



*VFR leisure experiences of Italians and Chinese in Sweden:
a new study approach to migrants' personal networks
influence on place participation during (im)mobility times*

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Abstract

This thesis explores the Visit Friends and Relatives (VFR) tourism experiences of highly skilled first-generation Italians and Chinese in Sweden. It focuses on personal networks influence on migrant hosts' interaction and participation in the place and how the Covid-19 global immobility has changed the dynamics and the feelings towards the place. Data are collected through semi-structured interviews with a participative target sociogram as memory recollection and visualization tool. Results showed that VFR is mainly a *within* network experience and the interaction with the place and the society is marginal and influenced by hosts' mediation, their local network structure and composition. The VFR aspect of sharing quality time emerges as central element. The *local* dimension shapes place interaction and participation dynamics: the migrant host personal relation to the local place, their local network structure and composition, and the difference of having a native member in the network are crucial elements.

Key words: Highly skilled migrants, Personal networks, Immobility, VFR, Place participation

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

The recent Covid-19 crisis has shed light on the relevance of both mobility and personal networks for our life and well-being highlighting the significant role of family and friendship and stimulating reflections on our relationships with our surrounding social and physical place. The attention to multicultural societies' members' experiences, perceptions and feelings is particularly important for societies that value inclusion and diversity representativeness in these times of global change. It emerged as particularly evident during this global immobility which shed light both on several issues related to migrations and mobilities and on the often-overlooked factors of place and the relations to it.

It is undeniable that global mobility has always been subjected to privilege and that immobility is a widespread and multifaceted reality. However, this global immobility and closure of international borders is certainly a new experience for the globalized contemporary world. Being restricted in personal mobility has had different effects on people and their interaction and perception of the places around them. This has changed especially for migrants who were used to or needed to move, raising self-awareness also among the more privileged groups. On the other hand, society has re-considered the presence of migrants or people with a foreign background within itself and noticed that they are relevant components.

A particular and complex phenomenon that intersects migration, (im)mobility and personal networks is the Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) mobility and experience, which has been deeply affected by global travel restrictions and nationally imposed lockdowns. The novelty is that this has significantly affected also highly skilled migrants who are characterized by being used to free mobility.

How has the restricted possibility of visiting relatives and friends influenced migrants' relation to society and place? Has this changed their feelings towards the place? How was it before? Are there any implications for inclusion and diversity representation?

These are the general interrogatives that motivated this research project, which tries to explore highly skilled migrant hosts' relation to, their experience of, and their feelings towards the place through the investigation of an aspect of the VFR phenomenon: the tourism and leisure perspective. This perspective was chosen because it potentially allows for more interaction of the migrant with the society and the place. Moreover, it is often an overlooked aspect of the

migrant experience, despite its potential for studies on inclusion and diversity representativeness in society¹.

1.1 Why research VFR tourism experiences in migration studies?

As for VFR mobility, it is undeniable that it is essential to keep social ties and takes place along personal and social networks (transnationalism). However, it also has important host-guest-place interaction dynamics and noticeable leisure characteristics, which are potential opportunities for inter-communities contacts and exchange.

VFR mobility is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon which is intrinsically connected to migration flows, and it is characterized by being bi-directional. This means that it is not only about migrants' return visits, but also about migrants becoming poles of attraction (Williams and Hall, 2002). These mobilities take place along social networks and are connected to the migrants' personal network and transnational ties, thus highly influenced by the network's internal politics and dynamics, but also by contextual factors, such as the mobility/immobility conditions, the place's attractiveness, and the host society characteristics (e.g., Williams and Hall, 2002; Larsen et al., 2007). Besides the mobility patterns and internal dynamics, also the study of the migrant hosting practice at the micro level – especially the VFR tourism aspect – offers interesting perspectives because of the particular role assumed by migrants in the country of settlement, where they are simultaneously migrants, locals and tourists.

During the VFR tourism experience, both the host-guest-place interaction dynamics during the visit and its noticeable leisure characteristics are potential opportunities for inter-communities contacts and exchange. They entail a non-routinary interaction between migrants, local communities and places which can result in a dialogical process of learning, exploration and exchange, with a potential for enhancing the feeling of social inclusion in the guest as well as in the migrant host (Catalano, 2021; Griffin, 2017; Humbracht, 2015; Shani and Uriely, 2012). This interactive nature of the VFR phenomenon allows for particular participation in and experience of the place and the host society influenced by personal and social aspects. Despite being VFR hosting experience still underresearched in migration studies, these features make

¹ See Eksell et al. (2022) *Semester på hemmaplan? Personer med utländsk bakgrunds resvanor och turismkonsumtion i Sverige*, Media Tryck Lund.

it interesting for exploring migrants' inclusion processes and interaction dynamics with natives and other minorities.

As already mentioned, VFR mobility and experience are intertwined in migration and personal network dynamics. The influence of social networks on migration flows, patterns and dynamics is widely recognized as well as their role in shaping the post-migration social adjustment (see Bilecen and Lubbers, 2021 for a review). As for the post-migratory phase², personal and community networks offer support to migrants in different social and personal spheres, both locally and transnationally. Research has concentrated on the role of network structure, composition, and internal power relations in favoring or hindering social support, social mobility, and social capital development. Studies have developed mainly around the exchange of resources and support, transnational tie maintenance, network development and evolution, and co-ethnic or native-born ties influence on labor market participation and social mobility (ibid.:842-845).

However, the influence of personal networks on the ways of participating in places during leisure or tourism activities has received little consideration, despite the important part that leisure plays in migrants' well-being and inclusion processes (Horolets, 2012). Moreover, little research has focused on the impact that the interplay of mobility and immobility can have on personal network dynamics among privileged migrant groups, used to conceive their network as internationally spread but always reachable. Therefore, exploring the Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) tourism experiences among highly skilled migrants before and during the Covid-19 pandemic can offer interesting reflections on the role of personal networks and (im)mobility in place participation and inclusion processes.

1.2. Research Aim and Questions

The aim of this research project is to explore the VFR tourism experience as one aspect of integration or social inclusion through highly skilled migrants' experiences of interaction and participation in place during leisure tourism activities in Sweden before and during the Covid-19 global immobility. The choice of the topic is motivated by the fact that it is a particular form of leisure travel that requires an active mediation of the migrant host between their guests and the place, and it is strictly connected to the personal network structure and the (im)mobility patterns.

² Due to the research project focusing on the post-migratory phase, pre-migration and in-transit phases are not mentioned here. See Bilecen and Lubbers (2020) for a detailed review of research on social networks in migration studies.

The research questions that guide and shape the direction of this thesis project are the following:

(1) How do the structure and composition of migrants' personal network influence the experience of place participation?

(2) How has the immobility caused by the Covid-19 pandemic crisis influenced the experience and feelings of place participation?

1.3. Scope, Delimitations and Intended Contributions

The empirical case study for the project is constituted by the VFR hosting and visiting experiences of Italian and Chinese first-generation highly skilled migrants³ who have lived in Sweden before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. Considering the general characteristics, these two groups share some similarities in migration patterns in the past with the development of widespread diaspora communities and the establishment of transnational networks which reflect the central value of family, friendship, and acquaintances. More specifically, they are two relevant immigrant groups in Sweden in recent years (Statistics Sweden, 2022), but still fairly invisible in Swedish public debate and academic research, until maybe recent pandemic times when both China and Italy have been highly present in the media also for their similar politics during the Covid-19 crisis by adopting stringent measures and restrictions for both internal and international mobilities. However, they differ in their level of administrative accessibility to Sweden, which is much easier for Italians being EU citizens, and their phenotype visibility which not only makes the Chinese more visible but also entails power relations and position. This combination of similar and distinct features makes these groups' experiences interesting to explore and compare.

The focus on first-generation highly skilled migrants is determined by the fact that they are usually considered as integrated for their economic status and have easier access to mobility compared to other groups. The intent is to explore the leisure experience and the interaction with the place among a migrant group that is considered to be privileged and thus potentially able to access any place and activity as much as a local native of the same social class to observe the dynamics under full-choice conditions.

³ High-skilled migration is the movement of persons who normally possess university education (ISCED 5-6), extensive experience or a combination of the two. In selected cases, public policy frameworks can use salary level to define high-skilled migration (e.g., Blue Card). Research in this category includes studies on recognition of qualifications, brain drain/gain/waste and brain circulation (Migration Research Hub by IMISCOE, <https://migrationresearch.com/taxonomies/topics-migration-processes-migration-forms-high-skilled-migration> , access on 12-05-2022).

As for the contributions, this thesis aims at increasing awareness and reflection on underresearched themes in migration studies such as VFR tourism and mobilities, leisure participation in places, and immobility of non-vulnerable migrants. Moreover, it offers an alternative perspective to the transnationalism approach on the role and influence of the personal network at the individual level by focusing on the individual experience and perception instead of the communitarian, the transnational political and social dynamics of obligations and ties maintenance. In addition, the adoption of an interview design with the insertion of a participative method would like to highlight the importance of methodological reflection and the need for inclusive and participative methods of enquiry, which renegotiate the roles and power positions in research. Finally, by addressing an interdisciplinary topic located at the intersection of three different fields of research (urban studies, tourism and migration), this work reflects the complexity and the necessity of cross-disciplinary studies.

Following, after the relevant previous research (Chapter 2) on the field of VFR mobilities, place and leisure with attention to the relation to migration studies, the chapter on methodology and method (Chapter 3) will explain the research process and the choice of the methods of enquiry. The theoretical framework (Chapter 4) precedes the analysis chapter (Chapter 5) to introduce the concepts and approaches that are guiding and structuring the following discussion. Lastly, the conclusion (Chapter 6) presents the main findings and gives suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2 – Previous Research

This section presents the previous research relevant to this thesis project. Due to the variety of research in each field, and for the sake of clarity and relevance, only research connected to the thesis purpose is discussed. Hence, literature related to migration context about *place participation and leisure* and *visiting friends and relatives tourism* is presented to offer a brief overview of the existing knowledge aimed at understanding the basis on which this research project is constructed.

2.1. Place Participation and Leisure: an underresearched connection

Place and *Participation* are two words that have rarely been paired in migration studies, and the *Leisure* dimension has been even less taken into consideration. When thinking of *Place* in the context of migration, it is often associated to *place attachment* with a focus on the migrant personal dimensions, feelings or memories, and everyday life in a process that leads to concepts of home and belonging (eg. Kohlbacher et al., 2015; Rishbeth and Powell, 2013; Trąbka, 2019). It is also connected to *place-making*, thus highlighting the migrants' roles, agency and influence on shaping and transforming the place (eg. Buhr, 2018; Kärrholm et al., 2022; Pemberton and Phillimore, 2018). On the other hand, *Participation* often goes with *labour market participation* or *political participation*, which are both related to the collective dimension, the social structure and its internal issues, or the migrants' claim-making (e.g. Alba and Foner, 2015: 47-67, 143-168). While these themes are under the lenses of research, *Leisure* has still attracted less attention in spite of its potential implications for migrants' inclusion processes (e.g. Berasategi Sancho et al., 2022; Horolets, 2012; Shinew et al., 2004) or more generally migrants' interaction with their physical and social environment, their self-realization and self-expression (Mata-Codesal et al., 2015).

As far as my research on literature has shown, studies in the migration field that connect place, participation, and leisure are still limited. Two recent studies are particularly interesting because they research the connection between place, social networks and leisure by focusing on two different realities of migration, but both highlight the importance of non-working activities and interpersonal interaction. One explores the refugees' leisure activities and participation, their relations to the place, and the socialization and segregation dynamics under the lenses of racialization and power relations (Marucco, 2020), while the other investigates the relevance of place for highly skilled migrants across life domains through a practice-oriented approach and points out the importance of transnational connections between people and places

(Povrzanović Frykman et al., 2020). Therefore, it seems that not only the personal sphere and social connections are important in migrants' inclusion process, but also the leisure sphere and the overall interaction with the place might play a role or might offer new perspectives on the study of such a manifold and composite phenomenon.

2.2. Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR): a complex phenomenon

Despite being one of the most common and widespread forms of and reasons for travel and being strictly connected to migration flows and dynamics, VFR mobilities have received minor attention both in tourism and migration research. It has been underestimated in tourism studies by being considered irrelevant for the industry (Backer and King, 2015a; Jackson, 1990) and in migration studies by privileging its transnational nature, thus delimiting the research focus on the more functional aspects of keeping ties, comply to social obligations, and feelings of home in a diaspora return visit framework (Ashtar et al., 2017; Coles and Dallen, 2004; Duval, 2002, 2003, 2004; Tie and Seaton, 2013). However, VFR travel is a more multifaceted and complex phenomenon which needs to be further researched, as Jackson (1990) firstly pointed out in his seminal article “VFR tourism: is it underestimated?”, where he highlighted the potential for the tourism industry and social development due to the interdependence with migration and transnational social networks, and the connection to mobilities patterns linked to geographical and economic factors. His article set the basis for the following research and exploration of the field, which developed consistently in the following decades reaching a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

The literature on VFR mobilities can be divided into two distinct but correlated phases: the first of assessment, definition, and exploration; the second of theory application in search for connections to and meaning for social development. The watershed pieces of literature are the book “*VFR Travel Research: International Perspectives*” edited by Backer and King, 2015b, and the articles by Griffin, 2013, Ramachandran, 2006, Yousuf and Backer, 2015 which offer a complete review of the first phase of research and suggest further development directions (see also Aslan and Dincer, 2018). The following paragraphs present in more detail the acquired knowledge considered relevant for the thesis project, namely the literature about the migration and mobility nexus, the host role and experience, and the relevance for social development and participation.

2.2.2. VFR and Migration Nexus: bidirectional, networked and relational mobility

Migration and tourism mobilities association is well assessed and researched. Williams and Hall (2002) have highlighted the interrelation of migration and tourism through the lenses of the mobilities approach and have presented its complexity and reciprocal influence. Particularly interesting for this project are their observations about the reciprocal generation dynamics and the bi-directional nature of the mobility flows. These characteristics imply that it is not only about the return movements of the migrated community, already widely recognized as transnational return travel or diaspora travel (eg. Duval, 2003), but also about the flow generated by the migrants settled abroad who can become poles of attraction. It has been observed especially in contexts of geographical extension of friendship and ethnic and kinship networks (Williams and Hall, 2002: 4-12), as well as in the case of migrants residing in attractive places (Backer, 2008a). It is also worth noticing that it does not depend on the permanent or temporary nature of migration, as shown in studies on the significance of international students in VFR attraction and the role of their hosting activities, patterns and behaviors (eg. Bischoff and Koenig-Lewis, 2007; Min-En, 2006; Taylor et al., 2004).

The intrinsic characteristic of VFR mobility is that it occurs along personal networks, thus it obviously plays an important role in keeping transnational ties, but it also entails non-functional aspects of interpersonal contact that can influence individuals' motives for visiting as well as both guest and host experiences. As Williams and Hall highlight, VFR travel flow is determined by several factors which include the structure of family relationships, the network characteristics, such as intensity, reciprocity and means of contact, and the life cycle, together with place attachment and the attractiveness of the place of residence (Williams and Hall, 2002: 38-40). It represents a way of maintaining bonds and can include compliance to social obligations and the recreation of interpersonal connections and sociality through proximity and copresence, which is fundamental to keeping a geographically dispersed network alive and active by performing the necessary rituals and sharing quality time together with relatives and friends. These are aspects of personal life that cannot be entirely substituted by remote communication because, while virtual connections enable the maintenance of the relations in-between real-life meetings and facilitate the organization of journeys, physical encounters allow for a deeper and more intimate experience of life shared with the hosts and lived in the visited places (Larsen et al., 2007: 254-249). Therefore, the 'geographical "stretching out" of social networks makes tourism desirable and indeed necessary' (ibid: 247).

In parallel, but still very relevant, it is the role played by the place of destination. As pointed out by Larsen et al. (2007: 250-251), ‘much tourism involves a particular combination of places and significant people’ and, simultaneous to the tourist visits to relatives and friends, there is also the travel to ‘particular places that are experienced through the host’s social network and their accumulated knowledge of the local scene or of pertinent landscapes. [...] Sociality matters in sightseeing, and places matter in visiting people’. Therefore, places can be variably experienced according to the different modalities of interaction shaped by the network structure and travel purpose. The interconnections between the visitor, the host and the place are fundamental elements of the networking approach (ibid: 258-259), which highlights the sociability, relationality, and embeddedness in social networks of the tourist experience.

2.2.3. VFR Host Role and Experience: gatekeeping, interacting, negotiating

The research on VFR hosts has mainly been on the economic and marketing relevance of the hosting practice until more recent times when the attention switched on the exploration of the hosting experience from the perspective of the host and on the pros and cons of the host-guest interaction. The research focus has changed following an exploratory movement, starting by identifying the host characteristics, roles and practices, and moving forward with an insight into the emotional and personal side of the host-guest interaction, to finally analyze the whole hosting practice and internal dynamics, as well as its wider implications.

A first approach to the topic worked on the host profiling to point out their importance for the tourism industry and the marketing organization. Their particular role was highlighted by defining them as poles of attraction and ambassadors for local attractions, as well as gatekeepers to the local culture, life habits and experiences. By being closely involved in activities together with their guests, the hosts not only influence them with advice, recommendations, and opinions but also actively participate in tourist activities, thus adopting tourist-like behaviors and expenditure patterns (Backer, 2008b; Young et al., 2007).

Subsequently, research concentrated on the personal dimension of the hosting experience and highlighted the complexity of and the tensions within the host-guest interaction and relationship. The main focus was on the negotiation of personal spaces, times, needs, expectations, and values during the period of host-guest interaction and the discussion revealed both the complexity of these relations and the positive and negative impacts on the hosts’ quality of life in terms of economic, physical and spatial dimensions, as well as the socio-

psychological aspects (Capistrano and Weaver, 2017, 2018; Janta and Christou, 2019; Shani and Uriely, 2012; Uriely, 2010).

In parallel, some research widened the angle to include the analysis of the hosting practice in relation to the surrounding social and physical environment and called attention to the learning process that the host undergoes while responding to the need of complying to their duties of good hosts. Some studies have shown that while trying to satisfy their visitors' needs, the hosts also learn about the destination and gain new knowledge about the place of residence and the host country's culture (Dutt et al., 2016; Dutt and Ninov, 2017; Shani and Uriely, 2012). Moreover, taking care of the guest in a leisure context can be an opportunity to live familiar spaces and places differently and to discover new destinations together out of ordinary life.

These circumstances of copresence involve sharing experiences and emotions with close people, which lead to the creation of new memories built during the circumstantial stories and interactions and it is also deeply linked to the places, hence representing a potential contribution to social inclusion processes through leisure activities (Griffin, 2014, 2015; Griffin and Dimanche, 2017; Horolets, 2012). However, there is a constant identity negotiation process behind the host-guest interaction which can also constitute a moment of exchange of perspectives that can stimulate reflections and awareness in both the host and the guest (Humbracht, 2015). This can result in both positive and negative perceptions, especially in racialized societies, with correlated outcomes for what concerns the approach and the feeling towards the place and the society in general (AlSaleh and Moufakkir, 2019).

Chapter 3 – Methodology and Method

This chapter aims at explaining the methodological underpinnings of this thesis project in an attempt to be as transparent as possible in showing the reasoning and reflections that guided the research process and contributed to the design of the method of data collection and the approach to the analysis. After a brief discussion of my philosophical standpoint on social science research and some reflection on my positionality in relation to the research topic, the approaches to and the methods of data collection and analysis are presented.

3.1. Philosophical standpoint and Reflexivity

By exploring the individual migrant's experiences and perspectives in relation to their network, the surrounding society and the places, this thesis project reflects a constructionist worldview with an interpretivist approach to research. Through social interaction and negotiation, individuals develop subjective meanings about material or immaterial objects and things, resulting in a social world constituted by a plurality of meanings and possible interpretations. In this view, both the people and the context are influential in shaping and giving meaning to the social world and its dynamics, creating a highly complex picture which can offer different interpretations (Creswell and Creswell, 2018: 46).

Thinking of society as socially constructed and shaped by social relations implies recognizing the complexity and the multifaceted composition of each individual involved, including the researcher. Hence, self-reflection is key to understanding what we bring into research, not only to be transparent and recognize possible bias but also to value our background and ideas as constitutive of the necessary difference to offer innovative perspectives and interpretations to the topic under research. Regardless of the researcher's degree of closeness or distance from the topic, their point of view may highlight relevant observations and contribute to a different understanding (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018: 46).

The current research work required an overall reflexivity process to be addressed, during which I had to recognize the influence of my personal background in designing and shaping the research project. I am an Italian woman with white-Mediterranean features, a family with migration histories, and myself a temporary migrant first in China and now in Sweden. During my period in China, I had the chance of experiencing being culturally and phenotypically different from the local majority and learning to adapt while discovering and exploring the place I was living, studying, and working in. Then, it was also when I realized to be part of a particular anomaly typical of European countries where I had the privilege of having access to high levels

of education despite belonging to a low working class. These life experiences have pointed out the overall ongoing process of negotiation of roles and positions, of insider/outsider also present in the research process, especially in this case of research in a foreign country as a foreign student interviewing respondents from Italy and China, two different groups in which I am considered as an insider in one and an outsider in the other. My approach to the research topic, aim and design has obviously been informed and shaped by my personal (im)mobility experience, including my experience of living abroad, my family migration (hi)stories and the very recent lockdowns immobility experience. Being aware of these different aspects and their potential influence on my work has helped to maintain a critical approach and reflect on the design of the research project and the interview structure and questions in the search for a balance between the coherence with the research aim and the exploration of the different experiences and opinions to allow for expected and unexpected perspectives to emerge.

3.2. Research design process: an exploratory approach

This is an important section to understand the genealogy of the whole thesis project, to clarify the steps of the process that led to this thesis and the reasoning which have guided the research design. This thesis may be considered composed of two different but connected research phases: the first one exploratory and creative, where the topics emerged, and the method design was realized; and the second one of analysis and interpretation of the collected data on the defined case study.

This thesis project has undergone an exploratory path and approach to research, which started during my research internship within TiMS project about the role of tourism in multicultural societies⁴. It led to the definition of the research aim and questions as well as the design and development of the data collection method, after conducting an overview of the existing literature in the field of VFR tourism and the identification of potentially relevant areas of research. The key concepts that guided this stage of research were the core elements of TiMS project, namely inclusion, diversity, participation, and tourism experiences. The aspects considered more interesting and of contemporary relevance for both migration studies and inclusive tourism were selected and quite naturally considered in relation to the changes and effects that the recent and overall present topic of the Covid-19 pandemic has had on every

⁴ For further information about TiMS research project visit the official web pages: <https://mau.se/en/research/projects/tims-the-role-of-tourism-in-multicultural-societies--adding-to-stereotypes-or-contributing-to-diversity/> ; <https://blogg.mau.se/tims/> (access on 17/03/2022).

aspect of our lives. The result of this first stage was the identification of social networks and the VFR host's role in bridging the migrant experience with the place, while potentially creating extra-ordinary conditions for the migrant to reflect on their positionality and the surrounding society, thus also representing an opportunity for research to gather experiences from different perspectives. These key concepts have subsequently informed the case study definition and the realization of the interview structure together with the participative network visualization tool that will be presented later in the chapter. Therefore, the data collection, analysis and interpretation might be considered the second part of this thesis work with a two-fold aim of exploring the respondents' experiences and feelings, but also analyzing the practical application of the method itself.

Although an inductive approach is more usually applied in qualitative research, this thesis project has followed a slightly different path combining inductive processes with concept-based assumptions and hypotheses to guide the research design. Qualitative research is thought to capture the nuances of experiences and uncover or reflect on unmeasurable aspects, such as feelings, memories and personal stories and allows for a deeper investigation into those subjective perceptions (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018:41). Being based on the assumption that personal experiences are highly subjective and nuanced, and are difficult to define in advance, an inductive approach is usually adopted. It allows for a less structured exploration of the researched topic, and it perfectly suits the aim of drawing inferences tending not towards an explanation but towards an interpretation of the researched phenomenon. However, the first phase of the research design adopted in this thesis is openly based on predetermined key concepts. They guided the selection of the relevant topics and the identification of the research problem and defined the formulation of the research questions, the choice of method and the structure of the interview questions. Nevertheless, the idea is not to conduct deductive research, but to explore a phenomenon and its facets through the lenses of some ideas that could be connected beforehand building on observations reported by previous research in different disciplines. The results are still based on open-ended analysis and the possibility of different outcomes remains open, as well as the aim is still to offer interpretations and reflections instead of explanations.

At this point, it is important to restate that the aim of this work is to explore subjective experiences and feelings, reason on observations, give possible interpretations and stimulate informed reflections. Although the foundation of the research design is built on deducted assumptions originating from previous research, the methodology and the methods of data

collection and analysis follow an open-ended exploratory and highly reflexive process which aligns with the qualitative research approach. It is based on the richness of data about personal and subjective experiences, opinions, and feelings in order to present different angles and perspectives and allow for complexity and diversity to emerge and gain a deeper understanding of the multifaceted human and social world (6 and Bellamy, 2014: 76-77).

3.3. Method of data collection: interviews with participative visualization tool

This section is dedicated to explaining the interview structure, the techniques used and the choice of including a participative visualization tool in the process. The overall concern was to choose appropriate methods to explore the identified aspects of the research topic while keeping the interview at a reasonable and feasible time. Moreover, being aware of the role of each participant in a research process and material creation, it was decided to involve the respondent in a more active way through participative activities that could reduce the power imbalance and directly involve the participant in the co-creation of the research material. Therefore, a semi-structured interview with a participative personal network visualization tool was designed and used for data collection.

3.3.1. Semi-structured qualitative interviews: a reflective interviewing approach

It is generally acknowledged that qualitative interviews are the most suitable methods of inquiry to explore personal feelings and experiences because they allow for a deeper and more nuanced narrative, which can reveal unforeseen aspects, opinions and realities (Fedyuk and Zentai, 2018: 173-175). This thesis aims exactly to investigate and interpret individual experiences and the potential variety and nuances of each individual life; hence interviews were considered the most suitable technique to be adopted. However, in order to mirror the research aim and questions and cover the key elements, it was decided to opt for a semi-structured option, which would allow to delimit the scope of personal experiences and lead the conversation on the areas of interest for the research (ibid., 2018:173). Nevertheless, the questions were kept open and were aimed at introducing the sub-topics in a general way, thus allowing for free answers and for further exploration according to the respondent's personal characteristics and experiences, while posing questions relevant to the research scope. Therefore, a qualitative semi-structured interview method was chosen in order to explore the facets of personal experiences and feelings, while keeping the conversation around the main research questions and areas of interest.

The approach to interview design adopted in this work was inspired by the participatory research approach⁵ which aims at involving and including all the participants in the research process, and it is also based on the attempt of reducing or questioning the power imbalances that inevitably occur in the interview process between the researcher and the respondent. It also tries to empower the respondent by involving them in the co-creation of the interview material through activities or tasks in co-participation with the researcher and showing their contributions to the co-creation of research material and eventually finding common solutions or raising awareness. This is in line with the recent observations by Fedyuk and Zentai (2018) in their chapter about the role of the interview in migration research where they highlight the centrality of both the respondent and the researcher in the dialogic interaction and the knowledge co-production process.

As for the overall interview, the flow and technique were based on the reflective interviewing approach as presented by Nardon et al. (2021). In their guidelines for a four-principles model for research designs, they see interviewing as a means of conducting socially meaningful research and fostering participants' reflexivity. Firstly, they highlight the importance of *giving time to think* and reflect in all the stages of the interview: 'before' to understand the topic and the requirements and to be mentally prepared; 'during' to give space for reflection and introspection and avoid interruptions to allow for exploration of ideas, memories and opinions; 'after' to debrief, encourage last reflections, and closure, as well as giving the chance for feedbacks, critique and collaboration. Secondly, the importance of *developing a relationship of trust* to create openness and encourage reflexivity by making the respondent feel supported through active listening and active empathy. Thirdly, *invite reflection* to critically consider the preconstructed mental models by asking for clarifications or using interviewing tools. Lastly, they encourage the process of supporting *solution-focused interventions*. While the last principle is not relevant for this thesis project, the previous three are considered crucial to favor a smooth and open narrative process during the interview and to allow for experiences, opinions, and reflections to emerge. This was meant to seek for balancing the rigid semi-structured framework of the interview with a more flexible and reflexive approach, searching for a more dialogical interaction between interviewer and interviewee with

⁵ The participatory approach requires the researcher to actively be involved in the project together with the participants or actors, who are usually part of an organization or represent different stakeholders cooperating in a common project which aims at improving social conditions or contribute to reflections on both a theoretical and practical level. On the other hand, the participative approach means that the respondent is actively involved in the data collection through some co-participative activities or tasks to be conducted in collaboration with the researcher.

the intent of giving the interview a shape of a conversation which could also offer the respondent some fruitful reflections and looking more as an exchange than an enquiry.

3.3.2. Personal network diagram: a co-participative visualization tool

The main concern in the design process for the interview was to find a way to explore the key features highlighted in the research aim and questions in a coherent and interconnected way in the time span of an interview. Therefore, besides the interview questions themselves, qualitative methods of analysis of place, sense of place, social network and mobility were explored, studied, and tailored to reflect the research scope and aim. Due to time constraints and situational factors linked to the ongoing concerns about social distancing, some of the more participatory-led research techniques could not be taken into consideration⁶. Moreover, being VFR mobility strictly correlated to social networks, participative techniques of qualitative network analysis (QNA) have been prioritized and it was chosen to include a network visualization diagram in the interview structure.

According to Herz and Olivier (2012) who adopt an actor-oriented and participative approach to QNA, the visual map is created together by the participant and the researcher and acts as a ‘common third’, becoming as a ‘narrative-generating device’ supporting a dialogic reflection, and an ‘analytical instrument during the analysis’ (ibid, 2012:17). Therefore, this was a suitable tool to meet the aim to create a co-participative activity to support the memory recollection process and the conversation, while co-creating a personal network visualization diagram, which could also enrich the data and offer further reflections through the combined analysis of visuals and narrative (Herz and Olivier, 2012; Tubaro et al., 2016). Meanwhile, it would allow the participant to be actively involved in the creation of the research material and to visualize their network and connections, potentially stimulating self-awareness and recognizing their active role.

The co-participative tool was inspired by the name generator technique and the concentric-circles diagrams (target sociograms) commonly used in sociology to map the social network of support. The graphic form, the technique of use and the procedures were taken from some studies on the method itself (Antonucci, 1986; Herz and Olivier, 2012; Hogan et al., 2007), on the method variations and tailoring according to the study purpose (eg. Carrasco et al., 2008;

⁶ See Powell (2010) for visual mapping as a multisensory research tool for making sense of place, to evoke lived experiences of socio-cultural and political issues; Kochan (2016) for the combined use of three techniques (cognitive mapping, walking interviews, self-photography tour) for exploring the sense of place of rural-urban immigrants in China; and Buckle (2018) for the use of google earth and tour builder to map the movements during a biographical interview.

Ryan et al., 2014) and on the method specifically used in migration studies to explore local and transnational social support, social capital or network dynamics and emotional closeness or biographical narrative and migration processes (eg. Bilecen, 2016, 2021; Bilecen and Amelina, 2017; Cachia and Maya Jariego, 2018; Kindler, 2021; Ryan et al., 2014; Ryan and Dahinden, 2021). The result was the design of a concentric circles diagram tailored to reflect the purpose of the work, thus graphically divided by geographical location (international/national) and type of network member (relatives /friends) and it is organized by frequency of visit. This structure allows having a map on one single sheet to visualize both the composition of the personal network and the frequency of visits while working as a graphic tool to support the conversation.

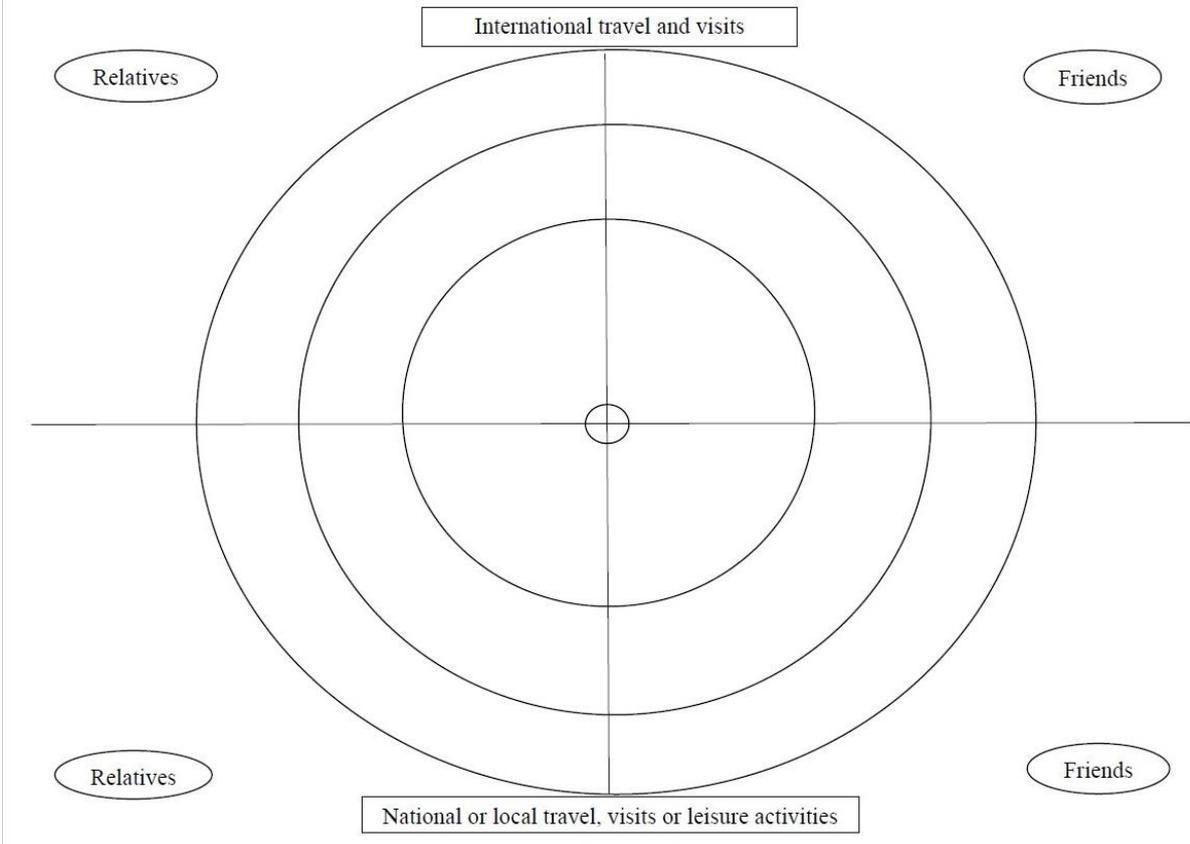


Figure 1: Diagram model.

After the creation of the graphic map, a self-test was conducted to simulate the activity and check for issues or potential results. This step was useful to identify the need for a pre-compilation step to focus on memory recollection because the retrospective approach to the interview needed some time to help the respondent to focus on a specific topic along a time span of 5-6 years. Therefore, the use of a name generator table was introduced and meant to be

compiled before the target map activity with the aim of supporting the memory recollection activity and also of reducing repetitive questions about network members during the target map activity. Moreover, the data collected could also offer interesting material about network composition and visited locations.

International Travels and Visits											
<p><i>“Think of your relatives and friends. Who has come to visit you or who have you visited since you moved to Sweden? Or in the past 5/6 years?”</i> Please write their names (first name or initials) and other information in the table.</p> <p><i>* All the names and information will be kept confidentially and anonymized, and used only for the purpose of the study.</i></p>											
Relatives					Friends						
Name	Gender (M/F)	Country of Residence	Nationality Ethnicity	Met before or after moving to Sweden?	Countries/ Cities you visited	Name	Gender (M/F)	Country of Residence	Nationality Ethnicity	Met before or after moving to Sweden?	Countries/ Cities you visited

National or Local Travels, Visits or Leisure Activities											
<p><i>“Think of your relatives and friends here in Sweden.</i> Who have you done any tourist activity with? Like going on a short trip, or visiting local attractions, or participating in other leisure activities?” Please write their names (first name or initials) and other information in the table.</p> <p><i>* All the names and information will be kept confidentially and anonymized, and used only for the purpose of the study.</i></p>											
Relatives					Friends						
Name	Gender (M/F)	Country of Residence	Nationality Ethnicity	Met before or after moving to Sweden?	Countries/ Cities you visited	Name	Gender (M/F)	Country of Residence	Nationality Ethnicity	Met before or after moving to Sweden?	Countries/ Cities you visited

Figure 2: Name generator tables.

3.3.3. Interview structure, data processing and ethical considerations

The final outline of the semi-structured interview was composed of three stages: (1) a general introduction phase with reciprocal self-introduction and general questions about tourism habits and patterns; (2) a co-participative personal network diagram activity, which included the name generator table and the compilation of the diagram with name interpreter questions about the experiences and feelings during the visits; (3) topic questions about visibility and Covid-19 immobility effects on visits, travels and place participation experiences. (see Appendix II for details)

Aware of the double need of collecting data in a transparent and accurate way and to respect the ethics of research (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018: 144-154), I have acted according to research ethics and conduct and adopted the necessary measures of informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality, as well as the safe storage of the interview material on the university private Box cloud. As for the interviews, information about the research scope and aim was sent in advance and the signature of the informed consent was required, so that the respondent was aware of the topic of the interview, the general structure, the expected time, and the data collection mode and storage (see Appendix III for the Informed Consent Letter). The recording was made with an external audio recorder device also during the online sessions that were conducted via Zoom with a single-use link and the room was locked to further protect privacy. Moreover, a single code was assigned to each interview, the names and personal information of the respondents are kept confidential, and codes are also used in the thesis.

Before the actual data collection activity, the implementation was tested in a pilot interview, during which both the interview questions and the memory recollection and visualization tools were tested, and feedback on the whole activity and experience was asked. The pilot interview was an important step to check for the interview flow, the clarity of the main questions and the procedures of introduction and explanation of the tools and the activity itself. Overall, the use of elicitation tools can enrich the interview material while helping the respondent to focus and recollect important information, but it needs time, not only for design and test but also during the interview itself.

Although the topic itself is not sensitive, it is strictly connected to the personal sphere of the respondents in some ways that they might not be fully aware of when accepting the interview. This is related to the fact that the visits and the hosting practices deal with relations with friends and relatives and to the experience of the pandemic-related immobility, so might

touch upon and bring back feelings and memories, and stimulate reflections and thoughts, especially when following steps of memory recollections and graphic visualization on a map (Ryan et al., 2014) Therefore, the interview questions and activities were thought to be enough open to allow the respondent to freely decide the content to share and the structure and aim of the co-participative activity was explained before and also during the activity if necessary.

3.4. Material

The collected material is composed of the interviews, the name generator tables and the personal network diagrams. The interviews were conducted during the period between November 2021 and April 2022 because I started during the last part of my research internship and then continued during my thesis work. In that period, I collected a total of 14 interviews with 7 Italians and 7 Chinese interviewees, which were conducted both online and in person, both in Italian and in English, and lasted for about one hour. The interviewees were found with the snowballing technique and introduced by some contacts I met in Sweden and were thus connected to the environment I was staying in, namely the university. Therefore, the sample resulted quite homogeneous as for demographics and social characteristics, which might be positive for observations and inferences within those specific target groups, but it is clearly limited as for the generalizability of the results to the whole population or to other migrant groups. The final group is composed of 7 men and 7 women mostly around their mid-late thirty with a partner and half of them with children, residing in Malmö, Lund and Göteborg and working in companies or in universities, only 2 were students. The interviewees' permanence in Sweden was one of the selection requirements but it was only stated that the candidate should have lived in Sweden for more than 2 years to allow experiences before and after the Covid-19 crisis. The result was three main groups: one who arrived just before the pandemic, so with a permanence period of around 3 years; one around 7/8 years; and the other 10 years or more (see Appendix I for details). In addition, together with the recorded interview content, 12 personal network diagrams and related name generator tables were collected as part of the research material.

3.5. Methods of data analysis: applied thematic analysis

'Thematic analyses [...] require more involvement and interpretation from the researcher. Thematic analyses move beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focus on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes. Codes are then typically developed to represent the identified themes and applied or linked to raw data as summary markers for later analysis. [...] a thematic analysis is still the most useful in capturing the complexities of meaning within a textual data set. It is also the most commonly used method of analysis in qualitative research.' (Guest et al, 2012:10 -11)

For this thesis work, the applied thematic analysis approach has been taken as a guiding model. This approach is presented by Guest et al. (2012) and it aims at practically applying methods of analysis in a rigorous, systematic and transparent way to enhance the validity and reliability of the thematic analysis process and results. Similar to grounded theory, it emphasizes the need to support claims and interpretations with data in a systematic, flexible and iterative way. However, it is not necessarily aimed at the development of theories because 'the primary goal is to describe and understand how people feel, think, and behave within a particular context relative to a specific research question', which shares the core idea of phenomenology (ibid: 13). Thus, this approach combines different methodological approaches by choosing the most suitable methods and techniques to adapt for an applied research context with the aim of ensuring credibility and accuracy of the results through transparency and systematicity of methods and procedures (ibid: 15-16)

As for the analysis procedure, it follows an iterative process that moves from a general reflection on the whole material under the lenses of the research aim through an analysis plan which helps to reflect on the analysis aim and the composition of the material, the tools and the time available. To start from a broad perspective and have a clear idea of how to approach the material before starting the analysis, which allows focusing on the relevant perspectives, understanding the degree of heterogeneity of the material and deciding on the strategy of analysis: aggregation or disaggregation of data; what to prioritize according to the strengths and weaknesses of the data and whether to use the same or different codebooks. (Guest et al., 2012: 32-34) The key elements are flexibility and the iterative process as guidance for the identification of codes, themes, text segmentation and ongoing creation of a codebook.

‘Codebook development is a discrete analysis step where the observed meaning in the text is systematically sorted into categories, types, and relationships of meaning’ (Guest et al, 2012: 53) and it is a necessary tool for both analysis and interpretation because it contributes to transparency, reliability and validity of the interpreting process and inferences. (ibid.: 80-84). There are two major procedures for thematic analysis and codebook construction: structural coding and coding for content. While *structural coding* is based on the interview guide and aims at the identification of structural topics and codes imposed by the research design, *coding for content* concentrates on the analytic objective and the emergent themes and meanings related to it. (ibid.: 49, 55-58, 64-65) These two approaches to data should also be reflected in an effective codebook through logically organized sections to ensure clarity and transparency of the process that conducts from data to inferences and then to theoretical frameworks. ‘Structural coding describes the link between data collection and the evidence generated. Content coding describes the link between the evidence and its significance. Subsequent steps in the analysis synthesize, summarize, and extend significance through the use of conceptual frameworks’ (ibid.: 75).

The practical analytical phase of this thesis followed guiding principles and procedures of the applied thematic analysis and adapted it to the collected material. Being the material constituted by both oral interviews and visual network maps, it was decided to analyze them both together and separately and then combine the observations in an iterative process of comparison and reflexivity. The interview recordings were listened to several times and the most relevant or interesting passages were transcribed, the text was segmented, coded and thematized. Due to the richness of the material and the diversity of topics and themes emerging, it was chosen to start with a structural coding based on the research aim and questions and then a coding for content phase of analysis. As for the diagrams and the related tables, they were first analyzed as integral parts of the interview content as tools shaping the narrative and embedded in it (Ryan et al., 2014; Ryan and D’Angelo, 2018a) and then analyzed separately with a structure-focused perspective to reflect on the cohesion, i.e., the density of the network, and the equivalence to identify structurally equivalent positions in the network (Altissimo, 2016; Herz et al., 2015). The observations were then compared and discussed in relation to the theoretical framework for the identification of themes, patterns, and concepts.

Chapter 4 – Theoretical Framework

Addressing an interdisciplinary research topic which intersects tourism, migration and urban studies, it has been difficult to find theories or concepts to use to analyze and interpret it. The research is about the personal individual dimension and not the community dimension or relations and connections, thus it has been decided not to use the transnational lenses, considered more useful to explain community interactions and transnational socio-political or economic participation. Moreover, the tourism activity side of the VFR experience is the main empirical research topic, which involves the migrants' leisure sphere and their non-routine interaction and participation in place, two aspects that are also little researched. Therefore, the theoretical framework has been tailored to reflect and mirror the different aspects of the research while keeping relationality and interaction as connecting focus. The theoretical framework is composed of observations and concepts which are used to interpret and analyze the dynamic connection between the migrant and the place. After a brief focus on terminology, VFR experience, personal network, and concepts of place and embedding in locality are discussed with the focus on migrant-place interaction.

4.1. Terminology

4.1.1. VFR definition and operationalization

The most recent attempt to define and frame VFR mobility has been made by Munoz et al. (2017) who included it in the purely theoretical framework of 'Mobility Influenced by a Host (MIH)', which is built on and incorporates the main features of the previous definitions (see Backer, 2007; Griffin, 2013; Janta et al., 2015; Moscardo et al., 2000), and attempts at capturing the complexity of the phenomenon. Not only did they include the key aspects of trip purpose, accommodation, motivation, and activity, but also proposed a solution for the ambiguity of terms such as 'travel' or 'tourism' by choosing the term 'mobility', which can also represent the implications of the politics and power of place, social structures, and cultural and economic factors (Munoz et al, 2017: 478-481).

“VFR can be defined as a form of MIH that involves a face-to-face interaction between host and visitor within the destination. [...] VFR mobility then is a specific type of MIH that includes a prior personal relationship between host and visitor and some face-to-face interaction, or copresence, between them during the act of mobility. Within VFR mobility, there are a variety of experiences that range from those that in many ways would be considered a tourist experience, but this definition can also include incidents of migration, acts of social

obligation, side trips to destinations that are part of a multideestination trip that is influenced at some point by a resident in one of the stops, and among others.” (Munoz et al., 2017:482-483).

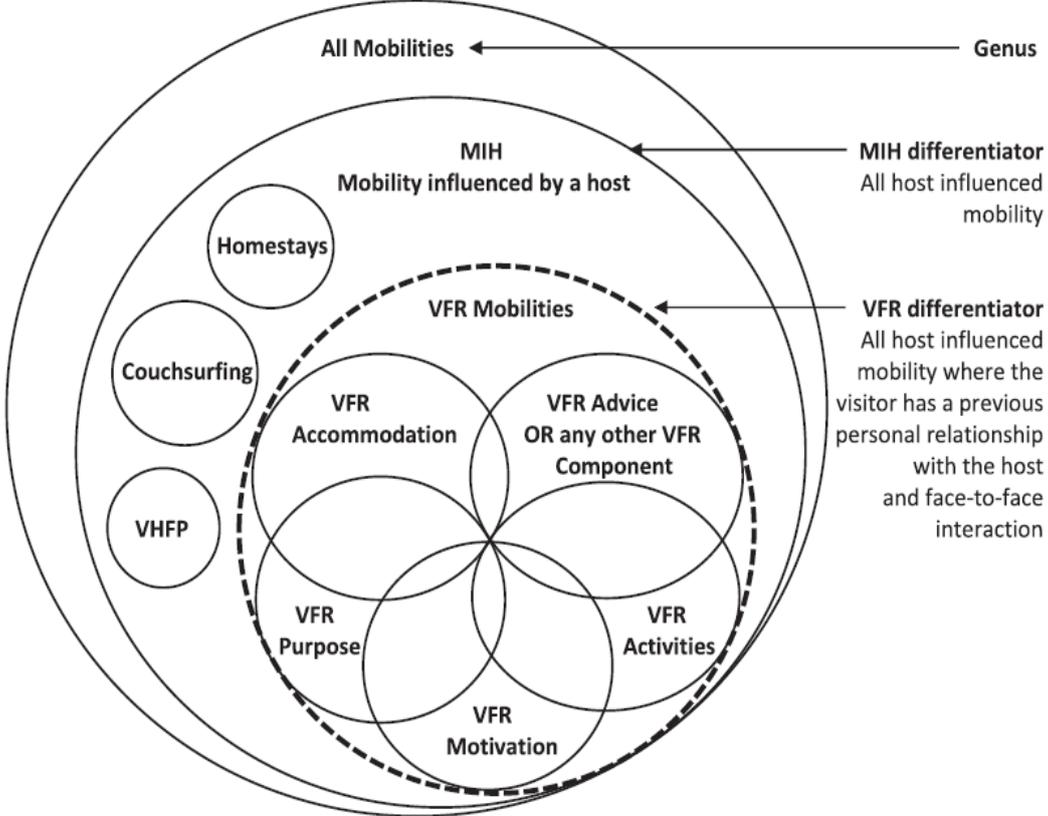


Figure 3: Genus and differentiators of visiting friends and relatives (VFR) and mobility influenced by a host (MIH) (Munoz et al, 2017:483)

To complement this definition with a more migrant-place interaction-oriented perspective, the VFR definition by King et al. (2013) has been considered pertinent. Although they focus on return VFR travels and dynamics with their power relations, which differs from the focus of this thesis, their conceptualization of VFR is particularly interesting because both place and the relation to it emerge as central.

‘VFR should be seen as a relational practice that is arranged to occur at a particular place: it is an ‘event of place’ (Massey 2005: 140–141) It is an event, or series of events, where relatedness is practised; such events are anticipated, experienced, and remembered [...] embedded both within the wider socio-spatialities of the migrant experience and within the life-course of the persons affected.’ (King et al., 2013: 10)

The operationalization of the VFR term in this thesis is adapted to the scope and aim of the research. On the one hand, it is limited to tourism or leisure-related visits, activities, and experiences during the hosting practice. On the other hand, it is stretched

to include also local leisure and tourist activities with local friends and relatives to allow for the diversity among interviewees to emerge considering their differences in network composition, length of permanence in Sweden and the recently Covid-19-induced mobility which made international mobility difficult or impossible. Therefore, the term VFR is intended as both “Visit Friends and Relatives” and “Visits *with* Friends and Relatives”, including international and local places, travels, and visits, but also non-routinary leisure activities that could be described as tourism activities and are centered on friends and relatives meetings and experience sharing practices.

4.1.2. Personal Network operationalization

As for the practical operationalization of the term ‘*personal network*’ in this thesis, it is based on the ego-net definition of a network whose central node is the migrant host and the other nodes are the relatives and friends. However, it is limited to the aim and scope of the research, thus only including ties to friends and relatives who are connected to the interviewees in the context of VFR visits and related tourism leisure activities. Therefore, it is not necessarily comprehensive of routinary connections to friends or nuclear family members, colleagues, or neighbors, hence it cannot be considered as representative of the interviewees’ entire ego-net. Moreover, it is dependent on the interviewees’ elicitation and memory recollection along a time span of 5-6 years or more (if considered relevant by the participant) and its nodes are spread in different locations according to the migrants’ personal characteristics, their migration movements and trajectories.

4.1.3. Place Participation

This term is meant to create a connection between two words and concepts that are usually approached separately: *place* and *participation*. Hence, *place participation* is an attempt to include the intrinsic interactive and participative meaning embedded in the word *participation* to the concept of *place* seen as relational, multiscalar, and intersectional. The aim is to highlight the interaction between the different actors involved in the place and the voluntary or involuntary exchange that occurs within the place and with the involvement of both the place and each of the participants. The choice of the word *participation* instead of *interaction* is because it can also include more involved feelings and perceptions, while still not necessarily meaning or relying on concepts such as place attachment, place-making or feelings of belonging or political involvement, which depart from this research project.

4.2. VFR tourism experience as a migrant-place connecting link

The host-guest-local community interaction and knowledge development have been clearly illustrated by Griffin and Glover's model (2020) in their recent study on VFR hosting under the lenses of social and cultural capital development. Their model (see Figure 2) summarizes and connects key observations of previous studies (see Griffin, 2013, 2014, 2017; Janta et al., 2015; Shani and Uriely, 2012) in an interesting graphic model that clearly shows the hosting dynamics and their potential effects on social inclusion.

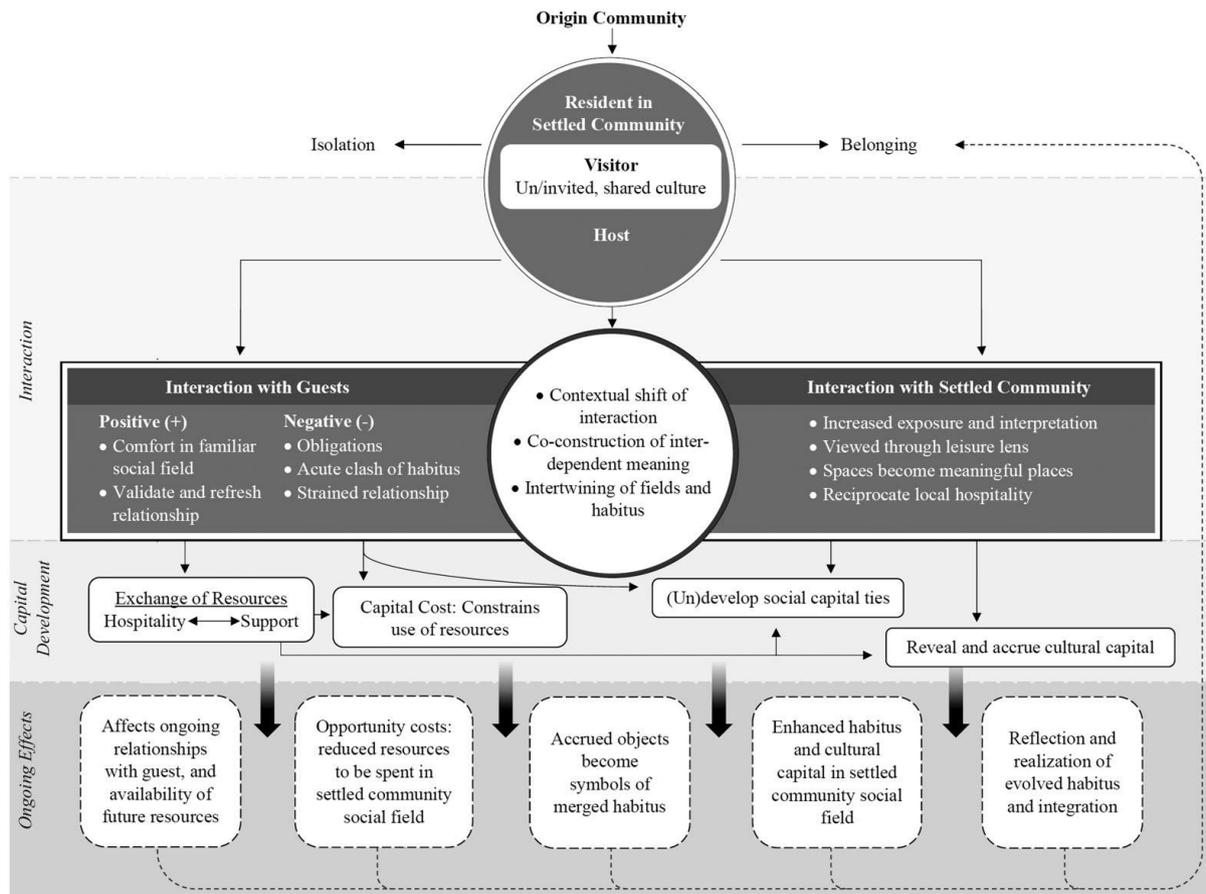


Figure 4 The interaction, capital development, and ongoing effects of hosting for immigrants (Griffin and Glover, 2020:11)

This model is particularly useful to interpret the relations and dynamics at the sociality level, i.e., between people, between host and guest or host-guest-community, which are the core of human interaction and dynamics of inclusion/exclusion. It shows the potentiality for intercultural communication and inclusion processes during VFR hosting experiences and highlights the relevance of interaction and connection between people and with the surrounding society during non-routinary activities as an opportunity for broadening the knowledge about the place and enhancing reflections.

The model shows that when receiving a guest there is a shift in identity from resident to host which pushes the resident to a non-habitual interaction both with their guests and the settled local community. Although this initial step is influenced by the degree of feeling of isolation or belonging which can affect the initial predisposition to interaction and communication, the hosting activity itself entails unavoidable negotiation processes, co-construction of meanings through shared experiences, and (re)-interpretation of habitus and relations. The second half of the model is the interpretation of these complex human interactions through the lenses of social and cultural capital development. It highlights the exchange of resources through hospitality or support and the development of social capital within the personal network and new connections with the local community which can also improve the knowledge about the local culture and habits. These processes have potential ongoing and long-lasting constructive effects both at the personal level within one's own personal network as well as in the interpersonal exchange with the local community due to the acquired new knowledge about the culture and habits which can arise reflections and considerations on one's habitus and level of inclusion.

This is in line also with other previous studies which highlighted the fact that during the whole hosting activity, several processes of negotiation occur, which span from the practical decisions to the identity constant definition and adjustment. As Humbracht (2015) suggests in his article, during the VFR experience there is a continuous interplay between the roles of host-guest, tourist-local, and immigrant-visitor that goes beyond the set boundaries of these dichotomies: according to the perspective, the role and the attached identity change and need to be constantly re-assessed. Due to the multiple dimensions of the VFR experience which intersects multiple dimensions which include personal relations, migration dynamics and tourism needs, the people involved find themselves in situations where they constantly need to adapt to the environment and mediate their positions.

Moreover, visiting and hosting activities happen in relation to a multifaceted place composed of different realities, ideas, perceptions, and inputs that can influence the whole experience. In this context, it has been observed that during leisure time together, the host and the guest undergo moments of discussion and exchange of opinions and feelings about the activity itself, the place, the life habits, and the values. This can lead to appreciation or critical observations about the destination and its culture, which can arise both positive or negative reflections and consideration about the choice of settlement, with feelings of appreciation or rejection accordingly. This is especially evident in societies where immigrant groups are subjected to racial or ethnic discrimination and stigmatization and where their guests face the

same experiences and feelings through a process of stigma by association and what can be called meta-perception in a process of reversed culture shock (Alsaleh and Moufakkir, 2019). However, it can also happen in less sensitive environments and among non-discriminated people, where it might easily be overlooked because it is perceived as unproblematic. Therefore, being VFR hosting practices intrinsically relational, they might influence the perception of the place, the feelings towards it and the society as a whole, thus potentially acting on people's place participation and future life choices.

4.2.1. VFR as networking: co-presence, caring and sharing

The networking approach to tourism studies proposed by Larsen et al. (2007) has been considered particularly relevant for this thesis project because it focuses on the relational aspect of tourism by highlighting the importance of sociality, co-presence, proximity, and meeting experience with significant others in travel and mobility patterns and habits. Co-presence is seen as central in social interactions within institutions, families, and friendships, for producing trust, sustaining intimacy, and pleasurable gathering which is difficult or impossible to fully experience through long-distance communications because 'co-present talk is embodied and located within a shared physical place, temporarily at least "full of life"' (ibid:247, quotation marks in the original). This is connected to the observation that a consistent amount of travel motivated by social obligations which often require being physically present in the same place at particular moments to perform life-cycle-related rituals and share quality time together (ibid:248), thus remarking the importance of sharing experiences in leisure, the connecting role of travel among stretched-out networks, and the time-place relation.

Moreover, they highlight the frequent combination of tourism, visits to, or meeting with friends or relatives and the fact that often 'tourism involves a particular combination of places and significant people' and 'when tourists visit friends of kins they simultaneously travel to particular places that are experienced from the host's social network and their accumulated knowledge of the local scene or of the pertinent landscapes. Thus, sociality matters in sightseeing, and places matter in visiting people'(ibid:250-251).

Lastly, they also recognize the planning work and negotiation dynamics that take place during the VFR travels and mobilities and how this makes evident the '*networking*' nature of visiting and hosting for people belonging to a geographically dispersed personal network. (ibid.:258, emphasis in original). The concluding idea is that the networking dynamics centered around personal contacts with significant people are important elements of VFR-induced travels

and involve a complex interplay of motives, host-guest interactions and experiences of place, which can take different identities and relevance according to the kind of encounter.

4.3. Personal network approach

The underlying concept of social networks is as networks as cultural forms (Knox et al., 2006) characterized by relationality and dynamicity, and embedded in a socio-cultural environment, thus shaped and influenced by the members and the place in a constant interaction of the different actors and factors involved. As (Mische, 2011: 80-96) explains in her chapter, the relational perspective on networks-culture interplay is not only to explain the intrinsic relationality of the network structure but also to develop a way of thinking that looks for ‘overcoming antinomies between structure and agency through a focus on the dynamics of social interactions in different kinds of social settings’ (ibid, 2011:80). She presents the discussion on the network-culture relations dividing the debate into four analytical approaches, each highlighting a different role and grade of importance of the network and culture, as well as a different degree of embeddedness and (in)dependence from each other (see Mische, 2011 for a detailed discussion). Among the different analytical perspectives, the one that considers ‘networks as culture via interaction’ has been chosen because of the centrality of the culturally embedded actors in relational dialogue and exchange within the networks.

‘Networks as Culture via Interaction moves beyond the conception of cultural forms as independent from networks (and thus capable of being “transmitted” or “incubated” or “transformed” by means of network ties) focusing rather on networks themselves as constituted by cultural processes of communicative interaction. [...] The focus on the conversational and performative enactment of ties allow to elide the traditional dichotomies between structure and agency. [...] Relations in this conception have durability, in that they have histories, meanings, obligations, and projected futures; yet this durability requires communicative work and is subject to negotiation, contestation, and opportunistic challenge. (Mische, 2011:88-89)

This conceptualization of networks allows for a dynamic perspective highlighting both the actors and the ties as relevant factors as well as giving space to the exploration of the interchange and communicative exchange that occurs in the encounter between the actors of the different networks and the place itself.

Research on migrants' networks has observed that network structure and composition are subject to several influential factors. The network composition in the place of residence is highly influenced by the motive for migration, the expected time or permanence, and the relations with the place and the settled community, which shape the location of ties and the interaction patterns firstly among personal contact and subsequently with the community of settlement (Cachia and Maya Gallego, 2018). The perception of the permanency or temporariness of the stay as well as the internal structure and composition of the community of interaction are influential factors for the development of a more local or more transnational network. Although the common trait is to keep close ties with the place of origin, if the duration of the stay is perceived as permanent, it is more likely that the network develops locally, while if the stay is perceived as temporary, the network tends to be more transnational. Moreover, the composition of the community of interaction shapes the kind of ties (local, transnational, sub-community) which are developed and the presence/absence of organizational structures, as well as the level of embeddedness within them, can have an effect on the development of ties within the community (ibid., 2018).

Interestingly, while the connection with the local society of residence has a crucial role in the network development and the integration and inclusion processes, the local element does not exclusively mean the connection to the native majority population. Some research has also shown that the connection between migrants and the local majority is often marginal, but it does not impede socio-economic integration or feelings of inclusion because the settled migrants' networks tend to be composed of migrant contacts who offer the needed socio-structural and emotional support (Ryan, 2011; Ryan et al., 2014). Moreover, when it comes to migrants' networks, it is also important to take into account that they are not only composed of co-ethnics or ethnic majority but also of other migrants, thus being constituted of a diversity of members belonging to different ethnic and cultural backgrounds who are all playing a role in the migrant settlement and emplacement, sense of belonging and social integration dynamics (Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019). Each kind of social connection works differently, has a different outcome, is dependent on time and place and it is subject to evolution and change, but each is important for a different aspect of the migrant's life both at functional and affective levels independently of their degree of intimacy and strength (ibid., 2019).

Network composition, structure and longitudinal change patterns highlight their interplay and influence on the level of embeddedness and its intrinsic dynamic nature. This suggests taking the dynamicity of the process into account and proposing the concept of

embedding in the social fabric as a multilayered dynamic process of networking and ties maintenance within spatial and temporal dimensions (Ryan, 2018; Ryan and D'Angelo, 2018b; Ryan and Mulholland, 2015). Longitudinal research on migrants' personal networks has observed that they are subject to change over time due to several factors related to the composition and structure of the network. (Lubbers et al., 2010). As for the composition, endogenous and exogenous factors and dynamics have a strong influence on the evolution or the involution of the network's internal diversity and the internal-external interaction; in particular, endogenous factors such as change of job or residence, transitivity (befriending friends of friends) and life cycle related events were reported as influential (ibid., 2010:96-97). At a structural level, they have observed that the density of the network tends to decrease over time, but the relational characteristics are those that mostly maintain the stability of ties. However, tending migrants' networks in being geographically and emotionally spread, the stability does not necessarily simultaneously entails factors like feelings of closeness, the frequency of contact and the degree of centrality in the network. Moreover, the network structure tends to be stable over time despite internal changes, developing internal closeness but not expanding to external elements (ibid., 2010:103). These factors and dynamics have an effect on the processes of (dis-)embedding which are not linear or predictable and are often influenced by factors beyond the migrants' own agency. Besides the meeting opportunities that are shaped by the local emplacement, the characteristics of the primary networks of both migrants and natives and the intersectionality factors, including life cycle events and external temporal cyclical events, play a major role in the process (Lubbers et al., 2021).

4.3. Place: experiential and relational

Among the different conceptualizations of place, the experiential perspective by Yi Fu Tuan (2001) and the relational approach by Doreen Massey (1994) have been considered particularly interesting because they are both focusing on the complexity of the interaction between people, space and time, and the role that it plays in the creation and construction of places. According to Tuan, the place is seen as subjectively perceived, interpreted, and created through personal experiences of the space, which becomes a place when people live it and acquire more knowledge about it including sensations, perceptions and conceptions, thus including both thoughts and emotions. Massey's idea is also related to interaction with the space but focuses more on the relational aspect, on the dynamic interconnection of social relations across different scales in a context of space-time combination. This results in her understanding of the lived world as a simultaneous existence and interaction of a multiplicity of spaces and

the place 'as a particular articulation of those relations, a particular moment in those networks of social relations and understandings' (Massey, 1994:5). It is determined by time, people and their specific interpersonal relations which extend independently from the set boundaries, are dependent of the nature of the relation, and determined by their dynamics and interconnections, which means that 'places are not so much bounded areas as open and porous networks of social relations (ibid:121).

Both approaches centralize the role of relation and interchange in living and creating the place and highlight the multiplicity and interconnectedness of different places, their dynamicity and connection to the specificity of social relations and personal experiences. Therefore, these are the elements and features that constitute the perspective from which place is intended and conceptualized in the thesis. Although it has to be considered that the place itself exists and is embedded in its own history, meaning, and relations to other places, it is also defined and shaped by people's dynamic interactions and experiences. It is not only a physical environment but it is also constituted by interpersonal relations and interactions that can change the perception of the place and contribute to its very creation.

Given the fact that place can be seen as experiential and relational (Tuan, 2001; Massey, 1994), interpersonal interactions, access to places, and participation become important aspects, especially when considering the leisure dimension of social and personal lives. Leisure can be defined as non-work time, as activity, but also as an experience and a state of mind which constitute a social space characterized by the use of time, its quality, and relative freedom of choice and satisfaction. However, being a social space, leisure experiences are influenced by social role expectations, environmental constraints, and resource limitations (Pain et al., 2001: 46-48). Considering then its space-place relation interaction and participation, social geographers move beyond the spatial patterns of leisure behavior to highlight the personal dimension of the individual participant and the meaning and value attribution process that happens during leisure experiences, which are shaped by personal background and sociocultural and economic realities. Moreover, they consider the contribution of leisure in defining place identity for its crucial role in the process of individual and group identity formation and subsequently of place identity in a complex interrelation across different spatial scales (ibid.:52-54). Therefore, leisure time, activities and experiences are important for social dynamics, access to, and participation in the place.

4.3.1. 'Becoming Local'

Buhr (2018) proposes '*Becoming local*' as a research tool to explore migrant spatial integration. In his article, he keeps people's practices and activities as central factors to establish connections with the place and develop knowledge about it, and he focuses on the locality scale to explore migrants' spatial integration. Without looking into the feelings of home or belonging, he concentrates on the migrants' urban apprenticeship, their urban know-how, i.e., their understanding of how a city works. The underlying idea is that it is important to understand not only how migrants use the city space but also issues of spatial accessibility, segregation, and exclusion. He argues for the term 'local' because it entails a broad knowledge of the space and place and a certain familiarity with their characteristics and dynamics while avoiding ethnicized or essentialized terms such as 'national' or 'citizen', which would automatically exclude some people from the possibility of being 'local'. He states that 'everyone can be a local in relation to where they live; a local has no particular face, no specific physical traits, no essentialisable identity. Anyone can be a local and, for that matter, there are many kinds of 'locals'' (ibid., 2019: 312).

Being a local is neither a formal nor a homogenous category because it is connected to people's practical engagement with the space and place, which depends on the diversity of people's lives. The experiences and the development of spatial expertise are shaped by people's habits, social roles, values, and beliefs, as well as personal and social networks and even by the kind of means of transport used (Buhr, 2019: 313-314). Therefore, '*becoming local*' is a process of skills and knowledge acquisition about the local environment and how to navigate it, which is embedded in practice and intrinsically intersectional, hence an interesting tool to explore migrants' spatial integration focusing on individual migrants' practical awareness and access to the city and its possibilities. It is this person-environment interaction that creates the knowledge about the place which is composed of a network of places and territorial units accessed, practised, and lived according to people's individual characteristics. '*Becoming local*' as a research tool allows for a non-normative approach to migrants' spatial integration by focusing on the term 'local' seen as 'a practical category fleshed out by enskilment and situated learning' (ibid., 2019: 318), thus technically independent from the descent, sharing values or sense of belonging.

Chapter 5 – Analysis

This chapter presents the analysis and discussion of the empirical data. Due to the richness of the material and variety of the topics that emerged during the interviews, the focus was set on the aspects related to the research aim and questions, thus concentrating on the interaction and participation in the host's place of residence during the VFR tourism leisure activities. After the descriptive thematic analysis, the results are summarized and discussed, and concluding remarks are presented.

5.1. The interviewees' VFR mobility patterns

The interviewees are socio-economically well integrated highly skilled migrants with a high degree of mobility and interest in the local socio-cultural environment. They reside in the cities of Malmö, Lund and Göteborg and arrived in Sweden for studying or working reasons. General comments emerged from the interviews about their opinion of Sweden and the Swedish society, the lifestyle, and the people were always positive, and appreciative and none expressed feelings of discrimination. Those with a longer permanence period consider Sweden as their home or as a second home (*IN09; IN08; IN05; IN13*), some even highlighted them having Swedish citizenship as a relevant element to express their feeling of belonging and attachment (*IN05; IN13*). Although some respondents expressed difficulties in interactions that go beyond initial contact with the local people, it was attributed to a cultural difference and not to a feeling of being unwelcomed (*IN03; IN14; IN06; IN09*). As for the mobility habits, they are used to being mobile through regular travels between Sweden and their home country on a yearly basis or even more often, but also to travel abroad for tourism or work at least twice a year. Moreover, they are interested in travels and visits to both cities and cultural or historical places and tourism-related leisure activities both in urban and rural or natural areas.

Analyzing and comparing Chinese and Italian respondents' narratives, interestingly very similar patterns emerge from both the interviews and the diagrams analysis. Patterns are highly similar as for the personal network involved in the VFR mobility with a central role of the nuclear family⁷ and the important presence of friends, while other relatives are marginal. It was also observed that parents' visits maintain a certain regularity, while friends' visits tend to be more frequent in the early periods after migration and become rarer afterwards, especially the international ones are rarely repeated. Moreover, it is interesting to notice a higher frequency and regularity of visits to the family, both back home or locally, during long holiday periods, which is often combined with other visits to both relatives and friends back home (*IN02; IN04; IN10; IN11; IN13*). These characteristics in the network composition are similar for both international and national visits but, while nuclear family members are usually coming explicitly for visits or important events, friends' motives are more flexible, including direct visits (*IN04; IN05;*) and combined travel/work and visits (*IN04; IN12; IN10*).

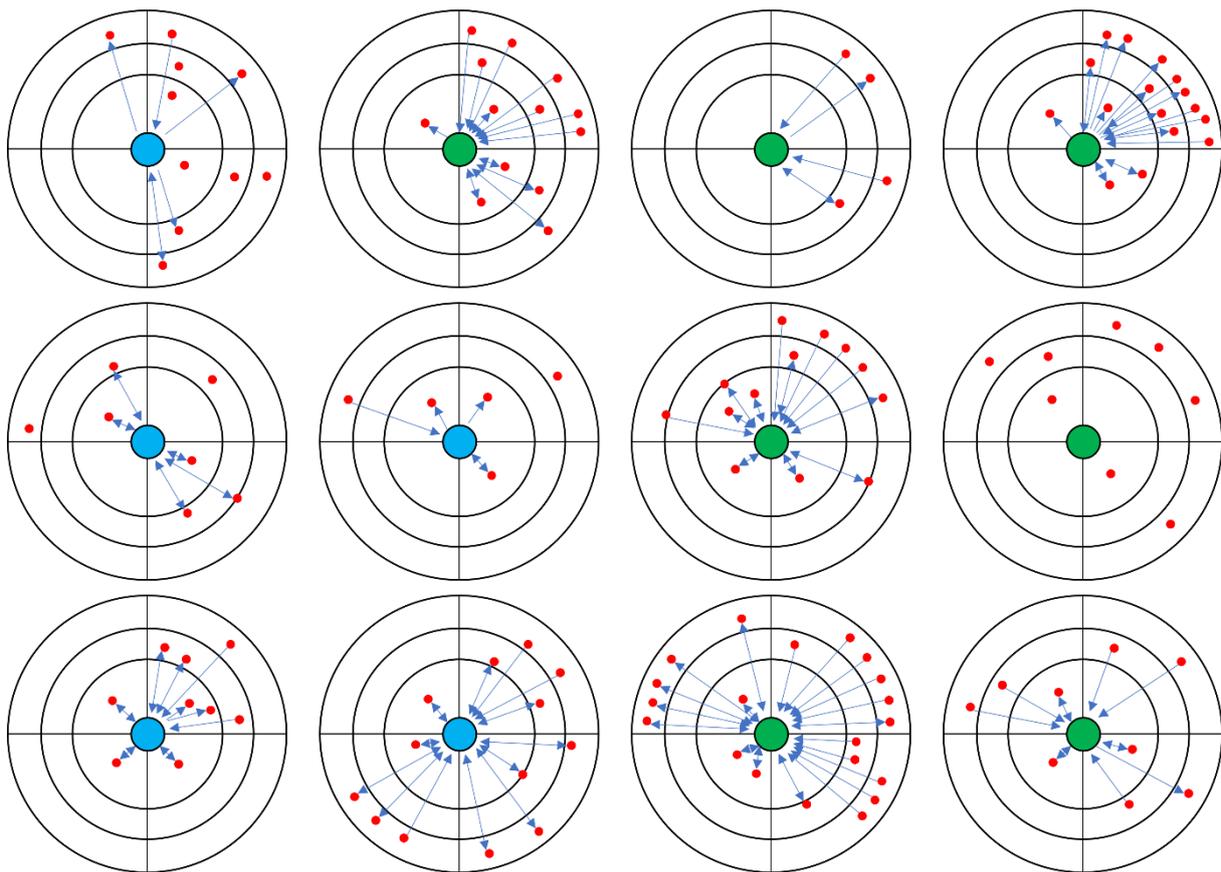


Figure 5: Graphic presentation of the interviewees' diagrams. The green dots are for Italian interviewees while the blue dots are for the Chinese interviewees. All other information has been excluded for anonymity reasons.

⁷ Nuclear family is intended as the part of the family composed of parents or close relatives such as siblings.

Differences in VFR mobility are more related to geographical distance, life cycle, and length of permanence in Sweden. Considering firstly the nuclear family visits, it is worth noticing that parents' length of permanence tends to be much longer for Chinese than for Italians due to travel logistics and costs. Moreover, it appears also more common to receive visits from friends from the home country for Italians than for Chinese, due to similar reasons (IN09; IN10). VFR mobility also depends on the life cycle of both the respondents and their family members, such as parents' age, working life, and the presence of children (IN10; IN12; IN06; IN04; IN07). The majority of the interviewees have a partner and/or young children at the moment of the interview and bring it up connected to mobility and tourism activity habits, especially the presence of young children makes a difference in the mobility habits as well as in the hosting practice and leisure activities, but also a partner contributes to it because it is someone significant to do activities with (IN02; IN03; IN07; IN08).

“Yeah, I know, I would say like this: before we got kids, everything was just fun. After that, everything you plan has to be, how to say, associated with the kids, so it's like more family vacations after the kids and it was just having fun before we got kids.” (IN02)

“I think this thing with me and my husband it's a little bit different than my other friends of similar age because we don't have kids and we don't plan to. So, I think that is, how do you say, a lifestyle difference between us and our friends” (IN07)

The longer they have lived in the country the more routinary their mobility is because of the familiarity with the place (IN08). Recently arrived interviewees are still in an exploratory phase, more interested in visiting and discovering and more sensitive to the attractiveness of the place.

“Also, because living abroad, at least at the beginning, you have the feeling of being on a kind of holiday [...] I don't know how to explain, it's true that we live here, but we still have the feeling of being a little like tourists” (IN06)

5.2. Sharing time, experiences, and thoughts

A recurrent theme emerging from the narratives is the desire of meeting and spend time together, not only as far as return visits⁸ are concerned, but it is also expressed in different moments when talking about receiving visits or the VFR hosting practice itself. The need to share time, life events and experiences with significant people has been expressed not only in case of visits and permanence of nuclear family members (IN08; IN10; IN11) but also for both close and extended family and friends who came to take part in special life events (IN07; IN13; IN14). Moreover, even when guests' main motive is tourism, it is often paired with the desire of meeting the host. The interviewees' place of residence is not considered as a main tourist destination, which makes the choice more influenced by the presence of the host than the attractiveness of the place itself. Therefore, the perception is that the guests come firstly to visit the person or to spend time with the family and in the meanwhile also to visit local attractions. (IN03; IN04; IN05; IN12; IN11)

“When someone comes to visit you in Lund, not even Stockholm, it’s also when you realize who are your closest friends because it’s really a dedicated travel, I mean, it’s not that everyone would come, and you are thankful that they came to visit you even if you don’t live in New York or in an attractive tourist location”. (IN03)

This emerges both when talking about international visits and national visits, the centrality of the desire to spend time together becomes evident because the occasion is taken to visit each other mainly to spend time together or travel to a place just to share time and experiences, while the place itself loses importance in favor of the time together. (IN04; IN05)

“It’s very nice and then not only have we visited places, but we also stayed much time at home because, especially with some friends, we hadn’t seen each other for a long time, so it was enough to eat together and chat all night long.” (IN12)

“That’s fun, you know, when you are with friends sometimes the destination is less important because going somewhere together that itself is kind of fun. So, you can joke or chat about anything, recalling time... So I think that’s fun. Of course, if the destination is interesting and fun then it’s better, if it’s not, when you have a group

⁸ Return VFR experiences are not the central focus of this thesis work therefore this aspect is not addressed in depth here. However, the need and desire for copresence and meetingness as a motive for return emerged as important as the social obligation.

of friends together, it matters less, you know what I mean. I mean, even if a place is boring, that itself can be something to joke about.” (IN08)

Visiting places together or simply showing the neighborhood or doing some activities together is not only a way of entertaining the guests or spending time together, but it is also a moment of sharing opinions and perceptions of the place and the social environment. The guests' comments and observations are also a part of the overall experience, contributing to the memories and to highlighting some aspects of the local culture and lifestyle which can arise reflections in the hosts.

“And the friend from Germany, well, she said that Malmo is much better than Germany. They didn't have anything, everything was like out of date, she was like 'we're living in the '90s, here is more modern, you have more things to do'. I was like shocked when I heard that because Germans, in my eyes are standing forward, so it's like the contrast with what I had in my image [...] That was also something new for me.” (IN02)

“Then sometimes you share your opinions, and you realize that somehow Sweden has changed you, your view on some topics has changed, you think a little bit different compared to the Italian perspective and you realize how much you have taken in despite the little integration, but on some things, you have changed.” (IN03)

The contrasting elements with their culture of origin or home environment were particularly noticed. The guests particularly appreciated the aspects more related to the difference in culture and habits, such as the more relaxed pace of life (IN02) and the general quality of life (IN13), local cultural habits (IN07; IN14) and the conception of family life (IN06) and the care for the environment (IN06).

“Uhm, I wouldn't say a particular place, but the whole environment, the things in the city, I would say that, because they felt the contrast [...] people are always in the rush and here you can just see many people just sitting on the bench and they're just enjoying the sunshine and having a coffee. But the contrast I would say, it's not a specific place, but the feeling that you are in a city as a traveler and the things you see.” (IN02)

“How can I put it... It has a special feeling, it's so different from their home and you also get to see the local people. I mean, although it's a short stay, a short visit, but you still got to feel the atmosphere of the city.” (IN08)

However, some guests' comments also expressed mixed feelings about some aspects of the local culture and social organization. Besides the lack of autonomy due to the language barrier (IN02; IN11; IN10;), the feeling of some guests was that the residential areas were socially isolated and, in the long run, living the routine without being into it would result boring because of the limited offer of activities (IN14) and the people to share it with (IN10).

“Sometimes it could be a little bit boring because they don't really speak the language, there are not too many people around, and you can't be with them all the time. So, it's a bit limited. Otherwise, they mostly like to be here and they also think that it's very beautiful here” (IN10)

“I must say that they both liked it (parents and parents-in-law). They were both satisfied even after noticing the differences. There is a mix of admiration for the country and then also see that some things are actually different, especially about socialization. I remember we lived in a residential neighborhood in Lund and both my parents and my wife's parents were surprised that there weren't shops, not even a café for kilometers around. This makes you understand that there is a different way of life here. It is a bit confusing, but they also admire the social model that more or less everyone in Italy considers somehow superior.” (IN03)

The most relevant impressions recollected are related to the possibility of visiting the tourist attractions, tasting food but also participating and experiencing the local lifestyle through visiting local markets and different neighborhoods and public parks, listening to concerts, having a drink, or going dancing (IN13; IN04; IN03; IN12). Some guests find the place and visit different from their expectations and image and the reaction might be positive or negative according to the previous idea or experiences.

“It has always been a positive experience in general for us and our friends, who sometimes were also surprised because they hadn't imagined that it (Malmo) could be so rich in things to see, being so small and not so popular as a tourist destination. When you think of a place to visit, or you ask someone what to do in Malmo, the first answer is to take a train to Copenhagen. Instead, there are lots of interesting

places here, like parks, beaches, neighborhoods, architecture, museums, places to eat and drink or listen to concerts, go dancing [...] It's a city that offers a lot. (IN12)

“That's the interesting thing. They of course appreciated my time and efforts to show them around, but they were not impressed as much as my parents. I think it's because they are young, you know, and plus they have been traveling a lot around the world, so they have visited even more magnificent places than this. I mean, there is nothing they complain about, of course, they are just 'that's nice', but they are not like 'wow', I never got those types of reactions.” (IN11)

5.3. Migrant host as Mediator

What emerges from the interviews is that the interaction with the place is highly mediated by the host. Thus, the connection is dependent on the host's previous relation and level of embeddedness to the place and on their desire to meet their guests' desires and needs while showing them the place they live in and their lifestyle. Therefore, place participation is highly influenced by the host's personal network characteristics more than the local socio-spatial environment.

This does not mean that the perception of the place is insignificant or negative because the guests' opinions are overall positive as emerged through the adjectives used by both hosts and guests to describe the environment and the local people. While people and society are described as “*kind*”, “*polite*”, “*helpful*”, “*respectful*”, “*honest*”, “*reserved*”, “*speak English*”, as for the physical place, cities and natural landscapes are described with similar adjectives and expressions, such as “*quiet*”, “*peaceful*”, “*clean*”, “*nice*”, “*beautiful*”, “*safe*”, “*cold, windy, cloudy*”, “*easy to travel through*”, “*fresh air, fresh water, fresh food*”, “*few people*”. In general, the guests' comments were positive, enthusiastic, and appreciative of the overall experience, both the places visited and the local lifestyle and mentality.

The tourism activities during the VFR hosting period differ substantially according to the guests' characteristics – frequency of visit, length of stay, personal interests – and the host's local personal network composition. The variety of places visited depends mostly on the guest's length of stay because if it is only for a few days, the visit tends to be organized more locally and in-depth, while with more days available it is more common to include different places in an itinerary, such as Stockholm and Copenhagen, which is considered almost as part of Sweden for the geographical proximity. In case of a first visit, the guests are usually taken on tours to

the host's city of residence and the nearby cities to see the main landmarks and have a broad picture of the local environment and lifestyle (IN09; IN11; IN07).

Tourist and leisure activities are usually tailored to meet the needs, characteristics, and interests of the guests to entertain and to show the place and the culture, which requires planning, organization, and sometimes also itinerary adjustments (IN09; IN10; IN03). The host always tries to combine their guests' personal interests and expectations with the desire of showing what they consider the most interesting and particular aspects of the place and the local culture.

“It's very diversified, right? It depends on the people, their age, their gender, and their interests. Also, it depends where we go each day: the first day we visit the castle, they are excited but if the second day we visit the castle they get bored. [...] It also depends on whether they have small kids: if you have small kids maybe we go to the amusement park and they're very interested. But older generations are not interested in amusement parks, they might be more interested in looking at historical sites, museums, and cultural things. It really depends and it also depends on whether they like the place they visit, right? It also depends on their background [...] And even if they are interested, if you keep giving them the same information, they start to get bored, you know. So, I try to arrange different things at different times [...] So we try to cover it a bit broad to offer a broad picture of this country” (IN09)

If repeated hosting appears as more challenging for the need to find new places to go (IN08), to mediate or negotiate activities (IN10) or to keep the necessary enthusiasm to show your guests around (IN04), it is also a chance to (re)discover and (re)appreciate places or take part in different activities (IN09; IN08; IN05)

“There is always, always a possibility to discover, even in the same place, they might renovate and change something [...] So, for me it is also discovering new things. So, yes absolutely we never walk in the same streams, every time. So, there is always something new to discover. No matter if you have been there one, two or three times, and every time you go by something new happens.” (IN09)

In the case of repeated visits – usually of parents or close relatives – or “return visits” of emigrated friends, as well as visits of and with nationally-resident friends, the patterns change towards a more local and everyday-life dimension. More time is spent locally participating in events, going to restaurants, free time activities or walks and especially ‘at home’, which could

be the host's home, the host's friends' home, the host's Swedish family home or their summer house. (IN02; IN10; IN11; IN14) The time together is also dedicated to some leisure activities on the premises, short trips to nearby destinations (IN07; IN04), or even longer trips to particular destinations or to other European countries, especially in the case of Chinese respondents who host their parents for long periods (IN08; IN11).

“And speaking of museums and galleries with my parents we did that also, and concerts as well. So that's part of the experience of the things we did together. So, it's not just traveling but museums and concerts as well.” (IN08)

“She used to live here, and we were very close, then she went back to Italy, and she came back recently for a visit. So, again she knows the city very well, she didn't need to be taken around places. We mostly went around to visit common friends during the time she was here.” (IN04)

Meanwhile, they also try to make the guest experience their own lifestyle, habits and 'local perspective' by offering particular experiences (IN12; IN14), taking them to places they like and even meeting their local friends (IN04) or bringing them to the local family's place (IN13; IN14).

Well, mostly I would say it was about being with other friends. So, if here I've my network and they (friends) would come to visit, yes, we would see Malmö, but we would also, you know, have dinner with these friends at their place or parting, so it would be about experiencing my network here or sharing experiences with them. (IN04)

“They stayed at our place, and we visited mainly Malmö. When the weather was nice, sometimes we rented bikes and we showed them Malmö, we went to the beach, the historical center maybe, but especially Möllan in small bars or places to eat, or to go to events. [...] Malmö it's a city that you can visit easily for landmarks and then by bike it's perfect. I think what they liked the most was when we rented the bike and showed them, proudly, the perfect cycling infrastructure of the city that has no equal in Italy.” (IN12)

They have a good opinion of Malmö, also because they come to visit us and I've lived here for ten years and I'm completely in love with Malmö, I really feel good here, so I somehow 'sell it well'” (IN13)

5.4. The “local-native” element: a key to place participation

Another interesting observation is that regardless of the length of permanence in Sweden, the ethnic composition of the personal network emerging from the diagram activity during the interviews is quite ethnically homogeneous or multi-ethnic for both international and local leisure experiences. Whereas, the “Swedish element” is mainly present connected to local family members, thus mainly for mixed couples. This diversity in network composition was also brought up by some Italian interviewees as reflection on their level of integration or feelings of inclusion/exclusion.

“Well, the elephant in the room, that I’m very aware of, is that there is only one Swedish, and this talks much about my social life and my integration, if we can say that. Also, he is a colleague of mine, so a friend but first a colleague whom I became friend with. We can say that Swedish people are clearly missing here”. (IN03)

Then, when I met my husband, much changed because I got more into the Swedish family. First of all, I spoke more Swedish and then I got into the system, and I understood much more of the Swedish society, [...] the family rituals, [...] for example for Christmas or the particular place that summer and sea have in the Swedish culture. All these aspects of the Swedish culture and society I knew after I met my husband.” (IN14)

“Yes, I think that maybe also having the family here I might see things... I don’t feel like I’m an outsider at this point. You know, I maybe felt it very much at the beginning but since I’ve been together with my partner and we often see her family, honestly, I don’t feel like an outsider. Obviously, I am, but I’m also part of the family and I also speak the language – that can be a huge barrier – which can help to feel more at ease.” (IN13)

The VFR travels and activities are influenced by the presence/absence of close local contacts and the structure of local personal networks. It is interesting to notice the diversity in access to places and related experiences in the narratives of interviewees with a Swedish partner and a Swedish family because, besides the main tourist attractions, they tend to bring their guests to their family house in the countryside or the seaside and offer them the experience of local lifestyle and typical local activities (IN10, IN13, IN14). This is not only in case of repeated visits of and to nuclear family members but also with first-time visits of friends from abroad (IN10, IN14) and especially when receiving visits from nationally based friends.

“With my mother once we went to the countryside with the Swedish family and it was really nice. But when we go there, there is nothing to do, we just stay home, we spend time together. Well, actually we usually also go to visit the local shops with typical products, which is always nice” (IN13)

“I think that with my parents there is a lot of visiting the people that I have a connection with here. It will be more local except for some of a little bit more tourist things that we do, some castles or parks or around some lakes” (IN10)

“They have all come to the seaside and when we usually go to the seaside, we take them for a boat tour or sometimes to catch oysters. Then we usually have dinner together, go to the beach and then maybe to the nearby village. Usually, we try to do activities that are also good for children. They all live in Sweden, so they all know Swedish society very well, so when they come, we stay home for dinner, we rarely go out eating but we often buy fresh seafood from the fishermen, which is a typical local food. (IN14)

Having a local-native family has also an influence on the local VFR travels habits, where the visits become more frequent and related to the holiday patterns and the activities are also more based on spending time together. This is especially central when considering the local tourist activities and visits with relatives and friends, because most of them were met after arriving in Sweden or are connected to the Swedish part of the family, so both sides are familiar with the place and are more interested in spending some time together at each others' homes, going on short excursions or passing time in non-touristic leisure activities (IN13; IN08; IN09; IN07).

“In summer we always stay here and go to the seaside because my husband, like many Swedes, has a house at the sea, so we go there from Midsummer to the end of July” (IN14)

“When they visit (my parents-in-law) we mostly are just at home. It's not like that we go sightseeing, maybe we go for a walk, it's not that we really do a tourist activity together because, I mean, they are already from Sweden [...] So, that's just going to the woods or the forest that is close to home and we go for a walk [...] That's just that we don't really do things like tourists” (IN10)

Having access to a locally rooted network can also give access to opportunities to visit different places or take part in activities more connected to the local habits (IN04; IN06; IN01)

“She’s a colleague of mine and she’s Swedish. I met her before coming here but here we have become closer and we went together to her cottage, that she inherited from her mum. It’s an old house with ancient furniture and you can feel the atmosphere of an ancient Swedish house with old photos, carpets, dolls, a bit old but very pretty and really typical. Then we went out for dinner and for a walk along the dock where they have a boat they usually use during summer” (IN06)

5.5. Covid-19 immobility as habit-breaking: isolation, discovery and reflection

“It was a confusing/disorienting experience, somehow it gave us the perception of being very far from home for the first time because at the very moment you cannot travel you realize that Sweden is far. Actually, suddenly there was the feeling of distance that before was mitigated by frequent travel. Moreover, the situation was stressful, with a lot of uncertainty and also some fear. So, I would say we lived that period quite badly. We missed the possibility to move, and we felt isolated in Sweden.” (IN03)

The forced immobility due to Covid-19 has had different impacts on Italians and Chinese as for the level of difficulty in returning home: while it was possible to travel to Italy during the summer, China was still very closed and strict in its regulations, which made almost impossible international travels and visits. However, also the Italian respondents notably reduced travels back home, especially during the winter holidays and avoided short trips that they used to do before due to the logistics and paperwork, as well as the highly strict restrictions in force in Italy. This implies that during the period 2020/2022 international VFR travels have been totally absent for Chinese and selected and family-oriented for Italians.

“If before I was visiting random friends as well, so maybe going a weekend in London or something like that, now it’s become mainly going home to visit my family” (IN04)

“Anyway, as soon as it was possible and I felt free and safe to travel, I went to visit my parents, so visiting them has a high level of priority for me.” (IN12)

The health-threat nature of this immobility discouraged social interaction, reduced the frequency of interpersonal contacts, travel and meetings, and resulted in a significant shrinking of the personal network to the size of the nuclear family or close friends (IN13; IN11)

“We were not only cutting down the traveling part, but also the social part. We were isolating ourselves from most social activities, because, you know we have small children at home, they already tend to get sick, so it’s not only about the travel part” (IN02)

“We had more family life. For example, I used to go more often to Stockholm also for pleasure, but now it’s been two years without going. But we have been pretty much to the countryside and on short trips to visit the family.” (IN13)

“But I did strengthen all my bonds with people here. I already had friends, but because you’re not going anywhere and everyone else is also not going anywhere, we kind of started seeing each other more, keeping distances and couples with couples and stuff like that, but I got closer to certain people for sure because we were all stuck here in a way. And not necessarily because they were all international, they maybe were Swedish, but they also travel a lot to see friends and they couldn’t do that, they had to cancel all their trips.” (IN04)

Besides the self-isolation dynamics, a different approach and living experience of the place around has taken place. The indoor activities have been drastically reduced while the outdoor activities, both in the city and in nature, have increased and were seen from a different perspective with a rediscovery of the natural environment and the interaction with it. (IN08; IN05; IN03; IN10)

“Maybe what I have done more was to go walking in the woods. I don’t know if it was to be more isolated and avoid contact with other people, but I often went hiking [...] I had done it for a year or so but in the last two years I have been very often.” (IN05)

“What has changed is that I appreciated more spending time in the woods walking, it has been important also for the kids because they also learnt how to appreciate nature, hiking has become an activity. [...] We also went ice skating in the lakes in the city, which we had never done before, partly because the lakes did not freeze,

but I also think that without the pandemic we would have done it less. [...] So, we discovered more sports outside, instead of going to museums maybe.” (IN14)

It has also been a chance to open or diversify the access to and participation in the place by opening new opportunities to interact and explore places and activities, local life habits or natural landscapes through outdoor activities, like having pic-nic in the park or going hiking (IN11; IN03; IN06). Interestingly, some respondents explicitly stated that without being forced to stay, probably they would have not traveled inside the country or the region because they would have traveled abroad or returned home, and they appreciated the opportunity which gave them the chance to know more about the place and the culture (IN09; IN12; IN04; IN06; IN13).

“Yes, it happened to do new activities that we probably hadn’t done before exactly because staying for longer (in the countryside) you have to pass the time somehow and so you go visiting also the strange museum that you would not consider having less time. So, during the summer of 2020 when we stayed more than a month in the countryside, we also went to visit the aircraft and car museum nearby or went to the strawberry field. So, yes, we did new things.” (IN13)

“Yes, the first summer (2020) we visited the Scåne region, something we would have probably never done if we hadn’t been forced to stay here. We rented a car and planned an itinerary connecting the main attractions of the region. We visited it and it was wonderful! It is an incredible region and I think we would have never dedicated an entire week or ten days to it. Then we also stayed in Malmö during the summer, also last summer and experiencing the city during summer totally caught on me and I totally fell in love with it. It is a wonderful city in summer and biking around... I can’t wait for it. So, actually yes, staying here let us discover much more about the city and personally I’m convinced now that it is a city where I would like to stay in the next few years, I like it very much, also simply for the atmosphere here.” (IN12)

The personal network still played an important role in shaping place participation and access to places. The short trips organized to some rural areas or natural parks were mostly associated with the company of family or friends as a way of sharing experiences in a different place, and in some cases, it was a member of the personal network who worked as a gatekeeper introducing the new place, or as an input to experiment and appreciate new ways of place participation (IN04).

5.6. Result Summary and Discussion

5.6.1. VFR visit for copresence and sharing – parallel to transnationalism approach

As for the VFR phenomenon itself, the centrality of the return visits and the migrant host as attractive elements for leisure purposes were reassessed as well as the influence of the geographical distance and the lifecycle factors as transversal elements shaping and characterizing the dynamics of visit (Williams and Hall, 2002, Jackson, 1990). Although this is not completely new knowledge and the dynamics and characteristics have been observed before, it is interesting to reconsider it because in these cases VFR experience emerges as an important aspect of migrants' lives at personal individual level. It emphasizes the pleasure of copresence, meeting and proximity (networking approach) parallel to or even predominant to the need for ties maintenance and social support (transnational approach).

The results repropose the centrality of interpersonal contact in both international and local environments as input and motivation for mobility led by an emotional and leisure purpose based on individual and personal agency. In line with the networking approach (Larsen et al, 2007) which focuses on copresence, proximity and meetingness in tourism travels and reflects the experiences reported during the interviews, leisure travels are either mentioned to be together with significant people or to visit significant people. This is the case on the overall importance given to the visits 'back home' to see the family and close friends, spend time together, let the children meet their grandparents, and it is also the case for relatives and friends who decide to visit the migrated person to see them, see where and how they live, spend time with them or their grandchildren, or take part in significant life events. Moreover, also some leisure travels abroad or to other cities, as well as tourism leisure activities are thought to be combined with time together with friends or relatives who live there, are passing by for other reasons or it is explicitly organized to meet somewhere (see also Tran et al., 2020).

The need for meetingness and sharing emerges also from the narratives when the relevance is put on the desire and pleasure of quality time together not only while visiting but more importantly when there are occasions for talking at home or in familiar places without doing any specifically tourist activity. Therefore, the relevance is given to sharing the experience and the time with friends or relatives, hence it highlights the importance of the emotional connection and social exchange between the host and the guests (Capistrano and Weaver, 2017, 2018) more than the maintenance of the network itself or the relevance of the place.

Sharing quality time together is central to the VFR experience whether it is about hosting or traveling together. Interpersonal exchange and relations are very important aspects, which also create opportunities for sharing thoughts, perceptions, and opinions about the place or the culture. As suggested by Humbracht (2015), this dialogue can arise reflections and have an influence on the perception of the place of all the participants. From the interviews emerged that the host acts as a mediator and presents the places and the society as they see it and their guests can express surprise, appreciation, or perplexities. The overall opinion is positive and appreciative of the differences that are considered as improvements compared to the culture of origin, such as the quality of the environment and the life, the tranquility, and the organization. However, some observations on social isolation, the difficulty of interaction and limited opportunities for activities also were expressed. The guests' reactions and perceptions can support or challenge the migration and long-term permanence plans even though they are not the main determinant factors. On the one hand, by sharing enthusiasm and appreciation of the visited places, positive memories and connections are created. On the other hand, the critical comments show angles and aspects that do not support the migration choice and need a justification by the migrant host, who often refers to cultural and lifestyle differences.

5.6.2. The migrant hosts and their local network as mediators

When considering the narratives under the lenses of Griffin and Glover's model (2020), the reported experiences are partially interpretable according to it, but they also present some incongruencies that question the generalizability of the model. It needs to be reminded that the research focus is narrowed to the VFR tourism and travel experience because of the research interest in place interaction and participation. This leaves aside the aspects connected to the interpersonal interaction out of the tourism practice, thus the interpretation is not comprehensive of the whole VFR hosting experience. The model concentrates on the host's individual experience with the guest and the settled society. While the section of the host-guest interaction reflects the narratives, the interaction with the settled society has resulted as being quite limited: it is subject to factors related to the personal network composition and structure and the host's individual relation to, and embeddedness in the places.

The international network can influence or shape the tourist experience and the access to the place but in a limited way, the most is dependent on the migrant host's own individual characteristics and their local network composition. Confirming previous research (Shani and Uriely, 2012; Yousuf and Backer, 2017), the guest's characteristics (type of ties, degree of closeness, interests, and preferences) and their length of stay condition the range of activities

and places included in the visit. Results show that besides indirectly observed VF and VR differences that are mainly related to the travel and permanence patterns, what is clearly expressed is the diversity based on the individuals' age, tastes, interests, and expectations which is determinant for the kind of activity. The host always keeps in mind their guests' characteristics while choosing the itinerary and the attractions in an interplay of entertaining and showing them the best scenery and landmarks of the area as well as highlighting the lifestyle and the socio-cultural aspects. However, the hosts' own relation to the place has a greater influence because they take the role of mediators and act on the desire of showing the most interesting aspects of the society they migrated to (Yousuf and Backer, 2017). Therefore, besides tourist attractions, places that they are familiar with or are meaningful to them are prioritized.

The host's personal relation to the place has an influence on the choice of places and activities and how the place and society are showcased to their guests. The desire is to give a picture as varied and accurate as possible of the place they live in, to highlight the aspects that they find more positive and attractive. Accommodating the guest's needs and interests also leads the host to new places, but it is more usually going to places which are already known but rarely visited because mainly belong to tourist attractions. Besides the main landmarks, the host tries to show more local environments and offer different experiences by sharing and sustaining their personal insight through the itineraries and activities. This process is influenced by their perspectives, their experiences and their own view of the place and the society, their level of embeddedness and familiarity with the places, and how "local" they have become (Buhr, 2018): the more local they feel, the more diverse would be the approach to the visit because of the desire of sharing this knowledge, feeling and experience with meaningful people.

The role of the local personal network emerged as influential and constitute an additional element to be considered in the VFR experience, especially as far as the interaction with the place and the settled community is concerned. Research has shown that migrant networks tend to be more ethnically heterogeneous in composition including ties to co-ethnics, to the native population, and to migrants with other backgrounds in different proportions and with different functions according to several individual and contextual factors. (Ryan 2011, Cachia and Maya Gallego, 2018, Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019). These ties and relations also influence the process of becoming local and familiar with the place together with the experience and the feeling toward the place and the society (Buhr, 2018). Looking at the narratives through these lenses, it is possible to observe correspondences between leisure

practices during VFR activities, the local network composition, and the 'local' migrant host's personal relation to the place.

The presence of a locally rooted and active network was perceived as a distinctive element worth being shared with the guests to offer them a more authentic experience while introducing them to their local lives. The perception is that the guest is coming explicitly to visit them, so sharing their lifestyle and the particularity of the place is thought of as central. In this case, the local network of friends and relatives is a particular characteristic and a good opportunity to share something original and personal. Therefore, an extended and diversified network offers the host more opportunities to engage in diverse tourism-related leisure activities and travels locally, to access more places and differentiated experiences, and it also offers more opportunities for exchange and interaction with local people. On the other hand, the migrant personal connection to places related to their routine, interests, activities or previous travel and tourism experiences is also influential in the choice of itineraries and activities, because it is part of the desire of showing their place and lifestyle to their guests and sharing with them part of their life experience or what they appreciate of the country of settlement.

Research has observed that the absence/presence of native members in the network is not determinant for the integration and inclusion processes nor for the feelings of attachment and belonging because the socio-emotional support can be offered by co-nationals or ties to other migrants (Ryan, 2011, 2014; Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019). This has emerged in narratives where there were no native members mentioned in the network, but close contacts with co-nationals or other foreigners locally, who contributed to the feelings and experience of 'being local' (Buhr, 2018). These non-native local contacts constitute the migrant local network which shapes the local lifestyle and works as both as gatekeepers and attractive elements to specific places and experiences, which are shared during the VFR tourist activities as part of the migrants' own local environment. When talking about tourism experiences, the absence of the native element does not emerge spontaneously, and it is not perceived as an issue or a disadvantage: the experience is mainly within the network, whatever is its composition and structure.

However, the experience and the places visited are different for those with a network mainly composed of foreign members and those with a close connection with the Swedish local network, such as a Swedish partner and related family or a very close friend. According to the network composition, the way of 'becoming local' and living the local place is different without

forcefully implying a non-inclusion feeling or non-integration status but shaping the access to places and the related experiences. Nevertheless, the presence/absence of natives in the local network resulted in very different patterns of experience and in a more locally embedded experience with some interaction with the local community, which is almost absent in the other narratives where the network is mainly centered around the migrant host and their family.

This not only is influential for what concerns the within-family visits or the local visits of friends but also for the international friends and relatives hosting tourism practice. Having a Swedish family requires dedicated visits which are mostly to spend time together at home or doing activities in the surroundings. Contemporarily, a local family also offers the host the opportunity to approach local cultural, and social customs and habits that otherwise would not be so easily accessible, thus becoming part of the experience that the host wishes to share when receiving friends and relatives. Therefore, the VFR experience, in this case, is different because the access to the places and the activities is different.

5.6.3. Immobility: an opportunity for discovering the local dimension

As for immobility, blocking or hindering international travel has obviously had a large impact on the VFR patterns both internationally and locally. Being a health-threat-induced immobility, it directly affected social life and significantly diminished the interaction among people, thus reducing the personal network to the nuclear family or to a close and selected circle. This led to a general prioritization of the close ties also when local or international VFR mobility is concerned. Moreover, having the respondents generally a local network geographically circumscribed around the place of residence, also local VFR visits and tourism activities have changed patterns. Not being able to move and meet regularly with the network members internationally, also leisure and tourism interaction with friends and family in the local place changed, took a different meaning, and opened new opportunities for discovery and understanding of the local culture.

Mirroring the natives' reactions (Hansen et al., 2022), the experience of the local place has changed by orienting the activities towards local outdoor environments while drastically reducing the interpersonal and social ones, switching from the search for social places to physical places. Moreover, spending more time locally or within the same small circle of people also created the opportunity and the need for a deeper exploration and experience of the surroundings through leisure activities in nature or short trips and visits to local tourist attractions. This is also a case where the importance of a locally based network has been

observed. Most of the visits and tourism activities have taken place among local family members or through local friends' contacts, which have become the gatekeepers in accessing new places and experiences. It has been a further development of the 'becoming local' process (Buhr, 2018) because it encouraged more interaction with the place for longer and under different conditions, allowing for new perspectives on and experiences of the society and culture.

5.7. Concluding Remarks

Considering the phenomenon under the lenses of networks and in particular networks as 'cultural forms via interaction' (Mische, 2011), the migrant host, their guests and the places visited can all be considered as nodes embedded in cultures and in intercommunication among them during the interaction. The guests have a marginal effect on the choice of places or experiences but are a point of comparison and convey different cultural perspectives. The migrant host has created a tie between themselves and the places becoming a mediator and coordinator of the different interactions and the access to places according to their perception and image of the society, the lifestyle, and their relation to them. Moreover, access to different places increases thanks to their local network ties, opening new nodes and expanding the network, thus contributing to the embedding process or knowledge acquisition and connection to the place. Therefore, the local network composition and the personal relations (ties established after migration) prove to be important also when interacting with the place in a situation that apparently only involves family and friends (ties established before migration).

Both the migrant hosts and the local nodes can be considered as bridging elements linking different networks. The migrant host connects the guest to the local culture, but the local element connects the host to a different level of locality, expanding their network and access to places and cultures. Furthermore, it offers opportunities for further communication and feelings of inclusion and belonging, which are shown and emerge clearly during the VFR hosting experience though the desire of showing the local culture and society to the guests and make them feel as welcomed as possible.

The locally embedded network has emerged as important, and the differential effect of a native connection has been observed. Having a locally rooted network opens opportunities for interaction with other places: the more diverse the network, the more opportunities to experience and access to places. Interestingly, it is not only valid for the migrant hosts themselves, but also it extends to the visiting guests and influences the tourism activities

organized together with friends and relatives. Differentiating and establishing connections to people and subsequently to places offers different angles and perspectives that the migrant host wishes to share with their guests. However, without a relational direct link to the place, the culture, and the people, the interaction is very limited, so it is the exchange.

A disrupting event, such as the immobility time, affects mobility habits and reduces the network size by concentrating on selected members (nodes) while blocking direct access to other nodes. This switches the priority level towards the most meaningful ties for the emotional aspect and selects particular nodes and ties to be more nourished and developed while opening up new connections to different nodes that can be people or places. For example, it happened with the outdoor activities or on the selected participation and interaction with some network members connected to private spheres such as the family or the friends with whom a particular leisure activity can be done.

Although it has been observed that the migrant network does not necessarily need native members for the migrant to have feelings of belonging and attachment or actively participate in society, from this case study it has emerged that there is a notable difference in experiences and access to places, cultures, and opportunity of interactions. Therefore, considering this with the desire of supporting multiculturalism in society, it might be important to think about the importance of involving the native majority in an active interaction and exchange communication with the other components in a bidirectional communication to allow for the development of more 'common nodes' in the different networks.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

This exploratory study concentrated on the role and influence of personal networks and immobility on migrants' place participation by exploring the VFR tourism experiences of highly skilled Italians and Chinese migrants in Malmö, Lund, and Göteborg (Sweden). It focused on a specific leisure interaction (VFR tourism experiences in the host country) that could involve dynamics of intercultural communication, place showcasing, access to places and interaction with the place and the community. The idea was to tackle aspects of migrants' lives that have not attracted much attention in migration research and explore the dynamics and the potential for inclusion and diversity representation. The leisure sphere of first-generation highly skilled migrants and their VFR hosting practices are still underresearched despite their potential for reflections on inclusion and representativeness under less constrained conditions. Moreover, VFR mobility has been highly affected by the recent global immobility due to the Covid-19 immobility, thus presenting the possibility for a comparative explorative case study to reflect on the effect of this unprecedented phenomenon on migrant's relation to the place and the society they live in.

The research topic involved personal networks and a focus on a large time span, therefore, besides a semi-structured qualitative interview, a participative QNA (qualitative network analysis) target diagram tailored for the study purpose was adopted. Although the effectivity of the visualization tool has not been addressed in detail in the thesis, it contributed to the narrative flow, the memory recollection, and the redefinition of the researcher-participant relation. Moreover, it resulted in additional relevant material to be analyzed in dialogue with the narratives. Incorporating participative and visualization techniques in qualitative interviews can offer multiple possibilities for research and data collection.

The study contributed to highlighting the networking approach (Larsen et al., 2007) to VFR mobility as a parallel but relevant perspective to transnationalism. While transnationalism tends to focus on the community level, maintenance of social ties and need for support, the networking approach focuses more on the individual level and the need for copresence, proximity and meetingness for sharing time and experiences with significant people. The latter has been observed as predominant in this study, which does not focus on VFR return mobility but on visits for leisure in the migrant's settling country.

Besides confirming previous research on VFR mobility patterns and the host's role and practice, the results also offered new perspectives on the role of personal networks and

immobility in accessing and participating in the place, as well as offering reflections on place participation dynamics and potential inclusion issues. The study has observed that VFR leisure experiences are mainly *within* the migrant host's personal network and there is a marginal interaction with the outside society and place. The results have shown that the major interaction and exchange happens between guest and host and their personal network, independently of the network composition or inclusion of native members in it. Although there could be a discovery of cultural aspects when going to a different place following guest needs or the forced immobility, there is little exchange and active communication with the outside-network society. Therefore, during the VFR tourism experience it is possible to observe dynamics of place interaction, but place participation does not emerge as predominant, and it is limited to the direct link to a local-native network member.

The migrant central role as a mediator between guest and place is reassessed but the *local* dimension emerges as highly influential. *Local* refers both to the migrant personal relation to the local place and to the structure of their local network. Having a locally rooted network and especially a native Swedish member in the personal network was a highly influential element determining a notable change in the experiences.

On the other hand, the Covid-19 immobility as a disrupting event on a global scale has brought a significant reduction in personal contacts, localizing the mobilities and orienting towards outdoor activities. Being difficult or impossible to travel, the interaction with the place has been more local, characterized by exploration and discovery and more interaction, but still dependent on the local personal network and differentiated by the presence of a native member.

As concluding reflections, 'being *local*' or 'feeling *local*' as well as having a *local* network are relevant and influential elements to consider even in leisure experiences when thinking of inclusion or participation. The migrant's relation to both people and places are determinant in the process of embedding (Ryan, 2018) and 'becoming local' (Buhr, 2018) and their different *localities* have influence on access to places, interaction, and participation. Moreover, the role of their local networks and especially the native population is worth to be evaluated when investigating inclusion and participation processes.

6.1. Suggestions for further research

The case study focused on two specific migrant groups with in-group homogenous characteristics and specifically on the tourism-related leisure aspect of the VFR experience in Sweden. The observations are strictly related to these characteristics, which means that it is hardly generalizable, but open the possibility of interesting further research developments. Considering the intersectionality elements, similar studies can be conducted within the same groups focusing on gender, age, length of residence and working position. Moreover, the experiences of migrant groups with different migration backgrounds, as well as ethnic and racial backgrounds might be explored and compared to obtain a more detailed picture. Lastly, research on second generations and the native population, might offered interesting points of comparison and broader reflections on the societal dynamics of interaction with places and people through the lenses of personal networks.

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Appendix I : Tables of Interviews and Interviewees

Interviews				
Code	Date	Duration	Mode of interview	Language
IN01	23/11/2021	75 min	In person	English
IN02	22/12/2021	50 min	Online	English
IN03	09/02/2022	75 min	Online	Italian
IN04	01/03/2022	75 min	Online	English
IN05	02/03/2022	50 min	In person	Italian
IN06	06/03/2022	60 min	In person	Italian
IN07	18/03/2022	50 min	Online	English
IN08	24/03/2022	75 min	Online	English
IN09	01/04/2022	35 min	Online	English
IN10	05/04/2022	70 min	Online	English
IN11	06/04/2022	50 min	Online	English
IN12	06/04/2022	70 min	Online	Italian
IN13	11/04/2022	60 min	Online	Italian
IN14	19/04/2022	50 min	In person	Italian

Interviewees							
Code	Sex	Age	Country of Origin	Nationality	Family Status	Occupation	Time in Sweden
IN01	M	27	Hong Kong (China)	Chinese	Single	MA Student	2019 - currently
IN02	F	34	Mainland China	Chinese	Married + Children	Employee	2007 - currently
IN03	M	39	Italy	Italian	Married + Children	Researcher	2015 - early 2022
IN04	F	29	Italy	Italian	Partner	MA Student / Worker	2015 - currently
IN05	M	39	Italy	Italian	Divorced	Researcher	2014 - currently
IN06	F	41	Italy	Italian	Divorced + Children	Employee	2019 - currently
IN07	F	34	Mainland China	Chinese	Married	Journalist / Translator	2012 - currently
IN08	M	46	Mainland China	Chinese	Single	Employee	2003 - currently
IN09	M	38	Mainland China	Chinese	Married	Employee	2011 - currently
IN10	F	38	Mainland China	Chinese	Married + Children	Employee	2010 - currently
IN11	M	37	Mainland China	Chinese	Married + Children	Researcher	2010 - currently
IN12	F	36	Italy	Italian	Married	Researcher	2018 - currently
IN13	M	38	Italy	Italian	Married + Children	Researcher	2012 - currently
IN14	F	40	Italy	Italian	Married + children	Researcher	2005 - currently

Appendix II: Interview guidelines and sample questions

❖ Phase 1 – Before introducing the sociogram template – Introductory talk and general questions

- Formal interview topic introduction and ethical information
- Brief personal introduction: telling all the information about myself that I would like them to tell me. *
- Ask for respondent profile, information, reason for being in Sweden

* Name, age, country/region/city of origin, ethnicity, mothertongue + languages (Swedish?), occupation, length of residence in Sweden, reason for being in Sweden

- *Could you please tell me a little bit about yourself?*
- *How often do you travel for tourism? Where? With whom?*
- *How often do you visit friends or relatives? How long do you stay and what do you usually do?*

❖ Phase 2 – Sociogram and SNA

- Elicit and position the initials or the first names of the people according to the name generator question and the frequency of visits or meetings
1) Name generator question → table

- *Think of your relatives and friends. Who has come to visit you or who have you visited since you moved to Sweden/ in the last 5/6 years?*
- *Who have you done any tourist activity with? Like going on a short trip, or visiting local attractions, or participating in leisure activities.*

Please write them here on the table. For the name, only the first name or the initials are enough, and all personal information will be kept anonymous.

2) Elaborate on the map: comment and explain the various relationships and alters characteristics

Please position them in the circles according to the frequency of your interactions. + Let's connect you and them with an arrow. Arrows pointing into different direction according to the role: guest/host

- *Could you tell me a little about them and explain to me why you choose to position them there?*
- *What was the reason for your / their travel?*
- *Did you/they stay overnight while visiting? How long, where, why?*
- *What did you do together when you last met? / Which places did you go to and why?*
- *What did they/ you think about their/your experience?*

❖ Phase 3: Semi-structured interview questions

1) Mobility/Immobility

- *Before 2019 it was easier to move and travel, and this possibility was given for granted. There were areas in the world where it was difficult or impossible to move, but during this pandemic it was particular because most of the countries were closed to international and also to national travel, and some still are.*

How have the Covid-19 restrictions influenced your travels, visits and gatherings with your friends and relatives? How have you felt about it?

What do you think about traveling in this period or in the near future?

- *During this period you have not been able to go back home to your country of origin for visiting or participating in some important events.*

How have you felt / how do you feel about that? What did/do you miss? Have you thought about going back home or bringing your close relatives here?

- *Sweden was a particular case because it didn't actually impose a lockdown or travel restrictions, even though it was recommended to be cautious and take precautions.*

How was your life during that periods, especially thinking about the type and frequency of your visits to and meetings with friends and family? Who did you visit or meet and/or how did you maintain contacts?

- *Has this situation changed some of your life mobility habits here or strengthened some relationships? Are there some places you go to, some activities you do, or some people you meet more often than before?*

2) Visibility

- *Considering the news and debates in the media about China's responsibility in the spreading of the virus and the several issues about anti-Asian feelings and actions in several countries around the world.*

How did you feel about it? Has anything changed for you in your relationship with the people around you or the places you went to? Have you ever felt uncomfortable, unsafe, or self-conscious while moving around in your neighborhood or interacting with other people?

How do you feel now? Do you think about "being Asian" when you choose a place to visit or a destination? Considering that you are from "country" or "world region" (eg- middle east)

Appendix III: Research project information letter and consent form

Research Project Information Letter and Consent Form

With this letter, I would like to ask you if you want to participate in an interview for my Master's Thesis project about *Visiting Friends and Relatives Tourism Experiences in Multicultural Societies before and during the Covid-19 pandemic*. In this document you can read information about the project and what it means to participate.

What is the project about and why do you want me to participate?

In multicultural societies, diversity representation and the participation and perceptions of every member is to be considered important and relevant for an effective and constructive intercultural communication and co-creation of an inclusive society. While there is research about labour and political participation of people with migrant background, there is still little research on leisure and tourism participation, despite the important place that these activities have in people's lives. Therefore, this thesis project aims at representing and valuing the diverse experiences and insights of migrants living in a multicultural society like Sweden by collecting their experiences and feelings while visiting and hosting friends and relatives before and during the Covid-19 crisis that has deeply affected everyone's travelling and mobility projects and experiences.

This thesis is written in collaboration with the research project *TiMS - the Role of Tourism in Multicultural Societies (mau.se)* and these are the links for further information about it.

- <https://mau.se/en/research/projects/tims-the-role-of-tourism-in-multicultural-societies---adding-to-stereotypes-or-contributing-to-diversity/>
- <https://blogg.mau.se/tims/>

What does it mean to participate?

It means that you participate in an interview which is estimated to take one hour and consists of some open questions and a participatory activity of memory recollection and network visualization through an interactive tool.

Participation is voluntary.

Your participation is voluntary, and you can choose not to answer some questions if you do not want to and also to cancel the interview at any time. If you choose not to participate or want to cancel the interview, you do not need to state any reason.

What happens to my information?

The project will collect and register personal information about you and the interview will be recorded digitally and transcribed. However, your anonymity will be kept, and you will not be asked to provide your name if you do not wish to. The recording and transcription are given a number that is the only one visible when the material is saved. A code key that associates your information with the number is only available to project members.

How do I get information about the result of the project?

You can take part of your individual data and the results of the entire project/study by contacting the researcher who conducted the interview. The result will not be sent out automatically.

Compensation to participate

You are not entitled to compensation for lost earnings or expenses related to the project.

Responsible for the project

Responsible for the project is **Sara Fiorella Viviana Licata**, Master’s student in International Migration and Ethnic Relations, Malmö University, phone +39 3404782620, e-mail sara.licata@outlook.com

You can also contact the supervisor Sayaka Osanami Törngren, Department of Global Political Studies, Malmö University, phone 040 - 665 72 27, e-mail sayaka.torngren@mau.se

Consent to participate in the interviews

I have been given oral and written information about the study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I may retain the written information.

The consent form must be in two copies, one for the researcher and one for the interviewee.

I agree that information about me is processed in the manner described in the research person information.

Place and Date	Signature