second floor, the entrance to the Tulip, visitors can find a large living room, a smaller room and a kitchen. In the smaller room visitors can play billiards. In one part of the living room there is a stage where it is possible to have small concerts. In the same area a wide screen television together with three small television sets are placed.

On the third floor of the building one can find three smaller and two larger rooms, together with a kitchen. One of the rooms is most often used by girls. It is colored in red, white and black. It has furniture with a TV set where visitors can play TV-games. Modern art has been placed on the walls. Mirrors have been set up on one of the walls and there are three high chairs placed in front of them. Another room is for creative activities such as drawing, painting or doing "pottery" for the Christmas or Eastern period. In another of the small rooms there is equipment for visitors interested in doing make up and/or doing their nails. Visitors have been involved in the designing of the room. Another room on the second floor has furniture with two sofas and a table. On the floor there is a mattress and pillows. The room is used for visitors who want to be more familiar with each other. In one part of the living room one can find an air hockey game, a fireplace, a smaller book shelf and two sofas and a table. This part of the building is even used as a discothèque. In another part of the living room visitors can play billiards and close to the billiard table is a smaller kiosk where visitors can buy soft drinks and candies. Visitors on this floor can also play parlor games, read magazines, play cards or watch video films. On both the second and third floors, decorations such as curtains, pictures, lamps and flowers give an impression of the area being a cozy place.

On the first floor, or the basement one can find a music room, a movie room and a living room. They call the living room the “VIP-room”. The rooms are painted in white and black furniture with sofas, mattresses and pillows.

Familiar youth clubs

This youth club, the Begonia is situated about three kilometers from the city centre of the local council area. This youth club shares their facilities with a leisure club aimed at young children of school age. When you come to the youth club as a visitor it presents a feeling of being at home. There is large kitchen furniture including a dinner table and chairs. In the huge function room one can find the table tennis table, small round tables and chairs, and on one of them a computer is placed. In one of the corners one can find two dark sofas, a table and a black bookshelf. Visitors can play table tennis, billiards, computer games, cards or chess. In the function room one of the sections is used for creative activities such as painting, sculpturing or modeling clay. Decorations of several of the walls are made in graffiti and in one of the rooms handprints in a different color from the wall are used as a braid. The decorations, carpets and color schemes at the youth club give an impression of being at home in a dining room. Approximately 50 % of the visitors are male and 50 % are female.

The youth club the Viola is situated a few kilometers outside the city centre, situated close to the compulsory school in a separate building. Close to the youth club is a centre for citizens, including children and young people, who have come as refugees to the local area. They can be families who have already received asylum or it can be people in different ages and gender coming in search of asylum.

The youth club has five rooms and a kitchen. One of the rooms has special furniture for screening. It is furniture of pleasurable sofas and the walls are colored in light colors. In this particular room one can also find a computer and a round table where visitors can play cards and parlor games. In another room visitors can play billiards and table tennis. In the same room there is also a corner, like a stage, where visitors can play music. This part of the room is painted in black and red, but in general this youth club is colored more in light colors than in dark colors. The youth club has a café where visitors can buy smaller dishes and soft drinks. In the largest room young visitors have used graffiti to decorate one of the walls. One can say that what is most specific for this youth club is its mission to work with integration.

Youth club the Crocus is situated a few kilometers outside the city centre of the local council and in the centre of the suburban area. Youth club Crocus is located in newly built and open premises and in the same building one can find a sports hall. When entering the youth club visitors first of all come to a function room. In the function room is a smaller area built as a café where visitors can buy tea/coffee or smaller dishes. The function room has furniture with four round tables with chairs. The chairs are orange and yellow and on the tables visitors can find fruit bowls. A black sofa, close to the TV set, is as well placed in the room. The walls are painted in white and the floor is in grey. There is also smaller function room furniture with two black sofas, two black armchairs, two floor lamps and two flying spots hanging over the white table. White is the dominant color as the walls and carpets are white. One large room is used as a movie room. White and grey are the dominant colors in the music room where visitors can play guitar, key board or drums. The creative room is large and has light furniture with a large table. In the room one can see paintings that visitors have done and one can also find an easel. One can also see drawings that visitors have done. The visitors to this youth club are roughly 50 % boys and 50 % girls.

Youth club, the Rose is open every Saturday from 12.30 until 15.30 during the period of October until May and shares its facilities with the Crocus. The youth club is established especially for disabled citizens of different ages. It is located in the same building as the youth club the Crocus. Visitors come from all over the local council area to visit the youth club that is situated in the newly built and open premises. Some of the visitors come and stay for many hours while others can stay just for some hours. Many of the visitors and their assistants would like to have the youth club open more months a year as it is very important for many of the visitors. For some of them it represents the only activity they have.

The youth club is situated on the second floor but visitors in need of a wheel chair can also visit the youth club as it has an elevator. Visitors sometimes come with their assistants or with their friends or parents. Some of the visitors come to the youth club with public transportation such as a bus; others come with the mobility service, especially those who need a wheel chair. The youth club is run by the board of social care and the leisure board at the local council and is financed with public taxes.

At the youth club visitors can meet friends, have a cup of tea or coffee, play table tennis, play music, and watch a movie or do pottery. Sometimes they have special themes such as parlor games, bingo or having a discotheque. When it is time for a disco or for bingo the movie room, as used for the youth club the Crocus during weeks, is used. All the other facilities and equipment used during the week by youth club the Crocus are used by youth club the Rose on Saturdays. The visitors to this youth club are of different ages and their sex and disabilities vary.

Institutional Youth Clubs

The youth club the Bluebell is situated about five kilometres outside the city centre. It is located in the centre of the residential area and is directly connected to a compulsory school, a grocery store and a sports hall. The youth club has many rooms and areas of open space for their visitors to use. In one of the largest rooms the table tennis table was the only furniture together with a smaller sofa. This room was coloured green and white colours on the walls and with a carpet in light brown. This room also had a stage used for concerts and music events. The room felt very sparsely furnished. Another room had equipment for creative activities, which room was painted in pink. At the youth club the staff have their own office.

The entrance to the youth club is placed with direct access for the visitors to a very large room and to the kitchen. This room is furnished like a Café with a kitchen section and furniture with round tables and chairs. At these places visitors can sit down and have soft drinks, tea, and coffee or play cards or chess. In this large room they have also a billiard table placed in the middle of the room and in one part of the room one can find an air hockey game. A special room to show movies is also available and is furnished with sofas. The walls are painted in black and the sofas have blue fabrics. In one of the rooms they have a TV set. There is furniture with a smaller sofa and a table but there are no chairs placed in the room. One of the walls is decorated with a black flower painted on the wall. Most of the visitors to the Bluebell are males up to 18 years of age.

The youth club the Cactus is situated 15 kilometres outside the city centre. The youth club is in the same building as the bath house and the sports hall, both resident in the centre of the local council area. The youth club is located upstairs on the first floor of the building. To get there one has to take the stairs. Firstly the visitors come to a small hall where they also can find the table tennis table. The youth club consists of a kitchen and two more rooms. One smaller room consists of furniture with sofas. In that room visitors can play games such as 'guitar hero' or 'sing stars'. The other room is much larger and in that particular room visitors can sit down on sofas to watch TV, play computer games, chess, cards, or parlor games. Another part of that room consists of sofas and there are several small round tables with chairs. In the middle of this room there is also a billiard table. The kitchen at the Cactus youth club is large with many possibilities of making bread, cookies or other dishes. The visitors at the youth club are most boys. When girls visit the club they are often interested in playing 'sing stars'.

The youth club, the Marguerite, is situated a few kilometers from the city centre. It is located in the centre of the residential area and is directly connected to a compulsory school, some grocery stores and a sport hall. The youth club has many rooms and areas of open space for their visitors to use. Some of the areas are used in the afternoons and shared with the nearby compulsory school. In that part of the youth club the table tennis table is placed. In one of the rooms they have an aquarium, two sofas and a TV set. In this room there are also some magazines that visitors can read such as PC magazine or illustrated scientific magazine. At the youth club the staff has their own office. At this youth club the furniture and the walls

are painted in blue and red. Young people visiting this youth club can also play billiards and chess and there is also a music room. There is a huge kitchen mainly used as a Café. A special room to show movies is also available and is furnished with chairs. As this particular youth club has lots of space they have furnished one of the corners with a big round sofa for more than ten persons. Another room had equipment for creative activities such as painting and these paintings were often put up on the walls of the youth club. Most of the visitors to this youth club are boys.

The youth club, the Petunia is situated in the centre of the residential area in the same building as a compulsory school. In the centre one can also find a grocery shop and there are also some restaurants and a church nearby. Close to the youth club one can also find the buildings of the university which are also situated in the local council. This is another youth club with a lot of space for their visitors. The staff has to walk between the different rooms that are a part of the youth club and can not see the spaces between them. In one large room one can find the table tennis table and the billiard tables and this room is painted in a light blue color. One of the walls in the room is painted with graffiti. At the youth club there is a special room to show movies and in the same room young people interested in music can play different musical instruments. In this room there also exists graffiti used as decoration. One room is especially furnished for visitors interested in experimenting with their hair or practicing their make up; this room is painted in a lilac color. At the youth club young people can watch TV, play TV games, chess and cards or paint. Visitors can hang up their paintings on quadrants of wood that afterwards can be hung up on the wall on small hooks. Many small paintings decorated the whole wall. At the café, visitors can buy candies, soft drinks, tea or coffee. Most of the visitors to the youth club are boys.

This youth club, the Orchid, is situated 30 kilometres from the city centre. The youth club is not situated in the centre of the suburban area. It is situated more than one kilometre outside the centre. In the centre one can find a sports hall, swimming pool, a few stores and the bus station. This means that visitors living on the edge of this part of the local council area have to walk some kilometres to use transportation in order to travel back from the youth club. The youth club is located in an older building and close to the youth club one can find a smaller sports hall. The facilities, equipment and the building give an impression of being old and worn. There are four rooms and a smaller kitchen on the same floor as the youth club. On another floor, one level up, one can find the music room, also a part of the youth clubs facilities. Staff cannot see the visitors that use the music room if they do not go there personally. The music room is painted with graffiti and in a black colour. At the youth club visitors can play billiards, hockey games, table tennis or TV games such as 'sing stars'. A lot of the walls are painted with graffiti. At the youth club it is also possible for visitors to buy soft drinks, tea/coffee and sweets. It is mostly boys who visit the youth club.

Table 1 beneath give a short summary of the décor, equipment and visitors sex of the meeting places, the house of youth and the youth clubs.

Table 1. Décor, equipment and visitors' sex.

Youth centres	Décor	Equipment	Female/male ratio
The Magnolia	Dark	Technical	Males
The Buttercup		Dark	Billiard table Table tennis table Music room
The Hibiscus		Neutral	Billiard table Music room TV set, computer
The Tulip		Coloured	Music room Movie room
			Females and males

		Equipments for creative activities TV-sets, computers, parlour games	
The Begonia	Coloured	Equipment for creative Activities Table tennis table Billiard table Computer, TV-set	Females and males
The Viola	Light colours	Computer, TV-set Café Billiard table Table tennis table	Females and males
The Crocus	Coloured	Movie room Music room Café TV-set	Females and males
The Rose	Coloured	Movie room Music room Café TV-set	Females and males
The Bluebell	Dark and neutral colours	Table tennis table Billiard table Air hockey game TV-set	Males
The Cactus	Neutral colours	Table tennis table Billiard table TV-set, computers	Males
The Marguerite	Dark	Table tennis table Billiard table Music room Movie room	Males
The Petunia	Dark	Table tennis table Billiard table Music room Movie room TV-set, computer	Males
The Orchid	Dark	Table tennis table Billiard table Music room TV-set, computer	Males

Table 1 show that these places are more attractive to boys than to girls. Visitors are often regular visitors and boys find the environment, facilities and equipment more interesting than girls do.

4. Discussions and conclusions of findings

Young person's leisure time is directed towards different kinds of activities; some of them visit youth clubs and similar meeting places. Official Swedish statistics show that young people's leisure time is also directed towards different kinds of sports, entertainment and computer and Internet activities. Depending on living conditions, leisure assumes different forms among children and young people. Participation in different kinds of leisure activities differs among different groups of children and youth. In general, children and young living in what can be described as economically vulnerable groups' such as single parents, foreign born parents and blue collar households have less active leisure time, with lower participation in organized leisure activities. About 5-10 % of the young citizens in the local council visit youth clubs and similar meeting places.

The social construction of space and place by youth is complex and multi layered. The possibilities or inability to develop young peoples' citizenship differs according to the public space, in this case the youth club, house of youth, or the meeting place. Life experience of public spaces involves testing social dependence and independence, agency and control.

This research can give us some clues about what it is about these meeting places that attract and the activities which young people choose to participate in during their leisure time, in other words their lifestyle choices. It can also provide an understanding of the possibilities these meeting places offer for the development of young people's citizenship.

The first aim of this research was to map out theories of citizenship and gender and practice. Secondly, the aim was to examine whether meeting places for youth can support their citizenship in terms of gender equality, accessibility and sustainability, integration, influence and participation. The dispositions of the following discussion are from these categories mentioned above.

Aspects of accessibility and sustainability

In the local councils the priority is that open leisure activities shall contribute to all young people participating in, and influencing, those questions which are of concern to them. The target group for open leisure activities in the local council is youth from the age of 13 years and upwards. Furthermore, their aim is that staff should focus on teenagers. They believe that open leisure activities should be attractive and developed in such manner that visitors influence, develop, and realize ideas.

However from research findings one can identify that the local council give high priority to young people who search for asylum in Sweden or to young citizens that have a foreign background, although some of the visitors are older than teenagers as stated in the aims for the local council. Staff at the youth centres promote integration and citizenship development for all ages.

Research has shown that the local council has invested in relatively many meeting places for youth compared to its number of citizens. Most of them are more or less accessible for all people interested in visiting them as they are geographically located in different parts of the local council's geographical area. Staff have informed nearby schools, information is accessible on the local council's homepage as well as on Face Book. Many of the places are physically accessible and at some places most of the space is accessible for disabled visitors, as they are often located on the ground floor. One of the places was located on the second floor without an elevator and another was located on the edge of the suburban area somewhat far from transportation. In another place activities were situated in a basement which was without an elevator. All places were also accessible for everyone as they are free of charge for visitors and do not require membership. The research showed that it is often the same youths who visit the

facilities, the so called frequenters. The activities at the youth club the Rose cater for all citizens' accessibility to leisure.

Places for integration

Several of the meeting places and youth clubs constantly attract young people coming from other countries. Some of them are waiting for a permanent decision concerning whether they can stay in Sweden. Others have been living in the area for several years. A couple of times during the year different events are arranged at some of the places. There are days/evenings where they are open only for girls or for boys. These special times just for girls give them the possibility to talk about things such as how to do their hair or make up, about clothes, sex, norms and values. Sometimes they also have the possibility to go on excursions, such as skiing or swimming. Special days or evenings for boys are also arranged. These arrangements start from the individual's life perspective and needs, and are built on the young persons subjective orientations, values and skills. It allows them to take a role as key actors in their own transition and integration. Schild, Pererva and Stockwell (2009) argue that young people coming from disadvantaged backgrounds often lack appropriate communication channels. This research shows that youth clubs and similar meeting places can meet such challenges as youth centres can offer a communication channel into society. Youth centres are an interesting alternative for this group and can therefore contribute to the promotion of gender equality and citizenship development. This case study indicates that youth clubs and similar meeting places can be important places for a transition to citizenship and integration.

Aspects of gender equality

The research clearly indicates that boys are more attracted to visiting the meeting places and youth clubs in this local council than girls are. This phenomenon applies equally for all the places in this case study. It seems as though these meeting places, in opposition to schools, cater for boys and marginalize girls, although several initiatives have been taken to attract female visitors. At the youth club or meeting place boys often play billiards or table tennis in controlled forms, most often with other boys. It is not unusual that this is the only activity they participate in during their visits. Staff has noted that some of them visit just because of the possibility to play billiards. It is a controlled activity and it is regulated. In this research nearly every meeting place and youth club has chosen to have billiards and table tennis. This research does not provide any direct answer regarding why billiards is so important for the fulfillment of young visitors' needs. However research has noted that staff often use billiards as a strategy and opportunity to learn to know the visitors. As visitors are often uninterested in attending school youth careers can offer a compensatory function to opposition to schools in developing youth citizenship. In research there seems to be a notion that visitors prefer manual activities like painting, drawing, cutting and pasting. Similarly to Pellegrini and Perlmutter (1989) this study indicates that these free creative activities are mostly done by girls.

The embodied use of space by boys seems to be more controlled than the embodiment and use of space by girls. There is an ambition in all youth clubs to have equipment that can attract and fulfill visitors' needs. The members of staff are often evenly divided between male and female. The types of equipment often seen are TV games, computer games, music room, TV sets, smaller cinema, parlor games, cards and material for creative activities like graffiti and painting. Although the broad ambition is to have facilities that attract both female and male visitors, nevertheless most of them are males.

Possibilities to influence and participate

At all places in this case study one can notice that visitors have been involved in the decoration and design of the facilities. It is very common that visitors have decorated the walls with graffiti and walls are often decorated with pictures and paintings. Visitors have also been able to choose the color of carpets, curtains and other details of design. They can come with suggestions to staff of movies to hire, computer games to buy or excursions. Staff have noted that it is not unusual that girls have been more involved in the planning than boys although they are a minority of the visitors. Research has discovered that youth

clubs and similar meeting places for youth have more female visitors if they have possibility to do creative activities such as paint, draw, work in the Café, be involved in decorations of the youth centre, possibilities to do their hair and learn how to use makeup. It has also been discovered that youth centers that have invested in to design of their facilities, such as furniture, carpets and decorations in light colors, also have more female visitors.

Other examples of influence and participation are the youth assemblies seen at some of the youth clubs. The so called Café group is seen at every place in this case study. In the Café group visitors can decide about the supply of small dishes, soft drinks and sweets that can be for sale at the Café. At one of the youth clubs, a visitor explained that it is mostly girls who are members of the Café group. Gordon, Holland and Lahelma (2000) argue that different expectations are inscribed on young people depending on their sex. In this research it seems like girls although they are in a minority have expectations put on them to be responsible for the Café or for planning excursions.

This case study show that although visitors are invited to participate it is not interesting for all of them to be active and participate, some visit these places just to “hang around” or talk to other visitors or/and staff. The staff make no demands on the visitors to ‘do things’, if they force them to be active there would be a risk that the visitors would decide to not return. Staff has to balance between intimacy and distance in their way to more effectively promote gender equality and citizenship development. This is an example of how young citizens can develop their citizenship and an example of what Yuval-Davis (2002) talk about as the theatre of citizenship taking place on a daily basis.

5. Conclusions

To conclude, these places are more attractive to boys than to girls. Boys find the environment, facilities and equipment more interesting than girls do. Visitors are often regular visitors and unlike school they come of their own free will and there is no demand to participate. Visitors have often an expressive life style and it is not unusual that they mistrust the school system. At the youth club and similar meeting places they can talk to staff and other visitors in a safe environment. At the youth clubs there are rules for the visitors to follow such as being a drug free place. The staff is both male and female and they are of different ages. Visitors to youth clubs and similar meeting places are often regular visitors, in this local council about 5-10 % of potential visitors come to these places established by and of the local council.

Activities are often traditional female or male activities, boys visiting the youth club and similar meeting places often play billiards or table tennis. They come to these places together with other boys and most of the time they participate with boys. Girls use space in different ways; girls are often involved in creative activities such as drawing and painting, baking, watches movies, playing TV games such as ‘sing stars’. Most often they carry out these activities together with other girls at the meeting place. It is not unusual that they come to these places together with another girl or a few other girls and stay with them the whole time. Shaw (1994) argues that leisure is not a gender neutral aspect of social life. This case study shows that these places reproduce gender differences and it has shown that visitors can, if they are interested, take a role in their own transition regarding citizenship. As research have found that schools offer a more appropriate space for females youth centers such as youth clubs need to be better shaped as male spaces.

For further research there are several questions that this study has not touched upon. One such question is the youth leader’s role, gender and age. Another issue is the fact that the local council have chosen to establish youth clubs or meeting places although it is a voluntary commitment for them. An interesting question is what the consequences would be for the development of young people’s citizenship without the establishment of these places. To be critical some questions must be raised about the fact that these youth clubs and similar meeting places mostly cater for boys needs. Firstly, approximately 10 % of the young citizens between the ages 13-25 years old visit the clubs, while 90 % have chosen to not visit the

youth clubs and similar meeting places. Secondly, should society be satisfied with such establishments mainly offering undemanding billiards game for boys?

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