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Precarious leisure in a teenage wasteland? Intertwining discourses on responsibility and girls' place-making in rural Northern Sweden

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ABSTRACT

The relationship with place has been recognized as a significant dimension of rural youth leisure, both through the discursive constructions of place, but also as affective and embodied dimensions. This study captures these processes by applying the concept of place-making as a set of recurrent discursive processes, analyzing how girls in Northern Sweden engage in place-making alongside, beyond, and in contrast to dominant discourses on leisure, rurality and wellbeing. The study draws on data from photo-elicited focus groups with girls from two sports organizations. The discursive psychology analysis resulted in three interpretative repertoires. The first repertoire describes the sharp contrast between discourses of the 'rural dull' and how stressful the participants constructed their own places of leisure. The second illustrates the gendered discourses around what is considered to be productive and respectable leisure. The third shows how the participants are made responsible for the survival of their leisure. Through place-making, the participants shape places of leisure, affecting both themselves and their rural community. They engage in, conform to, and challenge place-making within discourses of responsibility and precariousness, creating space for their own initiatives, which are simultaneously shaped by the material conditions under which these practices take place.

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The atmosphere is relaxed in the clubhouse. Snacks and soft drinks. A couple of girls are chilling on the couch. We talk for hours about everything and nothing. I ask what they like about the club. They describe the community, how they feel they belong to the place. They have their best friends here. One answers, 'we just come and hang out, there are no demands, and you don't have to achieve anything, as long as you do your tasks.' I ask who is in charge, and who decides what needs to be done. The answer is 'we do … we're the ones who run this place.' (Field notes from observation at the equestrian club by the first author)

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Introduction

Leisure is an important domain of life, shaping the health and wellbeing of both adults and young people (Denovan and Macaskill 2017). Studies have emphasized the importance of leisure in relation to coping with stress in youth (Park and Kim 2018), positive youth development (Bruner et al. 2017) and defining positive mental health (Hall, McKinstry, and Hyett 2016). In this article, we draw upon findings from a previous study on social factors of young people's mental health, civic engagement and collective responses to stressors within the context of leisure participation (Gotfredsen, Goicolea, and Landstedt 2020). The participants emphasized the role of the rural locale and discursively constructed places of leisure in relation to health and wellbeing. The present study extends these findings by further exploring the discursive constructions of spaces of leisure among rural young people engaged in organized leisure activities.

Just as time has been identified as an important part of leisure (e.g. free time and discretionary time), so is spatiality (Glover 2017; Johnson and Glover 2013). Massey (1998, p. 128) describes how (leisure-related) social spaces also

> order the population in terms of age by defining what spaces particular age groups are allowed in (e.g. playgrounds, cinemas and pubs) and how this control of spatiality is part of the process of defining the social category of 'youth' itself.

We understand leisure and participation in leisure as encompassing concepts such as 'games, stories, discussions, eating, drinking, moving, painting, playing, making music, reading and watching things' (Spracklen et al. 2017, p. 10).

In line with Farrugia (2014), we argue that the perspectives of young people in rural areas have been missing from research on youth leisure. Such research often describes leisure in relation to (urban) culture and symbolic practices (Thorpe 2012; Smith 2013) or as important for young people's process of (safely) becoming adults, where leisure has mainly been recognized if organized and provided by adults (Beniwal 2018; Quarmby, Sandford, and Pickering 2019). This reveals the need for a more nuanced analysis of youth leisure, especially concerning adult-led organized leisure, which is not by default positive for young people's health and wellbeing (Fullagar and Brown 2003).

Responding to the limited literature in this area, we acknowledge that, just as urban youth leisure holds multiple elements of subcultures, so does rural youth leisure (see for example Haartsen and Strijker (2010) on the Dutch *Keten*; King and Church (2013) on mountain biking and Lægran (2002) on rural technospaces). We argue that more attention should be given to social places of leisure that young people create themselves, and the effort this requires, especially in rural areas (Gotfredsen, Goicolea, and Landstedt 2020).

Leisured time and place

We are inspired by Massey's (2005) understanding of space as a relational, social and material process that is constantly constructed and co-constituted through social interactions. Given the focus on social interactions, language is central to this formation (Stokowski 2002). Through language, social groups engaging in leisure activities develop particularistic meanings of activity, norms of behavior and collective identities (Stokowski 2002; Kyle and Chick 2007). However, these meanings, emotions and practices are shaped

within particular places and therefore performed (Dunkley 2009). To capture this process, we apply the concept of *place-making* (Benson and Jackson 2013) as a set of articulated and recurrent discursive processes and practices, narrating collective understandings of place. The process of place-making occurs beneath verbally expressed interpretations of material place as sensed, emotive and experimental (Waite 2018). At the same time, a transformational role for space is envisioned, including the aims of changing material realities, social capacities and narratives (McEvoy-Levy 2012).

It is important to note that inequalities are also spatial (Farrugia 2015; Massey 2001). Leisure is a space where power is negotiated, contested, resisted and achieved along intersecting axes of inequality, and through everyday actions and behavior (Pierce, Martin, and Murphy 2011; Sharpe 2017; Watson and Scraton 2013). Feminist leisure scholars emphasize the importance of gender analyses since leisure is a site for the reproduction of gendered relations of power, as well as resistance to them (Mansfield et al. 2018; Skeggs 1999). This includes women's (lack of) access to safe leisure spaces (Green and Singleton 2006), and leisure as a new arena of consumption and gender regulations, such as competitive femininity and the self-fulfilling Do-It-Yourself Girl (Heywood 2007; McRobbie 2015). In line with this discussion and for the argument of this paper, the concept of *precarious leisure* (Batchelor et al. 2020) holds a central position, describing how young people nowadays have come to fear 'empty' and unproductive time, and instead see leisure as an investment in the future. 'Free time' should now be geared towards employability through activities such as 'CV-building', networking and developing skills that will be relevant in a precarious future labor market (Batchelor et al. 2020). However, precariousness does not only relate to time, but 'is a function of spatial vulnerability' (Johnston 2018, p. 934) and feminist geography has contributed to exploring not only what, but also where precarity is within themes of, for example, employment, geopolitics, disasters and health and wellbeing (Johnston 2018).

From a gender perspective, leisure becomes another space of consumption, constituting an added site of responsibility where the ideals of competitive femininity can be incorporated and reproduced, through the praising of girls' development of skills, strength, health, self-confidence and independence (Heywood 2007; McRobbie 2015; Fullagar 2013).

Rural places of leisure

A sense of place has been recognized as a significant dimension of rural young people's subjectivities, both through their perceptions, images and discursive constructions of their local place and also as affective and embodied dimensions (Yarwood 2005; Farrugia 2016). In rural contexts, youth leisure has mainly been discussed in relation to substance use (Pettigrew et al. 2012), equal access to sports and physical activity (Casey et al. 2016; Roult et al. 2014), positive youth development (Sharp et al. 2014) and partially to spatiality (Haartsen and Strijker 2010; Tonts and Atherley 2010). Research has revealed that dualistic discourses dominate the notion of 'the rural place' (Woods 2005). For young people, the rural place is beautiful and peaceful, yet simultaneously boring and isolated. It represents freedom and independence (within adult regulation), but also dependency, for example, due to being reliant on adults for transportation (Woods 2005; Leyshon 2008; Powell, Taylor, and Smith 2013;

Rönnlund 2019). As Leyshon (Leyshon 2008, p. 2) writes, young people's attachments to the countryside are 'characterized by conflicting feelings of belonging, longing, ambivalence and abhorrence'. Although a shared rural identity can be produced by young people as a way to distinguish their experiences from those of their urban counterparts, identities and places are socially and historically contingent, fluid and changing, reflecting the need to challenge reductive binary categories such as urban/rural and inclusion/exclusion (Power, Norman, and Dupré 2014). Further, factors related to rural economic and social restructuring both enable and disable inclusion for rural young people in terms of different times and spaces and due to their varying mobility across social and spatial boundaries (Waite 2018; Leyshon 2008). Similarly, young people construct and make use of different physical, psychological and digital spaces in which leisure becomes a moving and fluid concept (Abbott-Chapman and Robertson 2009; Sparrman 2019).

Young people might see 'rural boredom' as a challenge to overcome, and that carving out space for recreation, play, and social vitality in rural contexts relies on the agency and capacity of the individual (Gotfredsen, Goicolea, and Landstedt 2020; Leyshon 2008; Powell, Taylor, and Smith 2013). Previous research has highlighted how such creative practices deployed by young people are used as strategies to negotiate structural constraints and create spaces of their own (Massey 1998; Woodman and Leccardi 2015). However, according to Woods (2005), leisure often needs to be constructed in certain ways (e.g. adult-supervised, organized and sports-oriented) in order to be perceived as beneficial to the rural community.

With this paper, we address the knowledge gap identified by Waite (2018) on how young people's place-making projects in non-urban areas are an under-researched topic, especially in relation to their mental health. Dominant discursive understandings of place and rurality play a role in young people's place-making and the social relations that define place (Waite 2018; Massey 1991). In other words, place-making practices allow for certain places of youth leisure to be materially and discursively constituted, with the potential to make everyday spaces of leisure health-enabling for both individuals and communities (Bell et al. 2018). At the same time, places of leisure now also reflect the precariousness in young people's lives, where leisure participation is perceived as an investment that should preferably generate new competencies relevant for one's future (Batchelor et al. 2020). The aim of this study is therefore to unpack these different discourses on the leisure place-making practices of rural youth. By using a discursive psychology approach, we analyze the interaction and negotiation of discourses of girls participating in leisure organizations in rural Norrland.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Northern Sweden, an area called Norrland[1] which covers more than half the country but is inhabited by only about 12% of the total population (Statistics Sweden 2017). Data were collected by the first author between October 2017 and December 2018. The data used in this study was taken from a larger corpus of data collected for an ethnographic research project on young people's mental health and leisure (Gotfredsen, Goicolea, and Landstedt 2020).

Participants and data collection

The recruitment process started when the first author contacted a number of organizations providing leisure activities for young people in rural municipalities in Norrland. Two sports organizations within equestrianism and ballgames expressed interest in participating and were chosen for the study. Information meetings were arranged for the young people in the organizations, their caregivers and other adults (e.g. coaches). At these meetings, written and verbal information about the researchers, the study and the research procedure, including ethical considerations and approval were provided. Those among the young people who were interested in participating in the study later contacted the first author. In total, 16 girls from the two organizations agreed to participate. Five of the participants (aged 14–17) belonged to an equestrian club, located in a small rural town in the inland area of Norrland. The other 11 participants were aged between 14 and 21 and were members of a ballgame club in a different municipality to the equestrian group. The average age of the participants from both organizations was 16 years.

The participants were quite homogenous in terms of social positions, such as gender identity, social class and racialization. The girls had the financial ability to participate in leisure activities, with supportive family members helping out with logistics. In addition, many of them also had the possibility to moving to the city to go to a preferred school, signaling access to certain resources needed for this mobility. This mobility also reflected an embodied position as non-disabled, which also gave them access to various places of leisure. Although some had experiences of racialization, most of the participants were born in Sweden and spoke Swedish, which inevitably results in the exclusion of perspectives of marginalization.

We decided to undertake focus groups to capture what Wilkinson (1998) describes as the social context and interaction between the participants. This type of social interaction creates data suitable for a detailed discursive analysis (Goodman and Burke 2010). Three focus groups were conducted with the equestrian club (with four or five of the participants present during each interview). Six focus groups were conducted with the ballgame organization (the team was divided into three groups, with each group conducting two rounds of interviews). The focus groups lasted around 50–60 min on average and were moderated by the first author.

The open-ended questions guiding the focus groups touched upon different aspects of leisure, such as the participants' engagement in their sports organizations, positive and negative aspects of leisure and collective responses to stressors. The interviews took place in a secluded place at the location of each organization, and the first author later transcribed the recorded audio files verbatim.

Ethical considerations

The participants received information both verbally and in written form about the study's purpose, our research procedure, and the confidentiality of the collected data. Informed consent was obtained at the time of data collection. Parental consent was also collected for participants under the age of 15. Ethical approval was obtained from the Regional Ethics Committee in Umeå, Sweden (2016, 466-31).

Data analysis

The analysis was performed by all authors, although led by the first author. We applied a discursive psychology approach, using the discursive strategy of interpretative repertoires (Wetherell and Potter 1992; Goodman 2017) to enable a reconstruction of the young people's everyday experiential and discursive place-making practices in these rural areas. In discursive psychology, language is not seen as communicating a pre-existing psychological reality based on experience; rather, subjective psychological realities are constituted through discourse: situated language used in everyday texts and talk (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002). Interpretative repertoires, as defined by Wetherell and Potter (Wetherell and Potter 1992), are discernible clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech, often assembled around metaphors or vivid images which constitute the building blocks used for manufacturing versions of actions, the self and social structures in talk.

The transcripts were first to read several times in order to identify what is being accomplished in the data – the action orientation of the text (Goodman 2017) – in relation to the aim of the study. From the repetitive patterns of action orientation, we constructed the interpretative repertoires from the social interactions in the focus groups as 'what everyone knows' or the 'out there' concepts demonstrated to be performing actions (Goodman 2017; Jorgensen and Phillips 2002). By doing so, the purpose was to capture emerging nuances embedded in the material regarding understandings and meanings associated with rural places of leisure.

Findings and discussion

The participants were engaged in multiple place-making practices, both within their own leisure organization and in other places represented as important in relation to leisure and wellbeing. From the analysis of their talk in the focus groups, we constructed three interpretative repertoires that both reveal the reproduction of dominant discourses on rural places, and highlight frictions and oppositions found in girls' place-making practices.

Mental overload in a 'teenage wasteland'

The first interpretative repertoire mirrors the dominant discourse of the rural environment as a dull place (Leyshon 2008), a 'teenage wasteland' offering nothing for young people in terms of things to do. This is exemplified in the following extracts where Lisa, Malin, Maria and Weronika from the equestrian club talk about how it is to be young in a rural town (extract A), followed by extract B with Vanessa from the ballgame club.

Extract A with Lisa, Malin, Weronika and Maria (equestrians):

1. Lisa: Well, there's not much going on here … you don't see a lot of people
2. Malin: There's really not much to do here
3. Maria: Really not much to do for young people
4. Weronika: So either we hang out at the [equestrian] club going 'what
5. should we do?' (laughs)
6. Lisa: Or we hang out at the club eating
7. Weronika: Or cruising around in the car[2]

8. Lisa: And when we go cruising, we always start here [at the club]
9. Lisa: We always meet here

Extract B with Vanessa (ballgame):

1. Everything feels so … claustrophobic … I mean, there *are* things to do
2. but yet, it feels like 'we have nothing to do!'
3. it's really like that … like a dead shoe box
4. you don't want to hang out at ICA and Konsum [local grocery stores] all
5. evening

The place-making practices seen in these extracts construct rural leisure spaces in line with dominant discourses of rural places as dead (extract B, line 3), claustrophobic (extract B, line 1), sparsely populated (extract A, line 1) and with few or no activities for young people (extract A, lines 2–3). It also illustrates a shared understanding, and a 'taken-for-granted-knowledge' (Erlandsson, Lundin, and Punzi 2016) of what young people want and need, in terms of having 'things to do', without having to further explain what this means. This repertoire also reflects how the interpretations of material place are sensed and emotive (Waite 2018). As Vanessa describes it, even though there are things to do in terms of leisure, the feeling is that 'we have nothing to do' (extract B, lines 1–2), and 'it's really like that' (extract B, line 3). This extract further illustrates the powerful discourse of the dull rural locality where even the local grocery stores are considered as possible places for spending leisure time (extract B, lines 4–5). The rural as premodern and regressive, with nothing to offer young people, has been one of the key representations of rurality (Powell, Taylor, and Smith 2013; Rönnlund 2019). However, our findings reveal multiple paradoxical narratives on leisure and leisure activities for young people, contradicting this representation. The participants did mention several places and activities available to young people, such as the local youth club, sports clubs (ice hockey and football), in addition to their own two organizations and the culture of EPA cruising. Their own spaces of leisure (the equestrian and ballgame clubs) required them to practice frequently, such as weekend play-offs, and imposed other responsibilities such as daily tasks at the stables. According to the participants, these practices generated feelings of stress, which challenge the dominant discourse of the rural as a place where young people have nothing to do. This point is explained and exemplified by Erika:

Extract C with Erika (ballgame):

1. There's always something … if we have a game say on Saturday
2. but not on Sunday … then I'm so exhausted
3. I don't have any energy to see anyone on Sunday … I'm just so tired … I just
4. want to rest

The leisure activities in which the participants themselves were engaged are described as taking up all of their time (extract C, line 1), resulting in feelings of exhaustion (extract C, lines 2–4). This illustrates the tensions between how the participants reproduce dominant discourses of rurality as dull while also contrasting them with their own experiences of

leisure as something overwhelming, stressful and demanding. While youth leisure is often discursively constructed as a source of good health, these findings portray a more nuanced picture that underscores how leisure can affect young people's wellbeing in both a positive and a negative direction (Fullagar 2013).

Making a place for responsible leisure

The second repertoire elaborates on the paradox identified in the previous one: young people being busy is not a denial of the representation of rural places as 'wastelands', but a reaction to it – young people do a lot of things to make a place for leisure precisely because the space offers so little fun. Through these discourses, certain places for leisure are constructed as more positive than others for young people's wellbeing, as the following extracts illustrate:

Extract D with Camilla (equestrian):

1. Moderator: What do you think young people who are not doing sports are
2. doing in their leisure time?
3. Camilla: I don't know … probably just sitting at home and being isolated …
4. gaming online maybe

Extract E with Maria (equestrian):

1. I think it's important for young people to … do something … either do sports
2. or a hobby … or some leisure activity

This responsibility for creating places of leisure was constructed in relation to the 'common-sense' idea that (a certain kind of) leisure is positive for young people. Staying inside, at home, gaming and being online were described as less positive (extract D, lines 3–4) in comparison to leisure places outside the home; social places where you can 'do something' (extract E, lines 1–2). However, this 'do[ing] something' clearly does not include just any leisure activity (e.g. online gaming), but has to be perceived as beneficial, such as sports (extract E, line 1). Having something to do, a hobby, sports or participating in some form of leisure is perceived as balancing out the negative effects of social media and isolation (Beniwal 2018; Quarmby, Sandford, and Pickering 2019).

Being busy can be seen as involving youth practices of creating places for leisure, and this place-making is characterized by responsibilities. These responsibilities can be interpreted as value-laden by distinguishing between responsible and irresponsible leisure, representing certain places of leisure as better than others. The local youth club, where young people can spend time after school under the loose supervision of adults, was not constructed as a positive leisure place for young people, as described by Zandra:

Extract F with Zandra (ballgame):

1. There isn't much going on there either [at the youth club], you just sit …
2. with your phone … and that … you might as well do that at home

Even though getting out of the house and meeting others was described as something positive, only certain activities performed in certain places were represented as 'responsible' leisure. In contrast to the youth club stands the image of their own organizations, their 'own youth club', a place for leisure activities but also an important social space to hang out with friends:

Extract G with Camilla (equestrian):

1. It gives me so much to come here … the horses are important
2. but just as important is to see all of my friends … it's like our own youth club
3. except you learn how to be responsible

Extract H with Malin, Weronika, and Camilla (equestrians):

1. Malin: We often have sleepovers here at the club (laughs)
2. Weronika: We always have fun!
3. Malin: Yeah
4. Camilla: And it's pretty free here … you can do whatever you want to … kind of
5. Malin: When we stay and sleep here … it's just like we have our own place

Extracts G and H reflect how the participants construct opportunities for 'responsible' leisure through their place-making practices. They make their own leisure places into something more, something that ranges far beyond the dedicated activities of horseback riding. In addition, these place-making practices are closely related to feelings of freedom, independence and being able to do what you want, as illustrated by Camilla, Malin and Weronika in extract H, lines 4–5. Furthermore, as Camilla stated in extract G, above, the club is like their own youth club 'except that you learn how to be responsible' (line 3). The use of the word 'except' implies that youth clubs, in general, are not perceived as places for leisure where one can learn how to become a responsible young person. In addition, the words 'our own youth club' signal connection with a place, but also responsibility, exclusivity and ownership. Bogar et al. (2018) connect this ownership with the process of place-making in terms of increasing the meaning of, and attachment to, the space, in addition to feelings of responsibility towards the environment. Our analysis shows that positive leisure is constructed through place-making practices both as something social and as something you should do outside your home, in a place where you have friends, but also where you learn how to be responsible, something the participants returned to several times. Responsibility has been described by Skeggs (1997) as one of the key signifiers of respectability, and how women through care and obligations towards others (e.g. familial and voluntary caring) invest in and perform classed and gendered subject positions. When the participants talk about developing responsibility through their leisure activities, they construct (certain) leisure places as spaces where femininity marked by respectability can be developed. In addition, the following extracts illustrate how the participants' place-making practices create leisure as something that cultivates girls and offers them opportunities for self-improvement.

Extract I with Weronika, Lisa, and Malin (equestrians):

1. Weronika: Not every teen would do this … get up early in the morning to let
2. the horses out
3. Lisa: And clean the stables
4. Weronika: No … we really learn how to be responsible
5. Lisa: Yeah, so much responsibility taking … but it's a good thing …
6. to learn how to be responsible
7. Malin: Because you need that skill outside as well

Extract J with Weronika (equestrian):

1. We get to learn skills such as leadership and stuff like that
2. I've been teaching the younger ones here at the club … and talking in front
3. of people is much easier now … I used to really struggle with that at school

These discourses not only represent the participants' organizations as providing opportunities for worthwhile leisure, but they also position the participants in contrast to other young people, in relation to being responsible subjects who are willing to give up weekends and sleeping in to help out (extract I, lines 1–3). In addition, they talk about the individual skills they are acquiring, and how they are learning to become responsible subjects: 'we learn how to be responsible' (extract I, line 4), with responsibility constructed as a feature they need to learn. Additionally, as expressed by Weronika, 'we learn skills such as leadership and stuff like that' (extract J, line 1), illustrating how they acquire complementary skills that are constructed as positive for their educational and future achievements (extract I, line 7; extract J, lines 2–4). In addition to constructing and sustaining gendered positions through respectability, these place-making practices can be understood as adding a spatial dimension to the temporal concept of precarious leisure (Batchelor et al. 2020). As seen above, the participants value their leisure in terms of meeting friends, and having 'their own youth club', but they also construct leisure through their place-making practices as a context to gain useful skills and competencies for their personal development and future, in an effort to remain active and 'do something productive' (Batchelor et al. 2020, p. 105). The conditions of precarious leisure are closely associated with the discourses of individualistic and successful femininity, constructing places of youth leisure as arenas for self-fulfillment, development and empowerment (Fullagar and Brown 2003). This aligns with the neoliberal (gendered) subject position in which you should always strive to improve yourself, in relation to both your health and your skills in order to create and maintain competitive but respectable femininity (Heywood 2007; McRobbie 2015). According to the findings, being successful within leisure was equated to achieving short-term goals (e.g. winning the cup finals), but also long-term goals in terms of developing new skills, such as leadership, planning and taking responsibility. These investments illustrate the analytical importance of precarity, not only in relation to education and employment but also leisure (Batchelor et al. 2020).

Making place by making it work for the rural collective

This final repertoire emphasizes the precarious conditions and discourses of active citizenship that surround the leisure spaces of rural youth. By precarious conditions, we mean

the consequences of the dismantling of public and private services, including places for leisure, due to the rise of neoliberal governance (Rönnlund 2019; Shucksmith 2018). As shown in the previous repertoires, young people take responsibility for creating places for their own leisure and having something responsible to do. However, our analysis reveals that these responsibilities also include the survival of rural places of leisure, as well as the rural community in general. Lisa (equestrian) explains: 'we do everything for the club … if we left … the club wouldn't exist!' The stress and worry generated by this vulnerability of rural places of leisure were especially discussed in relation to the girls who were starting upper secondary school. In this region of Sweden, such an educational transition implies long hours of commuting or moving home. The participants also experienced pressure from adults:

Extract K with Josephine and Matilda (ballgame):

1. Josephine: Our coach had a chat with us about that … about how
2. important we are for the club … and yeah … if we quit … or start
3. commuting … well, if all of us decided to move that would be …
4. Matilda: That would be … more than half the team leaving

As already seen, young people are encouraged by adults to engage in place-making practices by taking on the responsibility (extract K, lines 1–2) for keeping rural leisure places alive (extract K, lines 2–4), suggesting that if the girls decided to leave or started commuting, the team would be at risk. These place-making practices are understood as important for the survival of leisure places in rural areas and, in a wider understanding, the community itself, otherwise constructed as being emptied of young people (Waite 2018).

The precariousness of rural leisure spaces for young people aligns with prevailing discourses on active citizenship (Newman and Tonkens 2011). Active citizens take on the responsibility for services that were previously provided by either private companies or the public sector through the welfare state (Newman and Tonkens 2011; Enlund 2020). In this study, discourses on active citizenship were primarily related to feelings of belonging to a (leisure) community (Leyshon 2008; Power, Norman, and Dupré 2014), as emphasized by Maria and Lisa:

Extract L with Maria and Lisa (equestrians):

1. Maria: Everyone helps out [at the club] … we help each other … it's part of
2. belonging to this community … everyone has to help each other otherwise …
3. Lisa: … otherwise it won't work

As seen in extract L, being part of the community means that you help each other (lines 1–2), not only because you want to, but because you have to (line 2), 'otherwise it won't work' (line 3). Everyone needs to help out, and take joint responsibility for the club to keep it up and running, especially with few resources available.

In sum, these place-making practices for recreation, play and social vitality rely on the agency, capacity and responsibility of rural young people, whereby using such creative practices becomes a strategy to negotiate structural constraints and create spaces of

their own (Massey 1998; Powell, Taylor, and Smith 2013; Woodman and Leccardi 2015). In line with the argument presented by Katz (1998), stressing how young people's (leisure) spaces are suffering due to increasing levels of disintegration and disinvestment, we argue that the spaces available for youth leisure often need to be constructed in certain ways (e.g. adult-supervised, organized and sports-oriented) in order to be perceived as beneficial to the rural community (Woods 2005). Consequently, the participants were contributing to the 'social economy' (Peters et al. 2018) and supporting the sustainability of rural places of youth leisure through their un(der)paid labor. Their carving of collective spaces exemplifies youth's willingness to adapt and persist in order to enable youth leisure to survive in rural places. Such commitment requires loyalty and responsibility from young people, which in turn creates worries and concerns about how these places of rural leisure would survive in precarious times without their engagement.

Concluding reflections

Our findings paint a layered picture of how girls in rural Northern Sweden engage in place-making practices alongside, beyond, and in contrast to dominant discourses on young people's leisure, rurality and wellbeing. The starting point for our analysis was the reproduction of dominant discourses on rural dullness and deficiency; how young people deprived of the opportunity to participate in leisure also miss out on the perceived benefits in relation to their emotional wellbeing. However, this taken-for-granted-knowledge that young people have nothing to do in rural places stands in sharp contrast to how demanding and stressful the participants constructed their own places of leisure to be. This challenges the dominant discourses of (organized) youth leisure as being beneficial by default (Beniwal 2018).

Despite the girls' experiences of their leisure activities as overwhelming, they still discursively understood leisure participation as positive for young people, as long as these places of leisure were characterized in certain ways, something they also strived for in their own place-making practices. Here, the concept of precarious leisure (Batchelor et al. 2020) came into play; leisure activities should be responsible, where one can acquire valuable skills for current and future educational and employment trajectories (in contrast, hanging out at the local youth club was not seen as productive by the participants).

Becoming a responsible subject was one of the skills gained from these leisure place-making practices and was something the participants apparently thought that young people lacked. As we have shown, the girls' place-making practices include discourses related to several strands of responsibility. In the second repertoire, they describe how they feel responsible by internalizing pressure and discourses around what is productive time, and what is respectable leisure, to ensure individual survival in a competitive society and future. In the third repertoire, the participants were made partially responsible for the survival of their sports clubs and, in the long run, of their community. Internal and external pressure concerning responsibility-taking (and making) should not be understood as separate; they feed into and off each other. Thus, we argue that one of the contributions of this paper is the theoretical expansion of the concept of precarious leisure. Apart from understanding the temporal aspects of leisure as something that needs to benefit the individual in terms of productivity and investment in personal development and skills,

the concept of precarious leisure should be expanded to include a spatial and collective dimension, which considers rural restructuring within the globalized economy (Waite 2018; Enlund 2020), and how these impact upon the conditions under which rural leisure operates. For leisure to be constructed as responsible, and as something from which young people can benefit in terms of personal development, certain organizational structures need to be in place. However, within a rural context, these structures and services might be few and far between or even or under threat of withdrawal. Therefore, young people carry additional responsibility for these places to survive, which extends to include the rural community more generally. As seen in the results, the responsibility to sustain places of leisure and make them work for the rural collective merge with, and feed into, discourses of ambitious and successful femininity whereby girls carry the burden and responsibility of keeping rural youth places alive. They are expected to put time, effort and commitment into their place-making practices, which means that rural places of leisure exist under more precarious conditions than their urban counterparts because they depend on the un(der)paid labor of young people. In other words, we see the place-making explored in this study as simultaneously material and discursive practices that create space for the young people's own independent initiative, as well as being shaped by the material (rural) conditions under which these practices take place.

In our study, we found that the girls created their own emancipatory places of leisure, but simultaneously reproduced gendered (and classed) subject positions whereby girls should be both responsible and respectable in pursuing successful neoliberal femininity. Therefore, we strongly agree with previous feminist leisure scholars who argue for the importance of analyzing gender within leisure, since leisure is a site for the reproduction of gendered relations of power, as well as resistance to them (Mansfield et al. 2018). The different repertoires have also directed the focus towards what kind of leisure places are (allowed to be) created. What still needs to be further explored are the consequences of this, in terms of inclusivity, exclusivity and power relations within youth leisure.

It is important to acknowledge some of the limitations of this study. This paper is based on data from a project investigating the social factors affecting young people's mental health, and how young people collectively respond to stressors within the context of their leisure participation. In other words, the material was not collected with the specific aim of exploring place-making practices in rural areas as such. On the other hand, the idea of looking into rural young people's place-making practices sprang out of the data and was not directed by questions imposed by the author during the interviews. Further, the interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed in Swedish, and later translated into English. Certainly, there were things lost in this process of translation, which might be of particular concern when conducting a discourse analysis.

Our paper contributes to the growing literature about rural young people, accessing perspectives otherwise lost in the metro-centric nature of youth leisure studies, especially in relation to young people's mental health and civil society, where the health benefits of (certain) leisure activities are strongly emphasized. Our findings show that rural areas are places where things can happen; through place-making practices, the girls shape places of leisure, which in turn affect both themselves and their rural community. The participants engage in and conform to, place-making within discourses of responsibility and precariousness, but they also challenge, question and position them in opposition to dominant discourses and material conditions. This demonstrates that leisure places are

constructed in relation to discourses on respectability and positive wellbeing among young people, where leisure should have a purpose, thus somewhat contradicting the purpose of leisure per se; as a relaxing activity where 'there are no demands, you don't have to achieve anything'.

Notes

1. We recognize that a large area of Northern Sweden is part of Sápmi, the land of the indigenous and colonized Sámi population.
2. Here the car referred to is an EPA tractor, a converted car modified to have a top speed of 30 km/h that teenagers over 15 years of age are legally allowed to drive.

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