“There’s no I in team”

A study of roles of civil society in Holmsund, and it’s connection to constructions of Holmsund.

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Abstract

The civil society and civic engagement is a prerequisite for democracy (Putnam, 1994), and in the form of the popular movements it has in many ways defined the Swedish democracy. This thesis focuses on the locality Holmsund located in the municipality of Umeå, Holmsund has a history that are in ways defined by activeness from civil society in similarity with many other places in Sweden (Ambjörnsson, 2001). Through interviews with people active connected to voluntary associations in Holmsund, and the use of narrative analysis this thesis tries to understand how what roles civil society has in Holmsund today; with specific interest in the rural context. Central to this is the understanding of space as relational and in many ways defined by power relations, and in particular relationship between centre-periphery.

The combination of the centre-periphery relationship and the neo-liberal restructuring of the Swedish economy from being characterized by wealth distribution to wealth contributing in order to prosper has among other things lead to a decrease in services and increase inequality, both in urban peripheral places or as in this case, rural places. A part of how voluntary associations perceive their role in a rural and local context, is a role of counteracting the effects of inequality but mainly voluntary association are occupied with creating a good living environment within their local community.

A part of the increasing inequality is that it enhances the identification with the local context which creates a common social reality among the inhabitants which serves as ground for organization. Through place attachment there seem to be an identification in between a significant presence and importance of civil society and the place Holmsund, this contributes to Holmsund being constructed as a civic community.

Keywords: civic engagement, civil society, centre-periphery, radical democracy, spatialized power relations.
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1. Introduction

Collective action in the form of civic engagement in Sweden is present on all geographical scales but have usually been studied and conceptualized on a national level rather than on a local level (Kings, 2011). Civic engagement refers to the action of involvement in issues of public interest (American Psychology Association, 2018) and is usually structured in voluntary associations or other similar types of organizations. Associations and organizations that are not a part of the state, the commercial market nor are individual households are referred to as the civil society (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society, 2018).

The civil society and civic engagement is a prerequisite for democracy (Putnam, 1994). Foremost it enables the political system to work properly under democratic forms. It is also a prerequisite for democracy because an active civil society is closely related to citizens being active participants in the community and in political systems, and not just by-standers (Putnam, 1994). Sweden’s political democracy have in particular been shaped by the popular movements, which is usually defined as the labour-, temperance and Christian revival movement (Kings, 2011). The popular movements have also been very influential in the shaping of the Swedish civil society (Kings, 2011) and still is a big part of it. A commonality for the three popular movements are that their organizations both offer their members services but also that they have an interest in making societal change driven by ideas (Kings, 2011). Kings (2011) argues that the voluntary associations within the civil society can be divided into either being service-driven and/or voice-driven, both on a membership level and on a societal level. Through collective action an association can provide services for either its members, but also towards society. An association can also choose to mainly represent the ideas and interest of its members and try to provide a change in that direction.

Today collective action in organized form are still one of the most influential and important ways to affect politics and society (Nilsson and Listerborn, 2015). Through civic engagement and organizing in voluntary associations inhabitants influence what happens in their local area, whether it is in the form of sports activity or the organization of political meetings. Toolis (2017) describe that civic engagement is connected to place attachment, civic engagement can work enhancing of the feeling of belonging to a place. Social processes affect the space where it is taking place because space is created in relation to how it is used (Rönnlund and Tollefsen, 2016), space is socially constructed. Space is always under construction, human action and relation constantly reshapes it in relation to how it is being used (Massey 2005). This means that civic engagement needs to be understood in relation to where it is taking place.

Besides a focus on the civil society in Sweden on a national level, other studies have focused on urban areas and particularly socio-economically weak urban areas. Uprisings and riots in urban contexts around Europe are a sign of the deepening spatialized social inequalities that come with neoliberal urbanism (Meyer, Thörn and Thörm, 2016). Even if the deepening of spatialized social inequalities takes different forms depending on geographical context Meyer,
Thörn and Thörn (2016) argues that social movement and collective action should be looked upon as a scale, where riots and uprising are specific collective actions towards inequality and deprivation and are at the far end of this scale. Sweden has also faced a re-structuring in the economy to an economy characterized by neo-liberalism (Eriksson, 2010), which seem to increase spatialized inequality. This is taking place both in peripheral urban areas (Kings, 2011) as well in rural areas when looking at regional policy. Regional policy has gone from being carried by an ideal of ‘whole country should live’ to an ideal of ‘the whole country should provide growth’ (Eriksson, 2011). This has left peripheral parts of Sweden with a lower access to public sector and the welfare state.

Both Kings (2011) and Nilsson & Listerborn (2015) have studied socio-economically weak urban areas in Sweden, which are also affected by a decrease in service and an increase in segregation. These are signs of spatialized social inequality. In these urban areas neither Kings (2011) nor Nilsson & Listerborn (2015) can see a decrease in civic engagement, which have seemed to be the expected. There is still a significant presence of civil society, although transformed to some degree. It has been a transformation in function, from being a voice-producing to service-producing which can be seen as defence mechanism to the retraction of the welfare state and the service which it provides. Both rural areas and urban areas are affected by the re-structuring of the Swedish economy.

The aim of this thesis is therefore two-fold. First, the aim is to study how the local civil society, consisting of voluntary associations, perceive their role in a rural local area and how they relate to democracy and rurality; and secondly, what are the effects of a decreasing public sector and service in relation to the civil society in a rural context. As mentioned above most of the research on civil society in Sweden has been focused on a national scale and when there has been a local focus, it usually been in an urban context. The literature also suggests that civil society to some extent reacts towards a decrease in public service in urban areas, and the re-structuring of the Swedish economy has also led to a decrease in access to the public sector in rural areas; this is part in why the relation between civil society and any decrease in the public sector in a rural context needs to be understood further. That is why this study focus on a local and rural context. An increased understanding of the role of civil society in rural and local context can further enable for this local context to be placed in a larger structural perspective. Due to the limitation to this study, a structural perspective relating to similarities between specific urban context and specific rural contexts can only be touched upon.

In order to achieve these aims, this study is carried out in a locality called Holmsund, which is part of Umeå municipality. Holmsund was an independent municipality until 1974 (Umeå kommun, 2017) and until 2014 some parts of the municipality services were governed by the Neighbourhood Councils’ which is translated to ‘Kommundelsnämnd’, for Holmsund/Obbola (Umeå kommun, 2017). Holmsund is also the focus of Ronny Ambjörnssons book “Den skötsamme arbetaren” (2001), where Ambjörnsson writes about the idea tradition and ideals in the mill town connected to the popular movements. It becomes clear in Ambjörnsson’s work that the civil society through the popular movements where present and strong in Holmsund.
Holmsund is the study area mainly because of the active civil society, historically and today, and because of its context as a rural area in relation to the city of Umeå. Research questions of this thesis are there for the following:

- How does voluntary associations in Holmsund perceive and narrate their own role as part of Holmsund?
- As a rural context, how does the civil society in Holmsund relate to a decreasing service and public sector?
- How does democracy, rurality and civil society relate to the construction of the local place, in this case Holmsund?
2. Theoretical Framework and Key Concepts

In order to create a theoretical point of departure for this thesis, the theoretical framework is based on concepts and perspectives from fields of social movement and human geography. It includes both definitions of relevant concepts and perspectives. There is always connection between theory and methodology but in studies like this one, theory and methodology is even more closely connected to each other.

2.1 Democracy and the role of the civil society in Sweden

Democracy is defined as rule of the people, but the more general usage of the word democracy refers to the organization and appointment of government through elections with universal suffrage. Democracy becomes a way to describe the organization of the state including the existence of ‘rule of law’, this is put in opposition to dictatorship. It is the political power that become democratized, also referred to as political democracy. In the western world this is usually referred to as ‘liberal democracy’, which have constitutional rights like ‘freedom of speech’ and ‘freedom of press’ as well as general election. These constitutional freedom rights are viewed upon as conditions for democracy to work properly (Nationalencyklopedin, 2018).

One of the other understandings of democracy, mostly based on Chantal Mouffes (1995) work, is referred to as radical democracy (Rivano Eckerdal, 2012). Radical democracy doesn’t view democracy as something static to attain but rather a process to handle different type of conflicts in society (Rivano Eckerdal, 2012). A basic assumption for a radical understanding of democracy is that it is a constant and conflict filled work in order to create democratic societies, and that the diversity and difference of social life is important. Both liberal democracy and radical democracy places citizens freedom as central, but because of the radical understanding of democracy as a process rather than an order to attain radical democracy also emphasis citizens agency and civic engagement. This means that citizens could and should act in order to democratize societies, to increase citizens’ agency and freedom. Civic engagement is, in a radical democracy understanding, then something that is both for the public and the private best. The interlinking of the public and private life is crucial for radical democracy (Rivano Eckerdal, 2012). Democracy can be conceptualized spatially in many ways, but it is often public space that is brought up as an example. Foremost public space is space that is shared and accessible to all, but also owned and under public control; most often through government (Toolis, 2017). The access to public space, and therefor in some ways democratic space, are important for the meeting and interaction with other members of the community, and can enhance sense of community (Toolis, 2017).

According to Putnam et al. (1992), civic engagement is described as prerequisite for a functioning democracy. Based on a longitude study in Italy, Putnam could see a clear connection between regions in Italy that had a high level of civic engagement in their communities with a working democracy in those areas. There is no simple way to define a working democracy, but Putnam mainly looked at how the government worked and defined a working democratic government as a government that most of the time serves the interest of
most of the people. In the same areas where plenty of associations and the democracy were functional Putnam (1992) described what he called civic communities, where the citizens were active participants in society and attended to community matters. The community is bound together by horizontal relations of reciprocity and cooperation. Civic communities trust each other and tolerate their opponents. In these regions people also tended to vote according to issues that they thought were important rather than for a specific person. This also reflected on the type of leaders that were elected. The civic engagement acted as a creator of social capital, and social capital is closely related to functioning democracies. Along with civic engagement acting as a creator of social capital it also acts as a creator of further political engagement, which contributes to a more stable and working democracy.

Kings (2011) describes civic engagement and its connection to democracy in Sweden as part of her doctoral thesis ‘Till Det Lokalas Försvar’ (Own translation: ‘Defending the local’). Kings’s (2011) work is vital to this thesis because of the linking Kings makes between social movement research and urban theory. Civic engagement in Sweden is in many ways defined by legacy and tradition from the popular movements. Kings (2011) refers to Olofsson (1995) definition of the word popular movement, Olofsson describes it as regional variation of the word social movement which is commonly used in Europe to describe the same type of phenomena. In order for social movements to emerge there needs to be an organized collective, which reacts through action to a social process. Social movements represent a link between a social process and the reaction to it. The concept of popular movement refers to the mass-organization of the Swedish population in these movements and also that the movements are organized through a bottoms-up principle; which are contrasted against the bourgeois class (Kings, 2011). In short, the popular movement were for and by the people.

The Swedish context of civil society is important because civil society has different functions and roles in different contexts. In Anglo-Saxon idea tradition the civil society foremost acts as a counterpart to the state, while the civil society in Sweden works closely, but autonomous, to the state (Kings, 2011). The national state is not viewed upon as the enemy. Amnå (2008) also describes that because of the efficacy of the Swedish welfare state and its extensions of civil and social rights connected to the citizenship, which usually is the role of civil society in other contexts. This relation between the state and the civil society is connected to the rather late democratization of Sweden, in comparison to other European countries, and with a labour movement that was more reformistic than revolutionary (Kings, 2011). The cooperative ideals of the Swedish labour movement followed when the working class got political representation and because the labour movement had a lot of influence over the construction of the Swedish national welfare state, it laid this foundation of trust between the state and the civil society. This also contrast the Anglo-Saxon idea tradition because it created a view of the state in Sweden as something that is ‘good’ and that the state wants the best for all its citizens. Sweden combine a strong state and a high level of civic engagement, which is a rather unique combination and which Kings (2011) refers to as a participatory democracy.

When referring to popular movements in Sweden it means the Labour- Temperance- and the Christian Revival movements. In short, they can be defined by four aspects (Kings, 2011).
- They are organized through membership, and volunteer work.
- There are few employees because the activities are carried out by the members.
- They seek societal change and are progressive.
- They are active on different geographical scale at the same time.

The relationship between the popular movements, and in continuation the civil society, and the Swedish welfare state is a close one in many aspects. Charity work towards deprived groups that is common in other countries has almost been rendered unnecessary in Sweden because of the large welfare state (Kings, 2011). This also means that the civil society doesn’t employ as many professionals that are necessary in other countries. In similarity are the popular movements a crucial part of the Swedish democracy, as mentioned above, both because they represent people’s opinion towards the state and because it works as forums for democracy (Kings, 2011). That the popular movements work as forums for democracy is also connected to the socialization part of the popular movements (Ammå, 2008). Another characteristic for the popular movements, is ‘bildningsidealet’ which roughly translates to educational ideal (Ambjörnsson, 2001). It differs from formal education though, it rather refers to attain knowledge for yourself but usually together with others through reading and discussing it in organized forms; and a notion that knowledge is for everyone regardless of background (Ambjörnsson, 2001).

To work socializing, to learn from each other and to share an ideal are also a part of how the popular movements seek societal change. Putnam et al. (1992) describes this as one of the reason that the civic engagement in association further leads to active participants in public affairs and in the community. Inside the association its members learn to collaborate with each other and solidarity (Putnam et al, 1992). This binds together the community horizontally rather than in a vertical hierarchy, an understanding of self-interest as a broader public context. Through civic engagement and association these norms and values are embodied and reinforced by social structures and practices. Putnam et al. (1992) also describe that through the association the members also work externally towards the rest of the community, the association aggregates its members interest. This division between internal and external effects also connects to Kings (2011) division of the civil society in service-producing and voice-producing. Service-producing activities fill a need or demand among either members or the community. Voice-producing seek to influence societal development, and rather represent its members through activities. Kings (2011) also adds that on a local level service-producing are more common because it is the national level that has been dealt the role of having political influence.

The specific connection in between different geographical levels are also part of the characteristics of the popular movements and could also be part of the explanation as to why the popular movements were able to organize so many people (Kings, 2011). Usually there is a local, regional and national level in the different popular movements, and the national level constitutes of the regional level and the regional level constitutes of the local level; which connects the different levels with each other (Kings, 2011).
Kings (2011) continues to describe that the Swedish popular movements have undergone transformation sometime from the 1990s and onward. There are numbers that indicate that there are lower levels of people that have a civic engagement, but this is probably more connected to a change in organization form than actual engagement. More and more people have their engagement in networks or other types of coalitions rather than in associations, and the former are usually not registered (Kings, 2011).

The term civil society in a Swedish modern context where defined in the government bill ‘Politics for the civil society’ (Swedish: En politik för det civila samhället) as the realm which is separate from the state, the open market and the private households; but also that civil society is a realm that uses collective action for common interest. Common interest includes political interest as well as the common interest of having a sports team where children can participate, they all exist within the realm of civil society. Actors within the civil society are associations, foundations and registered religious communities which are more traditional organized forms of collective action. Networks and temporary coalitions are also acting within the civil society (Prop. 2009/10:55). The most common form of civic engagement is probably in a voluntary association, which also the popular movements consists of. Despite the long tradition of civic engagement in the form of voluntary association in Sweden, there is no exact definition in Swedish civil law that regulates it (Kings, 2011). There is although a legal praxis which says that if a group of individual working together in organized forms which are constituted by organization charts and working for a common interest they have formed a voluntary association. Kings (p.88, 2011) categorizes voluntary associations into five groups, which is based on a Swedish context. The voluntary association are divide to all include a category, under-category and characteristic.

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1) Idea.
   a. Parties, local action groups, temperance associations
      i. Political influence

2) Interest
   a. Women’s, ethnicity, parent’s, functionality/patient’s and retiree’s associations
      i. Special interests

3) Solidarity/aid
   a. Charity/social, international politics, peace associations
      i. Non-vested interest

4) Religion
   a. Groups within Church of Sweden, other Christian groups and other religions
      i. Religion

5) Lifestyle
   a. Culture, sports, leisure/recreation, outdoors and other misc.
      i. Recreation
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7
The new type of social movements and/or new ways of collective action still follows in the popular movements tracks, rather than being something completely new (Amnå, 2008). Amnå (2008) adds that these types of new social movements that are not a part of the popular movement still follow the traditional Swedish popular movement ideal, they share the same understanding of socialization and societal gain. There are also a shortage of young people and people with immigration background in the Swedish civil society (Kings, 2011). Because of the political importance of the civil society, imbalance in participation can also create a political democratic inequality (Kings, 2011, Amnå, 2008). Still, collective action in organized form are still one of the most influential and important ways to affect politics and society (Nilsson and Listerborn, 2015).

2.2 The matter of geography

To understand how civic engagement affects the local area where it takes place, and how it can relate to other social processes; space needs to be understood as a social construction and a process (Massey, 1994).

Space is socially constructed through human action and not just a container for human action and experience. Spatial forms are the product of human action and the material dimension of society, which express and perform the interests of power but will also be marked by resistance from the oppressed (Castells, 1984). This is because that space cannot be regarded as only a reflection or representation, and the physical concretization of power has material effects and affects people’s lives (Mitchell, 2000). This can be exemplified by how different people experience space differently, gender and ethnicity being such aspects (Massey, 1994). The differing experience of space has been one of the focus by feminist geographers, especially concerning ‘the geography of fear’, Women’s fear in public space is not a response to the physical settings but rather to the patriarchy effects of how public space is constructed, that the unequal power distribution creates different ways for women and men to use and perceive public space (Koskela, 1997).

Space is defined by relations, to human action and to other places (Rönnlund and Tollefson, 2016). Since it is the product of human action and relation, space is always under construction (Massey, 2005). As something that is constructed through human relation and interaction, space in turn also constructs human relation and interaction. Part of that is the relation in between the concept of space and place. Space and place are at times conceptualized with a tension in between them, with space being the more objective and place the more specific (Taylor, 1999, Baars, 2014). Massey (1994) argues that space and place should be viewed as interrelated, especially turning against that place is used as something definite and argues that space can also be filled with meaning and importance. Places does not have an essence, but they have an identity but one that is in relation to other places and constantly changing (Massey, 1994). This interrelation connects space, place and people (Baars, 2014), space is created through social interactions but the same space will shape individuals differently because they experience space differently. Baars (2014) summarizes it to that through sense of place, space gives individuals different set of beliefs and there for different sets of responses.
Sense of place also connects to place attachment, place attachment refers to a sense of belonging to a place and having a bond to that place (Toolis, 2017). Place attachment is related to both physical and social factors, and place attachment have been seen to deepen what can be summarized as civic community (Toolis, 2017). Mainly it increases collective efficacy and connects to the feeling of being responsible for other members in the community. At the same place attachment is not the same for everyone, in similarity with what Baars (2014) describe about how the same space shapes individuals differently; place attachment is connected to social position (Toolis, 2017). This further enhances the need for an understanding of human experiences in the context where it is taking place.

Toolis (2017) argues that language is what connect people with place and especially the stories connected to place are essential in understanding the meaning of the place for the community. There is always a power aspect to the construction of narratives, and a sort of master narrative about a place that tells a single story can also function as way to not re-distribute power; the public realm is not that homogenous that it contains one single story (Toolis, 2017). At the same time narratives and especially narratives that build on community can work re-distributing of power and enhance a civic community that is inclusive. Toolis (2017) describe that when a narrative is connected to a place that also enables individuals to connect their personal narrative to a collective narrative, and within a civic community a collective shared narrative can serve as the common ground for mobilizing because it highlights shared interest through place. Social interactions between individuals with different social positions within a community can act as a catalyst for the connection of personal narratives to a collectively shared narrative, if space is made for it (Toolis, 2017). Toolis (2017) names these collective narratives as community narratives, through a shared story the community is reminded of their ideals. Space and place shape not only people, but also communities.

People and places are interconnected with each other, and one cannot understand people and their social realities without also understanding space and place (Baars, 2014). That space is relational also includes that places are constructed in relation each other, and that no place is independent of other places (Massey, 1994). When relating places to other place it rather works as network, and because of that Massey (1994) also emphasises the focus on the local and not just the global. Although Castells and parts of Massey’s work are not of the present day, it still provides some key understanding to space. This conceptualization of space, as well as place, is still relevant, as shown by the other later works included in this section.

2.3 Rurality

The modern world is an urban world, throughout the globe urbanization is ongoing and people are migrating from rural areas to urban areas. The same is true for Sweden, during the last century the Swedish population has gone from being a very rural country to a high level of urbanization. In 2015 around 85% of the Swedish population is living in urban areas (Statistics Sweden, 2015).
Urbanization is not only a description of migration patterns, there is also a distinguishable dichotomous relationship between urbanity and rurality (Woods, 2011). In similarity with other dichotomous social relationships, there is a clear power relation in between the rural and the urban. Especially if understood through theory of centre-periphery. Eriksson (2010) describe that theory of centre-periphery developed as a way to conceptualize the un-even development of the world, explaining that wealth of one place is based on the exploration of another place: making the centre-periphery relationship a description of spatialized power relations. Although initially focused on a global scale, the centre-periphery relationship can exist on other geographical scales as well.

Massey (2005) description of the intersection of time and space, that space and time are not oppositional dichotomy pairings, is another aspect of the centre-periphery relationship; and important in constructing the urban as the desirable. The periphery is not only connected to a specific geographical space, the rural, it is also connected to a specific time, the past (Eriksson, 2010). These dichotomies cannot be separated from one another.

In a Swedish context, as in many other western capitalist countries, the urbanization process has contributed to an urban-rural binary which has also created a power imbalance between different parts of the country. Eriksson (2010) describes that within Sweden this becomes particularly evident in the construction of ‘Norrland’ and the identities projected to the people living there. People from ‘Norrland’ are made to represent the opposite of modernity, as not being part of the urban and progressive Sweden, and as a part of Sweden that doesn’t contribute to wealth. 'Norrland’ is the periphery in Sweden (Eriksson, 2010). These representations reflect the spatialized power relation that exists between the centre and the periphery, in Sweden. In turn these representations also lead to material effects and have an influence over people’s lives. This can be exemplified by what Eriksson (2010) describe about the out-migration from rural areas in Sweden. It is harder to find a job in these rural areas which makes it harder for people to live there but to live in rural areas also clashes with the ideals of modernity connected to urban areas.

The out-migration and the difficulty of finding jobs creates problems for those areas, and at the same time the blame is placed on the population living in rural areas. This is constructed both for inner-city problems and regional problems, the problems that these areas are facing are conceptualized as the specific geographical place as the problem (Massey, 1994). Eriksson (2010) describes that the Swedish economy has in the recent decades been re-structured in accordance to a paradigm shift to a neo-liberal economy. From around 1980 and forward there are growing economic inequalities in-between regions in Sweden, and Sweden can no longer be regarded as one of the most geographically equal countries (Enflo, 2016). The Swedish economy used to be characterized by a strong and general welfare-state and wealth redistribution, and this also meant a regional policy based on the notion ‘whole country should live’ (Eriksson, 2010). Today it is rather the region of Stockholm that keeps growing and having a positive economic development, which follows the global urbanization trend (Enflo, 2016). The urbanization trend means both uneven economic growth but also un-even population development. More than half of Swedish municipalities are suffering from de-
population while the overall Swedish population is growing. The re-structuring of the economy has led to a shift from that to ‘the whole country should provide growth’, and the places that do not contribute to the nation’s economy are not deemed worthy or valuable (Eriksson, 2010). De-population also makes it harder for the society to maintain a high level of service (Enflo, 2016). Overall this means that the rural parts of Sweden get less and less resources to re-direct the trend, while both being blamed for the negative development and being viewed as inferior to other parts of the country.

Another aspect of the deepening of spatialized social inequalities that comes with the neo-liberal restructuring (Meyer, Thörn and Thörn, 2016) are taking place in urban contexts and more specifically urban suburbs. Meyer, Thörn and Thörn (2016) argues in two-fold that riots and uprisings are collective action taken against deprivation and further that if applying a macro-perspective to where riots and uprisings are occurring in Europe a pattern of urban suburbs are prominent. The use of a macro-perspective rather than micro-perspective that is the usual in social movement research, allows for a structural perspective on which places are affected by deepening spatialized social inequalities.

2.4 Place as common ground

Both Kings (2011) and Nilsson and Listerborn (2015) describe that there is an often-occurring narrative about the civil society in socio-economically weak urban areas in Sweden. This general narrative suggests that because of the negative development of these areas there are also low levels of civic engagement and a small civil society in these areas.

In connection to the public report ”Demokratiutredning” (SOU:2016:5) that were issued during 2014, Nilsson and Listerborn has written an additional report called ‘Local associations and democracy in socially deprived residential areas’ (Swedish: “Lokala föreningar och demokrati i socialt utsatta bostadsområden”) which seeks to understand how changes in society has resulted in a civil society which take a bigger part in the local community as well as the civil societies communication with the public sector. Nilsson and Listerborn (2015) have studied civil society in city areas of Malmö and Helsingborg, with focus on areas that are characterized by being socio-economically weak areas. The notion that the civil society would be weaker in socioeconomically weak residential areas are not supported by their report (Nilsson & Listerborn, 2015).

In her thesis Kings (2011) has studied the civil society in the suburb Tensta and Rinkeby in Stockholm. In line with what Nilsson and Listerborn (2015) describe, Kings (2011) finds that the civil society in Tensta and Rinkeby is rather active, at least on a local level in Tensta and Rinkeby. Part of Kings (2011) work focused on what type of activities that the associations or organizations produced, dividing production between service or voice. The majority of the civil society in Tensta and Rinkeby produced services, both for its members but also for a more societal level. Although local levels of associations and organizations are usually more service and national level is usually more voice, Kings (2011) describe that there is an overall shift in civil society from mainly providing a voice for their members to providing services, and that
in Tensta and Rinkeby the services provided for the society by far exceeds what the associations does for the individual members development.

The increasing injustice and polarization of society creates common experience connected to place. Inequality enhances differentiating and fragmentation aspects of society, which tend to spark a symbolic elevation of the local area because agency is limited in other areas of society (Kings, 2011). It also creates the local area as a common identity marker, something to share when the rest is conflicting. In similarity to what Toolis (2017) describe about place attachment and shared narratives. Together it creates a growing ground for collective organization, which Kings (2011) call ‘organization in every-day life’ (Swedish: vardagslivets organisering), collective action in relation to the closest shared material context and social reality. In Rinkeby and Tensta it is still the traditional membership in a voluntary association and everyday interactions that is the base for collective action. It becomes a way to offer something that makes every-day life easier, to counter the differentiating aspects of society. It is not collective action that is acting offensive towards injustices, unions can be described as offensive, but rather defensive and binding life-situations in the local area together.

Even though place and stories about a place, as Toolis (2017) brought forward, can work binding and creating a connection among community members and especially in a local context; doesn’t mean that one place has one identity or one story. Places doesn’t have inherent essence, they are created through human action and experience (Massey, 1994). It means that place have different identities and meaning depending on who is using it or telling stories about it.
2. Methodology

The methodology of this thesis is based on the ontological and epistemological understanding that our reality is constructed through our social relations with other people, which is a social constructionist approach. A social constructionist approach serves as the base for many different types of analytical approaches (Winther-Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). The social constructionist approach is wide and can carry different meanings. The common ground among approaches is that social construction reflects the social reality which has created it, but that reflection also contributes to the construction of the social reality. Social constructions reproduce themselves (Gren & Hallin, 2003). An assumption which Winther-Jørgensen & Phillips (2002) elaborate on based on the work of Burr (1995) and Gergen (1985) is that we are social beings and behave according to our understanding of reality. This is why social construction also has real consequence because different understanding of the world leads to different behaviour.

To understand the complexity of social realities, a qualitative approach can be useful for interpretation of the social reality. To explain behaviour and phenomena there needs to be a contextual understanding and an interpretation based in those who experience that social reality (Bryman, 2011). Providing an interpretative framework for critical understanding of the social reality is the qualitative approaches natural setting (Denzin, Lincoln, & Giardina, 2006). It is situated and tries to make sense of the world through interpretation of human action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

A view of knowledge and our reality as subjective and situational also means that when using a qualitative approach, reflexivity on your own position is imperative. This also includes the notion that there is no research that is truly neutral and objective. For me, this study and the themes it touches upon are close to me and something that I care for. In similarity with the respondents that I have interviewed I also have a civic engagement, although mine is mainly political and rooted in the labour movement. For me this gives me an additional understanding about the research presented surrounding the popular movements but also an understanding for the respondents’ stories surrounding their engagement. Much of my own knowledge which has contributed to the making of this thesis is situated in my own political engagement.

Part of acknowledging my own position in relation to this is connected to being transparent towards the respondents about my own engagement and especially about the positions as popularly elected in the municipality of Umeå. Throughout the analysis I have tried to be critical of my own role and be aware of why I make the analysis that I make.

2.1 Selection of geographical area

In short, the main objective for this thesis is to expand the understanding of civil society in relation to a local and rural context, but in order to study it a specific rural context has to be chosen. The motivation of choosing Holmsund as geographical study area is based on it being a rural area but it is also defined local area. A part of the motivation is also the historical
background of Holmsund, both the history of the popular movements (Ambjörnsson, 2001) as well as Holmsund previously being its own municipality (Umeå municipality, 2017). Holmsund has a number of voluntary associations as well as presences of built representation of these voluntary associations such as a church, football fields and gymnastics hall, which are also used for activities. There are also of course some practical reasons to the choice of Holmsund, Holmsund is relatively easy to reach from Umeå.

Holmsund is a locality within the municipality of Umeå and is located by the sea, previously has Holmsund been a municipality itself but became a part of Umeå municipality in 1974 (Umeå municipality, 2017). A locality is an area which has at least 200 inhabitant and have continuous built-up area (Statistics Sweden, 2018a). Municipalities in Sweden is usually divided in a number of different localities. Umeå is the central locality in the municipality of Umeå and is also the regional capital for the county of Västerbotten. Västerbotten is located in north of Sweden and is the second northernmost county, Umeå is located in the coastal area of the county. Umeå has recently passed a population of roughly 125 000 (Umeå kommun, 2018), making it the biggest city in the north of Sweden and one of few municipality in the north which has population growth.

There were around 6000 people living in the locality Holmsund at the end of 2016 (Statistics Sweden, 2018b). Until 2014 some parts of the municipality services were governed by the neighbourhood council (Swedish: ‘kommundelsnämnd’) for Holmsund-Obbola. Obbola is another locality in Umeå which is located next to Holmsund, it lies across from the river and the two communities are connected by a bridge.

![Map over Umeå and Holmsund](source: hitta.se)
The definition of rurality is diverse and contextual, in a report from Glesbygdsverket (2008) a number of different official Swedish definitions are described and Woods (2011) also describe the difficulty of creating a sharp definition of rurality in the field of geography. Although not defined by a sparsely populated agriculture land, I would argue that Holmsund is constructed as a rural area. Umeå municipality has a comprehensive plan from 1998, the plan has throughout the years been complemented with additional plans so called addendums; both thematic addendums as well for specific areas in the municipality. During the time of writing this thesis, the municipality of Umeå is working with an addendum called ‘Program för hållbar landsbygdsutveckling i Umeå kommun’, which I would translate to ‘Programme for sustainable rural development in the municipality of Umeå’. The programme has been on its latest exhibition between November 2017 until January 2018 and has therefore not been implemented yet. In the current comprehensive plan, as well as in an overarching addendum focused on growth from 2012, Holmsund is referred to as ‘landsbygdsområde’ and the up-coming thematic addendum includes plans for Holmsund. The municipality of Umeå also differentiates between using ‘stadsdel’ and ‘kommundel’ in their physical planning. ‘Stadsdel’ refers to areas in Umeå which are recognized to be a part of the city Umeå, while ‘kommundel’ are the localities that are part of Umeå municipality but aren’t a part of the city of Umeå. In this context, Holmsund is a rural area.

Holmsund doesn’t have a long history, and the first settlers in what later would be Holmsund settled in the area early 19th century and the area later came to grow around the sawing mill (Umeå municipality, 2016). Idea-historian Ronny Ambjörnsson has written a book called ‘Den skötsamme arbetaren’ which focuses on Holmsund and the ideals connected to the popular movements among the workers in the community in 1880-1930. As a result of the difficulty to go up-streams in Ume River the saw-mill was re-located from Baggböle to Holmsund and was finished in 1885, Holmsund had previously had a harbour to re-load the planks coming from the mill in Baggböle (Ambjönnsson, 2001). It was around this saw-mill that the community grew. In similarity with most mill towns, the company, the church and the school became common ground. At the time there was no sharp border between public life and private life in Holmsund, children used the lumberyard as a playground and the community sense were connected to the company (Ambjörnsson, 2001).

It was in these environments that the popular movements grew strong and the same for Holmsund. At the start of the 20th century both the temperance and the Christian revival movements were active and present in Holmsund, but the grow of the labour movement was more slow and it was not properly established until around 1920 (Ambjörnsson, 2001). This development in Holmsund is shared with the rest of Västerbotten. To be active in a temperance association became a way for the workers to gain control over their recreational time, and a step away from the control of the company (Ambjörnsson, 2001). As Västerbotten transformed the temperance movement became a way to act as social safety net but also as protest movement against the injustice and exploration that the industrialization meant, all political movements in Västerbotten was connected to the temperance movement and the sobriety at the turn of the century (Ambjörnsson, 2001).
Holmsund, and in addition Umeå, provides an interesting object to study because of a rather nuanced relationship to a central-periphery perspective. Umeå can be argued to both be a part of a periphery, in relation to Stockholm and the south of Sweden, but as well it could be argued that Umeå is part of a centre in relation to the rest of northern Sweden.

2.2 Methods

In order to get the information needed to answer the research questions in-depth interviews seemed like the best option. Interviews can provide a nuanced and rich portrayal of the process in question (Kitchin & Tate, 2000) but are also a good option when it is necessary to get particular information (Valentine, 2005). Valentine (2005) also describe that interviews is a good option when the aim of a study is more illustrative then representative. Through the use of an interview it allows for the respondent to create their reality and their account of it (Valentine, 2005).

There are multiple options when it comes to the structure of the interview, I have opted for semi-structured interviews with an interview guide with broad questions divided into different themes. Bryman (2011) describes that through the use of semi-structured interviews with a set list of issues/subjects to be discussed it allows for freedom for the interviewee but can also provide the structure needed to achieve some comparability. Interviews are a way to get the respondents story on the subject, which require flexibility and allowing the respondents to talk with their own words.

Before doing interviews with the respondents a shorter pilot interview was made with a person whom have long experience of civic engagement and just recently started a new association. Based on the pilot interview some adaptations were made in the interview guide.

2.2.1 Sampling method of associations

For respondents I opted for persons that either were a representative of a voluntary association or active in a voluntary association in Holmsund. Voluntary associations, as described in the theoretical framework and key concepts section, are a large part of civil society and represent a more traditional way of collective action. Both because of their role in civil society as well as being rather easy to identify and locate, voluntary associations where chosen. In the official numbers there are around 650 registered associations in Umeå municipality (Umeå municipality, 2018), the register is foremost a tool in order for the municipality to pay subsidies to associations which means that not all associations or organization that are a part of the civil society are in the register.

The selection of associations and organizations to interview were made by first looking at the municipality of Umeå’s own register of associations, which are divided by type. From the register I got multiple options of association to contact, that first list was then complemented
with tips I got from posting on my own Facebook page and asking about tips. A snowball method where also used where I asked from tips from the association that I had interviewed for other associations that could be of interest. With the selection of associations, I aimed to get a variation of types. To structure this selection process, I used Kings (p. 88, 2011) categorization of associations.

1) Idea.
   a. Parties, local action groups, temperance associations
      i. Political influence

2) Interest
   a. Women’s, ethnicity, parent’s, functionality/patient’s and retiree’s associations
      i. Special interests

3) Solidarity/aid
   a. Charity/social, international politics, peace associations
      i. Non-vested interest

4) Religion
   a. Church of Sweden, other Christian groups and other religions
      i. Religion

5) Lifestyle
   a. Culture, sports, leisure/recreation, outdoors and other misc.
      i. Recreation

The final number of association and their category are shown in Table 1. More associations where contacted but declined to participate. There is a majority of the chosen voluntary association that belong to the ‘lifestyle’ category, ideally there would be more variation in relation to category. This is mainly due to the associations that I was able to come in contact with and also accepted to participate, but also what type of voluntary associations that have their activities in Holmsund. When looking in the municipality’s register over associations, associations that belong to the ‘lifestyle’ category constitute the majority of associations. This will of course influence the selection.

During the selection there were also other factors that this categorization doesn’t reflect but that I took into consideration. For example, as mentioned the ‘Lifestyle’ category constitute the majority of voluntary associations that participated, but there is some variation within that category regarding to what activities that are arranged by the different associations. Both of the sports association are fairly large associations and have been active in the community for many years, while the culture association are more recently started. The culture- and the music association also differs from one another because the culture association arranges a number of different cultural expression while the music is focused on only one. There is also a variety among the age of members, where the sports associations mainly have youth teams, but the culinary association and the music association mainly have adult members, where the majority is 45 or older.
Table 1. List of associations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORDER</th>
<th>ASSOCIATION/ORGANIZATION</th>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Culinary association</td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Organization for integrative activities</td>
<td>Idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>Religious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sports association</td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sports association</td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Music association</td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Culture association</td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three (3) out of the seven (7) association interviewed where accounted for in Umeå municipality association register. Umeå municipality uses the register mostly to pay out subsidies. Some of the associations are local sections of a larger regional or national organisation which could explain why they are not in the register. There could also be that an association being registered under one name in the register but have another public name, or that they don’t want to be in the municipality’s register.

I have chosen not to name the specific association or organization in order to preserve the anonymity of the respondents. When in contact with all of the respondent I was also upfront about my own civic engagement, as I felt it was important to be transparent and for the respondents to feel secure.

2.2.2 Interviews

The themes for the interview guide are: ‘Association/Organization’, ‘Place’, ‘Democracy’ and ‘Service’. ‘Association/Organization’ concerns the activity and what the association/organization aims to do. ‘Place’ concerns the function in Holmsund. ‘Democracy’ focus on the function of the association or organization in relation to democracy. ‘Service’ are focused on the service aspect of the association, what kind of service do they provide their members especially. The themes where chosen in order to get information from the respondents about the association or organization itself but also in connection to the overall aim of the study. The ‘Democracy’ and ‘Service’ themes were chosen with Kings (2011) division between ‘voice-creating’ or ‘service-creating’ division in mind. They are all of course interwoven with each other, but the choice to have defined themes were made in order to create some structure to be able to survey the data after the interviews were completed. The whole interview guide can be found in Appendix 1.

Seven interviews were made mainly during March in 2018, and the interviews were with (7) different association or organizations but with a total of ten (10) respondents were interviewed because two of the interviews was with several representatives from the association or organization. The interviews were done in Swedish and took place in different locations, but a majority took place in Holmsund. All interviews were recorded in full and after the interviews
were completed the material were processed through transcription before analysis, the finished transcriptions of the interviews were then sent back to the respondent in order for them to check and approve them.

Since the aim of this thesis is not to create quantifiable data, but rather understanding the respondent’s social reality in connection to civic engagement the information provided from the respondents were deemed sufficient. Especially in relation to the time-frame of the study.

2.2.3 Analysis

The material provided through the interviews have been analysed through the use of narrative analysis. A narrative approach assumes that social realities can be explored and studied through the analysis of narratives (Mura & Sharif, 2017). Narratives are told stories, events are connected into sequence by a speaker with the intention for the listener to take away something from the story (Riessman, 2008). They are an important part in the construction of a social reality and the analysis of narratives can lead to an in-depth understanding of the social reality (Mura & Sharif, 2017).

The method of narrative analysis is wide and there is no universal agreement on how a narrative analysis should be done (Mura & Sharif, 2017) and there is no one true narrative analysis method (Riessman, 1993). Their commonality is the interpretation of texts which have a storied form (Riessman, 2008) and in comparison, to other qualitative analysis methods narrative scholars keep the story intact; because the contingency and the sequence of the story is important. Both because a narrative needs contingency to be a narrative but also because it brings meaning to things that would otherwise be random, and it shows what things are important for the speaker of the narrative (Riessman, 2008).

Out of the different types of narrative analysis the interviews and the material from them will be analysed with a thematic narrative analysis. When using a thematic narrative approach, the emphasis is on what is being told rather than how it is being told, and to understand the thematic meanings of the narrative. This includes identifying reoccurring themes and narrative between the different interviews. All types of narrative analysis are context specific but thematic narrative analysis opens up for linking personal actions to social processes, if thoroughly connected to theory (Riessmann, 2008). As brought up in the theory section collective narratives can also serves as a way to create common ground which leads to collective action.

All of the interviews were transcribed in full, to transcribe interviews is not only a way to enable the possibility to go back to the interview or easing for quotation in the finished paper. Transcribing can also be a part of the analytical process and the first step in making the analysis (Riessman, 1993). Both of these reasons motivated the choice to transcribe. Since the analysis method focuses on the content of the narrative rather than the structure or other things that can be of interest, I opted for a style of transcribing that excluded body language, tone of voice and at times also pauses when they didn’t contribute to the content. After the process of transcribing the interviews they were all read through at least once in full before coding them according to
the different narratives that I could discern from the previous read-through. That coding then acted as the groundwork for the thematic narratives that are presented in the results.

2.3 Method discussion

Through the methodology section I have tried to present and argue for the strengths of the chosen method but there are naturally some shortcomings as well. The limitations of chosen methods in relation to what can be said about the results are presented in the ‘Limitations and further studies’ section.

Ideally, I would have liked to both do more interviews and with a larger variation within the group of respondents. This is mainly connected to time limitations and which respondents that accepted to participate or not. Had there been time it would also been preferred to have respondents living in Holmsund that weren’t active in civil society or respondents that were active but didn’t have any leader or representative role. This could also had introduced more variation to the respondent group.

When it comes to the means of analysis, narrative analysis flexibility also means that a lot of the analysis is up to the person doing the analysis. Throughout the analysis I have tried to be critical of my own role and be aware of why I make the analysis that I make. In relation to positionality, I think that my own knowledge of the civil society and the civil society in Umeå was a way to ease the communications between me and the respondents. Things that are not common knowledge or experience that come from being active in an association, might have had to be clarified for other people but wasn’t necessary for me. This also could pose a risk, that me and the respondents interpret things differently but isn’t aware of that. As a way to be aware of this I tried to be thorough when asking questions to the respondents to make sure that their interpretation where included.

Another part of this is that I have tried to be as attentive to the negative aspects as well as the positive aspects brought up by the respondents. Especially with respondents’ descriptions of politics I have been extra careful to examine my own role in my use of them.

2.3.1 Ethical considerations

The ‘Good research practice‘ (2017) presented and produced by the ‘Swedish research council’ has been used as guidance for the ethical considerations for this thesis.

The ethical considerations made for this thesis mainly concerns the preserving of anonymity of the respondents, transcriptions of interviews but also transparency with my own position in relation to the respondents. In order to preserve the anonymity of the respondent I chose to leave out the name of the association that they are a part of but rather describe the type of association. This was also included in the first contact with the respondents, that because of the design of the study the association could be described as a sports association or a culture association, but they would never be mentioned by name. Holmsund, as well as Umeå, are not
that large in population, it is also possible for other people especially if they are also active in associations in Holmsund or Umeå to identify the respondents. Because of that I tried to use a general language as possible when it comes to describe the activities that the associations arrange but also leaving out other identifying markers. I have also opted to leave out gender when describing and referencing to the respondents, continuously using ‘they’ as pronoun.

All interviews were recorded in full with the respondents’ approval. The choice of recording interviews can be sensitive to respondents but since a recording is a way to enhance accuracy as well as transcribing being a part of the interpretation (Riessmann, 2008); I opted for recording the interviews. So, the request to record the interview were included in the first contact with respondents. One respondent requested that the recording would be deleted after I was finished with it, so I have chosen to delete all recordings after transcribing the interviews. When transcribing I assigned each respondent a number and also removed all names that were mentioned during the interviews, assigning a description instead such as ‘Member 1’. The full transcription was sent to respective respondents for approval before using them.

For me the trickiest part was the transparency of my own position as a person that also spend a lot of time devoted to civic engagement and especially political engagement in Umeå municipality. I chose to inform the respondent after they accepted to be part of the study but before we had agreed on a time for the interview, in order not to spring it upon them when meeting for the interview. This gave the respondents time to assess if they still wanted to carry on, which all wanted to.
3. Results

Through the interviews there are five thematic narrative that comes forward, and even though they are all interconnected to one another; there are first three (3) more distinct narratives which also furthers constructs two (2) overarching narratives. The three (3) more distinct narratives will be presented first and then the overarching narratives. They are presented as overarching narratives because the other thematic narratives presented first is crucial to the construction of them.

3.1 Thematic narratives

3.1.1 Presence of civil society

There is a main narrative among the respondents that civil society in Holmsund have a significant presence in the community and a presence that is of importance to the community. This is expressed both in number of people that are active as participants, leaders or volunteers but also there seem to be a large range of different voluntary associations that is active in Holmsund; as well as other type of actors that is part of the civil society. At the same time there is also some contradiction within the narrative about changes and shifts happening in civil society in Holmsund, that people are less engaged than what they used to be both generally in society but also that many of the associations have a hard time to get people to volunteer for them. As presented in this section, these two parts appear often in parallel with one another and run throughout the respondents’ descriptions, creating contradiction. However, this very contradiction demonstrates the efforts, awareness and care the locals have for both Holmsund as well as the civil society in Holmsund.

Many respondents talked about the presence and activeness of the civil society in Holmsund. One of the respondents expresses it like this.

“Everyone you know either does gymnastics or football or floorball that’s just what it’s like” (Sports association)

This is also constantly retold by the different respondents, that a lot of involvement in sports associations and that there are some sports such as football, gymnastics and floorball that is very big in Holmsund and involves a lot of kids but also adults. Adults are mainly active in the associations as leaders. One of the respondents from one of the sports association describe that three out of four kids are active in some type of association in Holmsund and adds later that many kids have a lot of different activities, at times too much different activities according to the respondent. In addition to these three big sports, Holmsund is described by respondents to have wide range of different association or they are able to name a wide range of different association that they know of in Holmsund.
The types of associations and organizations mentioned by the respondents includes different type of sports, cultural activities, retiree associations, churches but also political parties or other political organizations that are locally active.

The respondent from the church tells about when they did a questionnaire that went out to households in Holmsund where they got a bit over a majority to say that they wanted to increase their own civic engagement and help out, adding that the response rate was high. This questionnaire has deepened the respondents own image of the people living in Holmsund as being active participants in their community. The same respondent also makes a comparison to their hometown.

“I think there are positive idealist here, in comparison to my hometown where I commute from on a weekly basis. There they just think that kids spend too much time in front of screens and playing computer games, and here someone instead organize a computer club where they can meet also I-R-L while still playing but it also creates opportunity for those who maybe can’t afford an own computer [...] It creates this meeting with others that is necessary and not just this sitting with headphones and being online” (Church)

The respondents from the organization that arrange integrative activities describe how there are many adults that are active as leaders in different voluntary associations around the village that almost everyone and especially the kids recognize, and that kids in Holmsund know that they can turn to and confide with these adults if they need anything. There is not only a lot of adults active and making sure that the associations have activities, but they do it enough to build relations with the young people that partake in the activities.

Meanwhile, many of the respondent spoke of a shift in society, that a collective interest had shifted to an individual one. This was expressed through a number of different stories, mostly as trying to explain and also understand as to why it was harder to get people to do volunteer work for the association or organization. Several respondents experience that many wanted to get paid, and because there were no economic benefits people weren’t interested. One of the sports association explained that they had trouble finding leader for their teams a time back, it wasn’t until they decided that if a parent becomes a leader their child will automatically get a spot in a team that they were able to solve the issue. Another explanation brought up by a couple of the respondents were that people didn’t feel that they had time, that nowadays there are so many other different things to do that people have less time to put in to a voluntary association. There was also a worry present about what would happen when there were too few leaders or too few engaged people, that the engagement in a voluntary association could cost leaders or engaged people’s health. One of the respondents that is active in a culture association also described that many people don’t seem to know the potential of a voluntary association; for instance, it is rather easy to seek funds as an association if you want to arrange or do something, and this is not common knowledge anymore.
"When I went to high school it was more natural to start a study circle if you wanted to arrange or do something, nowadays maybe you rather try to crowdfund it because you don’t even know you can do it through a study circle" (Culture association)

The respondents are all active in voluntary association, some are voluntary associations that exists only in Holmsund and some are the local level active in Holmsund but belonging to larger national organization. Even if there are some difference in how they organize their work, they all belong more to the traditional types of association. This could also be a factor in why the respondents sometime experience a hard time to engage people, that people want to organize in other forms then in the traditional forms. The above quote could suggest that people find other ways to organize activities rather than being passive.

Some stories told by the respondents show how they try to deal with these shifts and changes of local associations, while still try to maintain the presence of the civil society in Holmsund. For example, part of the narrative concerns the relationships and collaborations between different organizations in Holmsund. The respondent from the church describe multiple different types of collaboration with other organizations, but also that they offer other associations or organization in Holmsund to use the church and its appurtenant facilities for free. Several respondents talk about how several different actors in the civil society collaborate for the ‘advent fair’ (Swedish: skyltsöndag) and with a mindset from the managing organization that the fair won’t happen if not everyone helps out. There are multiple stories about the will to collaborate among associations and seeking new ways to combine activities. It seems that this part of the narrative is driven by two things, mostly a notion of teamwork being something positive but also a minor a decline among participants. The latter is expressed by one of the sports association when talking about the decline in players in the sports and the high ratio of sport teams/residents, but also in relation to a previous collaboration with the kids and youth activities with another sports association. Sports association is usually a very traditional way of organizing sports, and both of the sports associations have a long history in the community.

That collaboration between two different sports associations in itself is worth mentioning as a whole story, told by one of the associations. The story also shows of the meaning that civil society can have for different people but also how it can become a part of the community. Holmsund has had two major associations in this sport, and the belonging to either has been a divider in the community; the respondent active in one of them describe how many of the older members that have been active almost since the beginning won’t even say the name of the other association.

“It has become much much better than it used be, before this was just the way it was. If you lived on one side of the road you belong to this association and if you lived on the other side of the road you belonged to the other association [...] it was unimaginable to switch association all hell would break loose” (Sports association)
Then a couple of years ago the two competing association decided to collaborate with the activities for the junior players. The respondent described that it was hard to agree on a colour to wear when playing a game, because either association refused to wear the other association’s colour; eventually they decided on a colour that neither association had previously worn. However, the collaboration stopped and only one of the two associations has activities for kids and young people today. One respondent describes the period like this:

“I just think it wasn’t possible with all the kids, and then one of these driving spirit had enough and felt why should we even split all the kids into two different teams and it might have been a viable option before but now with all the people moving in and not knowing the history... so to start the collaboration around the kids was a good idea and I think they decide to do because together we could provide really good practices and activities for the kids, but it took someone who was really driven to say that now it is enough with the nonsense of rivalry [...] In the end it didn’t work as well as you would hope, I am not exactly sure why” (Sports association)

This specific story contributes to the narrative of a significant presence of civil society from another angle. That the sense of belonging to a specific association and the specific social context are something valuable, even though such strong identities can create rifts in the community and can be deemed as negative. One respondent from the church also talk about this sense of belonging to a specific association, the respondent describes that belonging to either of these two associations is something that comes up when they conduct burials. The belonging and membership has been so important that it is mentioned during funeral ceremonies. In addition, the same respondent describes that even if you aren’t a member that play the sport, there is a culture of picking and supporting one team.

The story of these two sports associations also connects to the historical context of Holmsund’s civil society. Many of the associations, including the above-mentioned sports association, have a long history and were established a long time ago, which the respondents from these voluntary associations are aware of. The historical context of civil society in Holmsund is reflected through respondents’ narratives of comparing how it used to be and how it is today. When talking about the number of associations and that they are active, one of the respondents from the culinary association adds that it wasn’t like in the glory days. This is similar to the parts of the narrative about there being harder to engage people, but these parts are put in direct relation to what the respondent perceive what Holmsund used to be; and not to an overall societal shit. Some respondents also refer to Ambjörnssons book ‘Den skötsamme arbetaren’ and its content, to narrate their own view of the historical context of civil society in Holmsund. One respondent from the church connects the history of Holmsund to why so many of the inhabitants are engaged in the civil society today:

"I think it’s part of the history, partly connected to the industry and the working class background which mean that people have had bad living conditions and small means and you know the difference it makes to help
each other but also that the associations have always been strong. The Christian revival movement has been strong and the overall church engagement have been strong, so I think through that it’s easier for people to not take for granted the wealth they have today or what you can do and then you see the difference in help each other, I think it’s the history and that it’s left as a collective memory and collective consciousness about the history in society”(Church)

The notion that this respondent refers to a ‘collective memory’ and ‘collective consciousness’ adds further to the main theme in this narrative, that voluntary associations perceive a civil society that has a strong presence in Holmsund but also that it is connected to Holmsund. Through several mentions and awareness of the history of civil society in Holmsund, the respondents place their own narration of the present civil society connected to the past of Holmsund. It is constructed as something that is part of Holmsund, and not just something that is taking place in Holmsund.

3.1.2 Reasons of engagement

Even though the respondents themselves come from various backgrounds and are engaged in in voluntary associations that focus on different things, there is a common thread to the stories they tell about their own and other people’s civic engagement. Together this constructs a theme of community, social relations and a feeling of belonging to their narration of their engagement. At times, a willingness is also expressed for a need to change things in society, or at least be a contributor to change.

One respondent from one of the sports associations tells that nation-wide there has been a shift in focus from being competitive and performing on a high level towards being more focus the social part of sports and especially keeping children in the sport for longer. The respondent also adds that for them this has always been the focus. One part of keeping this focus is to make room for every child and not just the talented ones. The one of the most important factors according to the respondent is that the leaders show that they care about every team member:

“That the leaders have seen everyone and shown that they are important by asking where they are if they’re not a practice, it doesn’t matter who in the team you are. we check with them ‘Where are you? Why are you not here? We miss you’. I think that’s the most important reason, that all of them feel: I want to be here because they care if I am here’(Sports association)

The respondent also notes that the teams that keep their players the longest are also the teams that have a good time outside practice or games. With the other sport association, the story is similar having a focus on the sport being fun for the participants rather than a focus on result. Similarly, there are nationwide recommendations from the national alliances that they both, respectively, belong to. The respondent from the other sport association also notes that for them
this also has been the focus all along, the focus on the sport being social and fun for the kids. At several times a sense of community is brought up as a reason to why people stay in the sport, and maybe especially why people choose to be engaged as leaders or in the board.

“A member in our board lived in Gothenburg for a long time and she was very engaged and active in the association before she moved, and when she moved she cried rivers but she managed to find an association down there so she survived but as soon as she moved home again she asked ‘Do you need any help?’” (Sports association)

When talking about their own engagement they also talk about a sense of community within the association, and a feeling of contributing and doing things that are good for other people; which is a reoccurring story among the respondents. Mostly it concerns giving the children in Holmsund a meaningful and constructive recreational activity, which consist of not only offering the training but also offering the extra support that the civil society can bring for some kids. A sense of community within the association further relates to a sense of loyalty, some of the respondents express that they feel a loyalty towards the association but also to the other people engaged within the association. They trust and depend on each other.

The stories about their own engagement in relation to motives for themselves, also circle around community and meeting people. The respondents in the culinary association which are mostly retired describe that the association has been a way to keep in contact with their old co-workers which are also members, and that it gives them something to do during the day; but also, that it is fortunate that they have such a good time together. A social environment is also described as a reason by the respondent in the music association.

“The goal is to have a good time together and then to be able to sing really good together, you can be really tired and coming from work when you there but then when you go home you’re filled with energy it gives energy […] so in short that’s our goal to bring happiness to others and to ourselves” (Music association)

It is not only that meeting people is expressed as fun and something the respondents enjoy, many of the respondents talk about the meaning of building relations to other people through the engagement. One of the respondents talks about how they wanted to get to know the refugees who came to Holmsund because it feels important to get to know people living in the same neighbourhood. That was part of the reasons for the first initiative when they hosted a sport activity for the children. Even if the motives to start up can be driven by ideas, the activities produced and offered to citizens are more of a service. Integrative activities were hosted for immigrants and natives to meet. Respondents talk about how important the friendship that came out of these activities is. Many of the refugees that came to Holmsund
have later been moved away from Holmsund, the respondents described how they nowadays take trips to visit them.

"4: [...] the ones that lived here in November they got moved to two other towns so then we have for two summers gone on a road trip, we are in the car for a whole day and then we stop and eat constantly under 24 hours because everyone has made food for us and them and we have such a fantastically good time and it is through these activities that we were able to meet them

5: It has resulted in close friendships with many people that you have been introduced to this way” (Integrative organization)

Aside from the description of a social environment and meeting other people, there are another part of this narrative which is grounded in a conviction of ideas. A conviction of making a change for the better, both in society as well as for individuals. These two are at many times intertwined with each other. The above respondents describe that their engagement is driven by the fact that they think integration is very important for the whole society, but it is also about helping the specific individuals that came to their area. At the same time, they are active in an organization that focus on making a change. The same is true for the church. The church describes participating and contributing to societal change as part of their mission. Persons that are active in an organization who express idea of change will naturally also express this while talking about their own engagement. This narrative is however, not only constructed by respondents from more idea driven voluntary associations. The conviction of ideas of changing things to the better is also evident in the other voluntary associations. For instance, from the sports association this is expressed through their stories about sportsmanship as well as creating supporting environments for young people. Another respondent expresses the importance for cultural and recreational activities for both kids and adults, and that it can partly create equal opportunities to a constructive leisure time in contrast to other opportunities that are potentially unequal.

A final part of this theme is that the respondents throughout describe their engagement as rewarding, and that even though they do not get paid they get lots of other things back from being active in a voluntary association.

3.1.3 Decline of services and separation from Umeå

There is a narrative about the relationship between Holmsund and Umeå, which centres on not only the decline of services in Holmsund, but also that Holmsund is a rural place, or at least not a part of the city in relation to Umeå. These are separate narratives but interconnected at several times. In describing the type of services that used to exist in Holmsund, it is also put in relation to that Umeå has ‘everything’. Although it also means that the population of Holmsund can reach services in Umeå but there is a feeling of separation present.
Umeå is constantly referred to as the city or ‘town’ with services, easily reached by car, while stores in Holmsund are less than before. The word “town” was used to describe downtown Umeå. Holmsund is referred to as ‘the village’ but also as ‘a small place’. This contrast portrays Holmsund as a periphery and Umeå as a centre in relation to each other.

Through the interviews Holmsund is described to have a school, a library, indoor swimming pool, health centres and a grocery store; services that seem to cover the daily necessities among people. When one needs something extra, such as jewellery or books then one has to turn elsewhere. A lot has changed among the services, both public and commercial service. One of the respondents describe the changes to the school.

"Holmsund has become more one Holmsund then before, mainly because now there’s only one elementary school previously it was divided by the main road, you lived on one side and went to school on that side or you lived on the other side and went to school on that side but now there’s only one school and I think that’s great because it means that all children get the same opening to the community" (Sports association)

Another respondent talks about the school, which also hosts the library. The school is also connected to “Storsjöhallen”, a recreational centre with indoor swimming pool and place for culture activities. While the school and its combination with the municipal public recreational services is described as something positive, a school is at the basic level of what a municipality is legally bound to offer. The school was also one of the things that lay under the neighbourhood council until the shutdown in 2014 and is now part of the school council for all of the municipality. What the respondents describe about there being one (1) school, it is a part of a re-organisation. So, while the school in itself according to the respondents is well working and have developed in a positive direction, it doesn’t necessarily counter the overall narrative that there has been a decline in services.

This is in parallel with the narrative of a clear separation from Umeå and a continuously shrinking public sector in the community. It contains a retraction of public services such as lack of police presence but also the centralization of decision-making. During one of the group interviews one of the older respondents talked about the library in Holmsund and that there was period a while ago were it felt like everything was getting transferred into the city, meaning Umeå, for instance the seaside bathe that got moved to a lake within Umeå city. A statement that the others agreed with. This suggests a construction of Holmsund as the periphery being left behind, which in continuation also constructs the city Umeå as the modernity that attracts the facilities from other parts of the municipality.

Another respondent who hosts integrative activities where immigrants and natives can meet, tells about how they use the library as a facility. Although the library is owned by the municipality, it is the association who volunteer and make sure that there are activities happening and people coming to them. They do get some help from the librarians but mostly
because the librarians themselves seem to find integration and the voluntary associations work important, not that it is an official request from the municipality. One of the respondents who among other things hosts musical events, adds on to the narrative by describing that when it comes to culture activities it doesn’t feel like Holmsund is a place that the municipality of Umeå prioritizes. This further adds to the narration of a separation between Holmsund and Umeå. While not being a resident of Holmsund, the respondent believes that the population in Holmsund has accepted that one has to go to Umeå for certain activities such as going out or going for a concert.

During the interview with the Church, the shutdown of the neighbourhood council also came up, and a description of the lack of presence from the municipality.

“people are engaged and they protest when there is something happening that they don’t think is good at the same time you are also used to feeling that the municipality officials are far away and that you have to do it yourself, there’s a state of mind that if don’t do ourselves it won’t happen at all [...] the paradox with the feeling of the municipality being far away and this resulting in doing things yourself is that it can enhance the feeling of the municipality being far away” (Church)

This narration both describe a sense of being peripheral and not prioritized by the municipality, but also that within that community that feels that is it is been left behind; there is an enhanced identification with the community because of that feeling. It becomes a shared identification based on a perceived shared reality. This narration also seems to suggest that shared identification also leads to collective action, both to create activated but also to re-store what are perceived to have been removed.

An identification with Holmsund rather than Umeå also shows in the narratives about collaboration among associations. One of the respondents from one of the sport associations mentions that the tone and attitude is not always the greatest when they had to decide on a time schedule for using the sport hall in Holmsund, because there are too few time-slots which leads to everyone wanting the same time-slots. The respondent continues to add that this is not really the associations’ in Holmsund fault but rather a result of limited space of sport halls caused by the politics in the municipality.
3.2 Overarching thematic narratives

3.2.1 Roles of civil society in Holmsund

Part of the narrative concerning the roles of the civil society centres around a purposive recreation for young people, in order to both keep them away from destructive activities but also to strengthen them as individuals. Several other narratives build to a narrative the civil society works as an extra social safety-net in addition to the one provided through the welfare state, and not just for young people but for multiple groups that are more vulnerable than others. This narrative also connects to Holmsund as a place.

The respondent who is active in a culture association explicitly described that part of the reasons of starting up their activities in Holmsund was to offer activities for young people, so they wouldn’t involve alcohol. In the municipalities’ youth recreation centres there is an upper age limit in order to avoid mixing the young people that can buy alcohol with the other kids who cannot. It also contains the parts of the relation towards both the municipality of Umeå and Umeå, relating to wanting to create activities in the local area. The common thread is to offer the young people of Holmsund other things to do because there seem to be a general agreement that otherwise some kids would partake in things that are destructive and dangerous. Through offering activities, they also know that they have more impact than just letting kids play a sport, one of the respondents adds about civil society as something that offers security.

“well we have a social safety net through our tax money but somehow is the contribution by the civil society as a social safety net also very important”
(Integrative association)

Several of the respondents relates the young participants involvement with ‘learning’ and ‘practicing’, both in relation to kids that maybe come from a troubled background as well as kids with stable background. One of the respondents from the voluntary association that hosts integrative activities but is also active in other associations, describes that engagement in an association can be a way for a kid to get a reference point for how things actually should be and how to treat other people; and as leaders there is an on-going task to see and how to look out for the kids that maybe doesn’t come from a stable background. Part of this also seem to be connected with an acknowledgement that Holmsund isn’t a homogenous community, the respondents acknowledge that there is inequality within the community as well. Which also part of how they construct their importance within the community. Commitment is another thing that is brought up, that kids get to learn to stick to what they say that they should do. Another respondent describes that the regularity and multiple number of practices and games is beneficial for some kids because it creates a structure in life that they don’t have otherwise.

This narrative is reinforced by stories by both respondents from the sports associations when describing how they handle a situation where a kid can’t pay the fees. Both describe how this is solved one way or another, either that the association can offer a lower fee or that the kid can
always participate in other things as a payment, for example cleaning. They feel that it is important for these kids to participate in the association, regardless if they can pay or not. That the activities are taking part in Holmsund rather than Umeå is also described as a factor for including as many as possible.

To learn to respect each other and listen to other people is also a part of what the respondent describes as something that young people get to practice when being a part of a voluntary association. Even if focus is on children, many of the respondents talk in more general terms. Both respondents that are active as leaders in sports association talked about the importance of the kids enjoying the sport and being part of the team, focusing on competing when they are older. This is also part of the narrative that civil society is a place for learning how to interact and respect others because it shows that the social activities and the community creating becomes something very important. It is about learning to be a part of something bigger than yourself. Other respondents also express more literally that the civil society is a forum to learn the basics of democracy, to listen to each other, respecting each other and understanding that different people have different background which results in different views on things; as well as to learn that there are rules to democracy. One of them also continues on community creation and that the sense of belonging also results in knowledge about the possibility of collective action.

“We are strong together… if we work together regarding this issue and work for it together we are much stronger… there’s no I in team and that makes you have faith in democracy” (Church)

The narrative about the roles of civil society in Holmsund is also connected to the civil society not being the state but filling some of the roles that is either expected from the state or roles that the state used to have. Part of this are the stories about the importance of recreational activated for young people along with the narration of Holmsund being separated from Umeå. There is both an expectancy about what the state and the municipality should offer but also the feeling of not getting the same amount of support as within the city of Umeå.

From one respondent this becomes clear when it comes to the issue of integration. The organization that works with integrative activities describes their own activities, but also other activities that other associations or organization provide for refugees which is told with sense that it is them and not the municipality that provides integrative services. Another respondent describes sports as the perfect way for people that are new to Sweden to get introduced and become a part of the Swedish society. One of the leaders in one of the sports association describes that as leader they have to take another position in relation to the kids that have come to Sweden as unaccompanied minor, because the association and personnel at the school are the only support system and social safety-net those kids have. The respondent that is active in the culture association talks about this in these terms.
“At times of crisis you notice that it is often the civil society that step up to the plate and becomes involved [...] and what part has done more in order to assimilate young refugees, is it governments efforts or the sports associations... parallel society is maybe not the correct term but it becomes a society right next to the society when these official institutions stop working because there used to be a connection” (Culture association)

3.2.2 Democracy and participation in Holmsund

All of the narratives here tell a story about democracy and participation in Holmsund when they are put together. This is constructed both through the activeness of the associations and organizations and what they provide for the people living in Holmsund but also through their stories about what they want Holmsund to be and what role they want their engagement to fill.

When considering both the narrative about presence of civil society along with the narrative surrounding reason of engagement, it constructs a community where civic engagement and agency is encouraged and in a way that includes the collective of that community. There is a care about the other people living in the same area and a will for people living there to be active. This is also evident through the narration of the role of civil society, for the respondent there is more to it then offering activities. Civil society is also a seen by the respondents as a way to ease tension within Holmsund, which several of the respondents talks about. The respondents hosting the integrative activities talk about how it hasn’t been all smooth sailings, and that there has been racism directed towards the group of refugees from other inhabitants in Holmsund but that they, the respondents, have worked together to improve the situation. Through their work they believe that it can ease the tension by letting people meet each other but also because voluntary associations have rules and norms for how things are organized, that persuades people to listen to each other and have respect for one another. The number of people active in associations and the variance among the voluntary associations also is a part of this narrative.

Through all the narratives there is a connection to Holmsund, they are constructed in relation to the place Holmsund. The narratives show a care for a community, and while that community at times is the people active in the same association; there is also a construction of Holmsund as a community that the respondents care for and want the best for. While there is an acknowledgement of a more general role of civil society in the rest of society, it is the role for Holmsund that are brought forward by the respondents.

Another part of this overarching narrative is how the respondents talk about what they want Holmsund to be, and that is something that comes up throughout the interviews and in the different narratives. There is a constant acknowledgement of the importance of service, culture and recreation, both the public provide by the municipality but also what is provided by the civil society. It is important to offer activities to the inhabitants of Holmsund, but their own personal engagement is also important for all of the respondents. This is both expressed through the description of the civil society as a safety-net for young people living in Holmsund and that
when there are major events happening and the state seems unable to handle; it falls to the civil society. It is also expressed through the stories about more every-day situations when civil society becomes a way to provide recreation for kids and adults in the local area.

“...we assume that studying or work is the most influential when people migrate or chose where to live but I think recreation and culture is at least as important” (Culture association)

Together the narratives tell a story about an active community with participating citizens, and citizens that see to collective and the community; which circles around Holmsund and their civic engagement. Through the voluntary association and their own civic engagement, the respondents construct a community which is connected to Holmsund, but also a community that is built around an aspiration to create a community based on equality. It is not a narrative just based on that there seem to be a lot of people in Holmsund that are active in different parts of civil society, it is rather based on the description of which roles that the respondents describe themselves to have through their voluntary associations. The respondents are concerned with Holmsund being a community that creates a secure and rewarding environment, and when they feel that the municipality is not providing it; they do it themselves. This also involves certain values that are more frequently described than others in the narratives, or some values that are given extra importance through the narratives. These values centres on inclusiveness within the community but an inclusiveness that is built on equality. They see that civil society can be a part in creating a secure and rewarding environment for everyone, regardless of starting-point.
4. Discussion

Through the thematic narratives that are identified in the interviews with these voluntary association in Holmsund, there is a perception of their own role and also what they identify as civil society as something that has a significant presence in Holmsund; and that role is also important in their construction of Holmsund. Holmsund is constructed by them as a place where civil society has a natural place, but also as a community that looks out for each other and the voluntary associations has a part in that caring. This importance and the roles are enhanced by Holmsund being constructed as rural context in relation to Umeå, which a decline and especially a centralization of service to Umeå is a part of. The local context becomes an identifying factor and a common interest. Connected to this, parts of what the voluntary associations provides are services for the rest of the community. Sometimes narrated as an explicit reaction to the public not providing it but mainly as a way to improve Holmsund, to counteract consequences of inequality.

Through this Holmsund becomes a place that is connected to civic engagement and civil society, which is also given a historical context. These narratives are enhanced by setting a historical context of a significant presences and important role of civil society in Holmsund. This is both connected how a community narrate their own stories as way to strengthen that specific community (Toolis, 2017) but also there’s continuous reproduction of social norms connected to the engagement in voluntary associations (Putnam et al., 1992). Civic engagement has a close connection to democracy, and not just the organization of the state, but also in a radical understanding of democracy (Rivano Eckerdal, 2012). Through these narrative citizens agency as well as civic engagement are constructed as something that is important in their construction of Holmsund. Equality, participation and caring in the community are all given importance to by the respondents, and it is connected to the role of the voluntary associations. Democracy both becomes something that is part of their construction of Holmsund, but also in their narration of what the voluntary association actually does in the community; even if not explicitly expressed it is common thread that comes forward in the interviews.

The narrative ‘presence of civil society’ lays the base for all of the other because what the narrative mainly illustrates is the extent to the presence of civil society in Holmsund, and it is a significant presence. A significance constructed both through the sheer numbers of voluntary associations and people active in them but also through the importance that is described by the respondents. Putnam et al. (1992) emphasises both a quantitative aspect meaning a high number of voluntary associations as well as engaged individuals but also inhabitants that are active participants in public issue and show caring for the collective when describing ‘civic community’. The community that the respondents construct through their narratives connects a lot to what Putnam et al. (1992) describes as a ‘civic community’. It is also a community that seems to extend beyond their own respective association, because one of the things that are brought up as important aspects are their roles towards the children and young people in Holmsund. This consist of creating a safe and rewarding environment for all the children and young people in Holmsund, but also the acknowledgment that there are several adult leaders whose presence is known to many children and young people; which also seem to have
established trust with many of them. The respondents both construct civil society as being active and a significant part of Holmsund, but also that they have an important role in creating a community which care about each other. This significance also constructs Holmsund as a ‘civic community’ (Putnam et al, 1992).

Part of this main narrative is almost a sort of counter-narrative, but mostly a contradiction within the narrative, concerning the increasing hardship to involve and engage more people. Some of the respondents talk about it on a local level, mostly concerning a decrease in parents being leaders for teams but there is also a connection to a societal level coming from the respondents. That there has been an overall shift in society to going from being focused on the collective to focus on the individual. It is also put in relationship to what some informants perceived how the civil society used to be in Holmsund, and there used to be ‘glory-days’ and that there isn’t anymore. Despite this the main narrative is still focused on a significant presence, because paralleled with these stories are the stories where the respondents describe active participants and functioning associations. There is still a large share of children active in voluntary associations in Holmsund, and just among the voluntary associations that have been interviewed there is a range of when they started up their activities. One of them has only been active around one and half year. Kings (2011), Nilsson & Listerborn (2015) and Amnå (2008) all describe that the general story being told about civic engagement and civil society in Sweden is that it is decreasing. There has rather been a shift in how people choses to organize when they do partake in the civil society. People are less active in traditional forms of voluntary associations but in addition new forms of organization has formed. This is also reflected in one of the respondents’ story about how there seem to be a gap in knowledge among young people, that instead of forming an association in order to be granted money they find other ways to finance the activities that they want to do. Amnå (2008) also describe that even though there are new forms to organizing, these new forms still seem to follow the ideals that have carried the popular movements. Mainly the ideals of socialization (Amnå, 2008).

In the narrative about the presence of civil society in Holmsund but also in the following narrative about reasons of engagement it also becomes apparent if civil society in Holmsund produces service or voice, in accordance to the division that Kings (2011) presented. The respondents tell a story about a civil society which mostly produces services, although ranging from a focus on members and inhabitants of Holmsund to inhabitants in the whole municipality of Umeå. It is both services in the form of offering kids to practice a sport or playing music and also providing a social context which aims for stability for the young people. Aside from the overall contributions to an active community and some minor references, there is no narration of the civil society producing a voice for their member nor the inhabitants of Holmsund. There is the willingness to improve society, but that is not resulting in producing voice. This can of course also be because of the types of associations that were interviewed, but also the geographical level. That the voice producing associations and organizations are usually more active on a greater geographical scale, mainly national level (Kings, 2011).

The division between service and voice is also used by Kings (2011) as a form of indicator. Kings (2011) argument is that the increase of service-producing in civil society can work as an
indicator for a decrease in service elsewhere, and in a Swedish context that mainly entails decrease of public service. The reasoning behind ‘every-day organizing’ also builds further on this, a decrease of public service means increasing inequality; which enhance the identification with the local area and the people there and in order to maintain the service level people work together to retain it (Kings, 2011). All of the respondents interviewed talk about a decline in service, private as well as public, in Holmsund and throughout places Holmsund as rural context; especially in relation to Umeå.

Holmsund’s peripheral position is argued for in relation Umeå being the centre. Just as Umeå as part of Norrland is also the periphery in relation to the rest of Sweden (Eriksson, 2010). Continuing the argument of scale, Holmsund could also be argued to be more of a suburb to Umeå or even a part of the city, if compared to other more rural parts of Västerbotten. Yet the narratives of the respondents still place the municipality of Umeå as far away, with better public service. Another part of it is the shutting down of the neighbourhood council for Holmsund-Obbola and with it the presence of municipality officials is personnel either working in the school or with elderly care. Even if the inhabitants can visit the same services in Umeå, there has been a physical retraction of the welfare state in Holmsund.

Because of the interconnectedness of the narratives this also concerns the role that civil society in Holmsund is given by the respondents. The socialization which is part of the traditional ideals of the popular movement (Amnå, 2008) is a part of this role. It is present in the narration of how being on a team can provide both much needed structure for some children, but also as a context where all kids can learn teamwork. It is present in the narration of the relationship of trust between adult team leaders and kids from all of Holmsund. It is present in the description of voluntary association as a way to learn how to listen and respect each other. The respondents construct a community that look out for each other and where people are included, and where the civil society is a natural part of that. Part of that role is constructed in relation to the public no longer providing that.

Through the narratives especially surrounding decline of services and the separation from Umeå it becomes noticeable that the public sector and service at time feel far away when one has to go to the municipality of Umeå; and that the civil society fills some of that distance. It is at times explicitly expressed by the respondents, for example with the culture association whose reason for having the activities in Holmsund was connected to a sense of it not being prioritized by the municipality. The church narrates it in a similar fashion, that when the municipality doesn’t deliver the community steps in. This common feeling of being a periphery, seems to serve as the focal point of organizing. In similarity with what Kings (2011) describe about Tensta and Rinkeby, parts of civil society provide service that eases every-day life. It also connects to what Meyer, Thörn & Thörn (2016) describe about collective action as a scale of protesting against inequality. The narrative of a peripheral position, which is present in all of the interviews, and thereby a shared material and social reality, seems to create an identification within the local community; and a need to counteract the material effects of that peripheral position (Mitchell, 2000; Eriksson, 2010). It is also connected to both what Putnam et al (1992) describe about a civic community but also place attachment (Toolis, 2017).
attachment seems to be enhanced by a civic community, but a civic community also seems to be enhanced place attachment.

In Holmsund, the historical context is also of importance. As mentioned previously the respondents constructs the history about civil society in Holmsund as active and influential, which is also what Ambjörnsson (2001) argues for. Putnam et al. (1992) describes that through the associations the rules and norms get reproduced. Toolis (2017) also describe how the common narrative a community has for itself helps to remind them of their shared ideals but also increase their sense of belonging to a place. Part of that historical context as described by Ambjörnsson (2001), and in line with the reasons of the popular movements; are the acts of resistance. It might be most easily associated to the labour movements because of its direct political conflicts as well as conflicts with the employer, but resistance is there in all of the popular movements (Kings, 2011). One of the respondents also talks about how there is almost a collective memory in Holmsund out of the consequences of not working together as collective in the community, that today’s general wealth is connected to collective action. Castells (1984) describe that space doesn’t only express and perform the interests of power but will also be marked by resistance from the oppressed. If space is to be understood as social process (Massey, 1994), it is not only space that is affected by human action, but human action is also affected by space. One way is that through sense of place, space shapes people (Baars, 2014). Among the respondents there are clear attachment to the place Holmsund, and that sense of place seems to include the identification with collective action and civic engagement. This seem to be further enhanced by narration of Holmsund’s peripheral position in relation to Umeå, and the sense of not being prioritized by the municipality. It is the common interest of the local community that is acted upon, and a local community which is very tied to the sense of place.

Parts of the interviews covered democracy and the role that civil society play in the creation of a democratic society. The respondents all acknowledge that civil society is vital to democracy, and some expressed mainly through describing voluntary association as a way for mainly young people to practice how democracy works. Which is also what Putnam et al. (1992) describes about the effects on members the internal work in association has, that it teaches them solidarity and to work with others. In a wider perspective, in a sense that democracy concerns agency and civic engagement (Riviano Eckerdal, 2012), all of these thematic narratives concern democracy. The understanding of democracy is central to this discussion, democracy is not only about the political power through general elections it also concerns power over other aspects of life. In the radical understanding of democracy this is expressed through citizen’s agency and their civic engagement towards the public good, the level of agency and civic engagement democratizes society. This also include equality and the right to equal opportunities because it increases citizens agency. While many of the narratives concerns how to create a safe environment for kids in Holmsund, and especially to create stability for kids that doesn’t have much stability, is connected to a care for the community that the respondent sees as Holmsund; the socialization part of civil society concerns democracy.
A more direct variation of this is describe by Nilsson and Listerborn (2015) when stating that collective action is the best way to influence not only politics but also life in society over all. Like all social process there is a spatial dimension to it, and also affected by space. The place Holmsund gets connected to civic engagement through the respondents’ narratives, and it has become so through the agency and the civic engagement of the inhabitants which in turn produces a sense of place that is shaped by democracy.

5.1 Limitations and Further studies

There are of course some limitations with this study, and what it can say. A qualitative approach is concerned with the specific and although this doesn’t mean that one cannot draw a bigger picture, but with a low number of respondents and with a very specific geographical area; it is hard to conclude and say anything that is outside that specific group in that area. This study mainly says things about how people active in voluntary associations in Holmsund perceive their social reality, connected to their engagement in a voluntary association. It also means that it is more dependent on the person doing the analysis, then with a quantitative approach. My own situated knowledge plays a part in this study, and because of this it is important to be reflective about one’s own position. The limitations to what this study can say also means that it is harder to connect what takes place in this local context to a more structural perspective. These are the restraints to this methodology to this study.

It is the structural perspective of civil society as an actor of countering increasing inequality that would be interesting to study further, both in rural context but also in urban context; and especially the similarities in between specific rural contexts and specific urban contexts. Basically, how does the civil society functions in area which aren’t prosperous in a neo-liberal economy. It would also be interesting to study how the civil society functions in areas that are prosperous, if civil society has another function then providing service.

5. Conclusions

In a short conclusion, voluntary associations perceive their role as important but also as a part of Holmsund. The rural and local context becomes an identifying factor and also a common interest. Civil society, through these voluntary association, become a part of identifying with Holmsund but also as a reaction to increasing inequality. Increasing inequality also seem to become a part of the rural context.

Through their narration the respondents construct Holmsund as place that is connected and shaped by a significant presence of civil society, and that it has become so through a historical context but also because of rural position that enhances the identification with the local. The significant presence of civil society also constructs a community that cares for each other, a community which shows solidarity and at times counteracts effects of inequality; all of which is connected to democratic ideals.
Appendix 1.

Interview guide

*Kopplad till plats*
Berätta om Holmsund?
Lokalen?
År deltagarna boende i området?

*Allmänt/Föreningen*
Beskriv verksamhet?
Vilka deltar i verksamheten?
Civilsamhället i Holmsund?
Hur har verksamheten utvecklats?

*Demokrati*
Demokrati
Hur ser ni på föreningars/organisationers roll i ett demokratiskt samhälle?
Vad betyder föreningens engagemanget för er?
Vad har er verksamhet för betydelse i Holmsund?

*Service*
Varför söker sig människor till er förening?
Varför blev ni själva engagerade i föreningen? Vad drivs ert engagemang av?
Vad tror ni föreningen/aktiviteterna betyder för de som deltar, eller andra som engagerar sig?
Hur ser ni på framtiden?
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