“We are not like those who/.../sit in the woods and drink”: The making of drinking spaces by youth

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Abstract
This article applies the concepts of place and space to understand youth and their engagement in risky behavior, such as drunkenness. It is based on the prolonged engagement with 23 underage youth coming from smaller municipalities in the south of Sweden. The study was comprised of semi-structured interviews, field visits, and observations at sites relevant for youths. In the stories narrated by youth, drunkenness is no longer an ad hoc activity conducted somewhere at the margins of society. The construction of drinking spaces was accomplished through highly managed, monitored, and organized practices, such as sending out invitations in advance, planning how much alcohol to drink, designating drivers, and securing transport means. Crucial to this was that spaces were products of relations existing between various youth, with no adults present. Spaces of drinking changed as those who participated in their construction changed. In addition, certain rules and codes of conduct (e.g. taking care of friends who drunk too much) were enforced to assure that the constructed spaces provided a sense of safety and enabled having fun. We conclude this article by arguing that a focus on place and space brings forward vital aspects in understanding the role of transforming party spaces that would otherwise remain obscure to social work knowledge and practice.

Keywords
Space, place, youth, drunkenness

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Introduction
This article applies the concepts of place and space to understand youth and their engagement in risky behavior, such as drunkenness. Traditionally, youth and drunkenness have been perceived by adults via the prism of uncontrollable behavior, irresponsibility, and outrageousness. Youths drinking to drunkenness has been seen as a societal problem as well as an individual problem and has been linked with among other, deviant behavior, lack of control, and sexual risk-taking (Blackman, 2011; Sato, 2004). Youth drinking, and especially, underage use of alcohol has also for a long time been a debated topic among social workers and other health and welfare professionals who have kept asking questions, such as: who, why, with whom, how much, and where? Those questions have been however largely posed with a purpose of finding, bringing back, and controlling young people rather than seeking ways of understanding what young people do when they drink alcohol and what it means to them.

Contrary to common imaginaries of young people and their drinking as scenes of uncontrollable outbreaks, recent studies engaging with young people and their drinking patterns clearly demonstrate that drinking alcohol among young people is also about a sense of control, responsibility, pleasure, and exercise of own agency (Ander, 2018; Lindsay, 2009; Percy et al., 2011). Lindsay (2009) introduces here the concept of “staging” intoxication to emphasize various ways of managing and controlling drinking as she observes them among young Australians aged 18–30 drinking in public places. Similarly, studies examining drinking places and space also advance the perspective of young people making active and conscious choices about their alcohol drinking (e.g. Demant and Landolt, 2014; Jayne et al., 2008; Roberts et al., 2012; Wilkinson, 2017). Following this line of reasoning, in this article, we lean on the sociological theorizations of place and space that approach places and spaces from the perspective of social processes and relations. Thus, our aim is to bring forward the perspective of space to come closer to the ways in which young people engage in so-called risky behaviors, such as, drinking. With this, the question leading this study is: how do young people create their own spaces for drinking alcohol?

A European study including data from 38 different countries clearly demonstrates that the location of drinking is one important factor determining the quantity of alcohol consumed, with private homes being least likely related to drunkenness (Grüne et al., 2017). Studies from UK also problematize the differences between various geographical areas showing that the availability of places where alcohol can be bought and/or consumed differs between bigger cities and smaller towns which also affects patterns of young people’s drinking (Valentine et al., 2008; Valentine et al., 2007).

Young people and drinking – Perspectives of places and spaces
The connection between spaces and youth drinking is not a new focus in research. The importance of space and place and youths use of alcohol has in recent years
been highlighted in several articles from different countries (e.g. Ander et al., 2015, 2017; Demant and Landolt, 2014; Pennay and Room, 2012; Storvoll et al., 2010; Townshend, 2013). A European study including data from 38 different countries clearly demonstrates that the location of drinking is one important factor determining the quantity of alcohol consumed, with private homes being least likely related to drunkenness (Grüne et al., 2017). Studies from UK also problematize the differences between various geographical areas showing that the availability of places where alcohol can be bought and/or consumed differs between bigger cities and smaller towns which also affects patterns of young people’s drinking (Valentine et al., 2007; Valentine et al., 2008).

The existing research demonstrates that concerns over the drinking vary depending which places and spaces are in focus and which groups of young people. Here, especially the use of public spaces creates many concerns. It is perceived both as a lack of something worthwhile to do and as a fear that young people will create disturbances. Youth meeting places can thus be seen as a threat to the grownups (Abbott-Chapman and Robertson, 2009). Thus, most of the existing research into the area has focused on outdoor places, such as parks, streets, and outside pubs and bars (Aresi and Pedersen, 2015; Robinson, 2009; Wilkinson, 2018) Drinking outdoors in such unsupervised places has often been viewed as risky behavior, especially since the drinking took place out of sight from the grownups.

Without a doubt, research shows that drinking in places, outdoor or indoor, without present adults are most common. However, the absence of adults is not the only factor determining the whereabouts of young people and their alcohol use. Age, gender, and socio-economic status create different conditions for young people’s drinking. For example, Roberts et. al (2012) show that when the place for drinking is parks and similar places, especially the girls could feel uncomfortable drinking in these places since they could be attacked by strangers. The study also shows that many youths disliked drinking to drunkenness in these places since they felt they could be regarded as troublemakers or tramps. Those who are not of the legal drinking age tend to drink alcohol in public spaces like parks, city centers, or in their homes. In Sweden, for example, people under the age of 18 are not allowed to buy and drink alcohol in pubs, shops, or restaurants. Another restriction is that those under 18 have to depend on public transportation or parents driving them to and from parties (Valentine, 1997). Youth coming from more affluent areas more often drink alcohol in home arenas in contrast to groups coming from less affluent areas who tend to drink outdoor (Roberts et al. 2012).

Even though place and space considerations take a more prominent role in research on young people and drinking, Jayne et al. (2008) assert that the connection between youth drinking and the importance of place has been theoretically underdeveloped and needs to be further explored. Very often place is used as one of several background factors in relation to youth drinking rather being a core focus itself. However, places for drinking are not only about where things happen but can be also understood as arenas for space production (Jayne et al., 2008).
One example of this, according to Demant and Landolt (2014), drinking in the streets outside bars or other venues which can be seen as “producing space” when meeting and interacting with different people, subcultures, and groups. Robinson (2009) demonstrates that public parks represent an open area without present adults and where the adolescents therefore “own” the place and decide about their own rules for their use of the park. Viewing outdoor drinking in such way allows Demant and Landolt (2014) to note the values of intimacy and privacy that are considered by young people as important when creating their own drinking spaces. Wilkinson (2017) links drinking alcohol and the use of place and space to the process of transitioning to adulthood and emphasizes the importance that young people attach to designing their own spaces for drinking.

Places and spaces are highly social phenomena that emerge and constantly change rather than existing. As Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith (1991) stressed “(Social) space is also a (social) product” (p. 26). He introduced the concept of social space as including three different aspects: spatial practice (practices producing the space, e.g. planning, designing, creating), representation of space (conceptualizations of space, e.g. images, concepts, visions) and representational space (lived experience of space). Social space can be therefore understood in terms of social relations, knowledge and power systems, bodies and objects all interacting and affecting each other. There are not only objects but also places and people’s experiences that come to the fore. Thus, the social space of drinking will therefore contain the physical environment, but also people, relations among them as well as ideas about drinking that are materialized in concrete practices and processes.

Considering space in terms of social life and social relations entails attending to the processes of change and accentuating the process of becoming, or as Massey (2005) discusses it, the need of recognizing “space as always under construction” (p. 9). This is particularly relevant when attending to spaces which exclude some groups of people and/or are created to disable some forms of activity. That process of constructing social spaces and associated with that exclusion and inclusion criteria used to maintain a particular vision of a space are closely linked to particular times. Massey (1994) stresses therefore the need to always consider space and time together, to conceive of space as “space-time configuration.” This accentuates the view that spaces and place are constructed by people, they do have effects on people’s lives, and they do inform the type of relations that may exist between various groups of people.

In this article, our aim is to bring forward the processes and practices involved in the creation of spaces of drinking among young, underage people. In particular, we are interested in exploring the ways in which various relations, structures, and ideas about drinking alcohol are materialized in the process of transforming private homes into drinking spaces. Our study advances the existing debates on drinking and spaces by focusing exclusively on drinking at homes and researching people underage (aged 16–18).
Method

Research setting and study participants

This article is based on a study conducted in three smaller municipalities in the southern part of Sweden and exploring drinking and drunkenness among youth. Two of the municipalities had less than 20,000 inhabitants and one was located at the outskirts of a bigger city with over 50,000 inhabitants. Recent investigations demonstrate that youth alcohol consumption has declined since beginning of 20th century (Kraus et al., 2019; Pape et al., 2018; Raninen et al., 2013). In Sweden, the purchase of alcohol from liquor stores is permitted from the age of 20 and in the pubs and bars from the age of 18. However, underage young people find different ways of accessing alcohol, for instance older friends and parents. A Swedish cross-sectional study shows that 3.5% of adolescents have been drunk at the age of 13 or below (Ander et al., 2020) and that just under 20% of 15- to 16-year-olds have been drunk during the past year. Most of them have been drinking to drunkenness together with same-age friends (Ander et al., 2020).

The study was based on the prolonged engagement with 23 adolescents (16 males and 7 females) in the ages of 16–18 who had personal experiences of drinking to drunkenness. All young people were provided with both written and oral information. The study was approved by the regional Research Ethics board (Dnr 2011/402-31). Those young people were recruited from three youth centers and all of them were open from 3 to 5 evenings a week. Youth centers in Sweden are addressed and available to all young people in Sweden; however, there are known to be mainly utilized by young people from families experiencing economic or financial difficulties (Mahoney et al., 2004). Generally, the level of alcohol use is considered to be higher among youth visiting youth centers as compared to other young people.

The first author spent time at the different youth centers as a way of familiarizing herself with the environment and getting to know the young people. As an experienced fieldworker herself, she regularly visited the selected youth centers during spring 2012, mainly evening time when young people were present at the centers. Those frequent contacts created the rapport between the researcher and young people. Yet, aware of being positioned as another adult who could potentially control and make decisions on behalf of young people, the first author was very careful about not to invade young people’s spaces. She entrusted young people who lead her to spaces that were important and meaningful to them, but not necessarily to social workers or other adults.

The participating youth were students of secondary school, with majority of them being enrolled in vocational programs. Many had to commute in order to attend school in nearby towns. They lived in apartments, detached, and semi-detached houses with their families. On average, when reporting on their drinking experiences, both boys and girls considered that between 10 and 12 cans of beer (33cl) per person were quite a regular amount of alcohol consumed during parties.
To further reduce the impact of potentially intruding adult researcher, the research participants were encouraged to choose how they wanted to be interviewed, for how long, with whom and how often. Thus, the data collection process did not have any predetermined structure and resulted in varied number of interviews coming from different participants. For example, two of the girls wanted to be interviewed together and they were interviewed four times. There were also two boys who wanted to be interviewed on two different occasions. One of the interviews was conducted with three boys and one interview with four boys who were interviewed once. While creating a “messy” research material, such a set up enabled young people to decide how they wanted to share their stories and when they considered their stories finished.

Majority of the interviews were conducted at the premises of the youth centers where young people felt comfortable to talk. The interviews lasted between 20 and 60 minutes and were tape-recorded. A semi-structured interview guide was used with questions revolving around drinking experiences, drinking patterns, partying, drunkenness, and relations with others. All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Analytical procedures

The focus of the analytical work conducted by the authors was on exploring the ways in which young people created drinking spaces, and that included questions, such as with whom? When? How? In that, the aim was to see drinking spaces as emerging from the social context of relations, places, times, and surrounding structures. All of the research participants pointed at home as the main and the most preferable drinking place. In the process of analysis, we wanted to explore the ways in which homes were transformed into drinking spaces, which processes and practices were involved, who were the people who actively and passively contributed to the creation of that space and how young people inhabited such spaces of drinking during their gatherings. Thus, the initial coding of the material aimed at highlighting interviews’ excerpts answering the above questions. That was done independently by the authors who then compared their coding. That opening coding of the material resulted in the distinction of several bigger themes, such as people, boundaries, code of conduct, and control. Following that, the two authors worked together during data analysis sessions to find patterns and relations between different narratives and stories told by young people about the ways in which private homes were made into drinking spaces and what was involved in that.

Findings

One of the key messages communicated by young people during the interviews was that their drinking was nothing like commonly spread images of outrageous and out-of-control daredevils who during their parties drank beyond limits destroying properties and hurting themselves. Instead, in their accounts, drinking happened in
carefully designed spaces that were built on certain rules, including considerations of preferred and unwelcome participants and modes of behavior. The creation of those spaces involved various practices and process that can be presented in the following temporal order: imaging drinking spaces, setting boundaries, and inhabiting drinking spaces.

**Imagining drinking spaces**

Drinking emerges as a highly planned activity that is predicted on different types of considerations and preparations. In explaining what type of considerations are taken into account, young people identify home as attractive drinking space because it is “cheaper than going to a pub,” “it is possible to put down a beer when moving around,” “it is smoothest,” and contrary to the outdoor public places “one does not need to freeze.” The plans and considerations involved into transforming homes to drinking spaces may take anything between several days to several weeks.

Interviewer: do you have parties planned?
N: yeah, a party that is planned, it is in few weeks
I: is it fun to plan?
N: I think it is super-fun, to see how plans go and so on
I: so it is about who is going to come…
N: come, what is allowed; to be one step ahead so there will be no problems, for my part, so to say
(Boy 17 years old)

Planning is here not only a necessity but also an actual part of fun associated with creation of drinking spaces. Imaging, planning, and designing drinking spaces are practices that not only excite but also give young people a sense of control. Young people like being in charge, they like considering different options and making their own choices. By imagining their drinking spaces, young people think more of creating spaces for themselves rather than drinking itself. While the sense of exercising their own agency seems to be at the center here, the creation of drinking spaces involves other considerations as well. It is also a warranty of a security and safety.

A: I would rather go to parties that are planned, so there will be no hassle later, that one must go at some point because parents have returned home.
(Girl 17 years old)

Planning and preparing allows young people to create a space that they would feel comfortable with. Drinking in the stories narrated by young people is associated with having fun and relaxing, thus preventing any problematic situations is seen as a way of assuring that indeed fun and relax will be not be disturbed. Robert (17)
provides an example of the type of precautions that need to be taken from the perspective of the party organizer:

I: (…) How does one plan such a party? (…)  
R: yeah, I make sure that only the closest people are invited, and then maybe I ask them to bring two friends with so there will be few of us  
I: how many have you been last time?  
R: 15–20, more or less  
I: do you live in an apartment or a house?  
R: a house  
I: house? Can people be everywhere?  
R: no, when I had a party, I closed the ground level. Because I had my bedroom there and parents’ bedroom is also there and so on. So, we were just at the upper level.  
I: at the upper level? And there were 15–20 people there… it was the way you planned?  
R: yes, it was  
I: yes. Can you… relax when you have a party, or do you need to check?  
R: yeah, one must have one’s eyes open and always be extra attentive… the one who hosts a party at home cannot be drunk  
(Boy 17 years old)

The thinking ahead as mentioned earlier by Niklas comes through Roberts account as a very practical reasoning about what could happen and how to prevent potential damage. Closing down one part of the house becomes a way of restricting the space available to the guests but also releasing some tension accompanying the sense of responsibility that one holds when organizing a party: responsibility for oneself, others, and family space of home that is temporarily transformed into a drinking space.

**Drinking spaces and their boundaries**

One of the most important aspects involved in producing spaces of drinking appears to be a creation of boundaries separating those who are inside from those who are outside. In this, spatial boundaries are not so much about physical features (although also important as an example given by Robert above demonstrates) but are largely about people and relations existing between them. One of the main boundaries that is set in this respect is that of familiarity; many of interviewees mentioned that they had never and would never attend a party with people they did not know. That came forward not only from attendees but also from organizers who shared the ways in which invitations and contacting “the right” people were important.

I: How does one get to know about a party?  
L: yeah, it is Facebook
I: hmmm
L: usually, or friends or school or whichever way, it works with text messaging too
I: which way is the most common, SMS, Facebook . . . or talking to each other?
L: yeah, person to person, yeah, because it is usually . . . people don’t like when those
whom they don’t know come
I: no
L: so, one keeps it relatively quiet
(Boy 17 years old)

Having a party home is something that young people will brag about but only to
some carefully selected others. Those others need not only be close friends, but
rather people that one is familiar with. Very often, the aspect of familiarity has
been related to the overall sense of safety following the knowledge of what to
expect. Carefully targeted invitations were thus first steps in setting the boundaries
of drinking spaces.

In addition to familiarity, age and gender are important aspects in the process of
designing spaces of drinking and drawing clear boundaries separating those who
are welcome and those who are not. Very often, age and gender considerations are
related to the different levels of experience with drinking:

S: if you drink with those younger, then there will be more trouble because it will be
like this: “I will drink a lot today because I could drink that much yesterday,” more or
less like that, when you are a bit older, then you know, you, f*** drink because of a
reason not just because you want to get drunk. So, I would rather hang out and drink
with older ones.
I: older
S: those who have been drunk already few times and they know that it’s not the same
thing now; the younger ones feel that they are tough because they drink much . . .
(Boy 17 years old)

The older the age, the more experienced in drinking young people are considered
and are thus more welcome. The selection of age mates as drinking partners is thus
another way of setting certain boundaries on drinking spaces. Interestingly, it is
not only the lower but upper age limits that are discussed. For example, those who
are 20 years old and above are very often considered as far “too old” by young
persons. From the interviews with young persons, it becomes clear that for under-
age drinking, the age of 18 seems like a type of boundary separating different
drinking spaces and possibilities. Most commonly, drinking spaces are designed
for people who are either the same age or maximum 1–2 years older, but hardly
ever younger due to the assumed levels of inexperience when it comes to managing
different drinking situations.

Although most home parties during which young people drink alcohol are for
boys and girls, there are certain gendered lines drawn between various drinking
spaces. Both boys and girls admit that when they drink together, their drinking is
different than when drinking only in the same-sex groups. It appears that both girls and boys drinking in their own groups seem to be more relaxed, while in mixed gender environments, they put on a special type of behavior and their drinking tends to be heavier. This distinction was made clear by young people explaining the difference between “chilling out” and “partying.”

A: hmm, I mean if I was drinking with girls only, it would be chilling-out
I: so, then it is chilling-out drinking
A: yeah, it would be with girls
[…]
A: I mean it is calmer when one is chilling-out
(Girl 17 years old)

“Chilling out” as opposed to partying is presented as a way of relaxing and spending time together and although, it is possible to do that in mixed groups, both boys and girls mainly talk about such way of drinking when describing same-sex groups. Drinking in mixed groups is largely associated with heavy drinking and drunkenness.

The boundaries are not only set to prevent unwelcomed young people to attend home parties but also to mark the difference between the world of adults and world of young people. For example, one of the boys explaining the choice of homes for parties mentioned specifically that the type of solution also assured that they would not be disturbed by drunk adults who would like to join or interrupt their parties. Home became thus a safe space protecting from potential intruders.

Interestingly, however, young people do not entirely exclude all adults from their drinking spaces or rather maintain some boundaries with the world of adults very fluid. This becomes, for instance, visible when young people negotiate the presence of police officers. Typically, these are unwanted intruders, but not always. Similarly to all other citizens, young people can see police officers as helpful and as Niklas explains, they do not hesitate to call them upon if things are getting out of hand:

N: If things got out of hand and I would have been standing there with the whole mess, I would then call the police
(Boy 17 years old)

The complicated and highly negotiable boundary between the drinking spaces belonging to young people and the world of adults is particularly visible when considering the role of parents. It is given that a home party is organized when parents are physically absent, more than that, it is their planned absence that is a necessary precondition for initiating any party plans. Symbolically, however, parents are to a large extent present during such home parties.

I: do you know if parents are aware of the party?
N: yeah
In Niklas' account, it is the symbolic presence of parents that not only impacts his own behavior but also provides some rationale for cleaning and putting things in order. In this sense, the symbolic presence of parents is also activated to control and manage the party, to set boundaries of what is allowed and what is not. Thus, there are not only relations with peers but also with adults and especially parents that both aid and shape the ways in which young people create their drinking spaces and what type of limits and boundaries they set.

**Inhabiting drinking spaces**

The issue of control is also a recurring theme when young people describe the ways of inhabiting drinking spaces. As mentioned earlier, the planning and setting boundaries are practices that are clearly underpinned by a desire to gain and remain in control of own choices and behavior. When describing the ways in which drinking spaces are inhabited, young people expose also their sense of responsibility for others and companionship.

L: well, one should not be drunk, one should not…, you need to know your limits, how much alcohol you can handle to drink … you need to be able to handle things, that is what I think
(Boy 17 years old)

I: Do you ever talk about risks?
S, N: No…, but we use to tell each other that if one of us gets to drunk we need to take care of each other
(Girls, 17 years old)

L: I usually have control over what is happening, if I am not drinking too much myself, and then I usually tell them to stop or put them in a bed or something, to prevent them from drinking too much, to prevent accidents
I: Is that something you have planned in advance?
L: It happens automatically
(Boy 17 years old)

Drinking spaces are to be populated with people who know how to handle themselves, but who can also take care of others. These are some of the most prominent
aspects featuring the stories of young people and their drinking spaces. If people need to travel to get to the party, there are designated drivers; if someone gets too drunk, there are others who can put the person in bed; if things get out of control, there is always someone who can help out or call for help. In the interviews, young people very often used words, such as “taking care of” or “keeping an eye” on things and others to evidence their sense of responsibility for each other.

As many young people emphasize, their parties and their drinking spaces are not scenes of horror and demolition. In this, they clearly oppose stereotypes and other common myths that adults appear to hold about them:

N: they [adults] think that it is obvious that one is outdoors, that these are young people and they stay outdoors, but, F***, young people today are not as stupid as people think, because my friends and I, we tend to plan ahead, we can plan several days ahead, so we know where we are going to be, we make lists of guests, lists of things to do or not to do, e.g. if you start a fight, you will be reported to the police; we plan several days in advance.
I: keeping the adults world outside - is that important?
N: it depends whom one parties with, how the parents are; as for myself, I do not want to have a bad reputation and end up in some sh***.
(Boy 17 years old)

As mentioned earlier, planning is the key to the creation of drinking spaces. However, that is only one of the ways in which young people break with commonly spread assumptions regarding their home parties. Evidently, there are certain rules that everyone attending a party needs to abide by. Following certain codes of conduct is on the one hand, a way of assuring a sense of safety that allows everyone to have fun, on the other hand, a problem-free party, a problem-free drinking space boosts self-esteem for the one who is in charge. It is not the wildest party that counts, it is the party during which everyone is ok that becomes a reason of admiration and pride. Interestingly, the reputation that young people talk about does not only relate to what other young people will think of them but also what some adults will think of them. For example, Anna explains that she would not organize a party at her home, because she does not want to “disturb the neighbors because they have small children.”

It seems that young people are very strict following such rules; it was not uncommon to hear stories about those who misbehaved during some parties and consequently were not welcomed during subsequent events. When one of our interviewees reported on a similar thing happening to him, there was no sense of injustice or disagreement with such a treatment in his story:

I: have you ever attended a party that you were not welcome to?
R: yeah, I have done that but I...people know me as a nice and gentle, calm and so on...I have been thrown out from a party once and it was when a friend of mine begun a fight and we were not allowed to stay there anymore.
(Boy 17 years old)
Fights and heavy cases of drunkenness mentioned by young persons are examples of some of the most unwanted types of behavior. The reasoning around is very often supported with the general picture of not looking “for a trouble.” Partying and drinking taking place in specially designed spaces is for fun but not for anti-social misconduct.

**Discussion**

Drawing upon earlier research problematizing the concept of space when approaching young persons and their drinking, in this article, we explored the private area of home and the ways in which it becomes a drinking space. Places become associated with different meanings due to variety of things we do, but also due to our relationships with others and subsequent feelings and emotions we develop. In her study of place and identity among women, Taylor (2009) demonstrates how the meaning of home varies depending on the person, her life, dreams, and aspirations. For some, home is associated with social status and social position- to be a home-owner entails belonging to a certain social group. But home may be also about a family and family life, about living and being with others, about being a mum or dad. Home may also indicate a space where a person can be on her own, a space that she can be proud of and use it to construct positive images of herself. Home may also, as we show here, be transformed into a drinking and partying space. In this, we recognize that neither place nor space are only about physical qualities.

Places and space are intrinsically related to the process of constructing our sense of identity and belongingness. In their narratives, the youth portrayed themselves as being in control of their drinking and as being responsible. Drinking in itself is important, but not the most important thing. It is far more important to be with certain people, to have fun and, above all else, to be able to decide how to do things together. Through the processes of imagining, setting boundaries and inhabiting drinking space, young people demonstrate their vision of what is important to them, what counts, and how to reach there. The stories of drinking as narrated by young people are not free from accounts of heavy drinking, drinking to drunkenness, and potentially dangerous situations. Interestingly, however, those occurrences are presented in forms of “failures” that young people are determined to avoid. Drinking has a reason, and as young people interviewed in this study emphasize, rebelling and misbehaving are not one of them.

Voices and stories narrated by young persons filtered through the prism of place and space considerations inform about practices and processes involved in the creation of drinking spaces. The processes of imagining, inhabiting, and setting boundaries are made of social practices and relations during which young persons negotiate their relations with themselves, others, and the outside world. When approaching young persons’ drinking in this way, we can see that when they talk about drinking, they talk about sense of responsibility and control, self-esteem and reputation, as well as being safe and secure. Drinking as emerging
from their stories is therefore a highly social process during which young people actively exercise their sense of agency, make choices, and stay aware of the surrounding world. With this, the choice of private homes for drinking space is a way of separating themselves from others and creating a temporary safe heaven where they can be themselves.

Conclusion

We conclude in this article that a focus on place and space brings forward the actualities and everyday practices constituting the social worlds of youth that would otherwise remain obscure to social work knowledge and practice. In the use of the terms “Imagining drinking spaces,” “Drinking spaces and their boundaries,” and “Inhabiting drinking spaces,” the article illuminates the transformation of regular places into (drinking)spaces and the meaning of these spaces to the young persons. The narratives show that planning and their own set of rules are important aspects of those spaces and are essential when drinking to drunkenness and having parties.

Implications

The study argues that the importance of space and place when youth involve themselves in drinking to drunkenness are important factors for social workers and youth workers. In the stories narrated by youth, drunkenness is no longer an ad hoc activity conducted somewhere at the margins of society. The narratives also show the importance to them of place and how it is transformed into a (party) space, thus allowing them to create their own space, even if it is only temporarily.

Social work has often a limited focus in preventive interventions against youth drunkenness, thus failing to see the relevance youth make of important issues, such as: with whom, where, and why. The understanding of place and the making of space are therefore pertinent in designing preventive measures aimed at reducing youth drunkenness and, at the same time, listening to their experiences. Typically, the focus of alcohol preventive interventions is on public arenas, but as our study indicates, social workers need to learn to recognize homes as spaces that are important and meaningful to young people when drinking alcohol and partying. Further, emphasized here is the importance of youth aiming for control and this raises the question of the extent to which preventive interventions are developed to guide the youth in this process. This is not to encourage anti-social behavior, but rather to recognize the young people’s strive for imagining, designing, and controlling their own activities and engagements. We see that as an important part of supporting young people in their process of self-development.

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