



Kristianstad
University
Sweden

Kristianstad University
SE-291 88 Kristianstad
+46 44-250 30 00
www.hkr.se

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Residents' perceptions of a place brand

A case study on how different
types of residents perceive
Kristianstad's new place brand

Emelie Farquharson and Emma Karajica

Author

Emelie Farquharson and Emma Karajica

Title

Residents' perceptions of a place brand - A case study on how different types of residents perceive Kristianstad's new place brand

Supervisor

Lisa Källström

Assessing teacher

Oskar Christensson

Examiner

Heléne Tjärnemo

Abstract

In the recent years place branding have become an increased topic of interest. Less focus has been put on residents even though they are a crucial stakeholder to target in place branding. This thesis explored how emotions, culture, and mental models, based on the sensemaking model influenced residents' perceptions of a new place brand. The thesis conducted a case study of the implementation of Kristianstad new place brand. A conceptual model was developed based on previous research and was created to connect crucial theories within place branding. The model represented different factors in sensemaking, that was believed to have an impact on how residents made sense of a place brand differently. The empirical material was collected through qualitative research by 12 personal interviews with residents from Kristianstad. Findings revealed that place attachment and emotions had a distinct influence on how the residents perceived the place brand. Furthermore, occupation was also found to be a factor that had an essential role in how residents perceived a place brand. Based on the empirical findings, three types of residents were discovered and explained in the thesis. The types had both similarities and differences in the perceptions of the place brand. This thesis contributed with new insights in place branding, on how residents make sense of a place brand differently with the sensemaking theory on an individual level.

Keywords

Place branding, Sensemaking theory, residents, emotions, place attachment, occupation

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Emma Karajica

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1. Introduction

Ghuari and Cateora (2014) described a brand as a consumer's perceptions of a specific product, service, person, or place that can add value to what is offered. A brand is an asset for a company, and marketers need to establish and maintain the brand. It is essential for the marketer to understand the needs and wants of different customer segments to create positive brand equity. Customers must feel that the brand satisfies their needs for the brand to be successful. Two crucial aspects of a brand that are important to consider are brand identity and brand image. Brand identity is the vision of how the internal organisation wants the brand to be perceived by stakeholders. The brand image is how people perceive the brand and what values and qualities are associated with it (Ghauri & Cateora, 2014).

Branding is often connected to a single company's product or service. Research from several points of views can be found in the place branding field. Some examples are urban planning research, the concept of "country-of-origin" of products, and tourism. Place branding is a created desired image of geographical locations aimed at a selected target group with the help of different marketing tools. According to Moilanen and Rainisto (2009), seen from a historical perspective, strong place brands have developed through positive heritage, place quality, or infrastructure. In contrast today's place branding is more niched to find competitive advantages and unique benefits to create higher life quality. These advantages and benefits can consist of technological resources, education and business opportunities, and close networks (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009). A critical role of a place brand is to create and promote a unique image that is attractive to present and potential stakeholders (Gilboa & Jaffe, 2021).

Just as companies can build a solid and valuable brand, so can cities, places, and destinations to create an essential competitive advantage. A place brand can help promote the desired image to attract stakeholders such as residents, tourists, investors, or professionals. To build a place brand is more complex in several aspects compared to a consumer product or service (Braun et al., 2013). Several external and internal stakeholders must be included in the implementation of a place

brand. One main issue is that there are several target groups of a place brand, and they all have different needs and wants. For instance, demographical differences such as socio-economic class, ethnicity, age, or interests can all impact how well the place brand is perceived. Also, internal stakeholders such as residents know the place and could oppose the place brand's message. Moreover, this can lead to residents possess a problem to identify themselves with the place brand and to behave in an unbeneficial way, such as negative word-of-mouth (Zenker et al., 2017).

According to Braun et al. (2013), residents are a crucial stakeholder to target when branding a place and are often ignored. They argued that the residents of a place can help form and develop the place brand by increased brand involvement and attachment (Insch & Walters, 2017). Resident's attachment and involvement are highly valued in place branding because they are the vital core of the place (Gilboa & Jaffe, 2021). Moreover, residents see everything from a different perspective compared to municipalities. Thus, it is essential to include them to create a place brand adapted to the whole place. Residents who feel that their opinions and beliefs are reflected in the place's identity will most likely be involved which will increase the attachment (Insch & Walters, 2017).

Kristianstad municipality has offered a relevant case for the current study. The municipality is an urban area located in north-eastern Skåne, the largest area in Skåne with its 1,346 km² (Kristianstads kommun, 2022). The city is currently in the middle of rebranding its place brand. Furthermore, the hopes are to implement a new brand identity that can capture the whole municipality and not just the city. Several attempts have occurred, but none have succeeded and had a significant impact. In the current study we will create an analysis and understand how distinct groups of residents perceive a place brand differently based emotions, culture, and mental models that will be further explained. The Bachelor thesis will provide valuable research and information to the municipality when they present their new place brand.

1.1. Problematization

Place branding has in recent years, gained increased attention, and there is plenty of relevant research from near time. The field has been studied from different aspects, and the importance and relevance of residents have increased. Braun et al. (2013) examined what role residents played in the place brand and gave three examples of how residents contributed to it. Gilboa and Jaffe (2021) identified four residents segments related to involvement and attachment to a place. Hakala (2021) focused on residents as a heterogeneous group and the importance to involve them in the place brand. Apart from the three previously presented studies, some researchers explored and described why the residents of a place are crucial stakeholders when branding a place. Therefore, it is theoretically relevant to research the place brand from a residential perspective as a thesis.

As previously presented, Braun et al. (2013) described three roles' residents have in a place: *ambassadors*, *an integrated part*, and *citizens*. Residents as ambassadors have an essential role to communicate the place brand, which can affect the perceptions of a place. Through word-of-mouth, residents can discuss and spread information about a place that often can be seen as more trustworthy than professional marketers. If seen from an external stakeholder perspective, the residents can give important information about a place considered authentic. Residents involved with the place are more likely to represent the place brand positively and feel more responsible for the development and reputation (Braun et al., 2013).

Braun et al. (2013) further explained that the experience of a place is based on the physical setting and the social environment. The social environment is shaped through interactions between residents and people outside of the place (Braun et al., 2013). According to Hakala (2021), residents involved in the city can successfully help develop the place brand. Furthermore, they are an essential representative of the place. Previous research has put less focus on residents and their experiences of the place. One example of this is the city of Las Vegas, which tried to brand the city as family friendly. However, this did not reflect how the internal stakeholders saw the place, and the campaign failed (Hay et al., 2021). The current study aims to

understand how residents perceive and make sense of Kristianstad municipality's new place brand.

Previous studies have showed that place attachment can bring benefits to the place. For instance, residents with a high level of attachment are more likely to invest time, money, and social factors to maintain their relationship with the place (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2021). Hay et al. (2021) wrote that involvement and attachment increased if residents' opinions and emotions are reflected in the place brand. Moreover, it would lead to unconscious place promotion by the residents. Previous studies showed that different segments perceive, experience, and use a place differently (Hay et al., 2021). According to Hakala (2021), it is beneficial to divide residents into segment groups as they often are not a homogenous group. Some factors that must be considered are that different segments have different preferences, desires, and attitudes (Braun et al., 2013). The level of heterogeneity within a group needs to be examined as it can differ in how they perceive and interact with the place (Gilboa & Jaffe, 2021). However, the authors further stated that segmentation is not often used when branding a place. Therefore, this study explores how residents perceive a place brand differently based on emotions, culture, and mental models.

The sensemaking theory will reflect on how individuals digest the information in society differently based on their background history or their previous actions in life. In this study, the background history consists of three different factors: *emotions, culture, and mental models*. In place branding, different stakeholders have different preferences, wants, and needs. Therefore, it is relevant to use cues of sensemaking to understand why stakeholders have different perceptions. Sensemaking is related to experienced situations in life that needs to be reformulated into words to make sense of it. This is to understand the action behind why your mindset is set in a certain way towards different circumstances (Weick et al., 2005). Furthermore, the theory will be used to deeper understand why residents perceive but also experience place brands differently. According to Will and Pies (2018), sensemaking can be used to analyse people's reactions to organisational

changes. In the current study, how residents make sense of a place brand will be explored through the sensemaking cues emotions, culture, and mental models.

We believe that our thesis can contribute to understand the importance of residents in place branding. Furthermore, to explore the similarities and differences regarding perception of a place brand among residents. The study will analyse resident segments perceptions of a place brand based on different factors. Furthermore, the sensemaking theory will be applied, and the empirical data will be studied from this perspective, to provide new insight into the field. Therefore, our research stands out from previous studies that looked more at perceptions of the place as such rather than the place brand.

1.2. Purpose

The present study aims to understand how residents perceive and make sense of a municipality's new place brand. The perceptions will be explored through three main factors: emotions, culture, and mental models. Furthermore, differences and similarities of the perceptions will be explored.

1.3. Research question

How do residents make sense of a place brand based on emotions, culture and mental models originating from place attachment, place involvement, and place of residence? Furthermore, what differences and similarities are there in residents' perceptions of the place brand?

2. Theoretical background

To further understand the concept of the place brand this chapter will contain an overview of key aspects relevant to this study. Also, a conceptual model will be presented and adopted to the research. Firstly, the chapter will give the reader an overview on place branding. Secondly, stakeholders, residents, place attachment and place involvement will be described. Finally, a description of the sensemaking theory, which will be used as a theoretical lens.

2.1. Place branding

Place branding has been studied for over 40 years and has origins in tourism management. Later in the 2000s, greater emphasis was placed on specialisation in place branding between various stakeholders (Huertas et al., 2021). The concept is about branding a place to create the right image, values, and city cultures so that residents and outsiders interpret the expressions equally (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Gilboa and Jaffe (2021) wrote that the place brand is explained to understand how the brain processes a place's information, feelings, and behaviours. They also wrote, how it is perceived, valued, and interpreted by internal and external stakeholders. Place branding is an increased topic of interest in academics. Previous research showed that the concept of place branding often is studied to attract tourists through destination branding. However, other stakeholders, such as residents, have lately become more attractive to include (Zenker et al., 2017).

Place identity is described as how the brand owner, in our case, the municipality, wants its stakeholders to perceive the place brand. Furthermore, some aspects considered necessary in the identity are the functional, emotional, and self-expressed values (Hay et al., 2021). According to Källström and Hultman (2019), identity is essential to create value for residents and can increase levels of pride and status, which can, in turn, be a reason behind place satisfaction among residents. Brand identity shapes the brand image. However, these might not always reflect

each other. The brand image in the form of associations or attributes can be affected by external circumstances that are hard to control (Hay et al., 2021).

Several studies argued that a place brand is multidimensional and consists of several parameters, which makes the process complex (Zenker et al., 2017). Two factors that makes the process complex are multiple stakeholders, and there are different associations to consider when branding the place (Kaplan et al., 2010). They further presented some associations connected to a particular place, geographical aspects, residents' characteristics, institutions, local products, and infrastructure. Furthermore, Kaplan et al. (2010) suggested another aspect that needed to be considered. Clearly, a place brand differs from a product brand seen in offering, attributes, ownership, and audience. Attributes and offers are harder to define for a place as they can vary which is depended on the study. Furthermore, the ownership of a place brand can be difficult to decide because there are multiple stakeholders, which makes the audience wide (Kaplan et al., 2010).

2.2. Stakeholders

According to Hill and Hult (2019), a stakeholder can be described as a person or group interested in a company, organisation, or project. Furthermore, stakeholders can be divided into internal and external groups, which depends on what role they have (Hill & Hult, 2019). Internal stakeholders, so-called primary stakeholders, can be employees, shareholders, managers, and directors. In comparison, external stakeholders are outside the company, such as suppliers, customers, the government, and different communities. Moreover, they can influence and affect certain organisational factors from an external perspective and are therefore important. It is essential to include the relationship with those outside the organisation instead of only investors. This means that organisations also share information and material about the company with the external stakeholders to feel included. Furthermore, this can result in more feedback and opinions from other perspectives that can help the company to improve (Blowfield & Murray, 2019).

Kotler et al. (1993) wrote that in place brand studies, the stakeholders are often divided into four main target groups: *visitors, residents, businesses, and media*. Just as a product brand, place brands also consist of internal and external stakeholders. The internal stakeholders in a place are current residents, local government, and all businesses that operate within the place, both public and private. Moreover, external stakeholders are potential residents and businesses in terms of investors or sectors in companies. Media as a stakeholder affects both the internal and external groups. Just as word-of-mouth, media can spread information about a place quickly and unforeseeable. It can be both negative and positive information that most likely impacts people's image of the place (Kotler et al., 1993). In the current study, the focus will be to explore residents as a stakeholder in place branding.

Branding a place is more complex than a product and one main reason is the diverse group of stakeholders. To find a way to include all stakeholders in the implementation of a place brand is a significant challenge. All stakeholders need to be considered as they all have different interest in the place. (Konecnik Ruzzier & Petek, 2012). For instance, internal stakeholders are essential because they can help promote and form the place brand. In return, they desire to feel that they can identify themselves with the place. Also, be satisfied with what is offered in the place. Furthermore, if external stakeholders find interest in a place brand, it can attract them to become an internal stakeholder instead.

2.2.1. Residents in place branding

Residents have an important role in place branding. It is common to only target new residents and forget that there is already a group that has been there for a long time that must also be equally satisfied (Braun et al., 2013).

It is addressed that if residents were more included in the process of a new place brand, they could make use of their knowledge and theories. Furthermore, one of the most important factors that influence residents' place brand attitudes is the social events in the city. Residents can be divided into three different roles to understand the value of the different types of involvement strategies. These are: "*Residents as*

an integrated part of a place brand," Residents as ambassadors for their place brand," and lastly, "Residents as citizens" (Braun et al., 2013).

Residents can become an integrated part of society by involvement and interaction in the place. For instances, a campaign created in Germany in 2008 called "Be Berlin", citizens had the opportunity to tell their own stories about the place, and it was used to represent Berlin (Braun et al., 2013). Secondly, *residents as ambassadors* are one crucial factor to create an image of the city. The competitive position in the market can be affected by how much the resident wants to promote the city. Through word-of-mouth, residents can discuss and spread information about a place that is more trustworthy than professional marketers. Therefore, many cities try to create a positive image to make residents talk proudly of the city. Lastly, the role as a citizen is the most ignored, although it can impact the place brand. Citizens are involved in the city at different levels, and they keep track of what happens daily (Braun et al., 2013). Citizens should be allowed to influence decision-makers regarded the place brand (Hakala, 2021).

The residents' social factors and interactions with the city create the social environment of the place. According to Braun et al. (2013), it is a mixture of society and the physical surrounding that determines how a place should be perceived. They also wrote that the most forgotten role is residents as citizens. Municipalities must both guarantee and provide the opportunity for participation regarded the development of the place to create more loyal residents (Braun et al., 2013).

2.3. Place attachment and place involvement

Place attachment is a common research area in place branding studies and refers to what level of bondage a person has to a place through emotional and functional factors (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2021). In previous studies, place attachment has been described as a multidimensional concept where place identity and place dependence are the main parts. Place identity refers to the emotional connection between place and person, and place dependence on the functional aspects.

Additionally, place dependence is commonly based on comparison of offers and goals between different places (Wilkins & de Urioste-Stone, 2017). Several factors affect how much a resident will be attached to or involved in a place (Gilboa & Jaffe, 2021).

Different factors can impact the level of attachment, and two examples of this is a person's social ties or how long a person has lived in a place. Furthermore, attributes such as easy access to nature and good commuting connections can affect a person's place attachment (Gilboa & Jaffe, 2021). Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin (2021) said that the level of attachment evolves and can increase or decrease based on a person's experiences of a place. They further argued that residents with a high level of attachment are likely to feel a higher loyalty to the place. This, in turn, can lead to beneficial behaviour for the place brand, for instance, positive word-of-mouth. Another benefit of having high levels of residential attachment is that it facilitates the process of attractive place brands (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2021).

How involved a person is with a place can depend on how attached the person feels to the place. Place involvement can be described as how involved a person is with activities connected to a specific place. It can, for instance, be involvement in local organisations and clubs, to use public transport, or work in the place (Shaykh-Baygloo, 2020). In previous studies, place involvement has been divided into two different concepts. The first concept is mainly used in tourism studies and measures values, experiences, and emotions. The second concept is related to routine activities in a place. Some examples of this are to use public services or to visit stores and restaurants. However, it can also be membership in local clubs or to volunteer in different activities (Gilboa & Jaffe, 2021).

Previous research has studied the role of place attachment through different geographical scales such as neighbourhood, city, region, or country. Gilboa and Jaffe (2021) stated that cities often have a higher level of residential attachment than a neighbourhood. The current study focuses to analyse residents' attachment based on what part of a municipality they live in.

2.4. The sensemaking theory

Sensemaking is an organisational activity and process where people, based on previous expectations, aim to understand, and make sense of issues, events, and experiences (van Helvert-Beugels, 2018). Furthermore, Weick et al. (2005) described the concept as retrospective changes that have been made in the past that simplify what people choose to do today. It is essential to know that organisational studies have used Karl Weick's theory of sensemaking since the late 1980s, and it has evolved over the years (Introna, 2018). It is a topic that has been around for a long time among researchers but an even more extended period for organisational practitioners. (Introna, 2018). Studies that have been found related to sensemaking have been written through an organisational perspective. This study will use the research but instead implement it on an individual level to understand residents' perception of place branding

The concept mainly refers to how an individual's actions and interpretations go hand in hand rather than to analyse the impact of choice (Weick et al., 2005). During change, there will always be uncertainty, contradictions, and paradoxes. Therefore, with sensemaking it is essential to know why people react in a certain way when changes occur (Will & Pies, 2018). Sensemaking consists of different cues from a person's environment that must be interpreted and analysed. Some examples of these cues are culture, emotions, and mental models. All three will be used in this study to understand residents' perceptions of a place brand.

According to Brown et al. (2014), cultural identity is an essential factor to have in mind in sensemaking. Cultural background is created by previous experiences and situations and most likely reflects an individual's personality. Culture can be described as a system of pliable abilities integrated into a mindset. Furthermore, it can originate from different aspects of a person's life, for instance, national, professional, or traditional. A person's culture can consist of personal characteristics and what values and norms have been learned. Through interaction, people can share their culture with others, which can create a common one, for instance, a place culture (Ivanova-Gongne & Torkkeli, 2018). Cultural diversity can be used in the sensemaking process to understand differences that may occur in an explanation.

An example can be different decisions or crises to understand the reason behind them also why people put themselves and others in certain positions (Means & Davey, 2022).

Mental models are described as models people create in their minds to prepare for events and compose explanations. Moreover, if a person faces an unfamiliar situation, they tend to use a mental model from previous situations to make sense of the present (Jones et al., 2011). Will et al. (2018) wrote that personal history shapes, mental models. Various events such as the education we attend, opinions from acquaintances, and people we look up to give us precise and silent knowledge.

Emotions are one factor that is considered in the sensemaking concept and are argued to be one reason that people perceive things differently. Will and Pies (2018) stated that sensemaking is affected by an individual's emotions. A person's emotions before an unpredictable change can impact the probability of resistance. One example is if an individual already has a negative mindset before the unpredictable situation, it will likely continue to be negative. Also, it depends on how the individual can recognize whether their judgment is or is not reasonable. The author assumed that three different stages can be affected by emotions. Firstly, emotions can convey information between unpredictable situations and sensemaking. For example, if you have had positive emotions in previous similar events, change commitment and effectiveness increase, which reduce the likelihood of negative criticism and resistance. Also, negative emotions can make you directly opposed to the change. Secondly, the author found that positive emotions make the sensemaking process more flexible and creative for development. Moreover, it connects to the first stage because the changes are automatically seen from a positive perspective, which can increase commitment. The last step is how much emotion can affect the reason and unreasonableness of a person. The sensemaking process is completed when the connection between the agreement, the interpretation of the new situation, and the completed documents go hand in hand (Will & Pies, 2018).

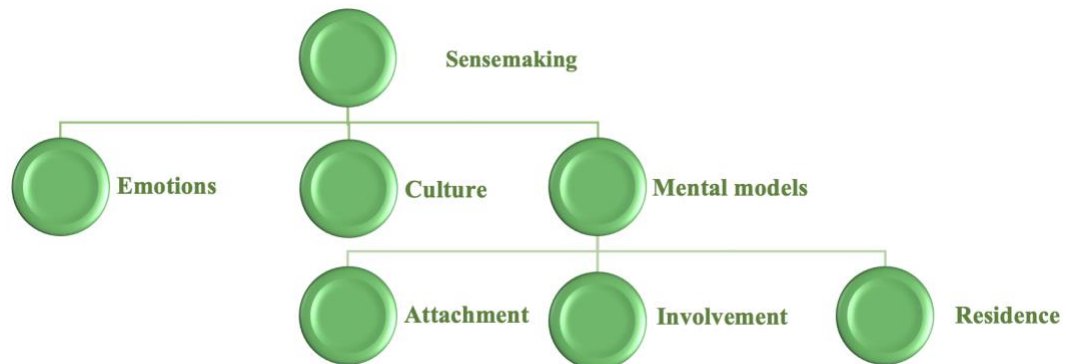
Maitlis et al. (2013) argued that the need for sensemaking depends on what affection an event makes a person experience. If the event emphasises vigorous and intense

affections such as rage, the need for sensemaking tends to be higher. In contrast, if an event emphasises low-intensity feelings, for instance, irritation, the need for sensemaking is reduced. Moreover, one important aspect to consider, referred to as sensemaking and emotions, is expectations. Weick et al. (2005) wrote that expectations affect how a person feels about a specific event in their relationship, as they can easily be violated. If a person has a close relationship and the expectations are high, it most likely will make a person feel strong emotions. However, if they are low, it will not bring out the same intense emotions (Weick et al., 2005).

Sensemaking is a broad theory that consists of many different parts. However, this research aimed to show a connection between residents and place branding through the specifically selected factors, emotions, culture, and mental models. The articles used to explain sensemaking described how the theory is used at an organisational level. However, in this research the sensemaking theory was used on individuals to understand their perceptions. Penttilä et al. (2020) argued that how individuals perceive and interpret things, is based on individual sensemaking frames. A sensemaking frame is used to understand what an individual acknowledges to be essential information (Penttilä et al., 2020).

2.5. Conceptual model

The current study aimed to explore how diverse residents perceive and make sense of a place brand. A conceptual model (Figure 1) was developed to facilitate the purpose. The model is based on the sensemaking theory and is further divided into three main aspects explored in the study. These are emotions, culture, and mental models. Furthermore, mental models were divided into place attachment, place involvement, and place of residence.

Figure 1*Conceptual model*

Note. Conceptual model of how residents make sense of a place brand, with three main factors are emotions, culture, and mental models.

The first layer of the model is the sensemaking theory which is the theoretical lens that was used to analyse the empirical material. Sensemaking refers to how people make sense of different things based on their previous experiences (Will & Pies, 2018). Based on this, the conceptual model expands into three parts to provide a more profound knowledge of emotions, culture, and mental models.

Firstly, it is argued that emotions influence the sensemaking process, both positive and negative. Emotions can have an impact on how people perceive things differently. Positive emotions influence the perceptions and make people supportive of changes. In contrast, negative emotions can make a person oppose a change without consideration of benefits and disadvantages (Weick et al., 2005). Therefore, it is essential to understand emotions to clarify why people react in a certain way and why events occur. Emotions connect to three aspects which are individuals' beliefs, norms, and interests (van Helvert-Beugels, 2018).

Secondly, culture is a critical aspect of sensemaking and is one factor that helps to understand why a person makes sense of situations in specific ways (Weick et al., 2005). An individual's cultural background is learned from previous situations and can be an explanation to why people make sense of things differently (Osland &

Bird, 2000). When individuals with different backgrounds encounter a specific place, it can lead to a shared culture (Ivanova-Gongne & Torkkeli, 2018).

Lastly, people create mental models based on personal experiences, preferences, and understandings of the world (Brock et al., 2008). The mental models will consist of place attachment, place involvement, and place of residence. The models are used as a starting point to explore if the three factors impact the perception of a place brand. Place attachment, place involvement and place of residence will be considered when the analysis is made of mental models. Place attachment is argued to have an influence on how residents perceive a place. A strong emotional bond between a resident and a place can make the resident feel more identified to the place and can make them satisfied with the place brand (Gilboa & Jaffe, 2021). In this study place attachment is used as a mental model since we believe it can have an impact on how the residents perceive the place differently. Furthermore, residents that are attached to the place are more likely to invest time and involve themselves in the place brand (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2021). Therefore, place involvement is another mental model in this research. Place of residence is argued to influence how residents will perceive the place brand. People can have different experiences based on where they live that in turn can affect the perceptions of the entire place brand (Hakala, 2021).

3. Methodology

The following chapter presents the methodology of the study. Firstly, a brief description of the research philosophy and approach will be given. Secondly, the choice of theory, research design and strategy will be motivated. Thirdly, the data collection and analysis will further be presented. Finally, the chapter presents the study's trustworthiness and limitations.

3.1. Research philosophy

There are three different philosophical approaches to consider in business research: *positivism, realism, and interpretivism*. The research philosophy will impact what strategy and methods will be used to collect and analyse data (Saunders et al., 2007). Interpretivism differs from positivism and realism as this approach aims to understand human behaviour by the use of social science in a subjective way. Further, interpretivism emphasises that people are different, and this should be considered by researchers (Bell et al., 2019). The current research aimed to explore how diverse residents perceive a place brand and make sense of a place differently. Therefore, this research adopted an interpretivism approach which facilitated the study to find similarities and differences. Neither positivism nor realism was relevant for this study as positivism has an objective view, and realism compares reality with the truth in a more detailed and accurate way (Saunders et al., 2007).

3.2. Research approach

Theory often has an essential role in research, and the relationship between them can be described through three different approaches (Bell et al., 2019). According to Saunders et al. (2007), the approaches are suitable for different studies. First, a deductive approach was used since the conceptual model was based on existed theory and that conducted the research questions.

A pure inductive approach was not relevant for the present study as parts were based on previous research within the field of place branding. The approach starts with data collection and then creates a theory, which did not suit the study (Saunders et al., 2007).

Later, the approach developed to an abductive approach to fulfil the research purpose. An abductive approach is a combination of deductive and inductive. The aim was to understand residents' perceptions of a place brand and how they made sense of it. Therefore, previous research related to place branding was used to understand the concept. Sensemaking theory was the theoretical framework and had a prominent role throughout the research. Based on this, a conceptual model was created before the collection of the empirical data. The conceptual model made it possible to analyse the data and explore new perspectives on how residents perceive a place brand.

3.3. Choice of theory

Several tools can help guide the research work and some examples are concepts, models, and theories. Lind (2015) stated that theory is used to describe occurrences, analyse, and interpret the empirical material. Previous studies related to place branding have covered a wide range of areas. All information found from previous studies on the subject has helped determine which theory suited the purpose the best. Several studies wrote similar research questions with other approaches that have been useful for this work, to create an idea of what place branding is and why it is crucial. Several studies about place branding have been discovered, but not many were written from residents' perceptions of a place. In the present study, great emphasis was put on the residents of a place to explore how different segments perceived a place brand differently. Also, previous studies have showed what different factors influence a place brand. For example, place attachment, place involvement, and where residents live have been used to analyse similarities and differences of the segments.

We believed that the Sensemaking theory could provide the research with profound knowledge and allow us to understand why people make sense of things in different ways. The main factors that were considered in this study were the sensemaking cues emotions, culture, and mental models. Furthermore, mental models were divided into place attachment, place involvement, and place of residence to create a more profound knowledge of what differs between the residents in the city. The factors were chosen with the help of other studies, as it became clear that these main factors founded the opinions behind a place brand. A conceptual model was created based on place branding and the sensemaking model, which laid the foundation for the study and a tool to analyse and interpret the empirical data.

3.4. Research design and strategy

According to Bell et al. (2019), there are two types of research strategies which are qualitative and quantitative research. The purpose of this study was to explore how different residents make sense of a place brand. Therefore, a qualitative research strategy was chosen. Qualitative research is characterised by the value of words rather than numbers to find connections and draw conclusions (Bell et al., 2019). To fulfil the purpose of the study, residents' emotions, culture, and mental models were in focus. The participants in the interviews were asked different questions related to the three presented factors, and the answers were then used in the analysis of the material.

This study was exploratory research and used to deeper understand different issues (Saunders et al., 2007). An exploratory study makes it possible for the researcher to adapt the direction based on the empirical material (Saunders et al., 2007). If new factors beyond the conceptual model appeared in the data collection, they were considered and used in the analysis.

3.5. Data collection

The Bachelor thesis has been written in collaboration with Kristianstad municipality. The collaboration has involved three meetings and the purpose of the Bachelor thesis was determined thereafter.

The purpose of the study was to explore residents' perceptions of a place brand and how they make sense of a place. Based the purpose, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method for data collection. Interviews are suitable to use when the research aims to explore and understand opinions, perceptions, emotions, or experiences. Therefore, this method was relevant to use in the present study. Denscombe (2019) stated that one benefit of personal interviews is that they are easy to arrange as there are only two persons to consider, the interviewer and the interviewee. Likewise, the transcription of the empirical material becomes easier when there is only one person's voice (Denscombe, 2019).

A semi-structured interview implies that the interviewer has a list of topics to cover and gives the flexibility to ask follow-up questions. However, the focus is put on participants' development of ideas and honest answers. Furthermore, a semi-structured interview can develop gradually from one interview to another based on information from previous interviews (Denscombe, 2019). In this study, the interviews were a combination of face-to-face and online interviews with the software application Zoom. The online interviews were synchronous, which means that the interviews took place in real-time. All participants had the opportunity to choose which alternative suited them the best. Of the 12 interviews, eight were held face-to-face, and four were online. Furthermore, this was because online interviews were more suitable for some participants as it is often less time-consuming (Bell et al., 2019).

One benefit of online interviews is that it enables people that might have said no to reconsider and participate. Whereas this was experienced in this study as one of the participants could not have a face-to-face interview. One disadvantage of online interviews is the risk of technical issues such as poor internet connections. Moreover, this can disrupt the flow and make it more difficult to transcribe the

material (Bell et al., 2019). Consequently, difficulties with the background music appeared when the film was shown.

3.5.1. Participant selection

Participants were chosen after place of residence and categories of the segment's city, urban area, countryside, and suburb. The reason why the selection was based on residence was that this was believed to impact people's perception of a place brand. Additionally, the study aimed to capture all residents in the municipality, and therefore specific segments were chosen.

Participant selection was made through purposive sampling, which means that participants were chosen to answer the research question. There was one criterion to be able to participate in the individual interviews, which was that the person currently lived within one of the four segments that we had chosen. An invitation was created and posted on LinkedIn and Facebook. However, this method did not have an adequate impact as there were only two enlisted participants. Therefore, personal networks were used to send emails or direct messages to potential candidates. These candidates were primarily acquaintances and recommendations from people with a vast network. However, this also enabled a snowball sampling where participants that were contacted recommended other people that could be relevant to the study (Denscombe, 2019). Participants were contacted through email or Facebook with information about the purpose, location, and how much time was expected. Of 41 people, 12 respondents accepted the invite. The ages ranged from 21 to 77, and the participants consisted of eight women and four men (Table 1).

In this case, the urban area was Åhus which is an essential part of the municipality as it attracts many tourists, and several businesses benefit Kristianstad. The countryside segment consisted of three people who lived in Viby, located 6 km outside of Kristianstad city centre. The suburb segment was Näsby and was initially chosen because it is a big area with various people, such as nationalities. The last segment was the city centre, which has often been the leading segment to target.

Table 1*Summary of interview participants*

Gender	Age	Occupation	Participant	Segment
Female	30	Maternity-leave	A	Näsby (suburb)
Female	25	Student	B	Näsby (suburb)
Female	54	Full-time worker	C	Åhus (urban area)
Female	27	Student	D	Näsby (suburb)
Female	35	Full-time worker	E	Åhus (urban area)
Female	21	Part-time worker	F	Åhus (urban area)
Male	49	Full-time worker	G	Kristianstad (city)
Female	56	Full-time worker	H	Viby (countryside)
Male	77	Pensioner	I	Viby (countryside)
Male	51	Full-time worker	J	Viby (countryside)
Female	23	Student	K	Kristianstad (city)
Male	49	Full-time worker	L	Kristianstad (city)

3.5.2. Interview guide

The 12 personal interviews were used to analyse residents' opinions and perceptions of Kristianstad with the help of semi-structured interviews. An interview guide was conducted to reassure that relevant information and answers for the research were covered. The guide consisted of 24 questions and 11 follow-up questions which was divided into different themes based on the conceptual model. The follow-up questions were created to help the interviewees develop their answers and go into the depths of their opinions. According to Bell et al. (2019), follow-up questions are essential in semi-structured interviews to receive more detailed answers and create a more profound knowledge. Apart from the questions, a film produced by Kristianstad municipality was shown to all participants. The film is a part of the new place brand implementation and is aimed to be used for marketing purposes.

The guide was produced in Swedish (Appendix A) as this was the native language of the interviewees, and the priority was to create questions that would be easily understood. Later, the interview guide was translated into English (Appendix B) to match the language in the Bachelor thesis. The interviews were between 18 and 41 minutes long and were held within one week (Table 2).

Table 2*Interview information*

Participant	Date	Length
A	2022-05-02	30 min
B	2022-05-02	30 min
C	2022-05-03	27 min
D	2022-05-03	25 min
E	2022-05-03	38 min
F	2022-05-04	41 min
G	2022-05-04	29 min
H	2022-05-04	18 min
I	2022-05-04	19 min
J	2022-05-04	20 min
K	2022-05-05	25 min
L	2022-05-05	37 min

Note. Shows the date and lengths of each interview.

The introductory phase started with a description of the interview layout and film screening so that the interviewee knew what was expected. A brief introduction of the Bachelor thesis' purpose and method was also presented. According to Denscombe (2019), it was beneficial, to begin with an "easy question" that enabled the interviewee to feel comfortable and relaxed. Therefore, questions associated with the interviewees' background were asked as a warm-up, which also gave us an insight of who the participant was. Subsequently, after the introductory phase, the questions consisted of four categories: *emotions*, *place engagement*, *place involvement*, and *culture*.

The first category of questions was emotions connected to the city. Moreover, it was vital for us to understand how emotions affect people's perception of a place. Secondly, questions related to place attachment were asked to explore how residents perceived the place brand based on how long they have lived in the place. Hence, the period that a person has lived in a place affects the perception of the place brand. Also, how high the participants valued their place of residence based

on what segment they belonged to. Thirdly, place involvement questions were asked to determine how much the residents were involved in the city and what factors were considered necessary for residents to feel interested in involvement. Lastly, questions connected to culture were asked to create a more profound knowledge of why some values outweighed the others and if the participants could characterize specific cultures based on place of residence.

After the questions, the participants saw the film and were asked to keep two things in mind. Firstly, their overall thoughts of the film which included what they liked and disliked. Secondly, whether the interviewees believed that the entire municipality of Kristianstad was represented. We informed about these questions before the film, as we hoped to receive more developed answers. The interview guide included follow-up questions to further keep up the discussion. All questions aimed to explore if these different factors impacted how residents perceived and made sense of a place brand. When the interview was finished, we showed appreciation and thanked them for their commitment and contribution to the research.

3.6. Data analysis

The interviews were recorded and later transcribed to enable the analysis of the empirical data. The participants had consented to the recording through a written agreement or verbally before the interview. Denscombe (2019) wrote that transcribing is time-consuming which we experienced as the transcribed material was 127 pages and took approximately 48 hours. However, Denscombe (2019) further stated that the process is a crucial part of the interview process as this is where the researcher comes in close contact with the empirical data. Different tools, such as Microsoft transcription in Word and slowed down audio-record function, were used to facilitate.

The data analysis was based on a *thematic* method. According to Bell et al. (2019), a thematic method is used to find repetitive topics, similarities, and differences in

the research data to make it easier to conclude the research. The analysis was based on deductive codes from the conceptual model, since we assumed that these factors would have an impact on how residents perceived a place brand. However, we were flexible to find new codes and logical conclusions that could explain the reason behind different perceptions. Therefore, the analysis was developed, and abductive codes were used as a complement (Bell et al., 2019).

In the data analysis, four codes were initially used based on the conceptual model and consisted of emotions, culture, and two different mental models: place attachment and place involvement. During the organisation of the empirical data relevant comments were highlighted based on the codes to understand the data more clearly. The codes were believed to impact differences and similarities of perceptions of a place brand between residents. However, new codes occurred during the process. Occupation and age proved to play a role in a person's perception.

Qualitative data can be a challenge to analyse as it is never known exactly how much relevant information will be received (Bell et al., 2019). When the material was transcribed, relevant answers for the analysis were marked. To mark and transcribe material at once saved time. After the data was categorised, relevant information was picked out and translated into English. Quotes and statements from participants were further used in the empirical analysis and discussion

3.7. Trustworthiness

Denscombe (2019) described that one way of evaluating credibility is by carefully analysing the empirical material, which contributes to trustworthiness. In our case, the collected data has been read through several times. Also, the interviews were conducted and analysed in Swedish to avoid misinterpretation through the translation.

According to Bell et al. (2019), dependability is achieved if all records of the research process are kept and accessible. If all records are accessible, it contributes

to the study's trustworthiness. In our study, these records can be found in the method chapter, that includes participation selection, interview guide, interview recordings, transcriptions, and choice of data analysis. Lastly, confirmability was utilized, which means that no personal emotions and opinions have influenced the study. The content of the interview was chosen not to be discussed before the meeting to avoid influencing the interviewee's views on the subject. Also, neither of us live in Kristianstad and therefore cannot express opinions on what it is like to be a resident of the place.

3.8. Limitations

Limitations occurred in the study that could have affected the trustworthiness in the research. The initial idea was to have focus groups to collect the empirical data. Due to the circumstances that followed, focus groups could not be used in this work. The reason for this was that it was hard to find approximately six people to participate simultaneously. Therefore, personal interviews with people who lived in the city centre, suburbs, countryside, and urban areas became a solution. Focus groups would enable discussion between the respondents, whereas personal interviews removed the possibility. If there had been a discussion, it might result in more developed answers, and respondents might have been inspired by each other.

The idea was to find various men and women of different ages to gather more opinions to create credible material. However, it was not easy to find pensioners who wanted to show up in the selected areas. Only one was found, which limited the age group in the empirical data. Likewise, the residents in Näsby were hard to find. Therefore, two of them lived on the university campus that is placed on the outskirts of Näsby. We believe that we would receive a different analysis if we had interviews with people born and raised in Näsby. Another limitation was that some of the interviews were held digitally, which affected the film quality for some participants. As a result, the emotion that the film aimed to convey decreased slightly.

4. Case introduction

The following chapter provide an in-depth presentation of Kristianstad as a place. As well as the collaboration between the municipality and the University of Kristianstad. Also, a general explanation of Kristianstad's municipality's re-brand process.

Kristianstad was founded in 1614 by the Danish king Christian IV and is still today largely marked by the time when Skåne belonged to Denmark. Many memorials, particularly in the city of Kristianstad, are connected to the Danish era. Kristianstad was initially built as a fortification city with bastions on Allön, located in the middle of the great wetlands. Many important memorials can still be found, and one of the most significant one is the Holy Trinity Church. In 1658 Denmark lost Skåne to Sweden, and thus Kristianstad became a Swedish city (Kristianstads Kommun, 2022).

Kristianstad is in the northeast of Skåne, with just over 86 000 inhabitants in the municipality and approximately 40 000 that live in the city. Kristianstad has a surface of 1,346 km², which makes it the biggest municipality in Skåne. The city was intended for defence, crafts, and trade which still can be reflected in the city today. Kristianstad city centre is filled with shops and restaurants. Furthermore, there are many commercial areas around the city's outskirts (Kristianstads kommun, 2022).

At this moment, Kristianstad municipality is re-branding its place brand, where the main target groups are businesses, citizens, and visitors. The goal is to create a more distinct place brand of Kristianstad that can represent the entire municipality. The re-branding includes pictures, a new logo (Figure 2), colours (Figure 3), and a short film that represents Kristianstad as an attractive place. The colours represent different feelings, for instance, orange represents city pulse, diversity, and cultural life. In comparison, blue represents the sea with the coastline, the lakes, *Vattenriket*, and the drinking water. The film released in conjunction with the place brand plays a central role in the implementation. Kristianstad desired place identity is shown through the movie, and the hopes are that this will agree with

people's image of the place. To implement these different elements of the place brand, the hopes are to increase the city's impact on its stakeholders. Also, to create a unity between everyone that uses the place (Kristianstad Municipality, personal communication, 7 February, 2022).

Figure 2

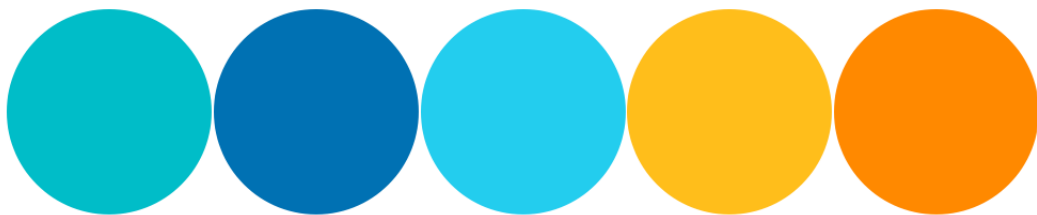
New logo with colours



Note. Kristianstad new logo together with the colours that are meant to represent the place.

Figure 3

Colour codes



Note. The new colour codes that will be used.

Before the re-branding process, a survey was conducted that aimed to explore the first thing people associated with Kristianstad. The survey was sent out to 810 people in the north of Sweden. However, only 425 could answer the question, which means that 385 could not associate Kristianstad with anything. The 425 answers varied a lot, and there were 15 different associations, which can indicate two

different things. Firstly, Kristianstad has not had a clear place brand that represents the whole place. Secondly, the present place brand has not been communicated satisfactorily.

In the re-branding process, some attributes are particularly emphasised. Firstly, *Vattenriket* is an important part of Kristianstad that the municipality highlights. *Vattenriket* has a biosphere reserve status and consists of 22 designated visitor sites. Helge Å runs through the biosphere area where wetland birds and endangered fish species can be found. Activities such as hiking, biking, kayaking, bird watching, and fishing are perfect to explore *Vattenriket* (Vattenriket, 2022). Another emphasised aspect is "the orange city", a non-profit organisation. The aim is to gather stakeholders and develop Kristianstad to make it a better place. Orange is chosen partly for the handball team IFK Kristianstad, one of Sweden's best teams and the colour represents warmth and kindness (Den orangea Staden, 2020).

A collaboration between Kristianstad municipality and the university of Kristianstad was initiated and the hopes were to give new external insights in the place brand implementation. Furthermore, the collaboration consisted of us students taking part of the implementation process by receiving information about the new place brand. The received information was the starting point for the aim of our Bachelor thesis where we wanted to understand residents' perceptions of the new place brand.

5. Findings and analysis

In the following chapter a presentation of the empirical findings and an analysis will be conducted. All three parts of the conceptual model will be reviewed with the help of the empirical data.

5.1. Emotions

Emotions were one part of the conceptual model and used as a code to analyse the data. According to the sensemaking theory, emotions are essential to why individuals make sense of things differently, in this case, the place brand. In the empirical data collection, clear connections, and repetitive themes of people's emotions toward Kristianstad were discovered. Overall, most of the participants had a positive image of Kristianstad, yet a few had mixed or negative emotions. Will and Pies (2018) stated that emotions could impact how people perceive things differently. Therefore, it is believed that the participants' emotions impacted how they perceived the film and place brand.

The majority of participants were proud of where they lived, that later reflected in the perception of the place brand. Participant A said:

This is where I grew up, it is a warm place for the heart.

The other participants with the same pride explained it in similar ways. They thought the film was good because it showed a warm emotion where solidarity was emphasised. The interviewees were optimistic about the new place brand because they saw opportunities in the city and that the place has a lot to offer. They also thought this emerged in the film, which they associated with the place brand. Participant G explained:

I want the best for the city because I was born and raised here as well, but also because I see that there is a huge potential.

One emotion that repeatedly occurred was that the place was familiar. Regardless of whether people grew up in Kristianstad or were newcomers, the participants explained a familiar emotion. Some described it as familiar because they had grown up in the city and had childhood memories as participant A did:

It is like now, we go to the public swimming pool, where I swam when I was little and so my daughter swims there now. [...] This is where I grew up, it is a warm place for the heart.

The statement shows that participant A had a strong emotional bond to the place, which was reflected later in the perception of the place brand. She felt proud and happy that her daughter had the opportunity to grow up in the same way as her. There was a clear connection between these participants' positive emotions and how they perceived the place brand in this research. Moreover, the participants with positive emotions perceived the film in an amazed way.

Yuksel et al. (2010) argued that an emotional bond often grows over time and consists of emotions, interpretations, and memories between the individual and a specific place. It is argued that place attachment influenced the emotions the participants felt. In sensemaking theory, it is expected that the different cues connect and influence each other. In this study, we experienced that emotions and place attachment influenced each other. Participants that felt positive emotions often had a higher level of place attachment. Therefore, place attachment is relevant to present with emotions as they are connected. Many participants had lived in Kristianstad for a long time and had memories of the place, and positive emotions were developed. Participants that felt familiar emotions and had a high level of attachment perceived the place brand warmly and proudly. The perception was described to occur from the memories participants had, which could connect with the film's story. Furthermore, they could identify themselves with the place brand and believed that it agreed with their image of Kristianstad.

The participants that were not raised in Kristianstad had moved here for functional reasons, such as the university. Despite this, they also felt familiar emotions explained by their occupation as a student. Gilboa and Jaffe (2021) explained that social ties could influence place attachment, which in turn influences a person's emotions. Two of the participants moved to Kristianstad alone without knowing anyone. They felt familiar emotions towards Kristianstad because they lived in an area with many students with the same conditions. However, the differences were that they did not feel identified with the place brand compared to the participants born in Kristianstad. The students did not perceive the place brand in the same way as they did not have the same connections with the place. The participants did not emphasise the place brand as they were only here to study. They knew that they most likely would not stay in Kristianstad after graduation. Furthermore, the students did not see the place brand in an overall way. Participants who lived in Kristianstad for a more extended time were perceived to have more indulgence in small things than the students. The students were more sceptical of the place brand, which can be explained by the fact that their emotions towards the place were more mixed than other participants.

Another emotion that was discovered was disappointment which was connected to participants who felt minimal support from the municipality. For instance, participant J said that projects were hard to complete due to the low engagement.

It is difficult to get something done here [...] all the authorities are like brake pads.

Maitlis et al. (2013) argued that the need for sensemaking depends on what affection an event makes a person experience. The result of participant J's intense emotion can lead to speculations about the place brand. Participant E also felt frustrated and disappointed that the municipality did not prioritise marketing to potential stakeholders. Participant E said:

It is great frustration that no one sells Kristianstad [...] it is too much "jante".

Another dismay was that residents experienced that many projects were not well-thought-through or completed, which was unpleasant. Will and Pies (2018) stated that an individual's emotions affect how a person makes sense of a place. Also, it depends on how the individual can recognise whether their judgement is or is not reasonable. There was a clear connection between these participants' negative emotions and how they perceived the place brand in this research. Moreover, the participants with negative emotions perceived the film in a critical way. Therefore, the critical comments had a clear connection to the judgment and were reasonable. We believe that the participants' negative mindset affected the perception of the place brand due to a pessimistic mindset linked to what was shown and what could be improved.

Weick et al. (2005) said that expectation impacted how a person feels about a specific occurrence, which was discovered in the thesis. One of the participants had very high expectations of the film. We believe that the reason was that the individual had a close emotional connection to the place brand due to the occupation. These expectations were not met as it was not how she made sense of Kristianstad. Therefore, the participant felt disappointed and dissatisfied with the place brand. The participant believed that Kristianstad could have been portrayed in a completely different way that would have been more suitable.

5.2. Culture

The last aspect of the conceptual model is culture. The sensemaking theory explains that an individual's personality reflects through cultural background created by previous experiences and situations (Brown et al., 2014). The only factor that we found relevant to culture was personal characteristics. Participants that had grown up with values that family and community were important enjoyed the film. The

reason for this is that the film's story was relatable as it showed values that agreed with what the participants had said. After the film, participant A said:

This when she says, "when mum gets older, I am close", it was really nice. And this, like meeting someone and then you see the future here you feel very targeted.

All three participants from Åhus believed some special norms and patterns could be pointed out. One characteristic experienced was solidarity, as it is a small community where everyone knows each other. An example was Participant F, who said:

Everyone in Åhus, greet each other and are like, you talk to each other regardless of whether you do not know each other so well...

The participants in Näsby described the culture differently. One of them had lived in the suburb their whole life and described it as familiar. Two of the participants were students and lived on campus on the outskirts of Näsby. Therefore, they described the culture as a place where all residents were social and open to meet new people. Furthermore, the differences to live as a student compared to other parts of Näsby were explained like this:

For example, the campus that is counted as Näsby have student culture and then when you are in Näsby I must say it is a tougher culture than what it is in the rest of Kristianstad, I have experienced.

The participants in Viby found it difficult to characterise the culture in the countryside. However, they stated that they had a close relationship within the community, and everyone greeted each other.

Several participants found this part of the interview more difficult to answer as it contained more reflections than other categories. Therefore, it was hard to see if it

was an essential factor that influenced their perceptions. Also, all places had similar explanations for their place culture, which meant that no one directly had a culture that stood out. One explanation for this might have been that the questions related to culture were experienced as difficult to grasp. Several of the participants had similar answers. Still, it was not considered as a factor that impacted how they later perceived the place brand.

5.3. Mental models

The following three parts will present the findings and analysis of the mental models which are place attachment, place, involvement, and place of residence.

5.3.1. Place attachment

In the empirical material, a repetitive theme was found in place attachment. It was found that place attachment could be divided into two subcodes: emotional attachment and functional attachment. These factors made it easier to explain the differences between participants and their perceptions. Our empirical data showed clear differences between participants with emotional and functional attachment.

Participant L explained that he considered himself to have an emotional bond and would miss Kristianstad if he moved from there. The participants who were emotionally attached to Kristianstad felt a solid emotional connection because it was the place of birth, and they had grown up there. Also, they had family there, and the residents felt a strong attachment to their friends. Participant J said he had an emotional attachment to the place and further explained it as:

Yes, I do because I am from here, it is my place of birth.

The different levels of place attachment and how the participants perceived the place brand was explored to find differences and similarities. Will et al. (2018) stated that personal history shapes mental models, which is shown in this study. Place attachment showed that participants who felt more attached emotionally

perceived the place brand more positively. We believe that the main reason for this was that the participants that had grown up in the place and established a strong bond felt that the place was familiar. The participants with a high level of place attachment that had grown up in Kristianstad had a positive perception of the place brand.

Furthermore, we also found a red thread where the participant could find connections in the film about the new place brand. People who had a history in Kristianstad could connect with some parts of the story and apply it to their lives. An example is Participant G, who had lived in Kristianstad his whole life and felt personal connections to the film as he further explained:

She also goes into this with the fact that she may be here when her mother gets older. Today I am sitting here with my single mother who is sitting alone in an apartment in the city. But we are close, so there are very personal connections to the film.

Therefore, people's personal history shapes the attachment to the place brand and adds value to the perception of the place brand.

A functional attachment can be described as how well a place can provide a person with the resources needed for specific activities (Yuksel et al., 2010). The participants that felt a functional attachment were all students who had moved to Kristianstad for their studies. It was proved that these participants did not have a strong emotional bond to the place as the participants that were raised in Kristianstad. Students could not feel attached to the film because they could not identify themselves with the place brand. Additionally, this made them perceive it differently than the other participants, as they could not relate to the film's story.

The students did not feel as attached to the place as their mindset was to move from Kristianstad after their graduation. Participant D said:

I would not recommend Kristianstad to live in after you have graduated. I can feel that the closer you get to a degree, it may not be a very interesting city to live in when you are not a student.

Therefore, their perception of the place brand was influenced by their mindset, and the place brand was not vital to them. Furthermore, we believe this made them more sceptical about the place brand as they neither loved nor hated Kristianstad.

Another factor that was brought up was that everybody felt attached to the place because of the comfort and vicinity Kristianstad municipality offered. Therefore, the functional attachment did include not only school and work but also different functions that Kristianstad offered that made it better to live there. Gilboa and Jaffe (2021) stated that attributes such as easy access to nature and good commuting connections could affect a person's place attachment. All participants said they felt attached because of the city's comfort, for instance, being close to nature. When the participants saw the film, they recognised activities they had earlier associated with Kristianstad. In addition, this was also a connection that the participants could see in their private life compared to the film, which made them satisfied with the new place brand.

Lastly, Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin (2021) argued that residents with a high level of attachment are more likely to feel a higher loyalty to a place. A high level of attachment can lead to beneficial behaviour for the place brand, for instance, positive word-of-mouth. This was found to be relevant for this case as people born in Kristianstad felt a high loyalty to the place because of their attachment. Further, the residents that felt attached said that they could represent the place brand through word-of-mouth as it agreed with their perception. Their positive perception also indicated that they would be proud ambassadors for the place brand.

5.3.2. Place involvement

The second factor in the mental models is place involvement which is related to how involved residents are in activities in the place. The study discovered that most of the participants were involved in the place in different ways. The majority of the participants emphasised that involvement was developed through personal interest, attachment, and activities related to their work. In this study, the involvement mainly consisted of routine activities in the place as all the participants were residents.

The majority of participants were involved in activities in some way. However, this did not connect to the place and therefore did not affect how they perceived the place brand. Personal interest was shown to be the most influential factor in why people chose to involve themselves. Due to the involvement being mainly based on personal interest, the place itself did not matter, which also meant that it did not impact how the participants perceived the place brand. When Participant F was asked if her involvement was related to the place, she said:

It probably has nothing to do with the place itself, [...] but because you want to help with things [...] and then that I am interested in it too, as well. But not the place itself, if this had been in another place, I would have done the same.

The place involvement only impacted the participants' perceptions of those that worked in the public sector. They perceived the place brand differently than participants who were only involved in activities related to their hobbies. The reason for the involvement was because they were "professionally injured." Their perceptions were influenced to some extent based on what activities they were involved in. The reason for this was that the activities were connected to the place and the place brand in different ways. An example is Participant E, who worked in the public sector and had an interest in how the marketing process of Kristianstad was implemented. The participant has been involved in several projects related to Kristianstad. The involvement meant that she had more excellent knowledge and

perhaps an understanding of what the municipality wanted to convey with the film and if it presented the place brand. The film did not reflect the Kristianstad that she knew and believed it was because of her involvement. Moreover, she felt that it was not the perception of the place brand she had.

5.3.3. Place of residence

After the analysis of the empirical data, it was discovered that the place of residence had minimal influence on how participants perceived the place brand. Some patterns could be detected, but overall, this was not a crucial factor.

The pattern that could be detected was that the place of residence impacted the students' perceptions of the place brand. The student thought that Kristianstad had a bad reputation due to the unpleasant incidents that had taken place in Näsby. Their perception of the place brand has been impacted by the negative outlook that has occurred in Näsby. Participant B explained it as follows:

There are quite a lot of bad things going on here [...] we have had a burglary in the basement, someone has stolen my bike, they have set fire to cars outside the apartment.

It showed a clear connection that the adverse incidents also impacted the perception of the film. The student said that the municipality should have focused to show actions on how the municipality made Kristianstad a safer place.

Therefore, we cannot say that place of residence did not impact the perception of the place brand. However, other than the already presented pattern, place of residence cannot be argued to influence how residents perceive a place brand in this study. Moreover, the four researched areas were located too close to each other to see significant differences. We believe that greater differences would have been seen if this study had been done to a greater extent, such as in a bigger city.

6. Discussion

In the empirical data, three different types of people were identified based on the perception of the place brand and through the conceptual model. This chapter will present these as, the sceptics, the opposers and the approvers.

The factor in the conceptual model that had the most significant impact on how residents perceived the place brand differently was their mental models. Place attachment was proved to have the most impact as participants raised in Kristianstad initially had more positive emotions. As a result, the participants had a better perception of the place brand. On the contrary, participants who moved to Kristianstad for functional reasons, such as studies, did not have an equally strong connection. Further, it resulted in them not having the same positive image of the place brand.

Another mental model that played a role was the place of residence in the municipality. Some participants had different perceptions of the place brand compared to others based on place of residence. For instance, residents in the suburb perceived Kristianstad as unsafe, which was not experienced in any other type of residence. Finally, the participants' occupation had to some extent, an impact on how residents perceived the place brand differently. People who worked in the public sector perceived it differently than those in the private sector. The main reason for this was that they were more involved in the place brand. Their occupation resulted in higher expectations of both the film and the new place brand than the other residents in the study.

Firstly, the sceptics were neither completely negative nor positive. Hence, they had mixed thoughts about their perceptions of Kristianstad's new place brand. On one hand, they believe that Kristianstad is a nice place to be and live in but that the film showed a somewhat beautified image. On the other hand, some factors were not shown in the film that they believed were important to highlight. One of these factors was that they desired some more pictures that showed how Kristianstad

prevents insecurity. Another thing that two of the sceptic participants noticed and no one else did was that the film contradicts what they wanted to mediate. On one hand, Kristianstad emphasises the importance of sustainability. On the contrary, the final scene in the film shows how they allow a lantern that consists of metal up in the air, which can damage both animals and surroundings. Therefore, their image of Kristianstad did not agree with the film's identity, which affected their perceptions.

The sceptics had in common that they had not lived in Kristianstad for more than a couple of years. Therefore, their level of attachment was not as high compared to other participants. They also had more of a functional attachment rather than an emotional attachment. The differences between the sceptics were that they did not live in the same place in the municipality, which indicates that this did not impact their perception of the place brand. Also, one of the participants was satisfied with where they lived compared to the other two sceptical participants. Therefore, this strengthens the fact that the place of residence did not influence the sceptics.

Secondly, the opposers were the participants who did not feel that they could fully identify with the place brand. Also, they believed that many important aspects of Kristianstad as a place brand were missing in the film. For instance, participant E believed that the film does not show much of what Kristianstad has to offer related to things to do or places to visit. Furthermore, participant J said:

So, there is nothing in the film about businesses at all, absolutely nothing.

Participant J further explained that the business sector in Kristianstad is a crucial aspect as they contribute to the development and growth of the place. Participant J believed that the business sector was one of the main factors associated with the perception of the place brand in Kristianstad.

The two participants in the segment "opposers" had in common that they have been involved a lot with the municipality and therefore had a different insight into Kristianstad. Participant E was involved in an organisation connected to the place brand. Therefore, she had high expectations of the film, which did not match with what the film showed. Participant J has been involved with the municipality through his work as a farmer and has experienced that it is hard to get things done in Kristianstad compared to nearby municipalities. Therefore, his image of Kristianstad's place brand has deteriorated over time, which also explained why he was more sceptical of the film.

Both participants E and J felt attached to their place of residence and said that they did not want to move to any other part of the municipality. Furthermore, they were both born and raised within the municipality but mainly felt attached to their place of residence rather than the municipality as a unity. One of the participants said that this probably is the result of Kristianstad not having a solid place brand that applies to the whole municipality. A difference between the opposers is their occupation, as one works in the public sector and the other in the private sector. Therefore, this was not a crucial factor in this case, which shows that the participants did not have to work in the public sector to have strong emotions and opinions connected to the place brand.

Lastly, the approvers are the participants who approved the film and had a strong and positive perception of Kristianstad as a place brand. The participants were satisfied with Kristianstad and felt that their image agreed with the identity of the place. Also, they felt a great sense of security and love for the city, which they were happy to tell in the interviews. This group of participants had in common that they had lived in Kristianstad their whole lives, which means that their level of place attachment was high. They described Kristianstad as a warm, welcoming, and familiar place and thought this also was illustrated in the film. Further, approvers are most likely the residents who are good ambassadors for the place. It was found that people wanted to spread good awareness about the city. An example was that

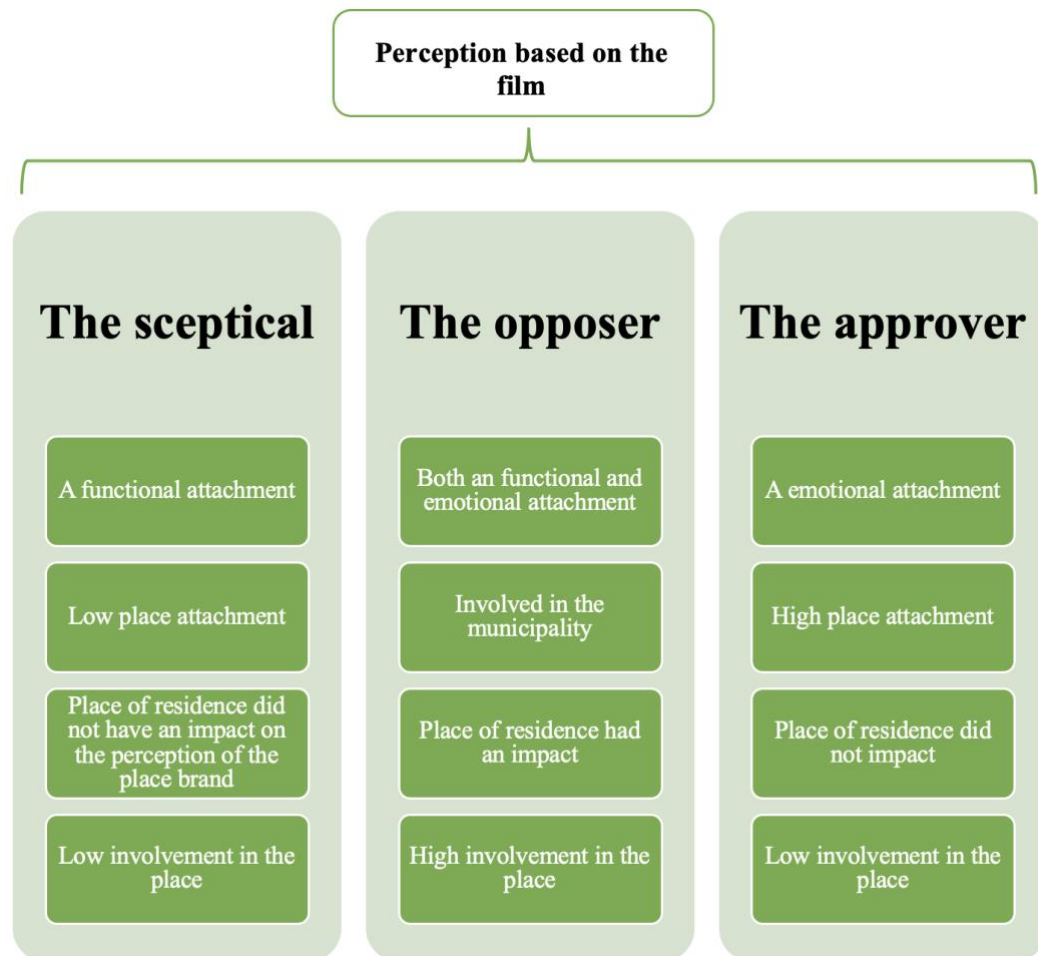
little things like to post on Instagram and tag the place would be an awareness about activities in Kristianstad.

Furthermore, the approvers had an emotional attachment which was the result of that they had grown up in Kristianstad. All the approvers felt a connection to the film and could relate to the film's story. One reaction after the film was:

I get a little warm in my heart as I can recognise the people as well as the places.

The approvers could be found in all four different parts of the municipality, which indicates that this did not affect how they perceived Kristianstad's new place brand. Furthermore, the participants in this group had different occupations, both in the public and private sector, which also showed that the occupation did not affect the emotional attachment.

Lastly, Figure 4 illustrated the three different groups of residents. Furthermore, it was created to show characterises that was found of what they had in common and what differentiated them from each other. The figure was created to give the reader an overview of the three different groups.

Figure 4*Characteristics of the three groups*

Note. Differences and similarities between the characteristics.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter the conclusion will be presented of how diverse residents perceive and make sense of a place brand based on different factors. Finally, theoretical contribution, practical contribution, and future research will be suggested.

7.1. Summary of thesis

This Bachelor thesis aimed to explore how different residents perceived and made sense of a place brand differently. There were several factors that were thought to have an impact, which were based on the sensemaking theory. These were emotions, culture, and mental models. Mental models consisted of place attachment, place involvement, and place of residence.

An abductive approach was applied where previous research related to place branding was used as well as the development of the conceptual model. The conceptual model made it possible to analyse the data and explore new perspectives on how residents perceive a place brand. Furthermore, it was used as a framework when conducting the research.

In the research, a qualitative method was used to collect relevant data through 12 personal interviews. The interview guide was developed with the help of the conceptual model. Furthermore, the personal interviews were conducted to find out residents' opinions on their perception of Kristianstad as a place brand. After the interviews, a thematic analysis was used to find repetitive themes and connections between the data and theoretical framework.

The types of emotions that the participants had before they saw the film reflected how they later perceived the new place brand. Also, there were clear connections between the participants' positive and negative emotions in the perception of the film. In this thesis, culture was discovered not to play a significant role. However, one explanation for this might have been that the participants experienced the questions as hard to answer. Place attachment was the factor that influenced the perception of the place brand the most. It was found that people with solid place attachment were born in Kristianstad municipality and had strong emotional bonds

to the place. Also, that place attachment played a role in how residents perceived the brand differently. Furthermore, place involvement did not significantly impact the perception of the place as we believed. The only significant impact that was noticed was that the participants in the public sector were involved in activities connected to the place brand. Other participants were only involved in personal interests.

Place of residence did not significantly impact the perceptions of the place brand as we believe the places were too close to each other to determine this. Finally, an understanding was created that people's occupations can affect how they make sense of a place. This was shown in the research where people who had a connection to the municipality on an occupational level had more substantial and more profound opinions about the place brand. The findings resulted in the development of three different types of people that made sense of Kristianstad's new place brand and the film in different ways. The three different types of people were the sceptics, the opposers, and the approvers.

7.2. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore residents' perceptions of the place brand based on different factors. The findings resulted in insights into what factors influenced residents' perceptions.

In conclusion, emotions and place attachment influenced each other and were essential in how residents made sense of a place. A person's emotions towards a place play a significant role in the perception of the place brand. This created an understanding of why the people perceived the place differently. Residents with positive emotions perceived the place brand in a positive way and felt more attached, which means that place attachment impacts how a person perceives a place brand. Participants that had negative emotions, connected it to previous events or situations that were related to the place.

Furthermore, negative emotions impacted the place attachment and place involvement as participants were more critical of the place brand. This indicates that a person's background history plays a big part in how they make sense of the place. The residents felt let down and forgotten by the municipality. Therefore, the municipality must create a stronger bond with their residents to reduce the negative emotions. In turn, this can lead to more residents wanting to be ambassadors for the place and spread positive word-of-mouth.

Initially, it was believed that a person's culture could impact how the residents would perceive the place brand. The participants could point out specific characteristics of their place of residence. Despite this, it was not considered to influence their perception of the place brand. Overall, culture was not one of the main factors in this study. We believe that if we had redone the research, we would have rephrased the questions to capture the participants' cultures differently. Our questions were quite broad, which was found hard to answer and led to general answers that were hard to apply to the research.

Place attachment was discovered to have a significant role in how residents perceived the place brand. Furthermore, this was also connected to what emotions different residents had towards the place. Residents with a higher level of place attachment had more positive emotions toward Kristianstad compared to residents with less attachment. This resulted in the insight that higher place attachment created more ambassadors for the place brand and positive word-of-mouth to be spread.

Furthermore, emotional attachment is essential to achieve, to create loyal residents. The emotional attachment was found to be higher for the participants who were born and raised in Kristianstad compared to newcomers. We believe that the reason for this was that their emotional bond was reflected in the place brand since they could relate to the film through their personal life. It was proved that participants with a functional attachment did not have a strong emotional bond to the place as the participants that were raised in Kristianstad. In this case, the participants with a functional attachment did not feel a connection to the place brand since they could not relate to the story of the film. The participant's mindset was already to move

from Kristianstad after graduation and therefore their perception of the place brand was influenced by it.

In this study, the level of place involvement did not influence the perceptions; instead, the occupation had a role in how the resident made sense of the place brand. The residents' occupation was not initially believed to impact the perceptions of the place brand. However, the study showed that participants who worked in the public sector were more involved in the place brand due to their occupation than participants who worked in the private sector. Apart from this, place of residence did not show any significant differences in how the place brand was perceived. The only pattern that could be detected was that residents who had lived in places where negative incidents had occurred showed that it impacted the perception of the place brand negatively.

Based on the findings, three types of people were discovered that reflected different perceptions of the place brand. The people were the sceptics, the opposers, and the approvers. The three different types had similarities and differences in how they perceived the place brand and the film.

To summarise, the thesis aimed to provide knowledge on what factors are essential to consider when implementing a new place brand and targeting the residents. Emotions and place attachment were proved to influence how a resident perceived a place brand. The participants' occupation was not initially believed to have an impact. However, when analysing the empirical data, this was shown to influence how residents perceived the place brand differently.

7.3. Theoretical contribution

In recent years the research in place branding has increased (Gilboa and Jaffe, 2021). Previous research has focused on place branding between various stakeholders (Huertas et al., 2021). Braun et al. (2013) stated that residents have an important role in place branding and are often forgotten. It is addressed that if residents were more included in the process of a new place brand, one could make

use of their knowledge and theories to make a stronger place brand. Therefore, it is significant for municipalities to create attachments to the residents. To improve the attachment, residents' desires and preferences need to be understood. However, to the best of our knowledge previous research has not explored similarities and differences on how diverse residents perceive a place brand, based on emotions, culture, and mental models. Also, we believe that the sensemaking theory has not been applied in studies related to place branding. Therefore, new insights have been provided through the thesis.

The aim of this thesis was to explore how diverse residents perceive and make sense of a place brand based on the different factors. Furthermore, we explored differences and similarities of the perceptions. Gilboa and Jaffe (2021) discovered in their research that higher levels of place attachment among residents make them more loyal to their place of residence. This was further proven in our study which indicates that place attachment has an influence in how residents perceive a place brand. The contribution to the research field is to deepen the knowledge about how residents make sense of a place brand differently with previous literature within place branding and sensemaking.

7.4. Practical contribution

This study has contributed to an understanding that emotions and attachment are the main factors to explain how a resident makes sense of a place. Also, how they perceive the place brand. The acquired knowledge can facilitate for municipalities or other organisations when implementing a new place brand. Furthermore, as emotions and place attachment influence the perceptions, this is something that continuously needs to be worked on. It is important to ensure that the residents have positive emotions towards the place to perceive the place brand in a better way.

Another contribution that has been made is that occupation is an important factor to consider, to understand what the residents' opinions are based on. People who work in the public sector are more likely to be closer to the implementation of the

place brand and have different mindsets than residents in the private sector on the subject. Therefore, people in the public sector cannot assume that all stakeholders will perceive the place brand in the same way as they do.

7.5. Critical review and future research

In this thesis residents' perceptions of a place brand was explored based on different factors. This study was conducted on a rather small scale as there only were 12 participants. Therefore, the results might have had a different outcome if it was applied to a bigger scale with more participants. Also, focus groups as a method might have made it easier for respondents to answer the questions. Focus groups give the opportunity to discuss topics in a deeper way as participants can inspire each other. Hence, the culture questions might have been answered in a more beneficial way for the study.

We also believe that in future research it would be interesting to include how a person's occupation can impact how they make sense of a place brand as a resident. Furthermore, it would be relevant to apply this study to other places. For instance, bigger cities where the residents might be more scattered.

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Appendix A – Interview Guide in Swedish

Bakgrund

1. Ålder
2. Hur länge har du bott i Kristianstad? Har du bott på flera platser i kommunen?
3. Vad jobbar du med?
4. Din favoritplats i Kristianstad?

Frågor innan filmvisningen

Känslor

5. Vad är det första du tankar på när du tänker på Kristianstad?
 - a. Vad är anledningen bakom det?
6. Vad är dina känslor för Kristianstad? Varför tror du att du känner så?
7. Skulle du kunna rekommendera andra att bo i Kristianstad? Om ja, varför? Om inte, varför?
8. Om du har växt upp i Kristianstad, tror du att din uppväxt påverkat bilden på Kristianstad på ett känslomässigt plan? I så fall på vilket sätt?

Plats anknytning

9. Känner du stor anknytning till platsen du bor på?
 - a. Om ja, vad tror du är huvudanledningarna är till det?
 - b. Om nej, vad tror du saknas för att du ska känna dig anknuten?
10. Har du familj eller vänner i staden? Hade du lämnat staden om du inte hade haft dem?
11. Är det viktigt för dig att bo i (platsen)? Eller är du öppen för att bo någon annanstans?
12. Vad är anledningen tror du att folk stannar i Kristianstad?

Plats engagemang

13. Är du involverade i några aktiviteter eller organisationer i Kristianstad?

14. Vilka faktorer anser du vara viktiga för att du ska känna dig intresserad av att engagera dig i platsen? Exempelvis, om du har barn så kanske det är olika sportaktiviteter som dem gör, eller om det är något som gynnar dig själv?
- Varför tycker du att det är/ inte är viktiga att engagera sig kring staden?
15. Vad skulle du specifikt behöva för att bli involverad i platsen och varför?

Kultur

16. Vilken kultur bär du på som individ? Främst genom din egen bakgrund och inte religion.
- Exempelvis, vilka värderingar har du vuxit upp med, har det varit viktigt med familj/umgänge och att gemenskap är viktigt? Eller känner du att du vuxit upp i förhållanden där man endast fokuserar på sig själv och inte bryr sig så mycket om folk runt omkring?
 - Har du en annan syn nu på det än när du växte upp?
17. Tycker du att platsen du bor på har en egen kultur? Kan du exempelvis märka på kulturen och atmosfären att du bor i just (platsen)? Hur känner man igen en (plats)bo?
18. Hur skulle du karakterisera kulturen på platsen där du bor?

Frågor efter filmvisning

19. Vad är dina första känslor efter att ha sett filmen?
- Varför känner du så?
20. Vad är din åsikt om filmen sett ur ett marknadsföringsperspektiv?
- Tycker du att rätt bild visas av Kristianstad genom filmen?
 - Vad gillar du särskilt mycket? Finns det något du inte gillar?
 - Finns det något du tycker saknas som är en viktig del av Kristianstad?
21. Efter att ha sett filmen, stämmer din bild av varumärket överens med bilden som filmen försöker visa?
22. Känner du att platsvarumärket gäller för endast tätorten eller för hela kommunen?

23. Vad uppfattar du att Kristianstad vill skapa för typ av värdeerbjudande med denna film?
 - a. Vad vill dem framhäva att de erbjuder för en person som flyttar till platsen?
24. Hur tänker du dig att du kan vara en ambassadör för platsen? Hur kan du bidra?

Appendix B - Interview Guide in English

Background

1. Age
2. How long have you lived in Kristianstad? Have you lived in different parts of the municipality?
3. What is your occupation?
4. Your favourite place in Kristianstad?

Questions before the film

Emotions

5. What is the first thing you think of about Kristianstad?
 - a) What is the reason behind it?
6. What emotions do you feel towards Kristianstad? Why do you think that you feel like that?
7. Would you recommend other people to live in Kristianstad? If yes, why? If no, why not?
8. If you have grown up in Kristianstad, do you believe that your childhood has had an impact on your view of the place? In what way?

Place attachment

9. Do you feel a strong attachment to the place you live?
 - a) If yes, what do you think are the main reasons?
 - b) If no, what do you think is missing for you to feel attached?
10. Do you have any friends or family in the place? Would you leave the place if you did not have them?
11. Is it important for you to live in (place)? Or are you open to live somewhere else?
12. Of what reason do you think people chose to stay in Kristianstad?

Place involvement

13. Are you involved in any activities or organisation in Kristianstad?
14. What factors do you consider important for you to be interested in involving yourself in the place? For instance, if you have children it might be different sport activities that they participate in, or if it is something that benefits you?
 - a) Do you believe it is important to be involved in the place? If yes, why? If no, why not?
15. What would be needed for you to get more engage in the place and why?

Culture

16. What culture do you have as an individual and how does it shape how you perceive different things?
 - a) For instance, what values have you grown up with? Has it been important with family and solidarity? Or do you feel like you have grown up in conditions where you only focus on yourself and do not care so much about your surroundings?
 - b) Do you have a different view of it now compared to when you grew up?
17. Do you think that your own place has its own culture or characteristics?
Can you notice that you live in Åhus, how do you recognize other Åhus residents, etc.
18. How would you characterize the culture in the place you live in?

Questions after the movie is shown

19. What are your first feelings after the movie?
 - a) Why do you feel that way?
20. What is your opinion on the movie through a marketing purpose?
 - a) To you believe that the right image of Kristianstad is shown through the film?
 - b) What did you like specifically? Was there something you did not like?

- c) Is there anything that you believe does not appear, that is an important factor of Kristianstad?
21. After having seen the film, do you believe that your image of the place brand agrees with the image the film is trying to show?
 22. Do you feel that the place brand only represents Kristianstad city or the whole municipality?
 23. What kind of value proposition do you perceive that Kristianstad is trying to offer?
 - a) What do they want to highlight that they offer for a person thinking of moving to the place?
 24. How can you imagine being an ambassador for this? How do you contribute? (Closing question, after the movie)