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Value creation in a dying city center - A study of important attributes visitors use to create value in a local city center

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Abstract

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Title

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Abstract

In recent years, online retail, shopping malls and the Covid-19 pandemic have contributed to dying city centers. To counteract the decrease, several Swedish cities have begun to improve their city centers with the help of Svenska Stads kärnor's development processes. One of these city centers is Hässleholm which serves as the case for this study. The purpose of this thesis was to explore important attributes of a local city center that visitors use to create value and to understand what type of value that is created. Based on previous research a conceptual model was constructed to describe the roles of the providers and visitors and their interactions in a local city center. Furthermore, the value outcomes were explored. Empirical data was gathered through four focus groups with a total of 21 participants that regularly visit Hässleholm's city center. Based on the empirical findings, this study confirmed that eight out of nine previous established city center attributes are important for the visitors. Additionally, the local aspect was found to be an equally important city center attribute consisting of five perspectives. These perspectives are seen as important driving forces to visit and shop in the local city center. The city center attributes are used in the city centers for visitors to create utilitarian, hedonic and altruistic value. This thesis contributes with new insights for the city center of Hässleholm in its development process, as well as contributing to new theoretical implications since the study found that the local aspect was an important attribute.

Keywords

City center retail, Place attributes, Retail attributes, Value creation, Service-based logic, Local aspect

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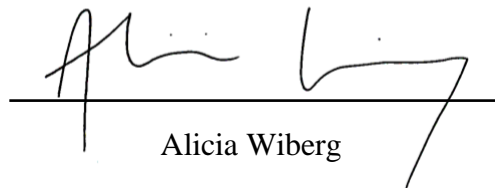
Each other

For the friendship and excellent teamwork. For the shared interest and making this process enduring and enjoyable.

Kristianstad 25th of May 2022



Lisabel Nilsson



Alicia Wiberg

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1. Introduction

The following chapter presents the background, problematization, purpose and research question. Firstly, the background describes the struggle city center experience and the importance of a thriving city center. Secondly, the problematization discuss the relevance of this study and the application of the case of Hässleholm. Furthermore, the gap found in previous research is identified. Lastly, the purpose and the research question of this study is presented.

1.1 Background

Visualize that you live in a small town. You wake up every day and ride your bike to work. On the way you make a small stop to buy freshly baked bread from the local bakery to share at the morning meeting. Before lunch you receive a message from the local shoemaker that your repair is ready for pickup. At noon you take a walk to consider where today's lunch will be bought and choose the town's famous salad bar where the queue winds long. Outside you spot some friendly faces talking and drinking coffee. While waiting for your food you pick up the repaired shoes and swing by the clothing store to see and feel the fabric of the new spring collection from your favorite brand. While you're out you notice that the town square is filled with people who shop fresh vegetables and farm goods at the Wednesday market. Back at work you enjoy the salad with your colleagues before finishing for the day to meet up with your friends for an after work at the new restaurant in town. On your way home you buy a bouquet of flowers to decorate your kitchen table for spring.

Now visualize that you live in the same small town where the local bakery has closed down. The shoes that needed repair were replaced by new ones ordered online since there is no shoemaker left in town. When you take a walk to search for lunch, your options are limited since there are not many lunch places still open. You notice the deserted town square where there are rarely any activities that attract people anymore. After work you meet up with your friends at home since the city center is so empty and unwelcoming at night. You discuss the new spring collection of your favorite brand that can no longer be found in the city center. You view the collection together online and agree that you miss the simplicity to swing by the store to try on and feel the fabric, purchase the item, and bring it home with you directly. The flowers

are delivered to your door from a large online flower retail chain, and you are reminded that you have not stumbled across anyone you know in town today.

The shift between the two scenarios shows the unfortunate ongoing global trend among city centers during the last decade (Dolega & Wrigley, 2011; Källström et al., 2021). The once prosperous city centers have been reported for several years to decrease. This decrease results in empty premises, less job opportunities and tax income, and empty urban environments which results in residents feeling unsafe in the city center (Perrault, 2020; United Nations, 2020). The Swedish city centers do not deviate from this trend, and there is an ongoing discussion about dying city centers today. Two well-known factors that have a negative impact on local retailing are e-commerce and the external shopping malls (Hart et al., 2013; Teller, 2008). The Swedish Trade Federation presents yearly reports on the current situation for Swedish retailing. The report of 2021 presents not only the two widely known influencing factors, e-commerce and external shopping malls, but also a new third factor. The third factor is a result of the two latest years with an ongoing global pandemic rapidly affecting physical commerce in the dying city centers (Svensk Handel, 2021).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, new trade norms and restrictions of the number of visitors made it difficult for physical stores to run their businesses (Koch et al., 2020). The global pandemic was handled differently from country to country in terms of restrictions. Many countries had total lockdown, but Sweden used a softer approach with the aim of business survival and residents' well-being (Samuelsson et al., 2021). Still, the retail report showed 40% increased online market shares 2020, at the expense of the physical stores (Svensk Handel, 2021). The increase has been steady, between 2005-2017 did online market shares increase with 335% (Svensk Handel, 2019). Newspapers all over the world report the struggles cities centers faces while the Covid-19 restrictions eases (Branson, 2021; Centre for Cities, 2022; Petersson, 2020). Despite the aggravating circumstances, retail in local city centers continues and many Swedish city centers invest in marketing and work actively with campaigns that will attract downtown trade (Svensk Handel, 2021; Svenska Stads kärnor, 2022a). Marketing activities and events in the city center is one way to attract people, giving the city center an opportunity to enhance the retail experience (Källström et al., 2021; Perrault, 2020). Oana Mihaescu (2019) explained the city center's development from a retail hub to today where visitors search for experiences. The consumer often visits the city center to look for inspiration and the trip becomes an activity. If the city center develops into a place connected to its history or unique design this can be used in the town marketing to attract visitors (Mihaescu, 2019).

The city center has been an important hub for decades, serving as a marketplace where people gather to exchange ideas and information (Gehl, 2010; Åström, 1993). A thriving city center has historically been the beating heart of the city which provides the residents and visitors a variety of opportunities and experiences located in a small area. Although the city center has been forced to develop and adjust to new external circumstances throughout the decades, shopping has remained central as the most common visiting purpose (Hart et al., 2007). Apart from retail and shopping, the city center consists of several important attributes which together creates the uniqueness of each town. This uniqueness is often the differentiated factor that separate city centers which can be marketed to receive a stronger retail destination (Källström et al., 2021). A city center consists of both retail attributes and place attributes (Källström et al., 2021). Retail- and place attributes are what is offered to the customers and visitors and can be seen as value propositions which they create value from. (Källström & Hultman, 2019). The city center attracts customers since it is a retail destination. However, since it additionally serves as a place destination the visitors also plays an important role. It can be argued that everyone who comes to the city center is a visitor, either with a commercial purpose (customer) or a recreational purpose (solely visitor). Henceforth, these two important groups are referred to as visitors in this thesis to simplify the reading.

To create an attractive and safe city center, people are a big part of the value creation (Svenska Stads kärnor, 2022b). To increase attention about how visitors affect their city center, a campaign is currently marketed in Sweden created by the organization Svenska Stads kärnor. The campaign states that the city has “no pulse without yours” which points to the importance of visitors for the center's survival. The campaign aims to turn the ongoing negative development among cities in Sweden (Svenska Stads kärnor, 2022a). The benefits with a thriving and lively city center can be understood to be many. All who operate directly or indirectly in the city are important for its survival, especially the commercial visitors (Svenska Stads kärnor, 2022b).

A typical city center in Sweden affected by the decrease of local retail is Hässleholm. The city presented a report 2021/2022 of the current situation in terms of retail, attractiveness, and development. The report indicates that the town is facing similar difficulties to keep a thriving city center, as other small towns (BID Hässleholm, 2022). To reduce the downward trend, Hässleholm has joined a development process called BID (Business Improvement District). The BID-process is used to review the current situation and promote a vibrant city with activities, events, and local retailing. Furthermore, the BID-process enables the city to develop a strategy

for the center to become more attractive and active for residents, visitors, and companies. The strategy includes aligning the city's municipality, property owners, businesses, and associations to collaborate with each other (BID Hässleholm, 2022). Along with the BID-process, Hässleholm has also joined Svenska Stadskärnor's campaign "No pulse without yours" (HessleCity, 2022a; Svenska Stadskärnor, 2022a). Since Hässleholm is a typical city in terms of size, unemployment figures and rankings of satisfied residents, simultaneously as they fight for a thriving and attractive city center, the city can be considered an appropriate typical case to study.

1.2 Problematization

The dying city centers have been lively debated for several years but reached a new peak after increased reports on struggling city centers as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic (Florida et al., 2021; Svensk Handel, 2021; United Nations, 2020). Online retailing and external shopping malls have gained bigger market shares at the expense of physical retail in the city center (Hart et al., 2013; Källström et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2008; Teller et al., 2008). This development has raised a lot of attention in the research field where studies aim to find out what retail channels are the most successful. Within the city center physical retail is important, and researchers aim to sort the benefits it brings. A thriving city center is often identified as an important aspect to attract residents and visitors, but the statistics show that a lot of Swedish city centers struggle to survive (Svensk Handel, 2021; Svenska Stadskärnor, 2022a). The current discussion of the dying city center can be further investigated to understand what values visitors can gain from the physical retail experience within the local city center.

Due to the declining trend of retail in city centers, several studies have looked at the value of thriving city centers (Florida et al., 2021; Hart et al., 2013; Hospers, 2017). However, to the best of our knowledge, the research field often focuses on larger cities as their empirical base. Hässleholm can be seen as a typical city in Sweden based on their population, unemployment, and size. According to the Swedish organization SKR (Sveriges Kommuner och Regioner) Hässleholm is classified as a smaller urban area, which is the normal size of many Swedish cities (SKR, 2022). In addition, in Europe, 56% of the population lives in small to medium-sized cities (European Union, 2011), which also indicates that a smaller city is a typical case to look at. As stated before, there are many Swedish city centers that fight for their survival through, for example, development work and campaigns, which Hässleholm also does (BID Hässleholm, 2022; Svenska Stadskärnor, 2022a). Therefore, Hässleholm can be considered as

a relevant case to look at as there are many similar cities who struggle with the same problem regarding a dying city center.

Researchers have aimed to determine the most central attributes for successful retail and several attributes have been found and discussed (Johnsson et al., 2014; Källström et al., 2021; Olsen & Skallerud, 2011). Previous studies have an in-store experience focus and explore the so-called retail attributes. However, when using the city center as a retail destination the experience is also affected by out-side-offerings, identified as place attributes. This combination stresses the importance to understand how different attributes affect the retail's development and creates a unique city center offer (Källström et al., 2021; Olsen & Skallerud, 2011). This thesis will combine and identify important place- and retail attributes that can provide an important foundation for visitors to visit their local city center.

It can be argued that the visitor's role is important for the value-creation based on both theory and practice. Studies show that co-creation and relationships between the user and the supplier are an important focus in place marketing (Grönroos, 2008; Källström et al., 2021). The significance of visitors' ability to contribute to the experienced value through co-creation is a well-studied field. One way to understand co-creation is through service-based logic. Using service-based logic as an analytical lens within the fields of retail and place marketing, the focus is placed on the relationship between the user and the provider to interpret the value creation process (Grönroos, 2008; Grönroos, 2011; Källström & Hultman, 2019). However, to best of our knowledge, the importance of co-creation as it is conceptualized within service-based logic has not been studied among city center retail. Furthermore, seen from a practical perspective, reality shows an emotional argument where the visitors have a compassion and desire to create value together to increase their city's activity and attractiveness. The previously mentioned campaign "No pulse without yours" emphasize that there is no thriving city center without its residents and visitors. This campaign implies to use visitor's emotions for value creation (Svenska Stadskärnor, 2022a). This thesis aims to use service-based logic as a theoretical lens to contribute and understand visitor's creation of value within the city center.

To shop local and locally produced goods has received increased attention in recent years which is influenced by the up-rising sustainability trend (Paloviita, 2010). The increase has also been linked to visitors' willingness to contribute to local producers' survival to keep a thriving surrounding. This attitude became even more prominent during the Covid-19 pandemic and societal restrictions (Koch et al., 2020). The literature provides a variety of studies on the local

aspect linked to the food industry. Several studies show that visitors have a positive image of buying local and locally produced food (Cranfield et al., 2012). Skippari et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of the experienced value through socialization and community in local trade as a driving force to protect the local grocery retail. As far as we know, the literature within the local field is often connected to locally produced edible goods and is rarely applied on the local retail market such as a city center. It can be viewed that the city center can offer something unique through a local aspect. This thesis will further investigate the local aspect as an attribute visitors can take part in to create value and contribute to the desired uniqueness of the city center.

In summary, there are several arguments that show the importance to study what the local city center offers its visitors and what value the visitors create within the area. Many city centers have been affected negatively by online retailing, external shopping malls and the Covid-19 pandemic, while the typical city is rarely studied. To succeed to maintain an attractive city center, it is essential to look at both place attributes and retail attributes, which the visitor can create value through. In the quest to explore what value visitors create in the local city center, this thesis will also examine the local aspect as an attribute since it can be argued to be an important aspect.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to explore important attributes of a local city center that visitors use to create value, and to build an understanding of what type of value that is created. The study is conducted with a visitor perspective and use the current case of Hässleholm's city center as a base.

1.4 Research question

What types of attributes are important to visitors when they create value through visits and retail in the local city center? And what type of value is created?

2. Theoretical background

To explore important attributes of a local city center and what type of value that is created, this chapter will present relevant concepts for this study. These concepts include city center attributes, a local aspect, visitors value creation process and three different types of value. Lastly, a conceptual model is presented which describes how the concepts are interrelated.

2.1 City center retail

The dying city center has been widely discussed in the literature field, where the main contributing factors point to increased e-commerce, external shopping malls and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic (Hart et al., 2013; Svensk Handel, 2021). The globalization and the Covid-19 pandemic have formed new norms and standards within retailing which makes it more difficult for the city centers to attract visitors. Today, many commercial visitors value efficiency and a wide product selection which is provided through online retailing and large external shopping malls. The city center is simultaneously reported to be a key area, not only in terms of retailing, but also because a thriving city center contributes to attractiveness and forms the place brand for the city. Researchers suggest a shift in view of what purpose the city center serves. It can serve as a complement to the online retail channels (Källström et al., 2021), or offer a unique place for experiences as a complement to the retail and service destination (Mihaescu, 2019). But what does the city center consist of and what does it offer its visitors?

A city center has historically been used primarily as a retail destination (Hart et al., 2007), and studies of what the retail offers have focused on the in-store experience - *retail attributes*. Later research has drawn attention to the shift of using the city center as more than a retail destination, which has resulted in a requirement to study the out-of-store offerings - *place attributes* (Källström et al., 2021). The retail and place attributes create the offerings of a city center and can be viewed as value propositions that visitors can use to create value. However, the literature does not provide a fixed set of attributes since each place and retail destination are unique, but unified descriptions can be identified (Johnson et al., 2014). Retail attributes described by Olsen and Skallerud (2011), Teller and Elms (2012) and Ghosh et al. (2010) will be further explored along with place attributes described by de Nisco et al. (2008) and a review from previous research presented by Källström and Hultman (2019). These attributes will form the basis for this study as the city center attributes which are vital for visitors to create value. The city center

attributes will be summarized in *2.1.3 Summary of city center attributes* and will be a main part of the conceptual model.

2.1.1 Retail attributes

Retail is one component of the city center that consists of different attributes offered to the visitors. The definitions of important retail attributes differ from each study since researchers have developed their own set of attributes. Thereby, the following section will present three different studies and their views on what offerings form a retail destination. Olsen and Skallerud (2011) presented five identified attributes while they studied store attributes and its effect on customers' shopping value. *Product assortment* is described as the store's product offer and how it impacts customers' outcome. *Product value* covers the customers' tradeoff between quality and price in terms of creating value. *Physical aspects* describe the physical environment in terms of interior and design, and how it might impact customers' perceived value whether it is connected to convenience or uniqueness. *Personal interaction* describes the interactions between customers and personnel and if value increases or decreases depending on what the customer sought for. The last attribute covered by the researchers is *accessibility* which involves the opening hours and location for easy access or availability to other similar stores (Olsen & Skallerud, 2011).

Teller and Elms (2012) listed six important retail attributes while they studied what offerings affect attractiveness within retail in an urban place. *Accessibility* is described to be important in terms of reaching the location fast, easy and without any obstacles. *Parking conditions* involves the number of available parking slots and where they are located for easy access to the retail facility. *Retail tenant mix* are divided and characterized by the following three: *merchandise value* referring to the level of price and quality, *product range* that describes the available products in terms of depth, breadth and range of brands, and *sales personnel* that covers the employer's friendliness, competencies, and willingness to provide service. *Non-retail tenant mix* is described by Teller and Elms (2012) as the surroundings that affect the retail experience such as entertainment and food consumption. *Atmosphere* refers to the elements that affect the retail experience such as, architecture, air, temperature, light, cleanliness, and other sensory observations. Lastly, *infrastructure* aims to cover both the orientation and maneuverability within the retail destination, but also the structure of the surrounding urban environment and availability of for example cash dispensers and public restrooms (Teller & Elms, 2012).

Ghosh et al. (2010) have identified and presented 12 store attributes that affect customers' store selection process. *Location* is described as an important attribute in terms of parking possibilities, reachability through public transportation and geographical position. *Size* describes the retailer's size and what impact it may have on value. *Price reduction* affects customers' choice of store as well as the perception of quality. *Outlet atmosphere* covers the importance of creating an atmosphere connected to the store image. *Flooring* can affect customers' shopping patterns. *Lightning, music, and odor* indicate that involving senses affect customers perception and behavior in the store, which also *Temperature* can contribute towards. *Colors* are connected to the layout inside the store and how it affects the store image. *Sales personnel* serves as an extension of the store image and the creation of relationships between customers and employees can enhance customers shopping experience. *Customer space* is described as benefits given to customers through, for example, dressing rooms, benches, toilets, and parking. *Technology* indicates both using digital screens to impress visitors and to create a more efficient shopping process. Lastly, *Merchandise* describes how offers are placed and displayed within the store (Ghosh et al., 2010).

Ghosh et al.'s (2010) article focused on how stores can use attributes to differentiate themselves against other competitors to win over customers (i.e., visitor in this thesis) in their store selection process. The attributes can also be seen as possible offerings the retailer offer the visitors, which the visitor then can create value through. The retail attributes presented in each study can be compared and stated to cover similar areas, which is viewed as attributes the city center retail can offer its visitors.

2.1.2 Place attributes

The city center should not only serve as a retail destination, but it should also be an attractive place for people to visit. Previous research has found that place attributes are important to frame what the city center consists of. As in the retail field, the definitions of the most important place attributes are not fixed, they differ from each researcher (Källström & Hultman, 2019). Thereby a study and a review that describe prominent place attributes will be presented.

de Nisco et al. (2008) presented a study that formed six categories of city center offerings. *Accessibility* describes the importance of accessible locations in terms of parking, public transportation, and infrastructure. *Quality of life* aims to cover the city offers in terms of services towards disabled visitors, security and crime prevention, cleanliness of outside areas as well as layout of the urban areas and buildings. *Retail offer* is described by de Nisco et al. (2008) to

involve opening hours, product assortment, level of quality and price and the interaction with the personnel. *Leisure, cultural and public utility services* refer to the quality and to what extent the area offers restaurants, entertainment centers, public parks and spaces, and public utilities. *Heritage and artistic aspects and their valorization* seek to cover how the city center emphasis on historical features, quality of tourist attractions, and events to promote the places historical aspects. Lastly, *Marketing strategy* includes how marketing campaigns are conducted connected to knowledge of target profile, usage of strategies and actions (de Nisco et al., 2008).

Källström and Hultman (2019) have reviewed several studies to identify attributes that determine what a place can provide in order to potentially increase place satisfaction. The studies used for the review were: Darchen and Tremblay (2010), Inch and Florek (2010), Inch and Sun (2013), Liao (2009), Ng (2005), Potapov et al. (2016), Rozhkov and Skriabina (2015), Santos et al. (2007), Van Ryzin et al. (2004), Zenker et al. (2013). The review resulted in a list of 14 place attributes.

The first attribute, *Transportation* involves mobility possibilities both in terms of public transportation and infrastructure. *Security* covers the overall safety in the place and the presence of police and fire departments. *Nature* describes the surroundings in terms of access to parks, water, and green areas. *Sports and leisure* are the possibilities for activities and events within the place. *Culture* refers to the place's cultural activities and facilities such as theaters, libraries, nightlife, and cultural events. *City center offerings* involves for example restaurants, cafes, and shopping. *Public services* are what education and health services the place offers. *Accommodation* covers the supply of apartments and housing for residents to live. *Location* refers to the place's connection to other important areas such as nearby cities and airports. *Employment* describes the labor market, career opportunities, wages, and professional networks. *Environmental quality* is the overall surrounding environment measured in cleanness and air pollution. *Atmosphere* is what image and feeling the place provides. *Diversity* covers how multicultural the place is. Lastly, *Prosperity* is described as the general economic growth of the place (Källström & Hultman, 2019).

Both de Nisco et al. (2008) and the review made by Källström and Hultman (2019) included similar areas as important for the place to offer its visitors. Källström and Hultman (2019) covered the whole place and included both the city center as well as the surrounding areas of a city, while de Nisco et al. (2008) focused on the place in terms of city center which resulted in an overlap of attributes between the place and retail field. There are similarities between the

two studies as well as with the three studies presented in 2.1.1 which leads to a possibility to combine the attributes into the compiled list presented in *Table 1*.

2.1.3 Summary of city center attributes

After reviewing literature within the retail and place field, it reveals a variation of definitions that are used on attributes. Johnson et al. (2014) found that this variety of definitions are intertwined and many of the important attributes include the same content but are described with synonyms. While adding place attributes as an addition to retail attributes to describe the city center, it can be noted that the attributes in the two fields are similar. Hart et al. (2013) describes this similarity as a result of that place research borrowed attributes from the retail field when it constructed important offerings of the place. The attributes are thereby combinable and will together create a deeper understanding of what the city center offers its visitors both in terms of place and retail.

The following, *Table 1* presents the 40 retail and place attributes found in the literature compiled into nine city center attributes that will serve as the foundation for this thesis.

Table 1

Summary of city center attributes

City center attribute	Description	Sources
<i>Accessibility</i>	Opening hours, location, transportation possibilities, parking conditions, linkage to other stores/places	Olsen & Skallerud (2011) Teller & Elms (2012) Ghosh et al. (2010) de Nisco et al. (2008) Källström & Hultman (2019)
<i>Atmosphere</i>	Feeling, characteristics, heritage, and overall town image	Teller & Elms (2012) Ghosh et al. (2010) Källström & Hultman (2019) de Nisco et al. (2008)
<i>Convenience</i>	Public restrooms, cash dispensers, benches, dressing rooms, playgrounds	Teller & Elms (2012) Ghosh et al. (2010) de Nisco et al. (2008) Källström & Hultman (2019)
<i>Design</i>	Store layout (e.g., size, lightning, music, colors) architecture, interior inside and outside, cleanness, parks, and green areas	Olsen & Skallerud (2011) Ghosh et al. (2010) de Nisco et al. (2008) Källström & Hultman (2019)
<i>Elementary attractiveness</i>	Security, job offers, attractiveness of surrounding area (e.g., housing, education, health), multiculturalism, economic growth	de Nisco et al. (2008) Källström & Hultman (2019)

<i>Personal interaction</i>	Width and type of in-store service, relationships with employees within the city center	Olsen & Skallerud (2011) Teller & Elms (2012) de Nisco et al. (2008) Ghosh et al. (2010)
<i>Product/service offer</i>	Product/store/restaurant assortment, price, and quality	Olsen & Skallerud (2011) Teller & Elms (2012) de Nisco et al. (2008) Källström & Hultman (2019) Ghosh et al. (2010)
<i>Leisure and entertainment activities</i>	Cultural activities (e.g., cinema and theater), sport events, entertainment, recreational parks	Källström & Hultman (2019) de Nisco et al. (2008) Teller & Elms (2012)
<i>Town marketing</i>	Campaigns, events, offers	Ghosh et al. (2010) de Nisco et al. (2008)

2.2 The local aspect

Another unique offer each town provides is the local aspect. To offer a *unique experience* within the local city center is difficult for online substitutes to recreate or compete with. This means that the city center has an advantage in being able to provide a unique value created by the local aspect (Hospers, 2017). However, the local aspect might bring value in other ways. Previous research that discussed benefits provided by the local aspect has mostly focused on the edible good field. The research discusses the current popular trend of purchasing locally produced goods, which is considered *sustainable* (Paloviita, 2010). One sustainable benefit of purchasing locally produced goods is the fact that the purchased good has a shorter transportation process than its substitutes. Another sustainable benefit of buying goods, visiting restaurants or other services in the nearest city center is that the visitors' travel distance shortens.

Support your locals has become a rising trend much due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Many people wanted to help their local small businesses to survive, in order to maintain a thriving surrounding in smaller areas (Koch et al., 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic clearly showed the importance of every visitor for the survival of smaller stakeholders. As city centers have other competition in form of online commerce and external shopping centers, it is important that visitors retain a supportive attitude in a post-covid world. Contributing to the survival of the local city center and its actors is one way to gain value within the city center. To retain relationships and socialize with the community is important since it creates bigger incentives to continue to protect the local restaurants, café, services, and stores (Skippari et al., 2017). The *personal relationships* within a small local city center are also studied to be a driving factor for commercial visitors to visit, since the personal attention is valuable (Hospers, 2017). Personal relationships are offered within a small city center and contributes to the local aspect.

Altogether, the local aspect has not been covered within the literature as an attribute in terms of city center retail, but it can be stated that the local aspect can play a major role as a city center attributes for visitors in a value-creation process. Following, *Table 2* presents the local aspect as an attribute with descriptions linked to the literature.

Table 2

Additional attribute

Additional attribute	Description	Sources
<i>The local aspect</i>	Unique experience, sustainable, personal relationships	Hospers (2017) Paloviita (2010) Skippari et al. (2017)

2.3 Service based logic

The purpose of this study is to explore important attributes for a local city center that visitors use to create value, and to build an understanding of what type of value that is created. One way to look at the visitor value creation process is by using service-based logic as a theoretical lens. Service-based logic derives from relationship marketing and is a research stream based on a customer and service view where value is delivered through exchanges and interactions between different actors (Grönroos, 2011; Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Källström & Hultman, 2019). When service-based logic is used, the starting point is the customer perspective, and the center point becomes the customer (i.e., in this thesis the visitor) and how they create value-in-use through the offered value propositions. For clarity we will continue to use “attributes” to describe the value propositions as previous research uses this term.

In service-based logic, value-in-use is often defined as "an interactive relativistic preference experience" (Holbrook, 2006, p.715) which is created by the customer (Grönroos, 2008). Value-in-use is a feeling of increased well-being while customers experience that they are better off than before (Grönroos, 2008; Källström & Hultman, 2019). Grönroos (2011) has emphasized that value-in-use is created through the process of buying and using products or services which can be linked to Holbrook's (2006) view. He found that products perform services that in turn create value experiences. Thus, value-in-use is created by the customer through value propositions offered by the providers, but the customer can also be part of the co-creation of value propositions. Studies within place marketing have shown that visitors not only consume a place, but they are also involved in the formation of the place (Källström & Hultman, 2019).

This means that visitors can co-create significant value propositions by interactions with other actors which they then can create value-in-use from.

2.4 Types of value

According to many researchers the concept of value plays a central role in the theory of marketing (Graf & Maas, 2008; Grönroos, 2006; Holbrook, 2006; Källström & Hultman, 2019). An increased interest in value has arisen in research during recent decades, resulting in different ideas and theories within the field (Graf & Maas, 2008). Many researchers agree that value is difficult to define (Grönroos, 2011; Holbrook, 2006; Yoo & Park, 2016), but in the literature it is often presented as a difference between benefits and sacrifices, monetary gains or hedonic appreciation of interaction between an object (e.g. a product) and a subject (e.g. a customer) (Grönroos, 2011; Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Holbrook, 2006). Teller et al. (2008) stated that commercial visitors visit stores not only to create value by shopping a product or service, but for various types of reasons such as value creation through socialization, information, or self-satisfaction. Additionally, Rintamäki et al. (2006) explained that within retail, value is a key concept since it describes what the commercial visitor wants and believes the purchase will result in. In order to build an understanding of what type of value that is created by offered city center attributes, this study views value based on three commonly used dimensions: *utilitarian*, *hedonic*, and *altruistic*.

2.4.1 Utilitarian value

Utilitarian value is an extrinsic task-related value created by the visitor to achieve their goal to “get the right product for the right price and at a minimum effort or cost” (Teller et al., 2008, p. 283). Utilitarian value is often described to be an economic value where the purpose is to get the most out of the purchase, in the most efficient way (Chiu et al., 2014; Rintamäki et al., 2006; Teller et al., 2008). Previous literature has aimed to list subcategories within utilitarian value and two common subcategories that are used is *convenience* and *monetary savings* (Chiu et al., 2014; Kesari & Atulkar, 2016; Rintamäki et al., 2006). Convenience is often described as the value created by saved time and effort. Connected to city center retail, convenience can be created through easily accessible parking facilities and stores where the visitor can quickly find what they are looking for. Kesari and Atulkar (2016) described convenience as a perceived benefit through reduced time in searching for location, store, product, and information. Monetary savings refers to the value created by spending less money. This can be done through,

for example, cheap prices and sales promotion which reduce the pain of paying (Chiu et al., 2014; Kesari & Atulkar, 2016; Rintamäki et al., 2006).

2.4.2 Hedonic value

Hedonic value is an intrinsic emotional value created by the visitor through the shopping experience. In contrast to utilitarian value, hedonic value is experienced by the visitor feeling enjoyment and excitement (Chiu et al., 2014; Kesari & Atulkar, 2016; Olsen & Skullerud, 2011; Park & Ha, 2016; Rintamäki et al., 2006; Teller et al., 2008) which means that hedonic value is more subjective and personal (Kesari & Atulkar, 2016). Rintamäki et al. (2006) stated that this value is created through the act of shopping experience regardless of whether a planned purchase is made or not. The focus is not on fulfilling a goal through the purchase of a product or service since the goal is the shopping experience itself. Previous research often divides hedonic value in two subcategories: *entertainment* and *exploration*. Entertainment refers to a value of excitement and enjoyment. This value can be perceived through facilities such as music, food courts, events and contests, fragrances, themed environments, and overall atmosphere. Exploration is a hedonic value based on joy of exploration, desired adventure, and sensual excitement. The value is created by excitement of product or information search such as variety seeking, window shopping or vanish from daily routines. The value refers to the experienced feeling of having fun and finding pleasure in the activity (Chiu et al., 2014; Kesari & Atulkar, 2016; Olsen & Skullerud, 2011; Park & Ha, 2016; Rintamäki et al., 2006; Teller et al., 2008).

2.4.3 Altruistic value

Altruistic value derives from the intrinsic benefit as it covers the “concern for how my own consumption behavior affects others where this experience is viewed as a self-justifying end-in-itself” (Holbrook, 2006, p. 716). Altruistic value can be created by participating and engaging in ethically desirable practices or through a spiritual sense of community and unity. Previous literature explains the value as an action for the benefit of other people without expecting any personal benefit for oneself. For example, this altruism can be experienced by helping others, contributing to charities, or acting for welfare (Holbrook, 2006; Källström & Hultman, 2019; Prakash et al., 2019).

2.5 Conceptual model

The conceptual model is based on the theoretical background and aims to illustrate important attributes for a local city center and to build an understanding of what type of value that is

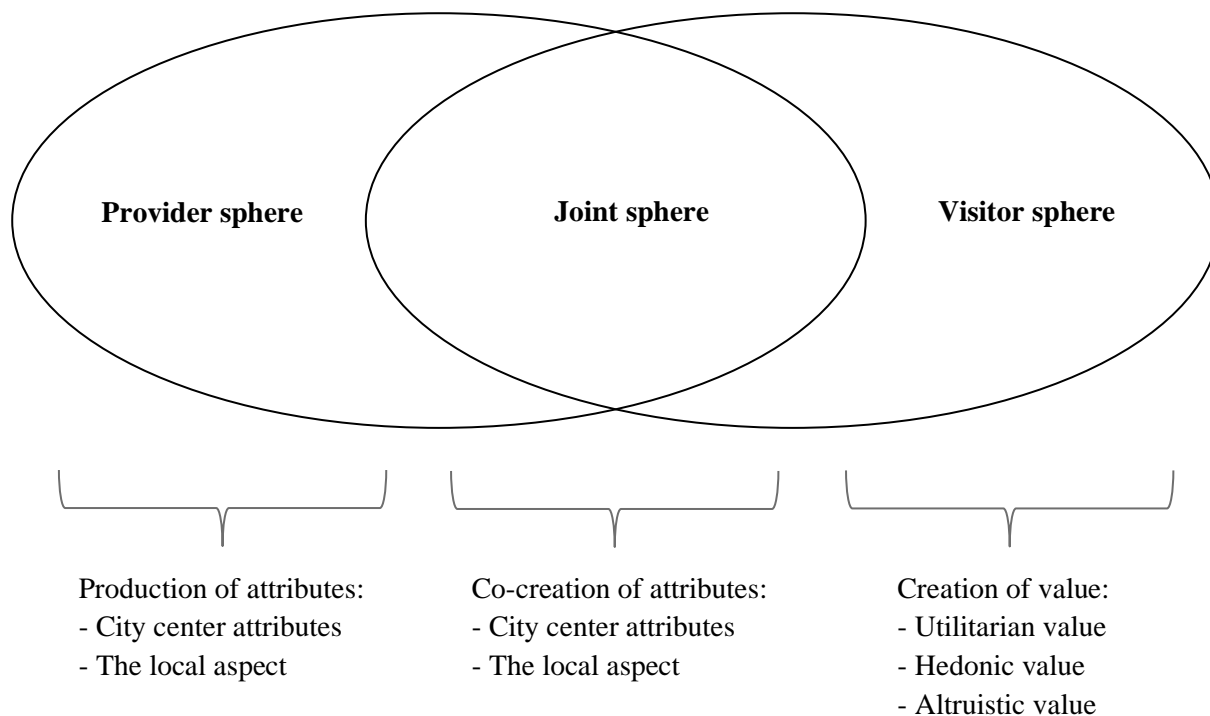
created by the visitors (*Figure 1*). The model is built on the concept of value creation from service-based logic (Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Källström & Hultman, 2019). The model contains city center attributes for visitors to create three types of value: utilitarian, hedonic and altruistic.

The model illustrates three spheres which aims to describe the roles of the providers and visitors and their interaction. The first sphere is the *provider sphere* where the providers are responsible for the production process where they produce offerings for the visitors to use. This is done by the offered attributes presented in the theoretical background (*Table 1 and 2*). Through the attributes, visitors create value, which means that the provider facilitates and influences visitors' value creation by providing visitors with relevant attributes. The second sphere is the *joint sphere* where the visitors and the provider together co-create attributes leading to created value (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). The joint sphere and the co-created attributes are dependent on mutual and direct interactions where two or more parties influence each other (Källström & Hultman, 2019). In the context of this study, co-created attributes can be considered as atmosphere and personal interaction (*Table 1*) as these are dependent on visitors being present and interact with the providers or other actors. The third and last sphere is the *visitor sphere* where the visitors independently create value. In this sphere, there are no interactions or co-creation since the sphere is not connected to the providers. This means that the value depends on the visitor's accumulated experience with attributes linked to the visitor's social, physical, and mental state (Grönroos & Voima, 2013).

Many types of value are created in the value creation process. In the conceptual model, value is represented by *utilitarian value*, *hedonic value*, and *altruistic value*. Utilitarian value is experienced as the visitor creates an extrinsic economic value by fulfilling its goal of efficiency (Chiu et al., 2014; Rintamäki et al., 2006; Teller, 2008). Hedonic value is a subjective value experienced by the visitor feeling enjoyment and excitement through the activity (Chiu et al., 2014; Kesari & Atulkar, 2016; Olsen & Skullerud, 2011; Park & Ha, 2016; Rintamäki et al., 2006; Teller, 2008). Altruistic value is experienced through acting to increase someone else's well-being where one does not expect a personal benefit for oneself (Holbrook, 2006; Källström & Hultman, 2019; Prakash et al., 2019).

Figure 1

Visitor's value creation process in a local city center



Note. Based on Grönroos and Voima (2013)

3. Method

The following chapter will present the choice of research methodology of this study. First, the theoretical method will be described through the research philosophy, research approach, and research design. The choice of theory will then be presented as well as data collection. The data collection presents our participant selection and focus group guide. Moreover, a description of the data analyze process is presented. The chapter ends with an argumentation of the study's trustworthiness and limitations.

3.1 Research philosophy

Within social science, there are three main philosophies that explain humans' assumption and view of the world: *positivism*, *realism* and *interpretivism*. Interpretivism aims to *understand* human behavior and considers the complexity of human actions and relationships, and the nature of the world (Bell et al., 2019). This thesis has a strong connection to interpretivism since it aimed to create an understanding of how the visitors in the city center use and value different attributes. Interpretivism requires an understanding of the subjective meaning of social action (Bell et al., 2019) which is consistent with this study as it is conducted from a visitor perspective. This study did not aim to *explain* human behavior and did not focus on creating an objective understanding which the positivist and realist philosophies do (Bell et al., 2019). Furthermore, co-creation of attributes is dependent on interaction and relationships which coheres with the aim of interpretivism considered the complexity of human actions and relationships.

3.2 Research approach

A study uses a research approach as the bridge between theory and empirical material. This approach can be divided into three strands; *deduction*, *induction*, and *abduction* (Lind, 2019; Bell et al., 2019). This study aimed to find important attributes for a local city center both in theory but also through the empirical study. Nine city center attributes were found and listed to examine its relevance in praxis. Furthermore, this study examined a new attribute, the local attribute, which was explored if it potentially could be added to the list of previously established city center attributes. Lind (2019) stated that studies that use the abductive approach identify patterns in the empirical material in order to interpret it through the chosen theory. Within this study we aimed to have a theoretical ground but also to find patterns and draw conclusions of

the gathered empirical data and compare it to theory. Some findings might cohere, others will serve as new findings that will be added to existing knowledge. Moreover, this study investigated value through three different dimensions, the hedonic, utilitarian, and altruistic. The content of how these values is expressed are partly based on theory but we also aim to find patterns and investigate the empirical findings to code it into existing theory. The deductive approach uses existing literature and knowledge as the theoretical foundation while the inductive approach uses the collected empirical study as the foundation and theorizes the findings into concepts and models (Lind, 2019). Since this study used a combination of these approaches, the abductive approach, which is a mix of the two, was the most suitable for this thesis.

3.3 Research design

According to Denscombe (2018) is qualitative studies characterized by the use of a smaller sample which allows the study to be more profound. Furthermore, qualitative studies analyze words or pictures compared to quantitative studies which analyze numbers and aim to capture a large sample. Qualitative studies are also known for using a holistic perspective, where the aim is to study a whole concept rather than focus on specific parts. Analyze qualitative empirical data tends to be conducted both during and after the sampling, unlike quantitative studies which only analyzes data after sampling (Denscombe, 2018). These characteristics can be identified in this thesis which is categorized as a qualitative study. This thesis focused on collecting a deeper perception of visitors' view of the city center and all its important attributes rather than choosing a more specific focus area. The sample consisted of a small selection of people where we aimed to analyze their thoughts and opinions expressed in words. Since we moderated the focus groups and listened to their discussions, the analyze process began during the sessions, but the main analysis work was conducted afterwards. Altogether, these aspects indicate the qualitative approach of this study. The qualitative approach is also visible through the choice of words in the purpose and research question. The purpose of this study was to "explore" and other descriptive words like "how" and "what" are indicators for the qualitative approach. These choices are used to form this study in its qualitative research design.

This thesis used the research design of a *case study* since it aimed to understand a complex and unique case. The case study also enables the researcher to deeper describe the researched phenomena (Denscombe, 2018), which this study aimed to do. Bell et al. (2019) described that a case study is based on either *a single organization, a single location, a person, or a single*

event. For this study, a single location is used since it aimed to study the case of Hässleholm and how visitors experience the place and what value that is created for them in Hässleholm's city center. This choice of research design also determines that this study is qualitative since case studies often are connected to the qualitative approach (Bell et al., 2019).

3.4 Choice of theory

In scientific research, theories have a central role as it creates a bridge between a concrete reality and the abstract notions. Researchers use theories to *explore*, *explain* and *create understanding* of phenomena in our world (Lind, 2019). Previous research has conceptualized retail and place attributes which has been useful in this thesis to explore important attributes created through city center attributes. Retail and place attributes described in previous research have created an understanding and contributed to discussions regarding what city centers offer their visitors. Furthermore, research in the local aspect has contributed to exploring whether visitors see the local as an offer they can create value through. Lind (2019) states that theories contribute to an extensive context of knowledge, identify relevant correlations and variables, and enable analysis and interpretation of the empirical basis. Since this thesis aimed to explore important attributes that visitors use to create value, previous research in the field of service-based logic was considered useful. Service-based logic is based on a customer and service view where value is delivered through exchanges and interactions between different actors. To investigate different types of value, theory within value was studied. Three different types of value were selected as previous research showed relevance and applicability. In summary, previous research in these areas of theory formed the theoretical basis of this study and contributed to understand and support the analysis of empirical data.

3.5 Data collection

To answer the thesis's purpose and research question, four focus groups were formed to collect data through a qualitative method. The four focus groups were semi-structured meaning that there were some predetermined questions for the participants to discuss, but depending on their answers, follow-up questions were adapted accordingly. According to Denscombe (2018), participants are convened by a moderator who guides and facilitates the discussion by ensuring that all participants have a say and that the conversations revolve around the purpose of the interview. When using focus groups, the researcher collects empirical data that describes what people say they believe, opinions and feelings they say they have, and what they say they do (Denscombe, 2018). The purpose of this thesis was to gain an insight into visitors' opinions and

experiences regarding the city center's attributes and visitors' perceived value, and therefore focus groups were considered as a useful method. Our aim was to create an interaction within the groups to obtain information regarding a specific area that the participants have a similar connection to. Through focus groups, the participants are encouraged to discuss the topic within the group (Denscombe, 2018), which helped us gain the participants shared and individual perceptions. Furthermore, an understanding was created about the underlying causes and reasoning around the participants' views and opinions and why they had these points of view.

The use of focus groups as a collection method can have both advantages and disadvantages. As focus groups are dependent on interactions and discussions between the participants, the participants have a major role in the creation of useful data. Denscombe (2018) states that an advantage of focus groups can be that the participants can inspire each other, which provides more developed and useful answers. If a participant finds it difficult to answer a question, the discussions and the other participants' answers can contribute help the participant to get ideas and answer with their own opinions. A disadvantage of focus groups being based on interactions and discussions between the participants is that if no discussion takes place, the data collected is negatively affected. If the participants feel unsafe within the group, discussions can default, therefore we made sure to use warm-up questions and let the participants share a *fika*¹ during the session. Another disadvantage of focus groups are that participants' free discussions can lead to the wrong topic. To avoid wrong topics, we moderated the discussion by leading the participants back to the topic with follow-up questions or other comments. However, it can also be an advantage for the participants to have the opportunity to speak freely as the collected data becomes more objective. Lastly, another disadvantage with focus groups is the risk of large amount of data, which becomes time-consuming and difficult to analyze (Denscombe, 2018). Therefore, we kept the focus groups few and small and recorded the discussions to ease the analysis process.

When implementing focus groups as a collection method, it is necessary to determine the number of focus groups, where the focus groups are to be held, and the number of participants per focus group. According to Bell et al. (2019), a sufficient amount of data is collected when the responses obtained from the discussions of the different groups are recurring. Our goal was to hold four focus groups, one hour each, as we considered this to be sufficient and achievable

¹ Swedish fika, to share a coffee and a treat

based on the cost and time limit for our work. Furthermore, we believe that four groups were sufficient because we could see repeated responses among the participants in all groups. For participants to feel comfortable presenting their opinions, it is also necessary for them to feel confident and secure (Denscombe, 2018). By hosting the groups in an attractive office space in central Hässleholm, we tried to create a safe environment for the participants where they would feel comfortable to share their opinions. The fourth group was held at the participants office space where they already felt safe.

To ensure that the data collected is not too extensive and difficult to analyze, the number of participants in each focus group should not be too many (Bell et al., 2019; Denscombe, 2018). According to Denscombe (2018), a group of six to nine participants is recommended and to schedule 1,5-2 hours. Given our one-hour time limit for people to be able to participate, we considered that groups of five to eight participants were optimal for our study. This choice was considered to lead to rewarding discussions where all participants would have time to present their opinions. Due to late cancellation and difficulty to gather participants, all groups became smaller than expected. Group 3 became only four participants, groups 1 and 2 consisted of five participants, and group 4 consisted of seven participants. The fourth group were conducted on a company where the participants knew each other well. We were worried that the smaller groups consisted of too few participants, and the flow of discussion would be affected. However, Bell et al. (2019) stated that shy people can benefit from smaller groups and find it easier to talk. We experienced that this was the case in our three first groups where the participants were not all familiar with each other. The smaller groups created a space where they all could participate.

3.5.1 Participant selection

Since this thesis aimed to explore which attributes visitors found important to create value, we gathered visitors for group discussions. To gather people for our focus groups we wrote an invitation and contacted Hesslecity, which is the town centre management in Hässleholm, who published the invitation in their social media channels. The purpose was to reach a wide audience which usually visits Hässleholm's city center without using a convenience sample (Bell et al., 2019). In our invitation we had four dates and times when the focus groups were scheduled. The response was low, and we continued by visit a selection of stores and restaurants within the city center where we asked for permission to display our invitations to reach our target audience further. When the response rate still was low, we continued to share the official

posts of Hesslecity on our own social media. In total we were contacted by seven participants that were interested in participating.

Furthermore, we reached out to companies in Hässleholm, where we offered to join them during a lunch break to conduct a focus group. One company accepted and we conducted one of our focus groups in their office with seven employees that lives in Hässleholm and usually visits the city center. Due to lack of time, we were forced to continue and switch to a convenience sample which means that the researcher chooses the sample (Bell et al., 2019). Using a convenience sample is fast and cheap but it can affect the generalizability of the study since the sample risk not to represent the entire population (Denscombe, 2018). Since time was short and we succeeded to gather people through our invitations on Hesslecity's social media as well as the company that chose to participate, we only aimed to fill the empty spots in our sample through the convenience sample. We contacted people in our personal network through text messages or social media. In the process we also aimed to contact a broad variety of people both men and women in different ages to keep the total sample with a broad demography. The people whom we contacted through our convenience sample were acquainted with us somehow and chosen out of keeping a variety of people in terms of age, gender, occupation, and involvement in the city center, but also as we thought they were most likely to accept and participate. The only criteria for all our participants were that they visited Hässleholm's city center at least once a month. This criterion was chosen since we aimed to cover a wide range of visitors. Some of the people we reached out to did not respond and some declined due to lack of time or that the set dates did not match their schedule, but we managed to get a total of 21 participants.

That participants feel safe within a group is an important part since it affects their comfort in expressing thoughts and opinions (Denscombe, 2018). We aimed to create a space where they were comfortable and in the mixed groups some of the participants were acquainted with each other. This was due to different reasons, they came together to the group discussion with a friend or colleague, they knew each other because they knew us, or they knew each other since the town is small. The group at the company differed since they all knew each other well. The four focus groups and its participants are summarized in *Table 3* below.

Table 3*Focus group participants*

Focus group	Participant	Gender	Age	Occupation
Group 1 2022-05-02 12.00 – 13.00	A	Male	57	Employee
	B	Female	70	Retired
	C	Female	24	Student
	D	Female	21	Student
	E	Female	48	Employee
Group 2 2022-05-02 16.10 – 17.07	F	Male	64	Employee
	G	Female	58	Employee
	H	Female	24	Student
	I	Female	24	Student
	J	Male	83	Retired
Group 3 2022-05-03 18.30 – 19.39	K	Female	54	Employee
	L	Female	53	Employee
	M	Female	35	Employee
	N	Female	45	Employee
Group 4 2022-05-04 12.30 – 13.16	P	Male	61	Employee
	Q	Male	56	Employee
	R	Female	56	Employee
	S	Female	30	Employee
	T	Female	30	Employee
	U	Male	29	Employee
	V	Female	55	Employee

3.5.2 Focus group guide

We used a semi structured interview guide for our focus groups (Appendix A). The guide was built around the purpose of this thesis in to raise discussions and hear opinions which we later could analyze. When the participants arrived, we asked for consent to record sound and video, and explained that their participation were anonymous in our thesis. We began the focus groups with information about our study and what the focus group were about to include. We clearly stated that there are no right or wrong answers and that the goal was for them to think aloud

and discuss in group. After the information we had warm-up questions to make the participants more comfortable. Since the participants in group 1, 2 and 3 did not know each other, we placed more emphasis on the warm-up questions than we did with the focus group held at the company. The participants who were part of the focus group held at the company already knew each other and we had a shorter time scheduled which meant that we excluded the first introductory question.

After the introduction, we started with phase one which was questions and exercises covering the city centers attributes. As one of the main concepts in the conceptual model consisted of attributes that visitors use to create value, we wanted to explore which attributes the participants experience in Hässleholm's city center. We described to the participants that a city center can provide their visitors with offers and gave examples of the two extremes, tangible and intangible offers to provide the participants with a frame. Then we made sure that the participants understood what a city center offering can be and asked them to write down 1-3 small notes with offerings provided within Hässleholm's city center. The aim of this exercise was to hear their reflections of the city center, what they find distinctive and how they perceive the center. The question was open, and no examples were given to hear their spontaneous reflections without being influenced by any given offerings. The participants presented their notes and the thought behind it and thereafter these notes were all placed in the middle of the table.

We continued by providing the groups with our city center attributes (*Table 1*) and added them to the participants' offerings. If the participants considered that some of the notes referred to the same offer, they were allowed to put them together. They were then asked to discuss and select seven to ten offers that they jointly considered to be most important for a general city center to offer. Here, the purpose was to investigate how well the city center attributes agreed with the participants' offer and to create an understanding of which attributes the participants considered to be decisive for a city center. To explore what Hässleholm's city center is good at offering out of these important attributes, the participants were asked to rank the attributes to which attribute is most to least visible in Hässleholm's city center.

The second phase consisted of two main questions regarding the local aspect. Since the conceptual model suggests that the local can be seen as an attribute, we wanted to explore the participants' thoughts and opinions about the local aspect. The first question was whether the participants shop in the local city center instead of online or in shopping malls, and if so, in what context and reason why they chose to shop locally. The second question asked whether

the participants considered the local aspect to be as important, more important, or not as important as the attributes they had selected as important attributes in phase 1. The participants were asked to discuss and argue with each other regarding their opinions about the local aspect. These questions aimed to explore how the participants argue around retail in their local city center, when they are affected by the local aspect and why. We also intended to capture if they mentioned any value they experienced by shopping and visiting the local city center.

The third and final phase consisted of questions about value which it is the third and last main concept in the conceptual model. We started by asking if there is any specific purpose for why they choose to shop and visit Hässleholm's city center. We asked the participants to discuss with each other whether they experience any specific value when they visit and shop in the city center. The purpose of this question was to explore different values created through visits and retail in the city center of Hässleholm. In order to gain a deeper understanding of what value visitors can create through local city center's offers, an exercise was presented where they would explain what they value and what they look for in three different purchases. The purchases consisted of a sweater, fika and a gift for a close friend. Through this exercise, we also wanted to investigate whether the participants experience and look for different values based on different types of purchases. Lastly, we thanked the participants for their participation and contribution to our study.

Due to more time and rewarding discussions in the third focus group, we added two additional questions. As a final question in phase one, we described how attributes can be used to create value for them as visitors. With this in mind we asked them to divide their chosen important offerings into what they believe is created for them and what is co-created together with them as visitors. The purpose of this was to understand if and which attributes they experience involvement in. The second additional question was asked at the end of phase three. We asked the participants to discuss each offering and what value they perceive they can derive from it. The purpose was to understand what type of value they experienced is connected to each attribute.

3.6 Data analysis

After the data collection from the four focus groups, analysis began. To facilitate the analysis of the data, all focus groups were recorded and then the data was transcribed. According to Bell et al. (2019) transcription is very time consuming and in total our transcription process took 22 hours and the material constituted 62 pages. After we had transcribed all the data, we read

through the material to get an overview and increased understanding of the data. The next step in the process was to analyze all the data based on this thesis' various main subjects, which is called thematic analysis (Bell et al., 2019). We started by together study and code the data to mark the different main parts from our conceptual model (*Figure 1*). We divided the data into *Attributes*, *Local* and *Value*. Each part was marked with a specific color, which made it easier for us to get an overall picture. Step two of the coding was to look at each color to identify different subcategories. We divided the discussed offerings into the attributes we used in Summary of City center Attributes (*Table 1*). The identified values were divided into utilitarian, hedonic and altruistic value based on the participants descriptions and discussions. During the process, we used abductive coding, which meant that we emanate from the main parts of our conceptual model, but we also wanted to explore whether there were new recurring themes. We found that many of the city center attributes were important in line with the research. The subcategories of the different values were also further developed. The analysis showed that the local attribute was present and important. The local attribute consisted of five identified subcategories that will be presented in 5.1.3 *The local attribute*.

3.7 Trustworthiness

A study's trustworthiness determines the quality and validity of the qualitative study. According to Bell et al. (2019) trustworthiness is based on four criteria, *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability*. Credibility refers to the researcher's confidence in how believable the study's findings are as well as the acceptance of the findings by others (Bell et al., 2019). Qualitative studies often present findings that are highly reliant on the empirical data (Denscombe, 2018). Through our study we aimed to analyze our findings so that the result was well anchored in the data collected to increase the credibility. Transferability describes if the study is applicable and generalized to other studies and situations (Bell et al., 2019). Qualitative studies can be difficult to generalize since the result is often specific and based on the circumstances of the specific. This thesis does not seek to be generalizable, but instead it aims to develop theory. This theory can later be adapted and used in other similar cases where a location aims to understand what is important in terms of attributes and what value that is experienced through them. We also aimed to describe our approach, strategy, method, findings thoroughly to increase the comprehension of what is specific to our study which increases the transferability.

Dependability refers to the extent the study is possible to repeat or review, which is enhanced by kept and available records of the research process (Bell et al., 2019). In this thesis we aimed to keep our focus group guide, focus group recordings, transcripts, coding, and other important collected data saved on our devices and presented in this study. Lastly confirmability which describes the researcher's impartialness to avoid affecting the research and result due to any personal agenda (Bell et al., 2019). We kept our study solely to be reliant on the findings and aimed to be transparent with the process to increase the confirmability.

3.8 Limitations

Some limitations that may affect the transferability and credibility of this study have been found within the used method. Firstly, convenience sample was used, which may exclude participants who have important opinions and insights on the subject, at the same time as the participants cannot be assumed to represent the total population (Bell et al., 2019). Furthermore, the sample of participants cannot be considered to represent the total population as the sample was to some extent homogeneous as only 6 out of 21 participants were men. In addition, 5 of these 6 men were over the age of 50, which meant that the younger generation of men were not as represented. However, the variation in gender, age and occupation can overall be considered high since the participants consisted of both men and women of different ages and stages of life. Secondly, this study is only based on one city and its city center, which makes it difficult to generalize the study. The choice of city for our case was a smaller city that can be considered a typical city based on population, unemployment and size which increases the transferability. However, this was not the full intention of the study. Instead, we aimed to use the case to generate and test theory to future research.

4. Case of Hässleholm

In this chapter information of Hässleholm's history and current situation are presented. Furthermore, the city centers town centre management, Hesslecity, and their current development process is presented. The city of Hässleholm serves as the case for this study.

In 1914, Hässleholm received town privileges and formed a small city with 3,000 inhabitants. Prior to the year 1914, the place has a long history where it is mentioned by name for the first time in 1539 when Matz Torbensen, owner of a manor house located in the area, mentioned himself as “Lord of Hessleholm”. Later on, Hässleholm became an important area during the war between Denmark and Sweden in the 17th century. In the end of the 19th century Hässleholm grew and became an important railway junction and the city began to form around the railroad that today is connecting the town to other destination, both in the Oresund region as well as the Southern Main Lane (Jakobsson et al., 2014; Hässleholms kommun, 2022). Hässleholm was formed into a municipality 1974 consisting of several smaller villages nearby, which today is the largest municipality in Skåne in terms of land area. The municipality has 52,000 inhabitants whereas 19,500 live in the conurbation area (BID Hässleholm, 2022).

The city center of Hässleholm has developed and changed throughout the history of the town. The main town square located next to the railway station became an important trade hub when the railroad junction took form. The town square has since then functioned as a central important meeting place, where retail, markets, activities, and celebrations has taken place in Hässleholm. The architecture of buildings and urban areas have developed and changed during the years and today some original buildings are preserved, while some are demolished. The area around the main square has become a pedestrian area and the city center consist of retail, service, public places, housing, activities, and offices. Some old original businesses are kept and running, while many have unfortunately closed down (Jakobsson et al., 2014). Today, the center offers 144 businesses whereas 20 are restaurants and cafés, 14 are retail stores, and 27 are beauty and health related business. The city center also has 23 empty premises. In 2000, a town centre management was created under the name Hesslecity to enhance a “living city”. The organization consists of 41 members from retail- and service companies, property owners, other businesses, and municipality employees. A centre leader leads the organization together with a board with members from the branches. The aim for the organization is to increase attraction

and visits to the city center by arranged activities and events but also to increase the cooperation between different actors within the city center (BID Hässleholm, 2022).

Many city centers struggle to survive at the same time as they continue to thrive as an important area of a city (Branson, 2021; Centre for Cities, 2022; Petersson, 2020; Svensk Handel, 2021; Svenska Stads kärnor, 2022a). Hässleholm is no exception, it has reported severity to stay attractive due to thriving e-commerce, changes in consumption patterns, globalization, and digitalization. These negative trends have accelerated due to the Covid-19 pandemic and Hässleholm's city center reports on decreasing revenues within all areas, with a total decrease of revenue by 16.2% since 2020 (Hässleholms kommun, 2022b). Simultaneously, Hässleholm has good commute possibilities with its large railway junction, where approximately 15,000 people move around each day. This easy access leads to an attractiveness to run businesses within the area and the municipality has 5,500 registered businesses (BID Hässleholm, 2022).

In an attempt to turn the downward trend for the city center, the centrum organization Hesslecity has joined Svenska Stads kärnor's development model, the BID-process. The BID-process is a working tool with the aim to enable and raise cooperation between actors, increase attractiveness, and receive new perceptions of a place. Hässleholm has adapted the process with the aim to "create an attractive place for visitors, increase revenues, sustainable establishments, new job opportunities and a pleasant environment to live and work within" (HessleCity, 2022b). Furthermore, Hesslecity strives to increase the local consumption and develop the BID-area that has been set to consist of the inner-city center. The process is conducted between February 2021 and October 2022 and aims to develop a common business plan for all actors within the city center to create a durable organization and financing for future development. The result intends to create a policy document to ensure development and increased attractiveness for the city center both in short and long term (HessleCity, 2022b).

5. Findings and analysis

The fifth chapter of this thesis presents an analysis of the empirical findings collected from our focus groups. Quotes from the focus groups are presented, discussed, and connected to the theories used in our conceptual model. This chapter covers important attributes, less important attribute, and the local attribute found in this study. The city center attributes are then divided into which are produced by the provider or co-created by the provider and the visitor. The chapter ends with an analysis of the discovered values: utilitarian, hedonic, and altruistic.

5.1 City center attributes

During the focus groups we aimed to discover what attributes the participants found important for their value creation and how well these attributes are offered in the local city center of Hässleholm. The participants were challenged to choose the most important attributes and rank the visibility of these in Hässleholm. After an analysis of the data collection, it was found that eight out of nine city center attributes (*Table 1*) were important for a city center according to the participants. The participants found the following attributes important: *accessibility, atmosphere, convenience, design, elementary attractiveness, personal interaction, product/service offer, and leisure and entertainment activities*. The ninth city center attribute *town marketing* was opted out and will be analyzed in *5.1.2 Less important attribute*. The participants also agreed that the local aspect was important for a city center, and we found that the local attribute consists of five subcategories. This section will further discuss and analyze the attributes that were important, less important, and explain why the local aspect is an important attribute.

5.1.1 Important attributes

In line with previous research, eight of the city center attributes were discussed in the focus groups as important offerings of a local city center. During the focus groups we found that accessibility, design, elementary attractiveness, personal interaction, and product/service offer were thoroughly discussed as important attributes. The findings showed that these attributes covered the same aspects as the research presented in *2.1 City center retail* and can be viewed in *Table 4* (Ghosh et al., 2010; Källström & Hultman, 2019; de Nisco et al., 2008; Olsen & Skallerud, 2011; Teller & Elms, 2012). Elementary attractiveness originates from the place marketing literature and describes the importance of for example, security, job offers,

attractiveness of surrounding areas. The participants were confused on whether schools, jobs, health facilities were important to be located within the city center. The participants concluded that all were important for the town. However, some were more important for the city center such as jobs, housing, and preschools. Participant M said that elementary attractiveness is an important foundation for the residents (Table 4).

Table 4

City center attributes – coherent to literature

City center attribute	Subcategory	Quote
Accessibility	Commute possibilities	<i>“[...] if I think about what cities I visit, I often go to the ones that are easy to reach by train.”</i> - Participant C (Group 1)
	Parking conditions	<i>“If you are about to run an errand for 5 minutes, you do not have the possibility to park 3 kilometers away [...]”</i> - Participant P (Group 4)
		<i>“[...] I always get parking. In the middle of the city center, and is there no slots on the streets there are always the parking garage [...]”</i> - Participant L (Group 3)
	Opening hours	<i>“They [the retailers] cannot get along. That is a disadvantage that the different stores cannot keep the same opening hours [...] it would be best for the town if they could cooperate.”</i> - Participant P (Group 4)
Design	Parks and green areas	<i>“I wrote green areas, I thought of nearness to parks, Hembyggdsparken [park in Hässleholm], it is located in the center.”</i> - Participant U (Group 4)
	Interior inside and outside	<i>“I think that design is important. It is more pleasant to walk in a city that looks nice.”</i> - Participant C (Group 1)
Elementary attractiveness	Security, job offers, attractiveness of surrounding area (e.g., housing, education, health)	<i>“[...] you don’t want to be here if this isn’t here [elementary attractiveness], I think Hässleholm can deliver these aspects, we have schools, we build a lot of accommodations, I think it is safe and we have a large hospital, many health centers. I think we live here because we have all this.”</i> - Participant M (Group 3)
Personal interaction	Relationships	<i>“Relationships. It’s fun to buy from someone who has time to learn what I’m looking for [...] that I can go and say, “the usual” and that they know who I am.”</i> - Participant E (Group 3)
	Type of service	<i>“That is a high level of personal service! [refers to participant A’s example of additional service] You know your customer and care! They do not only know you, but care for you.”</i>

- Participant B (Group 1)

Product/service offer	Restaurant offer	<p><i>“I wrote food in the evening. When you live in the city center it is important that there are good options [restaurants], not only one or two, but several.”</i></p> <p>- Participant B (Group 1)</p>
	Product offer	<p><i>“I think a variation of the supply is important, not only H&M. There are different social strata within a city. There has to be one cheap and one expensive shirt. One slim fit and one loose fit. There has to be different styles. I want one style, my daughter wants another.”</i></p> <p>- Participant E (Group 1)</p>
	Store offer	<p><i>“There are some stores, you do not need to travel to other places when you need something. We have a selection of clothes and other stores.”</i></p> <p>- Participant E (Group 1)</p>

		<p><i>“I wrote fika. There are a lot of cafes here. Then I wrote clothes, Hässleholm has clothing stores although I miss some...”</i></p> <p>- Participant C (Group 1)</p>
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Three additional offerings that was important but had details that differed from the presented research was atmosphere, convenience and leisure and entertainment activities. The discussions surrounding atmosphere were centered around characteristics such as architecture, design, events, people, cleanliness is in line with Teller and Elms’ (2012) description of the attribute. What an atmosphere consist of can be difficult to determine since it is intangible. The groups spoke about a feeling that is created by being among people and experience “life and movement” (Table 5). It was also discussed that landmarks contributed to the town image (Table 5) which can be found in Källström and Hultman (2019). de Nisco et al. (2008) described that heritage is important for a city center which can be connected to the town’s atmosphere. Participant U mentioned that the usage of history can be a competitive advantage retailers can use to attract visitors. However, this historical connection or heritage aspect was not mentioned further in the focus groups. The groups did not either discuss atmosphere created inside the stores which Ghosh et al. (2010) have found important.

When the participants discussed convenience, the importance of benches, toilets and playgrounds were brought up which enabled them to stay longer in the city center (Table 5) (Ghosh et al., 2010; Källström & Hultman, 2019; de Nisco et al., 2008; Teller & Elms, 2012). Neither the availability of cash dispensers described in Teller and Elms (2012), nor the

availability of dressing rooms described in Ghosh et al. (2010) was covered during the discussions. The offer of leisure and entertainment activities was also important for the participants. The participants appreciated and found cultural entertainment important, which is in line with Källström and Hultman (2019), de Nisco et al. (2008), and Teller and Elms (2012). Sport events was not mentioned during the focus groups. However, there are not much sport-facilities or activities located in the city center of Hässleholm. The focus lied on the offering of events such as outdoor cinema, the city festival, seasonal markets, parks for recreational purposes and the cultural center (Table 5).

Table 5

City center attributes – coherent to literature with modified subcategories

City center attribute	Subcategory	Quote
Atmosphere	Feeling	<p>“Yes, it is cozy, outdoor seating, you are there, people are there, the market is there, the atmosphere [is created].” - Participant M (Group 3)</p> <p>“[...] for me it is probably important with an atmosphere, to feel that there is life and movement. [...] it gets nicer to walk on the main square when there are things happening, rather than feeling all alone.” - Participant N (Group 3)</p>
	Characteristics	<p>“[Hässleholm] has for several years been good at displaying beautiful flower arrangements on the main square [gives examples], I think that it gives an enjoyable atmosphere [...]” - Participant K (Group 3)</p>
	Town image	<p>“[...] I think the Church is very pretty. [...] it is a symbol of Hässleholm.” - Participant I (Group 2)</p>
Convenience	Public restrooms, playgrounds	<p>“This [convenience] is what you feel is missing, toilets to change diapers, playgrounds that makes you stay longer in town. Because it would be easier to go for a coffee [if there was a playground], and it becomes a longer visit.” - Participant M (Group 3)</p>
	Benches	<p>“Benches are important within the city center, especially for the elderly and children.” - Participant K (Group 3)</p>
Leisure and entertainment activities	Recreational parks	<p>“[...] if you visit a large city, [...] its natural that you take a walk in a park [...] you want to visit the nature even though you are in a large city [...]” - Participant F (Group 2)</p>
	Entertainment	<p>“There has to be entertainment and activities, otherwise the town dies.” - Participant E (Group 1)</p>

Events	<p><i>“Markets [...] Christmas markets, spring markets, something happens on the square [...] something is arranged and offers something extra.”</i></p> <p>- Participant K (Group 3)</p>
	<p><i>“One thing I appreciate in Hässleholm [...] is the outdoor cinema. You cannot find that in Kristianstad, so I went here [Hässleholm].”</i></p> <p>- Participant D (Group 1)</p>

In conclusion, the participants found all eight attributes important for a city center. Five of the attributes cohered more precisely to previous research while three cohered but with modified subcategories that differed from the theory. Furthermore, they level of satisfaction on whether all eight were displayed and offered in the right amount in Hässleholm differed. Some participants lacked the presence of these attributes in the local city center of Hässleholm, while others found some of the attributes quite more present and enjoyable.

5.1.2 Less important attribute

The participants were instructed to choose 7-10 of the most important attributes which lead them to prioritize and compromise. The theoretical description of town marketing included campaigns, events, and offers within the city center, both in- and outside the stores (Ghosh et al., 2010; de Nisco et al., 2008). Marketing inside the stores described in Ghosh et al. (2008) was not brought up by any of the focus groups. The discussions regarding town marketing tended instead to include mostly marketing of activities and happenings within the city center. When the participants were asked to write offerings found in Hässleholm’s city center, a few participants expressed they enjoyed the events offered within the town. However, this was connected to the attribute leisure and entertainment activities. Furthermore, none of the four focus groups chose town marketing as one of the most important offerings.

Group 3 discussed whether town marketing qualified among the most important attributes or not. They stated that there are different needs of marketing depending on whether if you lived in town for several years or if you are younger or new in town. Participant K argued that since she is familiar with Hässleholm she knew usual happenings in town. Thereby, she explained that marketing was less important for her than for the younger audience or new people in town. While the group agreed to that argument, participant M continued to state that it is more important that something happens, than the marketing of the event. Participant L described that the town is first and foremost for them who live in the city, and the groups opted out town marketing in their list of important attributes. Furthermore, group 2 discussed that there is a

greater need for marketing in a smaller city. Participant H described that the events and happenings in larger cities are more likely to be commonly known, compared to events in smaller cities. She argued that marketing in Hässleholm was more important since it is a smaller destination. The group further discussed that their intention to visit town might change depending on awareness of town happenings. If they chose to visit the city center on a marketed happening, there were a higher chance they spontaneously meet friends that also decided to visit. Even if they found the crowded events attractive, they did not find the marketing of the events crucial. In the end, group 2 ended up choosing other important attributes over town marketing.

de Nisco et al. (2008) stated that the attribute surrounding marketing includes knowledge of target profile and then usage of the information to market strategically. How come that all participants ended up not to choose town marketing? It can be discussed that the de-prioritization gets affected by the participants unawareness of the effects of marketing, or they believe they are not the target group. Nevertheless, many participants recognized and appreciated the events offered in the city center. The discussions surrounding the events was never concluded to not include them as a target group. Marketing is a difficult offering since it is not visible in the same way as design or product/service offer for the visitors. However, the participants never spoke about town marketing as unnecessary, it was rather that other attributes were more important. It could be argued that town marketing is crucial within a town, but not to serve as an attribute. Town marketing could be seen as an important facilitator to reach out to residents and visitors to gather them in town where they can enjoy other offerings. Town marketing is thereby not seen as an attribute in this thesis and gets removed from the city center attributes.

5.1.3 The local attribute

During the focus groups we aimed to find out what role the local aspect has and if it can be viewed as an attribute. The participants discussed the local aspect widely during the focus groups and after analyzing the data it can be stated that the local aspect provides an equally important offering as the other eight attributes. Following, the findings regarding the local attribute will be presented and analyzed through the five identified subcategories.

Firstly, one central aspect discussed in the focus groups was the *uniqueness* found in a local city center. Uniqueness can be described to include different things, but in the focus groups uniqueness took the form of the specific offerings in their local city center. Participant L

described that the local aspect provides something unique specific for the place but also for her personally (*Table 6*). This coheres to Hospers (2017) who described that city centers can advantageously use unique offerings to create value. What the unique offerings was for the participants in the local city center was somewhat individual. One shared opinion of what is unique was the independent local businesses in the city center of Hässleholm. During the focus groups the same businesses was brought up in different discussions by all participants. These were the independent local businesses and were often described as the main reason for a visit and that they contributed to the towns unique and special offerings. The participants stated that the independent local businesses, which did not exist anywhere else, was the unique offering of Hässleholm. It seemed like the participants were proud over this uniqueness which strengthened their intentions to stay and attract others to the local city center. The participants concluded that it is important to see and appreciate the unique aspects since they are nowhere else to be found.

Secondly, another important discussion surrounding the local attribute was to *support local businesses* in town. The discussion came to be that the local private businesses were important to support to keep the local touch of the town. Participant K described that she felt a need to support the local for their survival (*Table 6*). Many participants stressed the importance of this matter and spoke about their obligations to support the local. Participant L revealed that she had picked 10-12 stores within the local city center that she found very important for her and the town. In order to do her duty, she decided that she would support those as much as she could (*Table 6*). This was a reoccurring thought among several participants. They felt the need to support the businesses to keep benefit from the assortment in town or to support the owners as they wanted to make sure they could continue their businesses. This discussion was brought further when participant B explained that she experienced a difference in support of chain stores or locally owned stores. She expressed that the local stores were the most important and that those must be kept (*Table 6*).

Koch et al. (2020) stated that this obligation to support the local increased during the Covid-19 pandemic, which was identified during the focus groups. Some participants claimed that support the local was their main philosophy, while other spoke about that they changed their behavior during and after the pandemic. Group 3 discussed that they appreciated the adaptations the retailers did during the pandemic and that they thought it was more important to support the businesses during those tougher times. In group 1, participant A mentioned that he wants to support the local companies even if it costs more. He cited an example where he was going to buy a book at the local bookstore. Unfortunately, the bookseller did not have the book at home,

but participant A explained that even though he could buy it cheaper online and get it home faster, he still wanted to support the local store (*Table 6*). Furthermore, group 4 discussed that they happily bought products from the independent local businesses in town even if the price was 10-15 % higher. The participants stated that the additional services were worth the increased price, but also since they wanted to keep the businesses in town. These examples demonstrate the importance of the local aspect and proves that visitors view the local as an important attribute.

Thirdly, *psychological closeness* was identified as a local aspect during the focus groups. In combination with the attribute accessibility (*Table 4*) it was discussed that nearness is important. The participants spoke about the importance of having things close for easy access. However, participant K spoke about another type of nearness. She mentioned that there was an emotional connection to the place since she lived here for all her life. She described the phenomena as a psychological closeness that she found value in. The group elaborated and stated that there are several forms of nearness. Either it is the feeling that the city center is small, and everything is connected, or it is the emotional closeness. This has not been identified in the previous research of a local city center. This finding contributes to a new subcategory where the local attribute contributes to an important aspect, the psychological closeness for the visitors. This could create incentives further to visit the local city center since it is familiar and in line with who you are.

Fourthly, *sustainability* could also be identified as a subcategory to the local attribute. Previous research has studied the local aspect based on the edible good fields and found that there is a trend in buying locally produced goods due to sustainability matters (Paloviita, 2010). During focus group 1, the idea of sustainability was discussed, and the participants stated that it is important to shop locally from a sustainability perspective. Participant E concluded that she believes it is of great importance to buy local products due to the environment, both locally produced food but also other goods (*Table 6*). This can be linked to the previous literature which states that local retail reduces transport distances, both for goods and for the buyer, which contributes to reduced climate impact (Paloviita, 2010).

Lastly, *personal service and relationships* is the fifth subcategory connected to the local attribute. Personal interaction was described by the participants as an important attribute in *5.1.1 Important attributes*. However, during the discussions and analysis we identified a different kind of personal service which the participants experienced specific to the local city

center. Participant D spoke about the benefits of receiving personal service within a local city center and compared it with the experience that it cannot be found through online retail (*Table 6*). Participant V developed it further and described that the service provided in a local store in Hässleholm was special. When one visits the same store several times it becomes natural to form a relationship. This relationship contributes to it being easy for the service personnel to pick out the right model, size and make appropriate suggestions (*Table 6*). The participants concluded that they appreciate familiar service and when the personnel recognize you. This conclusion is in line with Hospers' (2017) statement that personal attention is important and can be seen as a driving force for visitors to visit the city center. Participant M stated that she interpreted part of the local aspect as a personal algorithm (*Table 6*). She meant that within the local city center, the service personnel could offer such a personal service that they knew what you as a commercial visitor are looking for. She stated that this phenomenon only exists in the local city center and described it as stores in shopping malls or other cities cannot provide this personal service since they do not have the same opportunity to form a relationship with their visitors.

Furthermore, participant A brought up another aspect of personal service and relationships within a local city center. He stated that it is important to create relationships in the city center since it builds the community (*Table 6*). He said that the local city center can offer the opportunity to create relationships that benefit both the community, entrepreneurs, and visitors. This is consistent with Skippari et al. (2017) study which described the importance of retain relationships and socialize within the city center since it creates incentives to protect the local restaurants, café, services, and stores. Participant E continued and pointed out that she thought it was fun to buy from someone who knows what you are looking for and explained that she thought the local aspect contributed to this offer (*Table 6*).

Table 6*City center attribute – the local aspect*

City center attribute	Subcategory	Quote
The local aspect	Uniqueness	<p><i>“Yes, it is really important for me [the local aspect]. There is obviously no other, that’s what makes it unique. It is often those things that gets displayed in discussions and articles [...]. That’s the unique things.”</i></p> <p>- Participant L (Group 3)</p>
	Support local businesses	<p><i>“I want to support the local, so it doesn’t disappear, it is such a special store [refers to a local retail store] that has been here for many years.”</i></p> <p>- Participant K (Group 3)</p>
		<p><i>“I have picked out places, maybe 10-12 places in Hässleholm, that I think is important to survive, then I must contribute with what I can. Then I try, or I am, as loyal to them as I can.”</i></p> <p>- Participant L (Group 3)</p>
		<p><i>“I think it is very important to support the independent local businesses [gives examples in Hässleholm], and therefore, excuse me, will I not visit H&M, I am very patriotic about the local. [...] if we don’t support the independent local businesses, there will only be chains left.”</i></p> <p>- Participant B (Group 1)</p>
		<p><i>“I can buy it [a book] online [...] but I want to buy it from you even if you charge 70 SEK more.”</i></p> <p>- Participant A (Group 1)</p>
	Psychological closeness	<p><i>“I wrote nearness. Since I am raised here, you know everything, and it is close [...]”</i></p> <p>- Participant K (Group 3)</p>
	Sustainability	<p><i>“[...] Shop local, eat local, buy locally produced vegetables and meat and all that, I think it is very important when you think about how the world looks today. From an environment and sustainability perspective.”</i></p> <p>- Participant E (Group 1)</p>
	Personal service and relationships	<p><i>“I agree [with participant C’s described benefits with shopping in the city center], especially the service you receive in the stores which you cannot receive through online retail.”</i></p> <p>- Participant D (Group 1)</p>
		<p><i>“If you often visit the same stores, they know what you like [...] they just pick out [the right size and model] it’s their knowledge.”</i></p> <p>- Participant V (Group 4)</p>
		<p><i>“[...] if you know someone in a store, and they say, “Have you seen this new item, you bought this last time, do you want to look at this today?”. They keep track, like a google algorithm but it’s a personal algorithm instead. [...] it becomes personal which is easier in Hässleholm than</i></p>

[shopping malls], you're there to seldom for them to get to know you the same way."

- Participant M (Group 3)

"It's fun to buy from someone who has time to learn what I'm looking for [...] that I can go and say "the usual" and that they know who I am."

- Participant E (Group 1)

"For me it's about building relationships within the city. In my profession I feel that it is important that you get to know people in the city. [...] It builds an interest for each other and that's how a community is built."

- Participant A (Group 1)

5.1.4 Co-creation of attributes

In the conceptual model the city center attributes are sectioned into attributes produced by the provider and attributes that are co-created between the provider and the visitor. This division depends on if the attributes are solely offered by the providers, or if the attributes are built on interactions between two or more parties (Källström & Hultman, 2019). This cohered to the findings during the focus groups. Participants in group 3 discussed what attributes they experienced that they co-created together with the providers in the city center. Participant M described that she experienced that the division depended on if the attributes consisted of human interaction or if the attributes were more concrete. The group further discussed that some offerings require the visitor's involvement, while other attributes were offered in the city center no matter visitor's involvement.

According to this division it can be argued that three attributes from the city center attributes are co-created. *Atmosphere* is dependent on both the providers and the visitor's involvement through their behavior and presence in the city center. This involvement contributes to the overall feeling in town and can create a positive or negative atmosphere which leads to more or less visitors. Another co-created attribute is *personal interaction*. This attribute requires interaction between two or more parties which makes the attribute clearly dependent on the co-creation. Furthermore, the additional local attribute can also be argued to be co-created. *The local aspect* depends on all parties within the city center. The providers and visitors interact to co-create offerings of the city center with a local touch. The other six attributes; accessibility, convenience, design, elementary attractiveness, product/service offer, leisure and entertainment activities, can be argued to not be co-created since they are offered by the provider no matter visitors involvement.

5.2 Types of value

The focus groups contained questions that delved into the value that visitors are looking for and create through the offered attributes. The aim was to build an understanding of what type of value that is created. In all four focus groups, the three values included in our conceptual model could be identified. Following, findings and analysis will be presented regarding the three different values: *utilitarian*, *hedonic* and *altruistic*.

5.2.1 Utilitarian value

In the conceptual model, it was believed that utilitarian value is a task-oriented value, created through fulfilling a goal by a minimum cost or effort. According to previous studies, utilitarian value is often described as an economic value where the purpose is to get the most out of the purchase, in the most efficient way (Chiu et al., 2014; Rintamäki et al., 2006; Teller, 2008). During the focus groups, the value was discussed indirectly, and the findings show that many of the participants create a utilitarian value through the offerings in the local city center. The utilitarian value was mainly found in discussions about saving time and effort, but some participants brought up the value they felt by saving money. This can be connected to the literature's subcategories convenience and monetary savings (Chiu et al., 2014; Kesari & Atulkar, 2016; Rintamäki et al., 2006).

Firstly, it was clear that many of the participants experienced a utilitarian value by saved time and effort. When the participants were asked what their most common reason for visiting Hässleholm's city center is, many answered that they visit because they need to carry out an errand quickly and easily (*Table 7*). In group 3, participant M explained that she is a person who wants something right now, which Hässleholm can contribute to by offering a small city center and opportunities to easily find the right product (*Table 7*). The value in saving time and effort was also brought up when participant C stated that she values being able to go down to the city center, try on clothes and being able to bring the product home immediately. She continued to emphasize that it is valuable to be able to return the product quickly and easily if needed (*Table 7*). These discussions and statements cohere with convenience found in the utilitarian value (Chiu et al., 2014; Kesari & Atulkar, 2016; Rintamäki et al., 2006).

Convenience, found in the utilitarian value (Chiu et al., 2014; Kesari & Atulkar, 2016; Rintamäki et al., 2006) was also brought up when the participant specific stated that they could save time and effort through good service. The participants concluded that they experienced saved time and effort when the service personnel helped them find a certain size or item,

contribute with tips or pleasant gift wrapping. Participant N explained that she could feel that it was difficult to know exactly what she was looking for and that it was important to be able to ask and get advice. Participant V developed it further and stated that it was time-efficient to be able to buy a gift and have the product wrapped in directly on site (*Table 7*).

Secondly, the utilitarian value described by monetary saving was also mentioned when two of the four focus groups discussed the value found in low price (Chiu et al., 2014; Kesari & Atulkar, 2016; Rintamäki et al., 2006). Participants D and participant I both explained that they value saved money through a low price because they are students. Similar, participant A stated that he is satisfied with a purchase when the price is low no matter what he brings home (*Table 7*). However, this value described by monetary saving did not appear further in the groups, instead there was a discussion about their willingness to pay more for products in the local city center. This discussion is further described in *5.1.3 The local attribute*.

Table 7

Utilitarian value founded in the focus groups

Value type	Subcategory	Quote
Utilitarian value	Convenience	“[...] that’s when I notice that the daughter needs something urgent in terms of clothing [...]” - Participant T (Group 4)
		“[...] I want it here and now [...] I know I should look in that or that store to find that or that product.” - Participant M (Group 3)
		“You can just go there and try it on, if it is clothes for example, and you have it right away. [...] it is so much easier if you must return [the item]” - Participant C (Group 1)
	“You drive down and purchase, you get it [item] wrapped and ready. If I had driven to Maxi [a large department store] then I would drive home and look for gift wrapping paper and then I would wrap it myself. Here [in the city center’s stores] I get everything right away.” - Participant V (Group 4)	
	Monetary savings	“I value the price of what I buy. Maybe especially now that I’m a student.” - Participant D (Group 1)
		“[...]my wife says, “you are more satisfied with the price than with the clothes”. ” - Participant A (Group 1)

5.2.2 Hedonic value

In the conceptual model, it was believed that hedonic value is an emotional value experienced by the visitor feeling enjoyment and excitement. The goal is the experience itself and Rintamäki et al. (2006) described the value as it is created through the act of a shopping experience regardless of whether a planned purchase is made or not. Findings showed that the hedonic value was experienced through the literatures both subcategories entertainment and exploration.

During the focus groups and analysis, we found that all participants experienced a hedonic value of excitement and enjoyment which coheres with entertainment (Chiu et al., 2014; Kesari & Atulkar, 2016; Olsen & Skullerud, 2011; Park & Ha, 2016; Rintamäki et al., 2006; Teller et al., 2008). The participants stated that they felt enjoyment of a beautiful and pleasant environment and participant J described that he experienced the city center as a paradise. He found that the city is very charming, peaceful, and enjoyable which he valued. Participant C concluded that she felt satisfaction to walk in a pretty city and participant K developed it further and said that she experiences an enjoyable sense through beautiful flower arrangements and other decorations (*Table 8*). The participant also discussed a feeling of enjoyment when they are noticed by the sales personnel. Participant K explained that she experiences joy through happy waitresses, and she claimed that waitresses at Hässleholm's local café contributed to her experience becoming personal and pleasant. Participant E developed it and described the value of being noticed and remembered by the staff, which she felt contributed to her finding enjoyment in the purchase (*Table 8*).

In the discussions, the participant also stated that they feel excitement when they visit the city center of Hässleholm. In all groups, the participants expressed pleasure in the view of people gathering and having fun in the city center. In group 3, the participants stated that they thought it was enjoyable to see people on the move which also made them feel less lonely when they visited the city. Participant K mentioned an example when she visited one of Hässleholm's central restaurants when it was fully booked, which created a feeling of joy and excitement. Participant L developed it and said that she enjoys life and movement in the city, which all participants in group 3 agreed on. Furthermore, participant P explained that he feels satisfaction by going down to the city to have a companionable social meeting (*Table 8*).

Exploration is described as a hedonic value based on joy of exploration, desired adventure, and sensual excitement (Chiu et al., 2014; Kesari & Atulkar, 2016; Olsen & Skullerud, 2011; Park & Ha, 2016; Rintamäki et al., 2006; Teller et al., 2008). This way of hedonic value was also

found in the focus group discussions. Participant A explained that he likes to go down to town and buy coffee because it becomes a pleasant walk. Participant D developed it and said that she finds it much nicer to take a walk in the city compared to shop online. Furthermore, participant S described that she likes to bicycle into the city center which becomes a pleasant trip (Table 8). In all groups, the participants also talked about an experienced pleasure of going out and eat in the city center. Many described the food experience as fun, and they concluded that it was a big reason why they visited Hässleholm's city center. In discussions about lunch places, participant G further developed it and stated that she often refrained from bringing a lunch box from home because she thought it was fun to go out and eat at a restaurant (Table 8).

Table 8

Hedonic value founded in the focus groups

Value type	Subcategory	Quote
Hedonic value	Entertainment	<i>"[...] I think that it gives an enjoyable atmosphere when you walk in the square."</i> - Participant K (Group 3)
		<i>"It's fun to buy from someone who has time to learn what I'm looking for [...] that I can go and say "the usual" and that they know who I am."</i> - Participant E (Group 1)
		<i>"Satisfaction of going down and meet someone. Talk. [...] It will be a social meeting; you go down and get what you are looking for at the same time as you exchange a few words with someone."</i> - Participant P (Group 4)
	Exploration	<i>"I like to bicycle in [to the city center], it becomes a nice little trip."</i> - Participant S (Group 4)
		<i>"I do not take food with me [from home] since I think it is fun to go out and eat lunch [at a restaurant]"</i> - Participant G (Group 2)

5.2.3 Altruistic value

In the conceptual model, it was believed that altruistic value is experienced through acting to increase someone else's well-being where one does not expect a personal benefit for oneself. Altruistic value can be created by participating and engaging in ethically desirable practices or through a spiritual sense of community and unity (Holbrook, 2006; Källström & Hultman, 2019; Prakash et al., 2019).

After the analysis of the data, it can be ascertained that the participants expressed an altruistic value mainly in the discussions about the local aspect. In all focus groups, the participants mentioned that they shop inside the city center to support the local businesses and to keep the city center alive. All participants agreed that they thought it was important to shop inside the city center for its survival and participant C stated that she felt an obligation to shop in Hässleholm's city center (*Table 9*). Many participants explicitly said that they want to help keep the city alive (*Table 9*) and meant that it was the biggest reason why they choose to shop locally. Participant L stated that the pandemic affected her desire to shop local. When she noticed the businesses struggle, she began to strive to buy what she could within the city center (*Table 9*). Participant S said that she often chooses to refrain to buy an item in a chain store outside Hässleholm if the same chain also has a store in Hässleholm. She meant that she instead chooses to buy the same product in Hässleholm just to support the local store. In summary, it can be concluded that all participants feel an altruistic value when they shop local. They choose to shop in Hässleholm's city center to support the local businesses as they experience a value in being able to help. As previous research has stated, this value is experienced through an action for the benefit of other people (Holbrook, 2006; Källström & Hultman, 2019; Prakash et al., 2019).

Table 9

Altruistic value founded in the focus groups

Value type	Subcategory	Quote
Altruistic value	Increase someone else's well-being	<p><i>"When the pandemic came, I decided that "what can be bought in Hässleholm, I will try to buy here". [...] I strive to buy what I need and what is available here."</i> - Participant L (Group 3)</p>
		<p><i>"I want to help keep the city center alive."</i> - Participant E (Group 1)</p>
		<p><i>"When I shop here at home [in central Hässleholm], I feel that I am doing my duty. [...] I think it is an obligation to shop here."</i> - Participant C (Group 1)</p>

6. Discussion

In this chapter, we will discuss the most interesting find of this study. The local attribute and its five perspectives: uniqueness, support local businesses, psychological closeness, sustainability, and personal service and relationships will be presented in connection to the utilitarian, hedonic, and altruistic values. The chapter ends with an illustration of the find which explains the relation between the five perspectives and the three values.

The findings showed that the local aspect has a major impact on visitors' reason to shop and visit their local city center. The results showed that the local city center contains a uniqueness that is not found in any other places. In the focus groups, participants often mentioned this uniqueness as specific independent stores that they felt proud of and that they were happy to support. The findings can be interpreted that this uniqueness is important for visitors to feel a sense of belonging and create a will to stand up for their city. It can also be concluded that this uniqueness is a specific offer of each city that contributes to visits and retail. Through this unique offer, visitors primarily create a hedonic value. The participants concluded that it is fun to visit specific stores and experience something that cannot be found in any other places. However, the utilitarian value was also found in connection with the uniqueness. The participants experienced that they saved time at the same time as receiving a unique experience such as extraordinary wrapping from an independent local store in town.

The results also showed that visitors want to support their local city center, and through the support, an altruistic value is created. The local touch found in a small city center is usually something the visitors want to retain. Thereby, the visitors create incentives to keep the support and shop in the local city center. It was discussed that the participants found great value in supporting the city center for future survival. To keep a thriving city center over time the visitors felt obligated to support the businesses. An experience of pride to be part of something bigger was expressed, to contribute to someone else's wellbeing. This behavior is identified in the altruistic value. Furthermore, the participants expressed that it is important to support existing businesses in order to give incentives for others to open new businesses within the area. It can be argued that the participants want to create a future utilitarian value. If the city center can grow to a wider range of stores, restaurants, and cafes the visitors have a wider selection which can save them time and money. When visitors support the local businesses today, it can

contribute to a utilitarian value in the future. A wider selection can also contribute to an increased hedonic value since there are more experiences to enjoy.

Another finding that contributes to the local aspect was the psychological closeness. This is found in the local city center as an emotional connection to the place. The participant that expressed the feeling meant that it was a feeling of nearness, to be home. To feel this connection to the city center can create value in different ways depending on what a visitor is looking for. To feel that the city center is your home can create a utilitarian value. To be familiar with a city center increases the possibility to find what you are looking for, fast and easy. The hedonic value can be created through visiting traditional happenings in the city center. Visitors might experience an emotional connection towards for example the usual seasonal markets and other reoccurring happenings in town. These traditions might be a part of who you are and the connection between oneself and the city becomes stronger. It can also be argued that you are obligated to participate or support your local city center out of psychological closeness, which can be identified as an altruistic value.

Another aspect of the local attribute is the sustainability perspective which can also be seen as an offer that creates an altruistic value. By shop local and locally produced products, visitors create an altruistic value which makes them feel that they have contributed something good to the community. It can also be argued that locally produces products can contribute to a utilitarian value for the visitors. The utilitarian value can be experience when the visitor receives higher quality when buying for example eggs or vegetables from the nearest farm. The sustainability perspective could be applied in other ways as well. It is discussed that transportation distances and returns becomes problematic within online retail. To shop in the local city center reduces those distances for both commercial visitors and retailers which decreases the climate impact. Furthermore, many of the participants expressed that they enjoyed to walk or ride the bike to town, as an activity. When the city center offers attributes that satisfy the visitors, they might prefer to enjoy local experiences. This could replace the need to travel far to experience a hedonic value somewhere else, which creates a more sustainable experiences in a local city center.

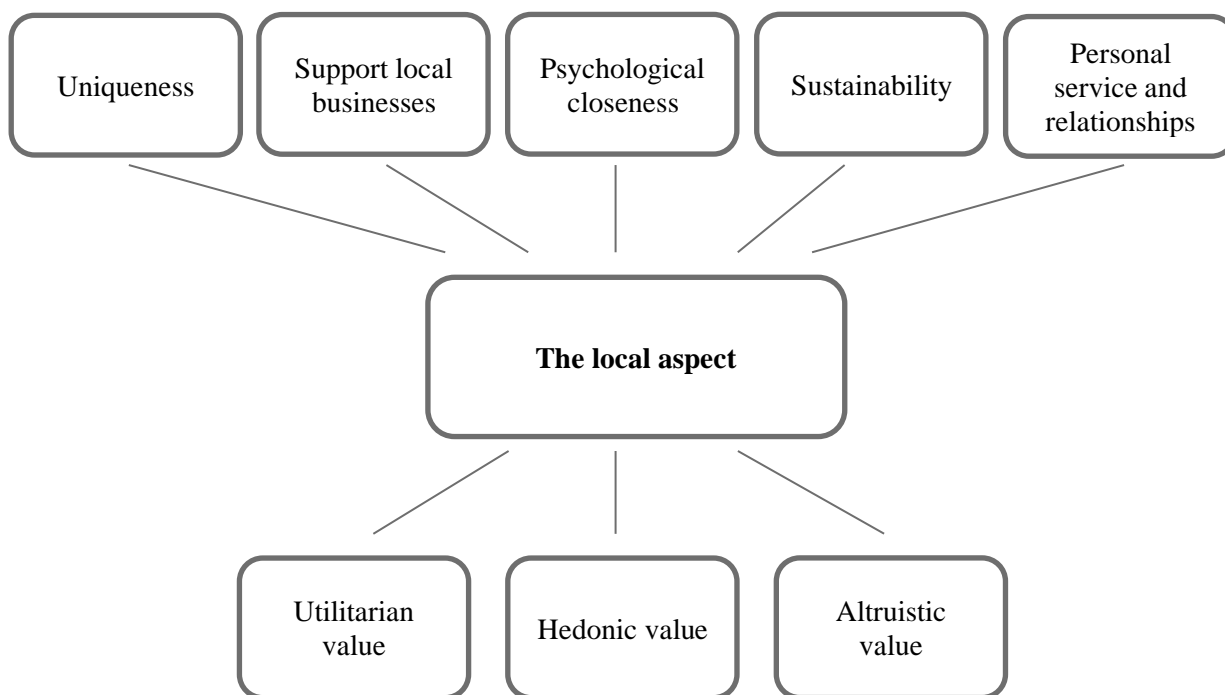
The last perspective of the local attribute is personal service and relationships. This aspect was identified by the participants as an important offering in their local city center. The discussions included that they valued the personal service they were able to receive when creating relationships within a local city center. The utilitarian value can be identified through the

simplified shopping process when the visitor received personal service. Furthermore, when sales personnel in town form a relationship with their visitors, it is easier to remember preferences or know what the visitor wants. One participant expressed that forming relationships with sales personnel in town gave her a personal algorithm. The personnel could text her when items she usually purchase is restocked or call to tell her an item just arrived that she would enjoy based on previous purchases. Another identified value is the hedonic value. Forming relationships with people in town enhances the experience and creates an enjoyable activity. Participants stated that they enjoyed buying from personnel they had a friendly relationship with, which coheres with the hedonic value.

Finally, these perspectives were individual according to our analysis. Some visitors prefer for example to approach the local aspect through feeling the need to support the local, while others felt a strong relationship towards the retailers and thereby found the local aspect important. During the focus groups all participants got to rank their satisfaction of Hässleholm's offerings. Many participants agreed that there was a lot of development potential in the city center regarding the city center attributes. However, one unified opinion was that the local anchoring was strong. Even if the other previously established city center attributes did not satisfy the visitors fully, they felt a strong connection towards their city center. This connection was found to be based on the five local perspectives. As identified through this discussion, the five local perspectives contribute to all three types of value which is an interesting find. The visitors experience utilitarian, hedonic, and altruistic value through the local attribute which shows its importance in the city center. These connections are illustrated in *Figure 2* below.

Figure 2

Value creation of the local perspectives



7. Conclusion

The last chapter presents a summary of this thesis followed by our final conclusions about the important attributes and what value that is created in the local city centers. Furthermore, the practical and theoretical implications for the study are established. Lastly, a critical review and suggestions for further research are presented.

7.1 Summary of thesis

This thesis aimed to explore what attributes visitors find important when they create value in their local city center. Furthermore, this study aimed to sort what type of value that is created. A conceptual model was produced based on previous research to serve the purpose. The model was constructed based on the concept of value creation from service-based logic (Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Källström & Hultman, 2019). The model consists of a provider sphere, joint sphere, and visitor sphere. The two first spheres illustrate the city center offerings that is produced solely by the provider in the provider sphere or co-created in the joint sphere. The third sphere illustrate the visitor sphere where the value is created. The model consists of utilitarian, hedonic, and altruistic value. This study used a qualitative research design, and four focus groups were conducted with in total 21 visitors of the city center of Hässleholm. The focus groups aimed to explore what attributes the participants find important in a city center and what type of value that is created. The focus groups also aimed to investigate whether the local aspect could be seen as an attribute equally important as the other previously established city center attributes.

The empirical findings showed that eight out of nine previous established city center attributes were important to visitors. The attributes accessibility, design, elementary attractiveness, personal interaction, and product/service offer (*Table 4*) were in line with previous literature. The last three; atmosphere, convenience, and leisure and entertainment activities were also coherent but with modified subcategories (*Table 5*). Altogether, these eight attributes confirmed previous research of what is important within the place and retail marketing (Ghosh et al., 2010; Källström & Hultman, 2019; de Nisco et al., 2008; Olsen & Skallerud, 2011; Teller & Elms, 2012). The ninth attribute, *town marketing*, was found to be less important than the others. This may be due to an unawareness of the effects of marketing or that the visitors do not see

themselves as the target audience. Town marketing was opted out as an attribute, instead it was identified as an important facilitator.

The findings also explored whether the local aspect can be seen as an additional important attribute. Through the focus groups, the local aspect was confirmed to be important to the visitors and thereby it was added to the city center attributes. The local aspect was found to create a driving force to visit or shop in the local city center. Through the analysis five perspectives of the local attribute was identified: uniqueness, support local businesses, psychological closeness, sustainability, and personal service and relationships. The local aspect has not been addressed in previous literature as an attribute which makes it an interesting find of this thesis. The analysis also covered a division between produced attributes and co-created attributes. It was identified that atmosphere, personal interaction, and the local aspect were co-created in the joint sphere. The division was found to depend on if the interaction between the provider and visitor was crucial in order to produce the attribute.

Furthermore, the empirical findings also showed that visitors create utilitarian, hedonic and altruistic values, through the city center attributes. Visitors create value in saving time and money, experience enjoyment and excitement, and by increase someone else's well-being. Moreover, in the discussion all three types of value were identified through the local attribute, which emphasize its importance.

7.2 Final conclusions

To conclude, the aim of this thesis was to explore important attributes of a local city center that visitors use to create value, and to build an understanding of what type of value that is created. The result showed that a range of attributes are important in a city center. For this study it was stated that following nine city center attributes found in theory was most important: accessibility, atmosphere, convenience, design, elementary attractiveness, local aspect, personal interaction, product/service offer, and leisure and entertainment activities (Ghosh et al., 2010; Hospers, 2017; Källström & Hultman, 2019; de Nisco et al., 2008; Olsen & Skallerud, 2011; Paloviita, 2010; Skippari et al., 2017; Teller & Elms, 2012).

Furthermore, this study indicates that five perspectives of the local attribute are a crucial part of the city center, and a main reason why visitors visit and shop in their local city center. The five identified perspectives were: uniqueness, support local businesses, psychological closeness, sustainability, and personal service and relationships. The results showed that these

five perspectives provide the visitors with a strong local anchoring which contributes to the towns attractiveness. It can be concluded that if the other eight city center attributes not fully satisfy the visitors, the local aspect contributes to a driving force to still visit and shop in the local city center.

Finally, the result showed that utilitarian, hedonic, and altruistic values were identified to be created in the city center (Chiu et al., 2014; Rintamäki et al., 2006; Holbrook, 2006; Källström & Hultman, 2019; Prakash et al., 2019; Teller, 2008). The nine important city center attributes were used by the visitors to create all three values. The five perspectives of the local aspect were also concluded to contribute to the creation of all three values, which points to the importance of the local attribute.

7.3 Practical implications

It has been reported that many city centers struggle to survive both all over the world (Branson, 2021; Centre for Cities, 2022; Petersson, 2020) and in Sweden (Svensk Handel 2021; Svenska Stadskärnor, 2022a). As a result, many Swedish city centers joins Svenska Stadskärnor's development processes. This thesis is based on the case of Hässleholm which is currently developing their city center with Svenska Stadskärnor's BID process. One important part of each city center is its visitors. Thereby, many town centre management organizations aim to make the city center more attractive for the visitor. Furthermore, this thesis is conducted with the visitors' opinions in focus. The results confirm previous research of what is important to offer its visitors. However, this thesis also presents new findings, that the local attribute is important for visitors to create value. The knowledge of the importance of the attributes can be beneficial in city centers development processes. The result of this thesis is relevant for Hesslecity in their development process of Hässleholm's city center. Since this study was conducted in one city center it can be difficult to generalize the result further. However, the local attribute is a significant find other city centers can further investigate to strengthen the connection between the city center and its visitors.

7.4 Theoretical implications

Previous research showed nine important place- and retail attributes that serve as the city centers offerings that visitors use to create value (Ghosh et al. 2010; Källström & Hultman, 2019; de Nisco et al., 2008; Olsen & Skallerud, 2011; Teller & Elms, 2012). Out of this nine, town marketing was opted out as an attribute in on our findings. Instead, it is argued to be viewed as a facilitator to attract visitors to enjoy the other attributes in the city center. Moreover, a tenth

attribute, the local aspect, was identified in this thesis based on the empirical findings. The local aspect has been discussed in previous literature in different context, but to the best of our knowledge, not in terms of an important offering in the city center. We found that the local aspect provides five perspectives. It contributes to something unique in the local city center, which coheres to Hospers (2017) findings. Shop locally produced goods is important for commercial visitors, both in a sustainable way and to avoid travel far to reach products of services. This is discussed in the literature; however, it focuses on the food industry (Paloviita, 2010). Furthermore, it was stated that the local aspect provides relationships among visitors and personnel in the city center (Skippari et al., 2017) which our finding confirmed was important. Our study also presents that a psychological closeness is important and coheres to the local attribute. Another implication is that this thesis aimed to discuss the connection between the important attributes and what value they created for the visitors with a service-based logic lens. This connection is not discussed in that extent in previous research leaving this together with the local attribute as the main theoretical implications for this study.

7.5 Critical review and suggestions for future research

The purpose of this study was to explore what attributes visitors find important of a local city center in order for them to create value. In this thesis we aimed to use service-based logic as our theoretical lens. Service-based logic focuses on interactions between different actors, leaving co-creation as an important aspect. Co-creation of attributes were covered within this thesis; however, it received a small focus. The questions regarding co-creation on our focus group guide was only asked to one of the four focus groups due to lack of time. For a richer result connected to the theoretical lens, this could have received more focus in the thesis overall.

For suggestions for future research our theoretical implications can be further investigated. One main implication was the local attribute and its importance for the visitors of a local city center. This find leaves an interesting path for future research to develop further. Furthermore, this thesis focused on one typical Swedish city center and the findings are difficult to generalize. For further studies, it would be interesting to make a similar study on another city center to compare and make more generalized results. The results showed important city center attributes and what value that is created through them by the visitor. Further studies can focus on how these findings can be converted to practical strategies with the aim to strengthen the visitor's attraction to the city centers further.

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Appendix A – Focus Group Guide

Formalities & practical information

- 2, 3 and 4 May 2022
- Welcome all participants, introduce us and our work.
- Explain that we will act as moderators during the session, while it is the participants who will discuss with each other.
- Inform the participants that the group discussion will be recorded to facilitate our analysis. The recording will only be available to us and our supervisor and will be deleted when the essay has passed. Participants were informed about their anonymity in the thesis.
- Collect signed consent forms from the participants.
- Explain that the goal is for the participants to think out loud and discuss as a group. There are no right or wrong answers.

Introductory question

1. We want to start with everyone introducing themselves where we tell our names, how old we are, what our connection to Hässleholm is, and our favorite place in town.
2. How often do you visit the city center of Hässleholm and what is the most common reason for the visit?

Phase 1 - Attributes

We will now go into what Hässleholm's city center has to offer you as a visitor. We are interested in the city center, not Hässleholm in general. We are interested in offers such as things that are tangible, such as product range, but also things that are intangible, such as the atmosphere.

3. Think for a few minutes and write down three offers on each note (one per note) that you associate with Hässleholm's city center. Briefly present what you have thought and written.
 4. (Add notes with the city center attributes). Now we have added offers that studies state to be important for a city center, maybe you have already named them so that there are duplicates. Together as a group, you should now select seven to ten offers that you consider important for a general city center to offer you as a visitor.
 5. Do you experience that these offers that you have selected are offered by Hässleholm's city center? Rank the offers based on which ones Hässleholm's city center best lives up to.
- (Additional question)
According to studies, there are offers that places and stores create independently of the people who visit and shop there. These offers are available to you as a visitor whether you are there or not. Then there are offers where the participation of people is necessary. Can you together in the group divide the offers you have in front of you into two

sections, one for the offers that do not require the involvement of visitors and one where the offers require the visitor to be in place. How do you think? Discuss freely with each other.

Phase 2 - The local aspect

6. Do you shop in the local city center instead of online / shopping centers outside the city center?
 - a) If so, in what contexts? Discuss.
 - b) When you choose to shop in the local city center, what is the reason for doing so?
7. Do you find the local aspect as important as the offers selected above?

Phase 3 – Types of value

We will now continue into the area of value - how you experience value when you visit and shop in Hässleholm.

8. What do you get out from visiting and shopping in the city center of Hässleholm? Discuss with each other.
 - a) Is there any specific purpose for why you visit and shop in the city center of Hässleholm instead of other places?
 - b) Does it create any special value for you?
9. You will now get three examples where we want you to briefly tell what you value when you make the following purchases:
 - A new shirt
 - Fika
 - Gift for a close friend
- (Additional question)
Based on the offers you previously selected as important for a city center to offer, what value do you experience that each offer can contribute to? Discuss.

Appendix B – Purpose of questions and exercises

Question / Exercise	Purpose
<p>Think for a few minutes and write down three offers on each note (one per note) that you associate with Hässleholm's city center. Briefly present what you have thought and written.</p>	<p>Attribute</p> <p>The purpose of this exercise was to find out which attributes the participants thought of without being affected by the others / our city center attributes.</p>
<p>Together as a group, you should now select seven to ten offers that you consider important for a general city center to offer you as a visitor.</p>	<p>Attribute</p> <p>Here we examined whether the city center attributes correspond to the participants' attributes. Furthermore, we wanted to hear the participants' discussion and reasoning about the selected attributes.</p>
<p>Do you experience that these offers that you have selected are offered by Hässleholm's city center? Rank the offers based on which ones Hässleholm's city center best lives up to.</p>	<p>Attribute</p> <p>This question was asked to explore whether the participants consider that Hässleholm's city center offers the selected most important attributes and to see which attributes Hässleholm mainly offers.</p>
<p>Can you together in the group divide the offers you have in front of you into two sections, one for the offers that do not require the involvement of visitors and one where the offers require the visitor to be in place. How do you think? Discuss freely with each other.</p>	<p>Co-creation</p> <p>This question was asked to understand which attributes the participants perceive themselves to be involved in value creation.</p>
<p>Do you shop in the local city center instead of online / shopping centers outside the city center?</p> <p>a) If so, in what contexts? Discuss.</p> <p>b) When you choose to shop in the local city center, what is the reason for doing so?</p>	<p>Local</p> <p>The aim was to understand how the participants argued around retail in their local city center, when they are affected by the local aspect and why.</p>

<p>Do you find the local aspect as important as the above selected offers?</p>	<p><i>Local</i></p> <p>The purpose was to explore how the participants value the local aspect in comparison with the previously selected attributes.</p>
<p>What does you get from visiting and shopping in the city center of Hässleholm? Discuss with each other.</p> <p>a) Is there any specific purpose for why you visit and shop in the city center of Hässleholm instead of other places?</p> <p>b) Does it create any special value for you?</p>	<p><i>Types of value</i></p> <p>The purpose of the question was to understand the participants' value of visiting and shopping in Hässleholm's city center.</p>
<p>You will now get three examples where we want you to briefly tell what you value when you make the following purchases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A new shirt - Fika - Gift for a close friend 	<p><i>Types of value</i></p> <p>The purpose was to investigate how the participants argued about perceived values in different purchasing processes.</p>
<p>Based on the offers you previously selected as important for a city center to offer, what value do you experience that each offer can contribute to? Discuss.</p>	<p><i>Types of value</i></p> <p>The purpose of this question was to explore types of value the participants associate with each attribute.</p>