"The café-chain appears as a corpse-maggot hatching when culture dies”
Agency and meaning in an Espresso House coffee-shop

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the terms *placelessness* (Relph 1976) and *Private Owned Public Space* (Arefi 1999; Németh, 2009) through a case study of one coffee-shop belonging to the chain Espresso House. This Espresso House shop is made to be conform and homogenous which according to the theory of placelessness makes it devoid of meaning. The space is also privately owned. Spaces being privately owned attributes to their conformity since their form of ownership predetermines possible social interactions and activities by only allowing some people to use the spaces and some activities to take place in the spaces (Németh 2009; Arefi 1999; Mitchell 1995). This paper shows that there are many spontaneous, place-specific and meaningful features in this space as well as homogeneous and predetermined ones and concludes that both the homogenous- and the specific qualities contribute to the sense of place. Furthermore, it discusses the agency of the different actors in this privately owned, publicly used space.

Keywords: placelessness, private owned public space, sense of place, coffee shop, case study
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1. INTRODUCTION

In October 2022 a chronicle was published in one of Sweden’s biggest newspapers Dagens Nyheter, in which the critical author Fredrik Strage declares the expansion of Espresso House in Stockholm as a sign of culture void. In his opinion, this is due to Espresso House's mediocrity, expensive products, increasing monopoly, and that their venues play loud, generic music by artists “...so undistinguished that their meaninglessness is only matched by the coffee” (2022, Author’s translation). Strage goes so far as to proclaim that: “The café-chain appears as corpse-maggot hatching when culture dies” (2022, Author’s translation).

Koolhas (2002) argues that brands in the built environment act as “…black holes…they are essences through which meaning disappears…” (p. 177). He begs the question: “Can the bland be amplified? The featureless be exaggerated?” (p. 183), and if emptiness can be local - similar to the opinions Strage (2022) proposes regarding Espresso House.

Kim and Park. (2021) states that coffee-shops, as well as selling coffee, also sell space. This type of spatial marketing is an important business strategy for chains, making the customer feel familiar in all of the chains shops. In these spaces being sold, visitors interact with each other but also with the brand (Kim and Park., 2021). Ferreira (2017) argues that café-chains create an homogenized landscape, whereas Felton (2018) points to the fact that large chains are more diverse and accessible spaces than one-of-a-kind coffee shops, and discusses the correlation between this and their predictability in menu offerings, aesthetics and branding.

Private Owned Public Space, or POPS, is a term coined to categorize spaces that are privately owned and publicly used, such as malls, corporate plazas or coffee-shops (Li et al., 2022; Németh, 2009). Theories regarding these types of spaces judge that the private ownership in itself dictate norms and rules of conduct for the space, excluding deviant, unprofitable people and behaviors from it (Németh, 2009; Arefi, 1999; Mitchell, 1995). Arefi (1999) and Relph (1976) argue that if it is not the individuals themselves who hold power in creating the behavioral norms for the spaces they interact in, authentic interaction is halted and inauthentic interaction is furthered. Relph (1976) states that inauthentic interaction devoids spaces of meaning, making them placeless. Placelessness is characterized by blandness, similarity, inauthenticity, homogeneity, ambiguous heritage, and as an effect of modernization (Relph, 1976). Often used examples of placeless spaces are theme-parks, parking garages, and chain-restaurants (Relph, 1976; Liang and Clio, 2022).

Above mentioned key traits of placelessness are also characteristics for industrialized food (Sandler, 2014; Weaver, 2017). Long (2017) describes that food is important for creating meaning in peoples lives, especially if the food is culturally significant. According to Long (2017), by studying food-events one gains intel in the broader culture. Authentic food and can be a contributor to sense-of-place, the opposite of placelessness (Liang and Clio, 2022). However, food served in chain-restaurants can be considered ”...a faceless commodity” (Weaver, 2017, p. 219). The chain and its food is the common denominator of these placeless spaces and faceless foods.

A, for Sweden, significant cultural phenomena related to food is arguably fika, consumed at home, celebrations, workplaces and - of course - cafés. The largest, most successful
Swedish café-chain is Espresso House, with its nearly 500 shops dispersed over the Scandinavian countries and Germany. There are over 200 Espresso Houses in Sweden, 42 of which are located in Stockholm (Espresso House, 2022).

This thesis will focus on the factors creating sense-of-place and placelessness, publicness and privateness, and how the actions and interactions of staff, brand, and customers shape the space of Espresso House Västermalmsgallerian - a chain coffee-shop, in a mall, in inner-city Stockholm.

1.1 Aim and Research Questions
This is a case study with the chosen case of Espresso House Västermalmsgallerian. The purpose of this study is to identify and describe characteristics for private owned public spaces and placeless spaces, and what contradicts these theories in the live example. With my case I hope to contribute to understandings of social interactions in privately owned public spaces and challenge the understanding of placelessness as a term to describe the uniform and meaningless.

- How can this Espresso House shop be understood as a Private Owned Public Space?
- How can this Espresso House shop be understood as a placeless space?
- How do the different agents in this space - visitors, staff and Espresso House brand, shape it?

1.2 Disposition
First the guiding theories of placelessness, Private Owned Public Space and food and meaning will be presented in Section 2. They have informed the chosen case and the mode of operationalizing the research questions. Previous research and background follows in section 3. In section 4 motivation for the chosen case is presented, as is the data collection methods, ethics, bias, and limitations. In section 5 follows the results, categorized first by guiding theory and second by key themes. The results present the data collection and thorough case description necessary for answering my research questions. The research questions are then discussed in section 6 in relation to the theories and previous research. Finally conclusions are drawn and future research is proposed in section 7.

2. THEORY

This chapter presents the guiding theories for this paper. The theories influence the chosen case and the manner of how the research questions are operationalized, which follows under 4. Method.

2.1 Private Owned Public Space, publicness and privateness
Private Owned Public Space - POPS - is a term to describe places constructed on non-public land by non-public investment but used by a wide range of public (Li et al., 2022). In this
term "public" is to be understood in regards to who uses it in the lived sense, and "private" in terms of legal ownership. This definition finds its place within the spectrum of public and private. Németh (2009) states that "...most scholars critique privately owned public spaces for restricting social interaction, constraining individual liberties and excluding certain undesirable populations" (p. 2464). Németh (2009) describes cafés as territorially controlled spaces allowing conditional use - they have opening hours and visitors are required to pay in order to take part of the space. He states that these types of spaces "...segregates users, determining who can and cannot enter, or who belongs in a particular area or does not" (2009, p. 2464).

Li et al. (2022) establish that ideas of public and private space respectively are being challenged due to difficulty in drawing a precise boundary between them in modern context. They specifically point to difficulties with earlier ideas of what constitutes publicness based on ownership as the sole attribute. The public realm is increasingly privatized and commercialized, in the sense that fewer and fewer areas are owned by the state, region, municipality or community (Christophers, 2018; Li et al., 2022). Other elements than ownership are therefore increasingly important for understanding space. According to Li et al (2022) "To determine whether a space is public is to examine whether the public interest is recognized and realized in it" (p. 6). Therefore, if the interests of the public are recognized and realized in a space, that attributes to the “publicness” of that space. Accessibility, management and inclusiveness all attribute to publicness, as do the utilization of the space. In this definition there is no clear boundary between public and private, rather the two exist as outer edges of a spectrum with many understandings of space included within (ibid.).

Mitchell (1995) emphasizes that the legal ownership of a space is not without meaning for who is considered a part of the public. Those who follow the norms of what is correct behavior in public are welcome, whereas those who do not are not. POPS as a term is not without its critique, with a more suitable term being ”pseudo public places” according to its critics (Li et al., 2022), exemplified by Mitchell (1995) as the shopping mall.

What is considered a private or public activity also factors in creating space, whose definition can vary greatly. Different places categorize different behaviors as public and private respectively, whilst ownership takes part in creating the norms. Places allowing a multitude of uses is by Arefi (1999) stated as qualification of those places being ”open-minded”. Characteristics of open-minded places are inclusiveness, spontaneous interactions, loitering, and diversity. Open-mindedness enables authentic behavior, and feelings of authenticity (ibid). Arefi (1999) states that open-minded public-places are losing ground, emphasizing that: ”Our public life has shrunk, we do not interact publicly as much as we used to, and our public realm is becoming increasingly privatized; that is, being built and rebuilt by corporate values and capital” (p.188). In privatized spaces Arefi (1999) explains that:

“Solitary contractual obligations where codes and "how to" instructions shape the individual’s behavior and obligations… [which are] not based on pre-modern place-centered, shared values and beliefs accumulated over time and experience… individuals react to a set of predetermined instructions, codes and numbers programmed for carrying out certain activities” (p.180).
Mitchell (1995) points to something similar, namely that: “whereas businesses tend toward a totalitarian form of social organization, authoritarian and prone to fascism, urban conditions... tend to uphold at least a measure of democracy” (p. 119), democracy here being posed as the opposite of totalitarian, fascism-prone social organization.

What is meant by "diversity" as a characteristic for open-minded space must also be put in context. Oftentimes in POPS it is beneficial for the owners present the place as inclusive and diverse, rather than to actually provide meeting places sans supervision - in the words of Mitchell: "Designed-and-contrived diversity creates marketable landscapes, as opposed to uncontrolled social interaction which creates places that may threaten exchange value" (p. 119). This uncontrolled social interaction, which is unwanted in privatized space, paves the way for spontaneous and authentic diversity according to Mitchell. Mitchell (1995) states that the predominant way of seeing public space in contemporary cities is either as a space that is planned, orderly and safe, "...where the users of the space are made to feel comfortable through unwanted elements being pushed out of the space" (p. 115) - or - as an unconstrained space which tolerates the risks of disorder as central to its functioning, allowing a multitude of uses. He, as Arefi (1999), proclaims that homogenization of the public continues to apace due to expansion of the private realm. Arefi (1999) connects this phenomena to the term placelessness. This is due to the controlled human behavior in POPS through above described innate rules, and that POPS often are themselves spaces intended to be consumed by the user - therefore being designed and marketed for the broad public.

2.2 Placelessness

Placelessness is the term established by Relph (1976) to describe interchangeable, ubiquitous, uniform, inauthentic and homogenous places. In Place and placelessness (1976) Relph describes the evolution and growth of placelessness in the built environment as an effect of modernization. He exemplifies this through theme-parks, parking garages, and food-chain restaurants. From Harvey’s (1993) understanding, mass construction of goods and infrastructure enabled by global chains of production, diminishes the diversity and significance of place and creates placeless landscapes. The idea that individuals have similar needs that can be met by similar products and experiences lay the base for this mass production "cookie-cutter" world (Harvey, 1993).

The opposite of placelessness is sense-of-place, wherein authentic experiences create authentic places (Arefi, 1999; Relph, 1976). Relph (1976) refers to authenticity as a "a mode of being", where the authentic person "...assumes responsibility for his existence" (p.64) whereas the inauthentic person "...transfers responsibility to large, nebulous, unchangeable forces, for which he cannot be blamed and about which he can do nothing” (p.64). Authenticity in places is created through lived experience, since this embeds places with a sense of meaning. This is not only tied to the individual existence, but even more so to the communal history and tradition. Relph (1976) also states that:

"What appears from the outside to be homogenous and placeless, [can] from within be closely differentiated into places by the personalisation of property, by association with local events and the development
of local myths and by being lived in, all of which give a genuineness and authenticity to somewhere in-authentically created.” (p. 71)

The difference between insiders and outsiders is central to Relphs (1976) description of placelessness and sense-of-place. According to Relph (1976), people can only experience sense-of-place by experiencing a sense of belonging to a place. Spaces who no one belongs to are entirely placeless. Sense-of-place and placelessness are not, however, strict opposites, but rather co-exist side by side in the lived world. Arefi (1999) underlines the importance of chronological connectivity in places, defined as ”...a historical connectedness; a sense of belonging to the same context” (p. 183). Arefi (1999) further exclaims that “A concept closely related to chronological connectivity... is that of meaning” (p. 183).

Authentic places are, according to Arefi (1999), more likely to be open-minded, and placeless spaces are more likely to be closed-minded. According to Arefi (1999), this is because the major structural process creating placelessness is growth of the private realm on behalf of the public. Privately owned places are shaped by corporate values and capital, which the individual has little power over. This makes spaces more uniform and homogenous resulting in a loss of authenticity.

Liang and Clio (2022) concretizes place authenticity by stating that it ”...can be classified as a 'transmitter of values and significance of cultural landscape'” (p.2). Per their example, authentic architecture, foodways, and shopping outlets that support the local economy and help conserve the traditional landscape are amongst these transmitters. In Gao and Zhou’s (2021) summation: “Place means particularity and locality, while placelessness is blandness and similarity. Both attempt to approach the extremes of landscape regenerations” (p. 2).

2.3 Food and meaning

Long (2017) points out that food is constructed on three fundamental levels: cultural, social and personal. These levels suggest types of meanings - meanings that can refer to the domains of food and eating in general or to specific foods and specific behaviors around food. This reflects how humans become social and cultural beings through food, the identity or beliefs expressed through it, the association or emotions attached to it, and its representation of larger social patterns. One methodological approach is studying food-events where one places oneself in a specific setting where food is consumed, and where concepts and beliefs about food as well as intended meanings are of central concern (Long, 2017, p. 212). Herein place matters - in gathering knowledge in what is served in a specific location or in a specific context, one gathers knowledge about the context.

Industrialized food is, as mentioned above, described by Weaver (2017) as ”...a faceless commodity” (p. 219). This faceless food remains a part of a larger discussion concerning the meaning of place according to Weaver (2017). He describes food consumed in chain restaurants, such as the products in Espresso House, as an example of where food is a faceless commodity. Garrod (2015) points out that food plays a central role in creating place-attachment and feelings of authenticity, especially if the food is locally sourced and/or culturally meaningful.
Long (2017) describes the relationship of food and meaning stating that: 

“...meaning is not inherent; it is constructed. Neither food in general nor specific foods intrinsically reference something else - their meanings are given to them through usage and social consent, or sometimes they are created and imposed” (ibid. p. 206). She further judges that meaning as intended by the sender/producer is not necessarily the same as registered by the receiver/consumer. She voices that “...every food carries within it the history of its surrounding culture and can therefore be used to read that culture and the logic behind its development” (ibid., p. 206).

Liang and Clio (2022) describe that restaurants connect to larger theories of place authenticity and placelessness, and state that chain-restaurants, being ubiquitous through space, create a landscape of placelessness. When considering foodscape factors such as decor, using local culture to convey an experience, menus, and recipes affect authenticity (ibid). Food matters for sense of place.

3. BACKGROUND

This chapter presents Espresso House as per their communication on their website as well as previous research regarding the coffee-shop as a social arena.

3.1 What is Espresso House?
"If there isn’t a cozy coffee-place with home baked goods where you live, why don’t you start your own?” (Espresso House, 2022a) is posed as the reason for how Espresso House first came about in Lund during 1996. The website states that Espresso House offered something completely different to what traditional cafés did at the time, being “a completely new, cozy and welcoming atmosphere where you could enjoy coffee in a new way” (Espresso House, 2022a). In the very beginning the two owners baked the goods sold in their home-kitchen, and the same recipe used today for the mud cake is a family-recipe of one of the founders.

Today Espresso House is owned by one of the largest coffee-shop conglomerates in the world, JAB Holding BV (Espresso house, 2022a). There are more than 480 Espresso House coffee-shops, with over 200 in Sweden with 42 of them in Stockholm. All Espresso House shops are centrally owned, as opposed to many other coffee-shop chains such as Starbucks, where the cafés are franchises.

Espresso House describes their assortment as "100% good, 50% plant-based" on their website, often using the word "yummy" to describe their cakes and drinks (Espresso House, 2022b).

All of their baked goods are prepared in Malmö and transported to the different shops, while their coffee is roasted in Länna, outside of Stockholm (Espresso House 2022c. The website does not describe or include pictures of the Espresso house aesthetic and/or interior design, other than using the word "cozy" as mentioned above.

3.2 Coffee-chains
Ferreira (2017) states that the ubiquitous presence of café-chains in the UK has been attributed to the development of clone towns, creating a homogenous landscape. She also dis-
cusses that the growth of cafés in general has coincided with the decline of pubs in the UK (but does not attribute a direct connection between these two phenomena). The UK pubs are important cultural institutions usually serving many traditional specific British foodstuff such as scotch egg, fish and chips and ale, whereas the foodstuff served in coffee-chains generally are less culturally specific.

Jones, et al. (2015) show how cafés in urban areas act as meeting places for ethnically diverse populations and that these spaces are shaped by the interests and needs of the visitors. They specifically argue for the role that coffee-chain cafés have in this and suggest that the regularity and standardization of chain-cafés allow them to function as *open* in a way that local consumption spaces do not, since the social cues are culturally generic and easily understood.

Felton (2018) furthers this by stating that chain-cafés tend to be more socially inclusive than local, specific cafés. She discusses that this has to do with the predictable menus and aesthetics, which make it possible for "a wider range of ethnic and social classes to project their own meaning onto them" (p. 37). Furthermore, Felton (2018) establishes that "... chain store cafés such as Starbucks use standardized but homey designs and branding to produce a sense of the familiar no matter where they are located" (p.37).

Kim and Park (2021) also discusses the importance of aesthetics for coffee-shop chains, and state that large coffee-chains have designed spatial marketing to increase sales and establish brand identity and values. They exemplify this by global coffee-shop chain Starbucks as "a place that sells space, not coffee" (p.8). Kim and Park (2021) argue that a clear spatial design profile arranges a direct meeting between the brand and the consumer, concluding that coffee-chains are spaces where not only people meet other people, but where people meet the brand. This statement is exemplified by how Starbucks uses socially conscious campaigns to signal inclusivity (ibid).

### 4. METHOD

The research design chosen to investigate my research questions is the case study, described by Baxter (2016, p. 133) as well suited to confirm, falsify or develop new theories, but most importantly to provide detailed analysis as to why theoretical concepts and explanations are, or are not, fundamental in the context of the particular case. The case study involves the single study of an instance of a phenomenon, in order to build an in-depth and nuanced understanding of how it presents, and the context it presents in. It is a mixed-method approach, often involving different types of fieldwork (Baxter, p.130).

Data is collected through participant observation as a customer and app-user, observation of the customers and staff, and semi-structured interviews of staff, all qualitative methods described in-length below. Long (2017, p. 204) describes that qualitative research is appropriate when the research questions concern *meaning* - an intangible, subjective quality that cannot be captured quantitatively. The interest of this study lies in how the phenomenon (Espresso House) affects the individual (the visitors, the researcher and the café-staff). Qualitative research uses theoretic frameworks for interpreting the phenomenon (Long, 2017), and case-study is a means by which to understand the practical and concrete aspects of a phe-
nomenon (Baxter, 2016, p. 144; Szklarski, 2016. p. 155). I use the theories regarding placelessness, POPS and food and meaning to understand the phenomena of Espresso House Västeralmsgallerian.

4.1 Participant observation

I will conduct participant observation in order to gain further insights into the social interactions taking place at Espresso House Västeralmsgallerian and to learn how it looks, sounds, smells, tastes and feels for me to be there. By being in the space I am a recipient of the product ”Espresso House”, and interact with the brand.

Taylor and Nichter (2017) describe that participant observation together with interviews give the researcher insight to how a particular behavior is practiced, with or toward whom, and its ramifications. According to Taylor and Nichter this requires “some degree of cultural competence learned over time and the establishment of an identity that is acceptable to others” (p. 60). With regards to my Swedish background, many years of working in service and over 20 years experience in attending cafés in Sweden I feel confident that I can perform participant observation as a customer at Espresso House. Many people come to Espresso House and study or work, so my activities do not stand out.

Kylén (2004, p. 95) declares that observation is the most fundamental way to gain insight of what is occurring, and that all data in all research is based on observation. Kylén (2004, p.95) emphasizes that human beings are not objective in their observations. To gain further insight in my area of study and not simply rely on my own observations, I am triangulating my data by performing interviews. The combination of these methods are a common way of collecting data in phenomenological studies according to Szklarski (2016, p. 153).

All observation is guided by interpretation; what is seen is affected by what the observer looks at. One important part of the setting is not only the place but also the time, as in season, date, day of the week, and time of day. This will be noted in the observations and results.

To bring clarity to my own observations and make explicit what I deem important to look at, I use an observation guide (Appendix A).

4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Long (2017) urges for the importance of the researcher being reflexive and attentive when researching a place and emphasizes the importance of flexibility. For this reason I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with the employees. Semi-structured interviews are described by Dunn (2016, p. 158) as appropriate for qualitative research in that it gives both a structure and a freedom for the interviewer and the interviewee.

The staff at Espresso House Västeralmsgallerian have unique place-knowledge of the locale and general knowledge of Espresso House brand, and were chosen through criterion-sampling. Criterion sampling is described by Dunn (p. 175, 2016) as a strong sampling method when researcher wants a specialized understanding of a certain process or phenomena, as I want of Espresso House Västeralmsgallerian.

To structure the interviews and have corresponding data from the interviews and observations, I have formed an interview guide based on the same themes as my observation
guide (Appendix B). The data was coded after key themes, also known as latent content analysis (Dunn, 2016, p. 175). This process is described closer below.

4.3 Operationalization of research questions
The interview- and observation-guide are both informed by the chosen place - a chain restaurant and POPS, the theories regarding these types of places based primarily on Relph (1976) and Arefi (1999), and most importantly, my research questions.

To learn what is normal, what stands out, and what is meaningful I have to know the place, people and product.

According to Relph there are three crucial components combined when experiencing a place: physical setting, activities and meanings (in Gao & Zhou, 2021, p. 3). Observations and interviews provide data for my research questions since the methods allow me to gather information of these components in Espresso House Västermalmsgallerian. My research questions “How can this Espresso House be understood as a Private Owned Public Space?” and "How can this Espresso House be understood as a placeless place?” respectively, are both therefore broken down into three sub-questions related to the three crucial components in experiencing place according to Relph (1976), namely:

- What is the physical setting of this Espresso House?
- What activities appear in this setting?
- How is this meaningful?

The observation- and interview themes for activities and physical setting are derived from Long (2017) - emphasizing menu, food-stuff and taste, Relph (1976) - emphasizing the physical setting and activities, and Arefi (1999), Mitchell (1995) and Németh (2009) - emphasizing the play between ownership and social interactions. The theory of placelessness puts emphasis on what is homogenous and theories of POPS puts emphasis on ordered social interaction - in order to identify these phenomena I will therefore also observe what stands out from the expected, labeled surprises.

The sub themes under meaning are related to what is deemed meaningful in my guiding theories. It is possible to observe the physical setting and the activities taking place in a space but one can not directly observe meaning. Meaning is intangible and unquantifiable but will in this study be understood in regards to the theories of placelessness and sense of place, following Relph (1976), public and private space following Arefi (1999) as well as in relation to the food eaten and consumed, following Long (2017). Meaning is particularly important for sense of place, and is related to authenticity. Meaning also relates to how the space as such can be understood and to the agency of the actors interacting in the space, since the space is created through social processes. As stated above, the observations are complemented with interviews with staff in order to deepen my understanding. I also observe what feels meaningful to me and ask my interviewees what feels meaningful to them. This is relevant for my research questions in the sense that placelessness relates to subjective feelings of meaning or meaninglessness.
To identify what correspond and stand out from my theories in my data, I discuss the data in relation to the theories. My last research question: "How do the different agents in this space - visitors, staff and Espresso House brand - shape it?" uses the collected data to analyze the friction and symbiosis of the different agents in the room, and the explicit and implicit interests of them.

4.4 Ethics
Long (2017, p. 203) claims the importance of ethics when using ethnographic methods. Since the interviews were performed with Espresso House employees, it is important that the staff interviewed are not subject to consequences due to their interaction with me. For that reason they will be made anonymous by the use of pseudonyms and their ranks are not disclosed. However, since the place where the study is conducted is disclosed it is possible to identify my interview subjects as someone in the staff at Espresso House Västermalmsgallerian. There is however a large interchangeability in the staff and given that the names and ranks are undisclosed one cannot identify any specific individual. Furthermore, I have full transparency with the staff regarding the aim of my research and the theoretical criticism of POPS and chain-venues which it is built upon. All interviewees permitted audio recording and transcription of the interviews.

Regarding observation, Kylén (2004) states that observation conducted in public spaces has ethical strengths since everyone there already knows that they are being watched by other people. This is the case of my study - it is performed in a public (in the sense that there are a lot of people there) space, where people are aware of other people's presence, and behave accordingly. I am not putting forward any information regarding the behavior of visitors that was not already visible for all other people there, I am not disclosing any private information. In my results I will include pictures of the locale, some of which have people in them. Their identities are concealed through editing in order to not violate their integrity.

4.5 Bias
Vallianatos (2017) argues that “analysis of the data is dependent on the research question and theoretical standpoint” (p. 76.) Since the theory informs the research questions, and the research questions will be analyzed by the theory, what is observed can be skewed. However, Long (2017, p. 204) illuminates that conclusions about meaning cannot be tested objectively - they are evaluated according to the logic of the argument as well as the insights they offer. This is applicable to the thesis presented.

I can not gain exact knowledge of any of the observed phenomena from an objective point of view. I can, however, gain an estimated knowledge from my individual point of view, and that is what I strive for. As stated above, the observations are complemented with interviews with staff in order to deepen my understanding.

Furthermore, the aim of the research is not to be objective but to gain a deep understanding of the processes shaping Espresso House Västermalmsgallerian and the phenomena presenting in it, and connect it to a theoretical framework relevant for its context. I aim to examine my chosen theories through applying them to an idealized case and describe and analyze the social processes in the chosen space.
4.6 Limitations and generalization

As stated above, Espresso House has over 450 units dispersed in Scandinavia with over 200 of them in Sweden of which 42 are located in Stockholm (Espresso House, 2022a). I will focus specifically on one coffee shop - Espresso House Västermalmsgallerian. The coffee shop is placed in the inner city of Stockholm inside an underground mall next to a subway station. This is an idealized case, chosen due to its extremity in the sense of its placement and context. Chain restaurants are often used as examples of placelessness (Relph, 1976) and both malls and cafés are private owned public spaces (Németh, 2009; Arefi, 1999; Mitchell, 1995). The theories regarding these phenomena have informed my choice of coffee-shop.

My interview subjects are as above mentioned, chosen by criterion-sampling. I have only interviewed staff and not visitors of Espresso House Västermalmsgallerian. This is partly motivated by my research questions, as my interest does not lie in the ‘customer experience’ per se, but rather the interactions between the different actors in the space - including visitors, staff, and Espresso House as a brand. This I gained much insight in through observation, participant observation as a customer and by conducting interviews with staff who were chosen due to their place-knowledge. It is also due to the time-consuming method required for finding good interview subjects amongst the visitors since I did not only want to use convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is not a strong sampling method according to Dunn (2016). Using a weak sampling method would skew my results - those interacting in the space who would be most inclined to be interviewed would probably be those who were big fans of Espresso House. Those less likely to take part in an interview would probably be the non-customer visitors using the space without being allowed to do so and their experience of the space would be most interesting as data. Interviewing any customer in the space willing to talk to me would not give valuable enough data in relation to the time consumed. Furthermore, I wished to remain as anonymous as any other visitor at Espresso House while observing the space since.

For the purpose of this study I have gotten a monthly subscription called “Favorite” in the Espresso House app which grants a new beverage every two hours for 349 SEK per month. This gives me the opportunity to choose from seventeen different beverages in the mid price-range, such as Iced Latte, Roiboos tea and Cappuccino. The cost of the subscription has amounted to 1047 SEK during the course of this study, and that is only the subscription and not the food or pastries. The financial barrier weakens the transferability of my work. The membership also gives me insight to what it is like being a regular at this Espresso House and in how the transactions take place, which is data central to my study. It would be very limiting for social science in general if studies were not to be conducted within pay-walled spaces for the sole reason that they are pay-walled. My study particularly demands that I follow the rules for how to conduct in this specific space, most importantly being a customer.
5. RESULTS

My three interviewees - “Erika”*, “Josefin”* and “Yasmin”* - are all permanent staff at the designated Espresso House. They have different ranks among them: Coffee-shop manager, Barista and Staff leader, and have worked at the coffee shop and within the brand for different durations. They all have experiences of working at other Espresso Houses and at Espresso House travel shops, which are shops entirely without or with very small seating areas. All of the quotes have been translated from Swedish by the author. (*Pseudonyms)

5.1 Physical setting

Location

We find Espresso House Västernalmsgallerian in Stockholm, located at Kungsholmen. The café is located in an underground mall, next to a subway station. The room is designed without external walls dividing the mall from the café with glass walls separating two out of four sides of the room. There is no sharp distinction between the rest of the mall and Espresso House’s seating area, which affects the movement in the room. Erika says that “...some customers think that they can go and sit at our neighbor’s [business] over there” (2022).

The register faces a passage in the mall and the seating area for guests is separated from the kitchen and register through different flooring and a bar. The kitchen is fully visible from two sides but is separated with a half wall from the seating area. Only a small part of the seating area is visible from the staff’s viewpoint. As Josefin put it “I think it’s strategically built in that we should have our bar out against the new customers, but also very stupidly built since we can’t see our serving-area” (2022). Yasmin says that whoever designed it did not have a clear vision of what type of place they wanted it to be “Do they want people to come and go quickly or do they want the guest to sit down and fika?” (2022). Yasmin hopes that Espresso House executive management will decide to renovate and re-design the coffee-shop, and says that there have been talks of doing so.

Aesthetics

In the seating area the flooring is light brown, with a wooden plank pattern. Barstools without back support are placed along the bar, and tables are placed aligned with the walls, creating a seat-free corridor in the middle of the seating area. There are comfortable lounge chairs in one of the corners. One can walk through the entire corridor without seeing or being seen by the staff. Chairs and lounge chairs are in brown leather and the tables are brown as well. There are big plastic coffee trees providing greenery and shade and some red Christmas decorations, for instance illustrations of little Santas. There are about 40 seats. The most popular seats are the lounge chairs, the least popular are the barstools. The lighting is dim with spotlights in the dark ceiling and decorative lights placed above the tables. The decorative lights are placed so low that many people hit their heads on them; I have done it three times, seen 12 others do it, and overheard a couple people complain about it. Josefin states that the place has “…the typical Espresso House environment [...] with the colors, the lounge chairs, the plants...” (2022) and Erika feels that it has “…a chill vibe... soft lighting and cozy…” (2022).
All Espresso House coffee-shops adhere to the same aesthetic, with dim lighting, brown colors, leather chairs and stools.

On many of the tables there are brochures placed for Espresso House campaign “Cup together” which encourages the reader to fight loneliness by talking to a stranger and states that Espresso House donates one SEK to a charity for every filter coffee sold in December.

Sound
The café is packed with sound since there are not any external walls. Some seats are more quiet than others, but the volume by the register is constantly high. Trolleys, people talking in the mall and café, the coffee-machines, sliding doors being opened and closed, screaming children, the occasional ambulance or police siren from the street above, and music; both that played in Espresso House and in the mall. Yasmin says that “It’s very loud… There is no place that is quiet for us, so it takes a toll on your brain… you are very tired after eight hours” (11:51). Josefin’s opinion is similar: “You get very drained, there's always so many impressions, a lot of sounds, a lot of movement…” (2022).

The music is mixed without clear profile, mostly rather recent pop but sometimes house, indie and reggaeton. There are official Espresso House playlists, but in this shop the staff chooses what music is played. “Now I’m playing ‘Best of 2010’s’…sometimes when it’s a bit more quiet I turn on my own lists, but not very often because the music maybe isn’t so customer friendly” (Erika, 2022). The playing of individual music has been okayed by upper management as long as the music is inoffensive. “We haven’t gotten any [customer] complaints about it so…” (Yasmin, 2022)

People
There is not one typical customer - men and women, old and young, people with different heritages, different languages, and different socio-economic classes come to this place. Yas-
min points to the fact that there are many couples coming there together and many elderly people. All members of the staff note that a lot of new mothers and some new fathers come with their young children, so called "latte-moms" and "latte-dads".

The employees say that all types of people come here but given my observations I would disagree. I have not witnessed any same-sex couples and there is a distinct lack of young edgy urbanites, otherwise a prominent feature in inner city Stockholm.

The staff wears uniforms, dress shirts or t-shirts, aprons with their name tag and title - Coffee shop manager, Barista, Staff leader, Shift manager etc. During this holiday season the female staff sometimes wear headbands in the shape of reindeer-antlers or other Christmas ornaments on their head, but that is not mandatory.

Food

Regarding the food, Yasmin says that it is supposed to be "Scandinavian with a little edge" (2022), pretty health-centered and includes a lot of bread. Josefin states that “You have to have those classic things like cinnamon bun or chocolate ball because that’s like very Swedish fika, and then you can think a little bit outside of that” (2022).

Josefin and Erika both say that the mud cake is important for the brand because the recipe has been the same since Espresso House opened.

In my opinion, the coffee is excellent and the tea is good. The food I have eaten is not as good. The bread is a bit dry from age and wet from vegetables and the tastes are bland. They serve salads, bowls, sandwiches. I had one dish named “Greek salad” which contained sesame seeds, soy beans, vegan ‘feta cheese’, and two types of lentils, to name a few not-so-Greek ingredients, but not so Swedish either. All sandwiches look fresh, decorated with rocket or baby spinach. Josefin says that she does not like any of the food anymore “Since I look at it all day... I get full just by looking at it” (2022).

The desserts are very sweet and decorated with nib sugar and sprinkles. Everything looks pretty. In the examined time-period Espresso House has done their Christmas campaign promoting seasonal drinks and desserts. The seasonal campaigns are a big part of the brand, with one member of the staff noting that she started “In the middle of the new pumpkin campaign” (Erika, 2022).
Time
The café is open from 7:15-20:00 weekdays, 08:30-19:00 Saturdays, and 09:00-17:00 Sundays. Who comes when varies greatly - university students, middle-aged people and elderly people are frequent throughout the day and usually come alone or sometimes in pairs, and teenager’s in high-school age come later in the afternoon, after school, in groups. The activities in the coffee-shop also differ by day of the week. On weekdays in the mornings until noon almost everyone sits alone. During lunch and later at “afternoon fika” more people come as a group. Less people come to work or study alone during the weekends, and more people come in company with each other to fika together.

The staff notes that there is a little bit to do all the time, but that the shop has “rushes” - one in the morning, one at lunch and a “mini-rush” at 5 pm. The weekends are busier throughout the day, and have a different “rush-schedule” than the weekdays, with less people coming to and from work to get takeaway drinks.

5.2 Activities

Alone-time
In all of my weekday-visits to this Espresso House there have been more instances of single guests rather than of groups. How long people stay is dependent on what they do there. A majority of people who come alone usually sit looking at their phone, drinking the beverage they have bought. Those who stay the longest are there to work or study and usually stay for 2-4 hours in front of their laptop. The feelings around this differ among the staff. When Yasmin started working she thought it was very strange that anyone would sit in the café all day and just order one refillable beverage - “I had a hard time being okay with it at first… But then I was like, okay these are regular customers, this is like their office, I guess it’s fine…” (2022).

People also come and sit in the seating area of the café without being customers. The members of staff I have spoken with note that these people are either young teenagers coming in to sit and hang out, drinking sodas they have bought at a nearby supermarket, or that they just sit for a very short time waiting for their transit or a friend. The staff say that they usually tell these people to leave, but don’t always feel like doing so since this is an unpleasant interaction. Some of these non-guest visitors are people seemingly living in social alienation, coming in the afternoons or evenings. A regularly occurring man usually comes in during weeknights and sits and mumbles to himself for about an hour. On a different occasion a man came in to take a nap. He took up a book, hid behind it, and then proceeded to snore for 45 minutes. Rough-looking non-guest visitors are not a phenomena any member of staff has paid notice to according to our interviews.

Eating
Those people who come to eat a meal alone usually do so quickly - they buy something to eat and drink, finish it and leave. People who come alone to fika stay longer. Most customers only buy something to drink, and nothing to eat in this Espresso House. Eating a meal is common during breakfast and lunch hours, and fika is eaten a little bit all the time, mostly during the afternoons. Popular dishes are the chicken pesto focaccia, and caesar salad accord-
Most popular fika during the Christmas season is the saffron bun, according to Yasmin and Josefin. They are often sold out.

Social interaction

The staff-customer interactions are according to policy to be initiated by the staff greeting the customer by the counter and not vice versa. The focus of the staff is with new customers at the register and not with seated ones, resulting in less staff interaction in the seating area. Josefin said that she does not know how long the seated customers usually stay - “I don’t see that” (2022). There are a multitude of take-away customers which do not sit at all. App-customers can pre-order drinks. The staff then receives a notification that an order has been placed. They fulfill said order and put it on a designated pre-order shelf, where the guests come and collect. No control is done by the staff, and usually no interaction - as Erika says - “They don’t see us” (2022).

In general Erika, Josefin and Yasmin say that they should be very accommodating to their guests and try to follow the motto of ‘customer-is-always-right’. They all state that many customers ignore them and that this hurts their feelings - “They’re like ‘Do this!’ or ‘give me that!’... and you’re like ‘Hi’ That’s the least you could say...” (Erika 2022), “Many people come up [to the register] and just say ‘one coffee’, not even hello...” (Josefin, 2022), “Sometimes it’s hard to get a ‘Hi’ or even eye-contact... and then it feels like... Am I a robot or?” (Yasmin, 2022). The employees also stress the importance of trying to not take the negative customer interactions personally in order to function - “I am still a human being [...] we behind the counter are still human beings... Sometimes you break and just can’t handle it anymore” (Erika, 2022).

Many customers are also nice, and the positive interactions are valued by the staff -“... looking at us, saying ‘Hi!’ and ‘Bye!’... it’s just an extra five seconds and it’s nice” (Erika, 2022). Erika also points to the fact that many people come and ask the staff general know-how mall-questions, claiming that: “Many people read ‘Information Center’ instead of..."
Customer-to-customer interactions are almost exclusively between those customers that come in company with each other. They fika and chit-chat. Sometimes unacquainted customers ask each other if they can move an unused chair. People also have work meetings here, both digital and face-to-face. A meeting that stood out was that between a teenage boy and a social service worker, in which they discussed that he had tested positive for narcotics over an iced caramel latte.

Conflicts
An irritant for both Josefin and Erika is that customers often take the wrong coffee on the pre-order shelf, causing a loss of money and time since the staff then has to remake the order for the right customer. Another frustrating element with the app is that it technically malfunctions from time to time, causing customers to complain to the staff - “…there isn’t anything I personally can do about it. I understand that it’s frustrating [for the customers]... ‘It’s always something wrong with the app and it never works!’ ...imagine standing here listening to that eight hours a day...” (2022), Yasmin states. She also says that change in routine, app or policy only can happen when enough customers complain to customer service, since it can influence both Espresso House policy, and that it does not make a difference complaining to the staff. All members of staff interviews face a lot of complaints during their shifts. Erika states that “If it weren’t for the colleagues I wouldn’t be working here” (2022).

Surprises
The mixed music, sleeping people in social alienation, and the social-service meeting as described above, all seemed to me as unorthodox Espresso House occurrences.

A few other social interactions stand out from the ordinary - once a young couple came in to celebrate an eighteenth birthday, which was made apparent to me since a member of the staff came out holding a cupcake with two number-shaped candles spelling ”18”, in cahoots with the young boys’ girlfriend. Another time I witnessed a spontaneous run-in be-
tween two elderly ladies in the café, which they seemed very happy about. Lastly, at Lucia a teenage quire of eight people came in spontaneously singing in the mall and sat down in Espresso House. Many of them proceeded to download the app, which gives new customers a coupon for one free coffee or tea. The staff did not seem overjoyed about that.

5.3 Meaning

Private Owned Public Space

The customer-staff interactions are governed by different factors that should also be the same at every Espresso House, with one being the app. After paying in the app a questionnaire pops up on the screen, where one is supposed to judge one's customer experience based on three parameters: speed of service, cleanliness in the shop and interaction with the barista. There are four alternatives to choose from, from very bad to very good. The questionnaire pops up regardless if you buy take-away or sit in the café. The staff at the shop get these results every day, as do their bosses, and they get judged accordingly. The different coffee-shops also compete against each other for the highest rating, leading to bonuses in case of a win. The staff members I have interviewed think this is good: “I don’t know how else we could get feedback from the customer” (Josefin, 2022).

The customers are also evaluated by the staff. All the interviewed members of staff point out that they are allowed to turn down customers and ban them from coming again. This is something they do when they feel mistreated by the customers. When doing this the staff can point to the Espresso House policy:

“I want the people who come to fika at our place to be the type of guest that are… how do you put this… ‘well-behaved’. So we’ve weeded a bit. […] And the easiest thing to do then is to follow policy, because then you can always take a step back and… say: ‘this and this are the rules’ and then I have something that supports what I say. (Yasmin, 2022).
The brand in itself also plays a role in the social interactions taking place between visitors of Espresso House. As noted above, the CupTogether-campaign encourages visitors to behave in a certain way - to acknowledge strangers. Although this is not enacted per my observations, it shows Espresso House’s brands interest in their spaces being used for social interaction, or at least that brand wants the visitors to think it does. It signals that Espresso House takes social responsibility which is a common marketing strategy for coffee-shop chains according to Kim and Park. (2022).

**Placelessness / sense-of-place**

The staff differentiates between interactions with “ordinary customers” and “Regulars”. The regular customers are recurring and often come to the location, building acquaintanceship with the staff. In most cases, the communication with regular’s is more personal. One of the regular’s often comes in with her pet parrot and she is popular among the staff, since she is nice and talkative. These individuals and their individual relationships shape the space, and they are place-particular for Espresso-House Västermalmsgallerian.

The positive customer interactions are meaningful for the staff members interviewed, and the staff-customer interactions can be important and meaningful even if they are fleeting, short and one-sided:

> On…world mental health day… [I] wrote little messages on the coffee cup holders for the person, saying… ‘You are worthy of a place on this earth’ and ‘Don’t forget you mean the world to someone […] When I saw some people walking away [they were] looking at their cups and smiling! And that is like, so special to me. (Erika, 2022).

However, Erika and Josefin both note that specifically Espresso House Västermalmsgallerian is known for having rude customers, compared to the other Espresso Houses they have experienced from. These interactions are described in length above. This is a place-specific feature according to them.

Furthermore, it is common for the staff to fill an empty slot in other Espresso House shops, or have an empty slot filled in in their shop, in case of sickness or vacation leave. All Espresso House staff are expected to be able to do this since the routines, register-system, app, food, recipes, and policy are supposed to be the same everywhere. The similarity between all Espresso Houses is an important factor in why guests come to Espresso House, according to Yasmin and Josefin. Yasmin says that:

> “It’s easily accessible… Like ‘There is an Espresso House, I guess we’ll go there then’… we know what we get… that’s the idea behind the products and the decoration, that it’s the same in every shop […] so the guest should feel like it doesn’t matter if I go in in one in Haparanda or… Stockholm. It’s exactly the same. You should feel at home.” (Yasmin, 2022)

Josefin’s argument is similar - “It’s like an easy choice? … if you go to an Espresso House you know what you get, if you go to a new café you don’t know what you get” (2022). Erika
says that the high-quality coffee and the staff are important factors for why customers choose Espresso House.

The staff also show a sense of ownership of the space, judging that they all are invested in making sure Espresso House makes money, and making sure that the “right” customers come. Yasmin says that the coffee-shop “Starts and ends with us... with the staff” (2022), showing that she deems her and her colleagues to be those creating sense-of-place.

Food and meaning
Some parts of the menu changes, but the standard dishes, cakes and coffees are very particular. Erika states that she does not think the customers would like it if any of their regular items changed. Yasmin also points out that customer complaints often revolve around certain products not tasting “as they should” and emphasizes the importance of exactly following recipes in the flavored coffees “…there has to be two pumps of caramel and not one” (2022). The regular customers are, judging by their complaints, invested in ensuring that the recipes stay the same and act as if it is important and meaningful. The staff also emphasize that the food and drink items should be exactly the same every time served, and be placed in the showcase in the same places in every Espresso House.

The food can also serve special purposes as noted above with the birthday celebration. On this occasion the Espresso House cupcake was used to celebrate the coming into legal adulthood, for most a very meaningful experience.

6. DISCUSSION

Espresso House Västermalmsgallerian is a mix of interests, with a constant interaction between the different actors - visitors, staff, and Espresso House brand. As Arefi (1999) and Mitchell (1995) note, private ownership tends to enable totalitarian instructions of how an individual is to behave in a space, with the goal of orderly, controlled and profitable behavior. This is very apparent in the case of transactions with the app, where each app customer is questioned on how they felt about their Espresso House experience and their interaction with the staff. The same goes for the Espresso House policy supporting removal of unwanted visitors, and the staff’s enactment of and referral to this policy. The policy is quite literally “...a set of predetermined instructions... programmed for carrying out certain activities” (Arefi, p. 180, 1999). The app interaction is also a direct interaction between brand and customers, as Kim and Park. (2021) stated is an important type of marketing.

As well as policy dictating the behavior of staff and visitors, the space also has opening hours and one is not per policy allowed in if one is not a paying customer, symptomatic for POPS according to Németh (2009). This rule however is not enacted all the time, since many people go to Espresso House Västermalmsgallerian just to sit down and rest for a bit, even to sleep as noted above. This contributes to the space’s publicness and open-mindedness, and contradicts the brands interest since. Sometimes the non-paying visitors are told to leave, sometimes they are not noticed, sometimes they are ignored and accepted by the staff, which shows that the actions of staff can be arbitrary and not always are predetermined by Espresso House policy. Furthermore, the space is multi-purposeful - work, rest, alone-time,
eating, fika, hanging out, celebrating, waiting and studying, to name a few activities take place in this space. The staff also acts as informants, answering place-specific mall-questions (Erika, 2022). This also attributes to the cafés publicness, and to its sense of place. Furthermore, the space is visited by a wide variety of people of different ages and ethnicities. This correlates with the findings of Jones et al. (2015) who show that chain-cafés oftentimes are multicultural spaces. All types of people, however, do not visit this space.

Many customers order takeaway, and therefore shape the room without being in the room. The app customer’s who pre-order rarely even interact with the staff, let alone the place. As noted above, many of the pre-order customers take the wrong beverage and end up causing conflicts between the staff and another customer. These occurrences are like that “...large, nebulous, unchangeable force, for which...[the individual] cannot be blamed and about which... [the individual] can do nothing” (Relph, 1976, p. 64), - a blameless crime, embedded in the system, fostering feelings of inauthenticity and placelessness. The same argument can be extended to include the Espresso House policy following Yasmin’s description of the usage of policy as a means to reflect responsibility from oneself when visitors complain or are to be excluded from the room. Yasmin’s description that she herself is not able to change anything in the policy, but that things could change if enough customers engaged with Espresso House customer service regarding their issues, also shows this.

Traditional and culturally significant dishes create meaning and authenticity according to Long (2017). Fika could be qualified as a phenomenon providing chronological connectivity as described by Arefi (1999) through its embeddedness in the local culture, both as social activity and as foodstuff. Spaces where fika is eaten therefore have a certain degree of authenticity, which is relevant for the case of Espresso House. Espresso House continues this cultural heritage with those “classic things” that Espresso House “has to have” on the menu, like cinnabon and chocolate balls (Josefin, 2022). The recipe for mudcake is especially meaningful for Espresso-Houses authenticity since it originates from one of the founder's family recipe. By that logic, the not-so-greek “Greek salad” contradicts the chronological connectivity, and can not be argued to be a dish providing authenticity.

In Espresso House, the similarity and repetition is meaningful, which contradicts Relphs (1976) argument of placelessness as a loss of meaning. However, Relph (1976) also points out that what at first glance seems as a placeless place can be meaningful for the insiders of that space. The regular customers who know the menu and tastes by heart can be regarded as insiders of the space and therefore may feel a sense of belonging through the culinary conformity, as repetition creates tradition.

An important factor in creating similarity between the venues is also the interior and aesthetics. These are similar in all Espresso House shops, with Espresso House Västermalmsgallerian proving no exception. The soft lighting and dark interior, combined with the plants and overall brown colors creates a familiar atmosphere, and is a successful lucrative product. As Kim and Park. (2022) note, this is an important marketing strategy - the familiar is welcoming. The place is a product.
7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The very conformity and homogeneity through space, the communal attributes of all Espresso Houses, create a sense of belonging. As Yasmin and Josefin both state - "you know what you get" (Yasmin, 2022; Josefin, 2022)). Whether or not this “easy choice” (Josefin, 2022) is meaningful is not possible to decide, what is clear is that it is not place-specific since the sense of belonging is stretched to all outlets. The conformity is upheld by aesthetics, products and rules of conduct, which make spontaneous actions and interactions difficult, in turn making authentic interactions difficult. This, following the logic of Rlph (1976), devoids spaces of meaning. Furthermore, place-specific features can also provide a loss of meaning, as per the staffs’ rapports of how customers at this establishment, compared to other Espresso house’s, are particularly rude and ignore them. Homogeneity through space in this case fosters feelings of belonging and is supported through predetermining actions and interactions, with the cost of authenticity. But to what does one belong to in the case of Espresso House? The “insiders” of Espresso House are not insiders of an enclosed space, but insiders to a sense of place, shared by all Espresso Houses. The staff themselves are quick to note the similarities between all outlets of the chain and the need for Espresso House as a concept not to stand out too much from what is expected.

That sense of place is however, as strongly put by Strage (2022) not liked by all, and does exclude some people. This points to the fact that those who do not visit Espresso House also have ideas of what type of space it is and that these ideas are more closely related to Relphs (1976) argument of placelessness. This, however, I can only speculate on.

The staff, policy and visitors contribute to the likeness between shops in different ways - through excluding unwanted visitors (staff), through evaluating the staff’s behavior (customers), and through stream-lining the overall concept (policy). The individual employees and individual visitors also contribute to the specificity of this space in their own ways, as they, regardless of policy, occasionally act whimful and spontaneous, breaking the predetermined rules through ignorance or choice, creating a place-specific sense of place and enacting the public interest in a privately owned space.

In my opinion, the very anonymity of Espresso House is what makes it stand out, and what makes it meaningful as a social arena. The "blank canvas-ness" of the overall vibe attributes to its publicness, and that allows it to be one of the few places where the socially alienated and socially conform - not meet - but sit, in the same brown leather chairs. Maybe blandness is to be preferred over exclusivity. This correlates with the findings of Felton (2017) and Jones et al. (2015).

This is not a comparative study, so I cannot compare the crowd and activities in an enclosed, small-owned café with those of Espresso House Västermalmsgallerian. In a future study it would be interesting to make that sort of comparison - studying the friction between anonymity, accessibility and meaning.
8. REFERENCES


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**Interviews**
“Yasmin”, 221128, employee at Espressso House Västermalmsgallerian
“Erika”, 221205, employee at Espressso House Västermalmsgallerian
“Joesfin”, 221129, employee at Espressso House Västermalmsgallerian
Observation guide

Physical setting
• Location
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• Sound
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Activities
• Alone-time
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Meaning
• Food and meaning
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Interview guide

Introduction
• How long have you worked here?
• What do you do?

Physical setting
• Where are we?
• Can you describe this place?
• How does it look?
• Why do you think that is?
• How does it sound?
• What do you sell?
• Who comes here?
• Who does not come here?

Activities
• What do people do here?
• What do you think about that?
• How long do they stay?
• How do the visitors interact with each other?
• How do people interact with you?
• Why do you think that is?
• How does that make you feel?
• How do you interact with people?
• What causes friction?

Meaning
• What are popular orders?
• What is on the menu?
• What do you think about the items on the menu?
• Why do you think Espresso House has this on the menu?
• What are your thoughts regarding the questionnaire that app-customers receive?
• Who is allowed to come here?
• Why do you think people come here?
• Why do you think people go to Espresso House?
• How do you feel about this place?
• What do you think of Espresso House?

Outroduction
• Is there anything important that you think I have missed?
• Can you think of anything you would like to add?
• How do you feel about this interview?