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# **Living Tiny - An exploratory study of the tiny house movement in Sweden**

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# LIVING TINY

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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE  
SWEDISH TINY HOUSE MOVEMENT



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*Frontpage photos: Received from respondents of the study and permitted to use in this thesis.*

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# Abstract

As cities today face widespread housing shortages, as well as a large need for reducing the average ecological footprint, two of the biggest challenges for the housing sector today concerns affordability and environmental impact. The tiny house movement is a growing movement that is meeting these challenges head-on - but as of now, the topic has been largely overlooked in academia. This study aims to contribute to the understanding of the motivations why people choose to live in tiny houses of tiny houses and the challenges the residents encounter. Furthermore the study explores what can be learned from the tiny house movement that is of relevance to the Swedish housing market. To fulfill the purpose of the study, a mixed-methods approach has been used in the form of a literature study and semi-structured interviews. The most common motivations identified in the study were financial and simplicity. The main challenges were identified to be legal, placement and practical challenges. The results from this study have been very much in line with what previous studies have found, and this could mean that we might be reaching a general understanding of motivations and challenges in the tiny house movement.

# Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>List of figures and tables</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Related terms and concepts</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>8</b>
1.1. Aim and research questions	10
1.2. Definitions of a ‘tiny house’	11
1.3. Delimitations	12
<b>2. Background</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1. Historical background of tiny houses	13
2.2. Previous research	15
2.3. Tiny houses in Sweden	16
<b>3. Method</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1. Ethical considerations	19
3.2. Semi-structured interviews	20
3.2.1. Selection of respondents	21
3.2.2. Transcription and analysis of interviews	22
3.3. Literature study	23
3.4. The categorization process	23
3.5. Validity, reliability, and transparency	24
<b>4. Results</b>	<b>25</b>
4.1. Motivations	26
4.1.1. Financial	26
4.1.2. Simplicity	28
4.1.3. Freedom & autonomy	31
4.1.4. Mobility	32
4.1.5. Community & relationships	33
4.1.6. Building & design	34
4.1.7. Sustainability & environment	35
4.2. Challenges	36
4.2.1. Legal	36

4.2.2. Placement	38
4.2.3. Practical	39
4.2.4. Social perception	41
4.2.5. Transportation	43
4.2.6. Financiation & insurance	43
<b>5. Discussion</b>	<b>45</b>
5.1. The results	45
5.1.1. Discussion of the motivations	45
5.1.2. Discussion of the challenges	47
5.1.3. General discussion	49
5.1.4. Concluding discussion	50
5.2. Reflections on the research methods	51
5.3. Ideas for future research	51
<b>6. Conclusions</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>7. References</b>	<b>53</b>
Appendix A	58
Appendix B	59
Appendix C	61

# List of figures and tables

Figure 1: Google Trends graph.....	p. 17
Figure 2: The categorization process.....	p. 24
Figure 3: Motivations of tiny house living.....	p. 26
Figure 4: Challenges of tiny house living.....	p. 36
Table 1: Swedish Facebook groups.....	p. 18
Table 2: Examples of news articles.....	p. 18
Table 3. Background information on the respondents included in the study.....	p. 22



# Related terms and concepts

**Compact living** - refers to smart and functional interior design developed in order to maximize the living space available. It can be found in either multi-dwelling apartment buildings or houses.

**Downsizing** - the process of moving from a larger housing to a smaller one (Huebner & Shipworth 2017). In this thesis, the term refers to the act of moving from a conventional larger housing to a tiny house. The related term *downsizers* refer to people who have made this journey are sometimes referred to as downsizers (see for example Boeckermann et al. 2019; Saxton 2019a).

**Ecological footprint** - the approximate amount of land and water required to sustain the consumption and waste production of a specific lifestyle (WWF n.d.).

**Minimalism** - in this context ‘minimalism’ refers to the modern contemporary lifestyle movement which strives to reduce material possessions in order to create a more ‘simple’ life.

**Off-grid** - sometimes written as off-the-grid. Merriam-Webster defines off-grid as something which is “not connected to or served by publicly or privately managed utilities (such as electricity, gas, or water)” (Merriam-Webster 2019).

**Tiny house movement** - throughout this thesis, I will be referring to the ‘tiny house movement’ when I talk about the trend and ideas of today’s tiny house lifestyle.

**Voluntary simplicity** - “A philosophy or way of life that rejects materialism in favor of human and spiritual values, and is characterized by minimal consumption, environmental responsibility, and community cooperation” (Lexico n.d.). Voluntary simplicity is sometimes referred to as “simple living” (Kagan 2019).

# 1. Introduction

As cities face widespread housing shortages, as well as a large need for reducing the average ecological footprint, two of the biggest challenges for the housing sector today concerns affordability and environmental impact. The tiny house movement is a growing movement that is meeting these challenges head-on - but as of now, the topic has been largely overlooked in academia. In short, tiny houses are small buildings (often not more than 20m<sup>2</sup>) where the space available has been maximized in order to create a long-term residence. But why would anyone want to live like that? In order to understand this, we briefly need to go back to the history of the modern housing system.

During the 1980s, in the US, the norms for housing policies changed from considering housing a common good to view it as a financial asset for wealth accumulation. By dismantling housing policies and deregulating financial markets, states could create a housing system where homeownership would be the primary housing form, limiting other options for housing. Simultaneously, the mortgage market was expanded - and the culture of mortgage debts was essentially born (Rolnik 2019). The “renovation” of the housing system was deemed a success, and in the early 2000s the economy in the US was thriving - the ‘American dream’ had never seemed more real. Housing was considered a safe investment, something that would inevitably keep increasing in value, and thus securing the future of a homeowner. But the system that had seemed foolproof started to rapidly crumble and several factors ultimately lead to the burst of the US housing bubble. People who had previously seen their homes as a safe investment suddenly found themselves out on the streets, having lost their house, their financial security, as well as their faith in the financial system (Kenaga 2012). Without a home, and with severe disbelief in the modern mortgage system, people started to look at tiny houses as an alternative. While tiny houses had been around for a few years already, the housing crisis in 2008 and the economic recession following it is often attributed as a springboard for the tiny house movement in the academic literature (Boeckermann et al. 2019; Carlin 2014; Carras 2019; Mangold & Zschau 2019; Mutter 2013). People wanted secure housing without having to depend on mortgages (Saxton 2019a), and since the size of a house is one of the most important factors in terms of cost, going small made a lot of sense.

The average person in Sweden has approximately 41m<sup>2</sup> of living space (SCB 2018a), and all of this area requires material and energy in not only the construction phase but also for as long as the building is in active use. The housing sector in Sweden is a large contributor to our climate emissions, especially this is true for the construction phase of housing (IVA 2014). Up until recently, it has been assumed that the largest climate impact

from housing comes from the operational phase of the building and that the construction phase only accounted for a small percentage of the total impact. This means that the greatest benefits would be achieved by reducing the impact of energy use. However, recent studies have suggested that it is not enough to produce more energy-efficient residential houses in order to decrease the climate impact from the housing sector. Instead, the studies suggest that the majority of the climate impact actually happens during the construction phase, and thus it is linked to the materials used (IVA 2014; Femenias et al. 2016). This, in turn, means that reducing the use of material, including building smaller and choosing material with less environmental impact, would be the most efficient way to reduce the climate impact of housing (IVA 2014). Still, the debate about climate-smart housings rarely includes the aspect of reducing the sizes of our homes (Femenias et al. 2018; Riksbyggen 2017).

If we can reduce the space we live in, we can also reduce the material and energy going into it, thus lowering the ecological footprint from our housing. The environmental gains from tiny houses are one of the main arguments among advocates and tiny house manufacturers alike (e.g. Small House Society n.d.; Graham et al. 2015; UN 2018). However, recent research is suggesting that environmental motivations are not the primary motivation for people moving into tiny houses, instead, the findings indicate that other factors are more important (e.g. Boeckermann et al. 2019; Mangold & Zschau 2019; Saxton 2019a). While we should not underestimate the potential of tiny houses reducing environmental impact, assuming that people make this choice primarily because of their environmental ethos can make us miss important learnings when studying the movement. Tiny houses as a form of housing have shown a lot of potential in dealing with contemporary housing issues. Compared to regular-sized homes, the petite size of tiny houses means lower material use and cost during construction, less land being seized for the house and the general living costs being lower and more affordable. However, the advantages of tiny houses could be offset by the many barriers potential tiny house dwellers are faced with. Thus, this study takes an exploratory grip of the subject, in order to understand the motivations among tiny house residents. If we want to seriously consider tiny houses as a housing option, we need to understand what attracts people moving into them. In addition to this, we also need to understand what challenges these people encounter, as this would be useful if tiny houses were to be considered in future urban planning schemes.

## 1.1. Aim and research questions

This study aims to explore the motivations and challenges to tiny house living among Swedish tiny house residents, in order to contribute to the academic knowledge of tiny house living.

**Research Question 1:** What motivations and challenges are found among residents of tiny houses in Sweden?

**Research Question 2:** What motivations and challenges are found in the literature on the tiny house movement?

**Research Question 3:** What similarities and differences can be found between the motivations and challenges among residents of tiny houses in Sweden (RQ1), and the ones found in the literature (RQ2)?

## 1.2. Definitions of a ‘tiny house’

As of today, there is no definition of tiny houses that is agreed on within the whole community and many different sources define them differently. For the definitions used in this study, I have relied on the most commonly used in the academic literature on the topic. These definitions assume that a tiny house is:

- *a stand-alone structure of less than 400 sq. ft (or about 37 m<sup>2</sup>) (Mutter 2013; Keable 2017; ICC 2018; Saxton 2019b)*
- *intended as a long-term residence (Carras 2019)*
- *typically built on trailers for mobility, but permanent types occur (Keable 2017)*

In 2018 the International Code Council (ICC), which is a US-based non-profit association offering codes and certifications on building safety, published ‘Appendix Q - ‘Tiny houses’ as part of their 2018 International Residential Code edition (ICC 2018). This includes building code requirements and a more official definition for what a ‘tiny house’ is. However, the 2018 International Building Code does not mention anything about tiny houses on wheels - even though it’s the most common way to build a tiny house. Thus, it is unclear how the code should be applied to tiny houses on wheels. In Sweden, there are also other buildings that could be viewed as tiny houses, but fulfill different purposes, and thus have not been included in this study. An example of this is the *attefallshus*. While *attefallshus* might look very similar to tiny houses, the differences are not primarily in their design, but in the ideas and values, they symbolize. The *attefallshus* is covered by the *Attefallsrules* which gives them official legal status, unlike tiny houses. This has increased their popularity in recent years, especially in the Stockholm area which suffers from a housing shortage. But while tiny houses are an affordable way to become a homeowner and thus secure your housing, the *attefallshus* are mainly rental housings and don’t provide the same security. Thus, *attefallshus*, together with a few other building types, have been excluded from the study. These are:

- **Attefallshus.** The *attefallshus* is a standalone accessory dwelling unit (ADU) of less than 30m<sup>2</sup> (as of March 1st, 2020) and a maximum roof-ridge height of 4 meters. The building must be located on the same lot and in close proximity to a primary house that fulfills the legal requirements for residential houses. *Attefallshus* typically don’t require a building permit, but there are exceptions. The building is allowed to be used as permanent housing (Boverket 2020).

- **Villavagnar.** The Swedish equivalent of the American ‘manufactured’ or ‘mobile homes’. Between 20 - 55m<sup>2</sup>. Will typically require a building permit after a certain period (Boverket 2018). It can be placed on an official camping site or adjacent to a primary building (Villavagn 2019).
- **Kolonistugor.** Allotment areas are owned by municipalities but are leased and run by allotment associations which in turn rents out allotments to residents in the municipality. The size of allotment cottages is decided in the detailed development plan applied to the area of the allotments, thus it can differ between different areas (Bygglöv Stockholm n.d.). In general allotment, cottages are not allowed as permanent housings, but the municipality of Gothenburg has, as of 2019, decided to allow some of its allotment cottages to be sold as permanent housings (Göteborgs Stad 2019).
- **Friggebodar.** A standalone complementary building of less than 15m<sup>2</sup> and a maximum height of 3 meters. The building must be located on the same lot and in close proximity to a primary house that fulfills the legal requirements for residential houses. It does not require a building permit (Boverket 2019).

### 1.3. Delimitations

The empirical material for this study has been delimited to tiny house residents in Sweden, due to the purpose of the study. I have only interviewed people that live permanently in a tiny house (or had the intention to do so at the time of the interview). Thus, I have excluded respondents that live in a tiny house temporarily (e.g. during the construction of a ‘traditional’ house). The study only includes respondents that live in houses that are considered a ‘tiny house’ as defined above. One of the main pillars of the tiny house movement is that the choice is voluntary. Living in small houses is not a new thing - many people live in less than comfortably sized homes due to poverty and necessity, and it’s important to understand that these are not considered part of the tiny house movement (Evans 2019; Mutter 2013). Because of this, the topics covered in this study are limited to high-income countries and have been viewed in this light.

## 2. Background

The background chapter is divided into four sections which cover a brief history of the tiny house movement, previous research on tiny houses, the critique against tiny houses as well as the current development of tiny houses in Sweden.

### 2.1. Historical background of tiny houses

The tiny house movement can be said to be both a lifestyle movement as well as an architectural movement, and the popularity of the tiny houses has been apparent through the increase of festivals, conferences, workshops, television shows, and social media channels on the topic. While the tiny house movement, as we know it today, is often said to have been born in the USA, other countries have also seen an increased interest in tiny homes. In order to understand the tiny house phenomena, the building itself must be placed into the context of the tiny house movement - a lifestyle movement that carries ideas and values that go further than the size of their homes. While the trend is typically pursued by high-income downsizers, tiny houses are an option for many different income levels (Mingoya 2015). The movement promotes an alternative to the consumer society and is characterized by a desire to move away from over consumption and materialism, towards a lifestyle that focuses more on experiences and non-material values (Carras 2019; Ford & Gomez-Lanier 2017; Mutter 2013; Saxton 2019a; Schneider 2017).

The ideas that are found in the tiny house movement has elements from several different influences, such as the minimalist movement, 'off-grid'-buildings, compact living, as well as the ideas of voluntary simplicity. Several books have also been attributed as influencers to the modern tiny house movement, among these are; *Tiny Tiny Houses* by Walker (1987), *The Not So Big House* by Susanka (1998), as well as *Walden* originally published in 1854 by Thoreau (2009). According to a paper by Shearer & Burton (2018), gypsy wagons and mobile houses can also be argued to precede today's tiny house movement, as well as the 2008 economic crisis. However, tiny houses had appeared before the recession. Back in 1999, Jay Shafer - who is often considered as one of the main pioneers of the modern tiny house movement - started the Tumbleweed Tiny House Company. The company was the first one to offer manufactured tiny houses on wheels and today the company is the US largest of its kind (Tumbleweed Houses n.d.). The company also arranges workshops on how to build your own tiny house (Mutter 2013), which shows that there is great interest in this within the tiny house community.

Having houses on wheels is one of the key ideas in the tiny house movement (Tiny House Company n.d.). As argued by the Tiny House Company (n.d.), this is beneficial because “the flexibility that comes from separating house from land, [...] frees a Tiny House from some of the pressures of the housing market”. This makes homeownership available for people that can’t afford to buy a conventional house, furthermore small and tiny houses make it possible to fit more housing units on less land which would contribute to a higher density (Wyatt 2016). Additionally, there are legal motivations behind having tiny houses on wheels as this allows them to get around local rules about minimum size requirements and other regulations that apply to permanent buildings. Since structures on wheels are not governed by the same strict rules that apply to permanent buildings it’s possible to build houses based on personal needs, rather than standardized regulations (Mutter 2013; Tiny Home Builders n.d.). Building tiny houses on wheels is also smart from a financial point of view since it frees the owners from having to pay property tax (Mutter 2013). However, it’s difficult to live permanently in a tiny house legally, as the rules that apply to them often exclude them from being considered permanent housing. But even though tiny houses are not yet incorporated into the general urban planning, the tiny house movement has already changed land-use policies and legal frameworks in a few locations (Anson 2014; Ford & Gomez-Lanier 2017). The city of Portland has “taken steps toward the inclusion of multiple housing units on an individual property” (Carlin 2014) and other communities, such as Salida in Colorado and Spur in Texas, have also changed their codes to include tiny houses (Wyatt 2016).

Today, social media platforms such as Instagram and Youtube have an abundance of tiny house material, and one of the most popular videos on Youtube has been viewed 27 million times (Living Big In a Tiny House 2019). In 2019, the popular streaming platform Netflix started to air a reality series about tiny houses, called ‘Tiny house nation’, and in January 2020, the game developer EA Games released an add-on to their popular game The Sims 4, called ‘Tiny living Stuff Pack’ (EA Games 2020). Needless to say, tiny houses are a huge deal in social and popular media. But apart from the growing popularity in media, the tiny house movement is also getting increasingly established as a legitimate housing actor. In 2015, the non-profit organization American Tiny House Association was created in order to address issues of safety concerns of DIY tiny house builders, as well as to represent tiny house owners in governmental agencies and private industry (ATHA 2019).

Tiny houses have also gotten attention through a project by UN Environment (UNEP) and Yale University, which together exhibited a sustainable tiny house outside of the UN Headquarters in New York. The purpose of the project was to “get people thinking about decent, affordable housing that limits the overuse of natural resources and



helps the battle against destructive climate change” (UN 2018). While tiny houses have a lower ecological footprint merely due to their small size, tiny houses can become even more sustainable through the use of recycled materials, alternative energy sources, as well as responsible water systems (Mutter 2013).

## 2.2. Previous research

Due to an increased interest in this unconventional housing type, academic literature on the topic has recently emerged, and tiny houses have shown potential in connection to several important issues, e.g. promoting more sustainable lifestyles (Saxton 2019a), reducing residents ecological footprint (Carlin 2016), providing affordable housing (Anson 2014; Keable 2017), supplying housing for students and homeless (Mutter 2013; Priesnitz 2014) as well as an option for urban infill (Evans 2018). With this in mind, several academics advocate for tiny houses to be included in future urban planning schemes (see for example Carras 2019; Evans 2018; Rollin 2017; Saxton 2019a; Shearer 2015; Shearer & Burton 2018). Planning policies that allow for more flexible housing choices, such as tiny houses in urban areas, could potentially address “urban issues, such as sprawl, housing affordability, and energy and water efficiency” according to Shearer (2015). Shearer further stresses in her paper that tiny houses are not going to address the underlying issues behind housing shortage which is directly linked to the affordability of land. However, some authors argue that tiny houses could impact societal ideas in a bigger way. Anson (2014) writes that the increasing trend of tiny houses on wheels holds the potential to make us question the capitalistic model of land ownership and consider whether other forms of land rights could have more benefits. Also, Kilman (2016) notes the potential that the tiny house movement has when it comes to making us reconsider our material needs and our relationship with consumption, as well as highlighting the flaws of a system where large houses are equal with a successful life (Kilman 2016).

Previous research shows that the demography of the tiny house movement is mainly well-educated white people with above-average financial resources (Evans 2019; Shearer & Burton 2018). Thus suggesting that their choice to live tiny is voluntary and not made out of necessity, something which is an important aspect of the tiny house movement. The research also indicates that there are more women than men that build their own tiny houses (Shearer & Burton 2018), the same trend is seen with manufacturers who report that the majority of their buyers are women (Wyatt 2016). As of now, the reasons for this can only be speculated on, one suggestion from Wyatt (2016) is that women buyers are “less willing or able than their male counterparts to assume debt”.

Previous research has also lifted some critique against the tiny house movement. One of the most prominent critiques against tiny houses is that they are not as affordable as portrayed. Hutchinson (2016) argues that since many prefab tiny houses are sold at a price of around \$100,000 and above, this contradicts the message of affordable housing that the tiny house movement proclaims. A similar critique is also brought to light in Anson (2014) and Mutter (2013). The authors argue that since there are no loans available for funding tiny houses, financing is dependent on personal loans or savings, something that not everyone has access to. The authors further argue that this limits the possibility to own a tiny house to those who already have some sort of financial assets (Anson 2014; Mutter 2013). However, not everyone agrees with this argument and Carlin (2014) argues that tiny houses can truly be an affordable option for the average US resident.

Originally tiny houses were promoted as an opportunity to build one's own house and as a counter culture of consumerism. But as with anything that gains popularity in society, tiny houses have become increasingly commercialized in recent years and some fear that tiny houses could become just another commodity for consumption (Anson 2014; Carras 2018; Hutchinson 2016). Hutchinson argues that many people who choose to go tiny don't do so because of financial or environmental reasons, instead, they are just following a trend reproduced by the contemporary consumption culture (Hutchinson 2016). Hutchinson also shares critique about the "profit-driven foundations" within the tiny house movement, referring to the expensive luxury THs sold by many manufacturers. There is also a critique that many of the THs that are sold are not used as primary housing and TH pioneer Jay Shafer "estimates two-thirds of the tiny house plans he sells are intended for backyard retreats - essentially, additions to existing homes" (Hutchinson 2016, p. 80).

Because of previous research having been limited to the sociocultural context of the US, Mangold & Zschau (2019) recommends studies focusing on other countries with an emerging tiny house movement. There are also recommendations in previously published papers to further explore motivations for people to live tiny (Boeckermann et al. 2019), as well as challenges facing the people choosing to do so (Shearer & Burton 2018). Carras (2019) writes that academic contributions to the subject are essential, as the topic is largely unexplored in academia.

### 2.3. Tiny houses in Sweden

The interest for tiny houses has increased in Sweden during recent years, as can be witnessed through the Google Trends graph (*Figure 1*). Google Trends is a tool provided

by Google that shows how often a given term is searched for in Google in a specific time frame and geographical area. The graph below shows how frequently the term ‘tiny house’ has been searched for during 2004-2019 in Sweden, compared to the total search volume for Google in Sweden during this period. The graph shows that the search for the term has been steadily increasing between these years.

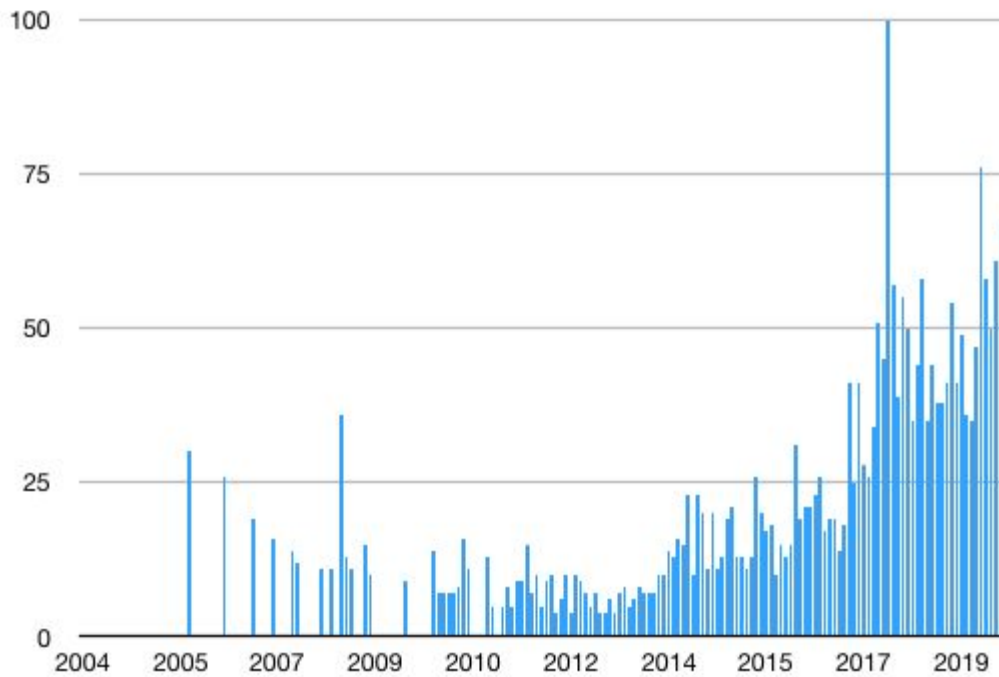


Figure 1. Google Trends search on “tiny house” in Sweden, 2004-2019 (Google Trends 2019)

Due to the surge in interest of tiny houses in Sweden the recent years, it is not surprising that there today exists at least four established companies in Sweden that specializes explicitly on tiny houses. However, many people build their tiny houses themselves and there are currently three Facebook groups for tiny houses in Sweden (see *Table 1*). All of them are fairly active with new posts published by different members every/every other day. The topics of the posts in the groups differ between personal updates on members’ tiny house building progress, advice-seeking about building and rules, tiny houses for sale and people that are interested in the experience but not actively in the process of moving into a tiny house.

Table 1. Table showing Swedish Facebook groups with ‘tiny house’ included in name or description, as well as the number of members for two separate times in the study.

GROUP	MEMBERS*	MEMBERS**
Tiny house community Sverige	1,933	2,452
Tiny house i Sverige	1,675	2,496
Bygga och bo i minihus	2,614	2,757

\*As of 1st November 2019, \*\*As of 25th February 2020

As seen in the table above, the interest for tiny houses seems to be increasing in Sweden, with members having increased in all of the groups. The increased popularity of tiny houses in Sweden is manifested by the number of news articles written on the topic (see *Table 2*). The table below is comprising a selection of news articles about tiny houses in Sweden, the articles were originally written in Swedish but the titles have been translated for the thesis.

Table 2. Examples of tiny house media attention in Sweden

SOURCE	ARTICLE TITLE	DATE
Expressen	Tiny houses new trend - wants to live mortgage-free and ecological	25th March 2014
Aftonbladet	She built her own tiny house - for 100000 SEK	11th March 2016
Västgötabladet	He’s building tiny houses on wheels	28th July 2017
Expressen	Lina, 19, is building her own tiny house on wheels	11th August 2017
Göteborgs-Posten	The tiny house movement is spreading in Sweden	14th November 2017
Uppsala Nya Tidning	Built a tiny house on a circus wagon	5th October 2018
Östgöta Correspondenten	They live on five square meters - and four wheels	1st December 2018
Kristianstadsbladet	They are selling a tiny house on wheels	2nd August 2019

## 3. Method

This study is of exploratory nature and has been conducted through a qualitative research approach using semi-structured interview and literature study as methods for data collection. The material for this study consists of academic literature on tiny houses, as well as personal interviews conducted during the Spring of 2019.

### Methods for data collection

- The first research question will be answered through a literature study to identify previously determined motivations and challenges among tiny house residents.
- The second research question will be answered by doing interviews with tiny house residents living in Sweden, focusing on motivations and challenges to tiny house living.
- The third research question will be answered by comparing how the motivations and challenges from literature relate to the motivations and challenges identified from the interviews with Swedish tiny house residents.

### 3.1. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations arise throughout the whole research process and have to be considered in all stages of the research (Kvale 1996). The ethical aspects of this research have been evaluated and reflected upon from the design stage of the study until the final report, as per the recommendations by Kvale (1996). In his book on qualitative research interviews, Kvale offers examples of ethical issues that can arise during any of the seven stages of an interview study - *Thematizing, Designing, Interview situation, Transcription, Analysis, Verification, and Reporting*. These don't provide clear answers to how to deal with ethical issues arising during the process of the research, but they can work as references to guide the researcher if similar issues are encountered (Kvale 1996). Further, Kvale covers three important aspects of ethical consideration for interview studies - *informed consent, confidentiality, and consequences*. These have been used as guidelines to ensure the ethical qualities of this thesis.

### *Informed consent*

The subjects in the study have been informed about the purpose of the study and their rights as participants to anytime end their participation in the study for whatever reason. Prior to the interviews, the respondents were sent a document of information about the purpose of the study and their rights as interview subjects (see Appendix A), a questionnaire was also sent to the participants covering background information on the respondents that might be of relevance for the study (see Appendix B). The recording of the interviews was confirmed with the respondents to make sure they gave their consent.

### *Confidentiality*

The individuals and the information given to me from the interviews has maintained confidential throughout the whole process of the study. Measures have been taken to ensure that the individuals cannot be identified through the findings published in the thesis. The respondents' real names were replaced with a pseudonym as soon as the interview had been recorded. Being unidentifiable in the study allows individuals to speak their minds more freely which is important when studying values and experiences (Bryman 2012).

### *Consequences*

Kvale writes that “the consequences of an interview study need to be addressed with respect to possible harm to the subjects as well as the expected benefits of participating in the study” (Kvale 1996; p. 116). Due to the sensitive information in this thesis, the confidentiality of the respondents cannot be stressed enough, and I have taken steps to protect them from any negative consequences that the study might have. E.g. I'm not including more information than necessary, and the study doesn't include information that would make it possible to identify the respondents easily. For this reason, I have also chosen not to share any geographical location of the respondents since this could potentially be lead to consequences for them.

## **3.2. Semi-structured interviews**

The interview is one of the most used methods in qualitative research, and it focuses on the interview subjects' point of view. Qualitative interviews are typically unstructured or semi-structured (Bryman 2012). During the semi-structured interview, a more or less developed interview guide is used, covering certain topics of interest for the study. The interviewer can depart quite significantly from the interview guide and change both order

and phrasing of interview questions, but making sure all topics are covered. The questions are usually open and the responses can differ a lot between different interview subjects (ibid.).

The interviews for this study were made in a semi-structured style, based on the recommendations by Bryman (2012). Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewees to share their point of view regarding a few specific topics pre-determined by the researcher (ibid.). This style of interviewing fit the purpose of this study since the aim is to investigate motivations and challenges which are subjective to the individual. This type of interview guide also keeps the interview focused, but with the flexibility to ask follow-up questions in order to gain more insight (Bryman 2012). Furthermore, the partly structured nature of the interview allows for cross-case comparability (ibid.) which is necessary in order to distinguish patterns from different interviews.

The formulation of the interview guide (Appendix C) used in this study considered the research questions and the purpose. The questions were formulated in an open way and covered questions of motivations, challenges, as well as pros and cons, which essentially was a way to ask the same questions but in a different way in order to create a more elaborate understanding.

### **3.2.1. Selection of respondents**

The selection of respondents for the study was carried out through purposive sampling as outlined in Bryman (2012). This means that the subjects are selected based on criteria relevant for the purpose of the study, rather than randomly. This method of sampling is commonly used in qualitative research, where the goal is often not to generalize the results to the larger population but to understand more in-depth phenomena (ibid.).

The subjects that were interesting for this thesis were individuals that live in a tiny house in Sweden with the intention of living there long term. I made no other delimitations as to who could partake in the study. In order to find study subjects, I posted a request looking for subjects that fit my criteria in three Swedish tiny house groups on Facebook. Those who were interested in participating in the study then contacted me themselves. From this group I found eight people that fit my criteria to include in the study.

A total of eight respondents were included in the study (see *Table 3*). Two of the interviews were conducted in a personal meeting and six of them over the phone. The interviews lasted between 15-30 minutes. Four of the respondents identified as men and four as women. The respondents were aged between 29-50 and geographically spread from the Northern to Southern Sweden. Six of the eight respondents had studied at university level and the median gross income among the respondents was 10.000-15.000 SEK per

month. This is significantly lower than the general median gross income in Sweden which is 30 900 SEK per month (SCB 2018b).

Table 3. Background information on the respondents included in the study

Alias	Age	Gender	Monthly income (SEK)	Education	Monthly housing cost	m <sup>2</sup> (excl. loft)	Mobility
Abbe	41	male	<10k	University	1000	18	Mobile
Birk	30	male	>40k	University	500	12	Mobile
Emil	37	male	10-15k	University	1000	17	Mobile
Ida	29	female	10-15k	HVE*	1200	17	Mobile
Jonatan	36	male	25-30k	High school	4200	21	Permanent
Madicken	49	female	n/a	University	600	18	Mobile
Pippi	29	female	10-15k	University	1000	12,5	Mobile
Ronja	50	female	20-25k	University	900	16,5	Mobile

\*Higher Vocational Education

### 3.2.2. Transcription and analysis of interviews

The interviews and transcriptions were made in Swedish. However, the coding process of the material was conducted in English, this was a choice of convenience since the report was going to be written in English as well. The quotes from the interviews have been translated from Swedish to English as accurately as possible. In the coding process, the data are broken into separate component parts which are then labeled and categorized (Bryman 2012). Each of the transcripts of the study was analyzed and coded in order to identify themes in the material.

The coding process started with an open coding approach where the essence of each sentence was noted down in the margins of the transcriptions - thus creating topics. According to Charmaz (2006), open coding in the form of line-by-line coding stimulates an open mind and allows new ideas to emerge within the data. After having done this with all the interview transcripts the topics were divided into categories. The categories were formulated based on the purpose of the study and covered topics relating to motivations and challenges.



### 3.3. Literature study

To identify motivations and challenges to tiny house living a literature study consisting of several types of academic sources was conducted. For the collection of motivations from the literature I have only included sources that explicitly used the term “motivations” or “motivators” and that has collected primary data from tiny house dwellers. I have not included “benefits”, “pros” or other wordings in that style. This is because motivation is something intrinsic within individuals, while benefits, reasons or pros can be attributed to something regardless of the underlying motivation. The challenges identified from the literature study are limited to the purpose of the study, this means that the challenges included are on the personal level, rather than on the municipal or national level. However, personal challenges may often overlap with, or emanate from, challenges on the municipal or national level. For the identification of challenges in the literature, I have looked for the terms “challenges”, “barriers”, “obstacles” as reference words. Most of the literature states the challenges in not much more than a few sentences and only one previous study included “Challenges” as part of their focus (Mutter 2013). I have summarized what the different sources in the literature write about motivations and challenges for tiny house residents and used this as a basis for comparing the motivations and challenges in the literature with the ones found in this study.

### 3.4. The categorization process

The categories in the results chapter have been identified through a multi-step approach (see *Figure 2*). The process started with identifying themes from the transcriptions of the interviews and, based on these, preliminary categories were formulated. The motivation to identify themes and categories in the empirical material first was to let the material ‘speak for itself’ before identifying categories in the literature. After the first categories had been formulated, a literature study was conducted to identify them in previous research on the topic. From this step, it became obvious that the categories found in the literature and the ones found in the empirical material were largely overlapping – making it possible to formulate categories that would cover both the empirical material and the literature. Some motivations and challenges have been excluded since they only occurred once in the material and could not be said to be general in any way.

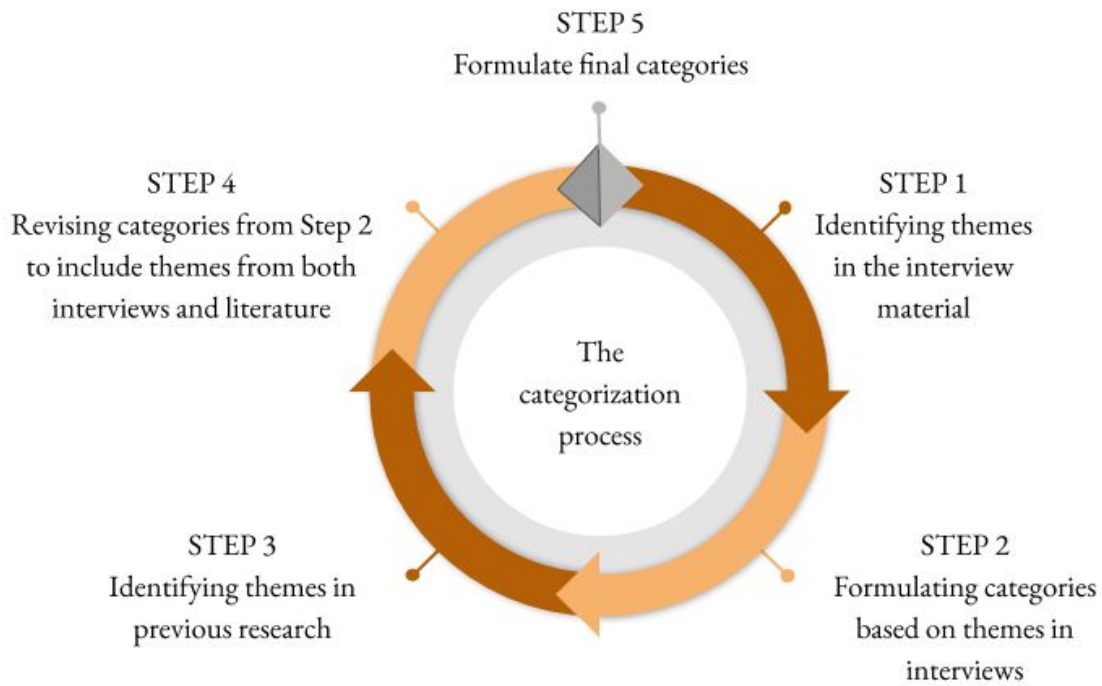


Figure 2. The categorization process in the study.

### 3.5. Validity, reliability, and transparency

All qualitative research is subjective and the interpretations made are subjective to the person interpreting them. Because of this inherent nature of qualitative research, reliability and validity are difficult to measure (Bryman 2012). In order to ensure the quality of the study, the process of the study should be as transparent as possible. The material used in the study has been revisited on several occasions, which increases the reliability of the study (Flick 2007).

## 4. Results

This chapter presents and compares the motivations and challenges identified in the interviews, as well as from the literature study, in order to answer the research questions.

- RQ 1: What motivations and challenges are found among residents of tiny houses in Sweden?
- RQ 2: What motivations and challenges are found in the literature on the tiny house movement?
- RQ3: What similarities and differences can be found between the motivations and challenges among residents of tiny houses in Sweden (RQ1), and the ones found in the literature (RQ2)?

In the chapter, the empirical material is connected to the literature under different categories, in order to compare the findings from them. The categories used in the chapter have been developed from both the empirical material and the literature study and the process of formulating the categories has been described in detail in part 3.4.

## 4.1. Motivations

The motivations (see *Figure 3*) from the interviews and the literature have been divided into seven categories; *Financial*, *Simplicity*, *Freedom & autonomy*, *Mobility*, *Community & relationships*, *Building & design*, and *Sustainability & environment*. The frequency in which the categories appeared in the interviews and the literature was very similar - with the most apparent difference in frequency being the *Sustainability* category which was the least common in the interviews but among the most common ones in the literature.

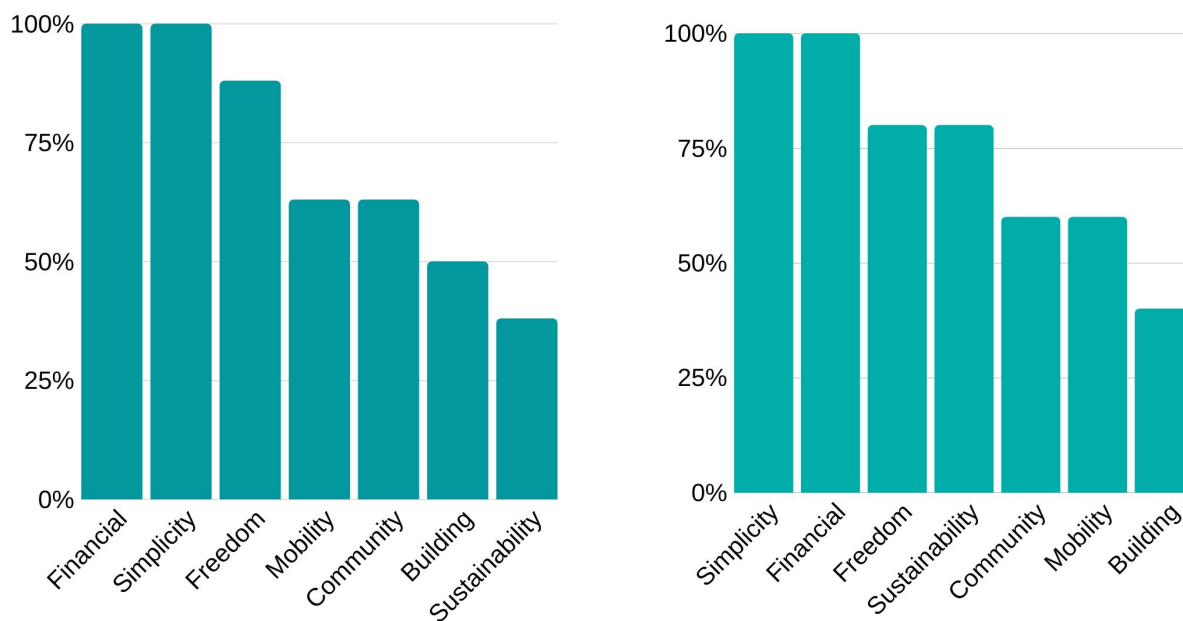


Figure 3. Frequency of motivations in the interviews (Left) and in the literature (Right). Presented with the most common motivation to the least common in a falling order from left to right in both the diagrams.

### 4.1.1. Financial

The financial motivation has many layers in it - something which becomes apparent from the literature study where some express that they want “financial freedom” (Mangold & Zschau 2019) and others using terms as “affordability” (Saxton 2019a) or “financial security” (Boeckermann et al. 2019). Saving money and reducing expenses is claimed in at least two academic articles to be the generally most important motivator among tiny house residents (Kilman 2016; Shearer & Burton 2018). Tiny house living is motivated by being an affordable option to become a homeowner (Boeckermann et al. 2019) and in a PhD. thesis by Carras (2018) the author writes that one fundamental finding of her thesis was

that “almost all participants expressed financial freedom as the primary motivation for adoption [of the tiny house lifestyle]”.

In the studies by Boeckermann et al. (2019) and Saxton (2019a), financial motivation was stated as an important motivator by around 70% of the respondents. The financial motivation was also one of the strongest ones in the interviews, as all of the respondents made explicit references to economic motivations for living in a tiny house. The economic motivations were mainly in regard to reducing expenses for housing. Jonatan (age 36) said that one of his main motivations to live tiny is because his expenses are very low and “that makes it possible for me to choose very freely what to do with my days”. Apart from low living costs, construction costs are a fraction of the average Swedish house which makes tiny houses an affordable way to become a homeowner.

While previous studies show that negative financial stress is sometimes the reason for downsizing, more often it's not. Having a low living cost is attractive in many ways and allows for people to spend their money on other things instead (Mutter 2013). For one of the residents, the decision to go tiny was made 20 years ago when she was in her 30's (Ronja, age 50). At one point she sat down and calculated how much rent she had been paying other people - while also doing refurbishing work on the places she rented - and she realized that she could do this with her own house instead. Inspired by a children's TV show she had watched as a kid, she bought a run-down second-hand tiny house that had previously been placed in a forest for moose hunters. She is still living in that first tiny house and says that if it wasn't for this she could never live this cheap in a big student city.

*A lot of the good in life is about reducing your expenses, and that's also why I live in a tiny house. Because then I have very low expenses which enables me to work less or work more, giving me a more financial freedom (Ida, age 29).*

Because of the low expenses of living in a tiny house, there is no need to earn a lot of money. Expenses and big money flow is something that can be connected with stress and negative feelings. Correspondingly, the connection between low expenses and more time is frequently recurrent in the interviews with the respondents.

*It's time that I want. I want time to do what I want to do. But this is based on financial freedom. If you have that you can do whatever you want. So that's how I've been thinking - to reduce my expenses as much as I can, and then I don't need to have so much income (Abbe, age 41).*

In regards to the above quote, Abbe emphasizes that he doesn't mean financial freedom in that he can do what he wants because he has so much money, instead he points out that he just needs to have an income big enough for him to continue living the way he does now. Similarly, one of the respondents emphasizes that he now has money to spend on other things, such as concerts and dinners. The economic freedom of having a low cost of living also made it possible for one of the respondents to walk away from a job that was no longer serving her, which was not as easy for her colleagues. "On my previous workplace, it was very bad for us who worked there. But no one dared to say anything because everyone wanted to keep their job because everyone had big loans on their houses. But I could afford to honestly say what I thought about the situation and quit (Ronja, age 50)". Being debt-free is often connected to 'freedom' in both the interviews as well as the literature. Having mortgages or debts is connected to a lot of negative life stress among the respondents, and this rationality can also be found in the previous literature as many tiny house residents looked to reduce their financial liabilities such as mortgages and student loans to live a life free of debt, or to decrease their expenses from consumption and other excessive spending.

*Everything feels bad with loans... our whole economic system. The stress it entails to know you owe money, I get very stressed by that and the bills that come every month. I would prefer to live completely without bills if I could (Emil, age 37).*

#### **4.1.2. Simplicity**

The literature defines simplicity (or a 'simple life') as a life with less focus on material things, and more focus on other aspects of life. A simpler lifestyle also rejects excessive consumption and materialism. As shown by the literature study, consumerism and materialism are often written about in negative sense, using phrasing such as "distaste for the consumerist lifestyle" (Mangold & Zschau 2019, p. 14) and consumption as a way of "filling some void in our lives" (Mutter 2013, p. 19). In the study by Boeckermann et al. (2019) 65.6% of the survey participants agreed on the motivation "To live a simpler life" as a reason for them to have moved to a tiny house. In the study by Mangold & Zschau (2019) all of the respondents stated that they wanted to live "a simpler lifestyle in a smaller space". Furthermore, 40% of the respondents in the study by Saxton (2019a) "was seeking simplification, minimalism and/or to reduce material possessions".

Several of the previous studies found simplification to be one of the top motivations to live in a tiny house. Similar to previous research, the simplicity motivation was frequently mentioned in the interviews with Swedish tiny house residents as well, and most of the respondents viewed the reduction of possessions as challenging but liberating. One respondent said that she is “tired of the material stuff” and wants “a simpler life. [...] With fewer things“ (Madicken, age 49). In her view, material things require time, energy and money in order to be maintained, things she would rather spend on developing her own wants and desires.

The burden that material things can bring was apparent for one of the respondents first after she had reduced the amount of material possessions. “When I started to reduce things in my life and just question why I have certain things, like TV-subscriptions, phone stuff, large expensive apartments, then a lot of anxiety disappeared from me, that I didn’t really know that I had” (Pippi, age 29). Living tiny has made it possible for her to “opt-out” on the materialistic lifestyle, a lifestyle that she believes does not generate happiness. For her it was not a challenge to reduce the material stuff in her life, because she was determined in which direction she wanted to take her life: “The biggest advantage, or the journey there, is this thing with reducing some stuff, it has made me realize how much I think I need that I don’t need” (Pippi, age 29). Similar statements were made by other respondents.

*It’s simplicity and minimalism. That I can’t have so much stuff, it gives me another focus in life (Jonatan, age 36).*

For many respondents, their tiny house made them re-evaluate their need for material things, coming to the conclusion that they actually need less than they might have thought. Mostly, this is viewed as something positive among the respondents and the connection between materialistic possessions and personal needs is often made in the interviews. “You don’t have more than you need. [...] You can’t fit a grand piano in here even if you would have wanted one” (Abbe, age 41). This might seem inhibiting, something that the respondent also acknowledged: “for someone else, this house might be a bit too spartan, but for my needs, it’s perfect” (Abbe). The respondent Birk (age 30) said that the tiny house has made him more aware of what he has and what he uses. For example; he used to have a bigger table in his tiny house, but since he never really used it he decided to get a smaller one which was a better fit for his needs (Birk, age 30). While an outspoken fascination with minimalism was something that several of the respondents had in common, there is no exclusive connection between minimalism and tiny house living, but the small space naturally limits the number of possessions one can have. One of the



respondents said, however, that she doesn't think that you necessarily need to live in a tiny house in order to adopt a tiny house lifestyle since, to her, it's more of a mindset.

*“It's not so much about living tiny, but rather the mindset of having too much. I don't think you feel better because you have a lot of material things“  
(Pippi, age 29).*

The primary motivation for Birk (age 30) when moving to a tiny house, was to have fewer things and space to take care of, he wanted the freedom of just being able to leave his house unattended when traveling. Liberating oneself from the shackles of material possessions also goes hand in hand with reducing your consumption of things, something that most of the respondents touched upon.

*The motivation comes from reducing expenses and minimize, try not to be such a large part of the consumer society and the need to have a lot of things.  
I think it's nice not to have that need (Pippi, age 29).*

The respondent Birk (age 30) partly accredited his changed consumer behavior to his tiny house as he since moving into it “cares a lot less about consumption” than before. A couple of the respondents also recognized that they have reduced their material consumption in the form of interior refurbishments, something that many conventional house owners spend a lot of time and money on.

*I don't think so much about refurbishments or expansions or refurnishing,  
there is more focus on living in the moment (Jonatan, age 36).*

As someone who grew up in a large house with rooms she barely even visited, the respondent Pippi (age 29) has come to reflect on how much is actually enough. Her biggest realization has been that “you still can live a good simplistic life, despite any of the conveniences like running water and indoor toilet” (Pippi, age 29). Other respondents also share a similar path to their tiny house. Birk (age 30) used to share a house with his partner and after they separated he lived there alone for a while. That's when he realized that there was a lot of space in the house that he never used; “I realized that I walked between the bedroom, kitchen, living room and bathroom, but large parts of the house I never frequented. You realized that you only visited the basement once a week when you do laundry. So I thought ‘why should I take care of all of this?’” (Birk, age 30).



For other respondents, the size has more to do with being personally at ease, than the inconvenience of cleaning and caring for large housing space. Ida said that she doesn't like big rooms and that she thrives in small spaces, there is also a sense of responsibility in not "taking up so much space here in the world" (Ida, age 29). While most of the respondents have downsized their homes, one of them has actually upsized his tiny house. Before, Emil couldn't fit the things that were actually valuable to him, living on just 7m<sup>2</sup> he says it was "too small and crowded and there was especially no storage for books and clothes and stuff that you might want to have" (Emil, age 37). But now, with a house of 17m<sup>2</sup> plus loft, he can fit everything he wants. As seen in the case of Emil, even if all of the respondents mention material simplicity as one of their motivations for living tiny, this doesn't necessarily mean excluding material for hobbies and such which add value to their lives.

#### **4.1.3. Freedom & autonomy**

'Freedom' in the literature covered aspects such as having a more flexible schedule and working less (Boeckermann et al. 2019) as well as a sense of having more control of your life (Mangold & Zschau 2019). Overall, 'freedom' in the literature study was often connected to having 'more time' as seen in the study of Mangold & Zschau (2019). The freedom experienced by tiny house residents allows them to spend their time doing what they love (Mutter 2013) and act in a way that is more in line with their values and beliefs (Mangold & Zschau 2019). For some this freedom interlinks with autonomy, and their tiny house life becomes a means for them to rebel against the culture of debt and excess consumption (Mangold & Zschau 2019; Saxton 2019a). The study by Mangold & Zschau (2019) also identified a sense of confinement among the respondents in connection to their previous conventional lifestyle, based on working long hours, debt and consumption. Living tiny made it possible for them to free themselves from the consumerist narrative and live a more deliberate, happy life. For others, it is simply a way to get the freedom to spend time on their families, hobbies, and travels (Saxton 2019a). Most of the respondents in this study made comments about how tiny house living has allowed them to work less and what this has meant to their lives.

*It makes another life possible, that I can work less, I can choose what I want to do when I want to do it, I am not bound to have permanent employment with salary every month (Jonatan, age 36).*

For some, this also means that some things which are usually included in the idea of a “happy life” have to go in favor of making room for a more meaningful everyday life. “Simplicity means to reduce work and hobbies, it means I will not be able to travel because I will not earn money for travel when I don’t want to work. It’s more valuable to have time in everyday life” (Madicken, age 49). Freeing time from work also gives the opportunity to reflect on your life, one of the respondents said: “It feels like most people that work 40-hour weeks, they don’t have any time to reflect over their lives, so when they enter their pension they might regret a lot of things but then it’s too late” (Emil, age 37). He also expressed that the freedom from having to work full time contributed to a new perspective: “I worked like 10 percent for some years and that was very nice to get some new perspective on life and so” (Emil, age 37). The formulations about freedom between the respondents were different, but the essence was the same - they wanted to live their lives how they want. One of the respondents put it like this: “Life is basically about working to be able to afford to live, and to me, it felt like... When I was doing it, it was just a hamster wheel and I don’t want it to be like that, and now it’s not” (Pippi, age 29).

#### **4.1.4. Mobility**

The mobility motivation is defined by a desire to have their house on wheels so that they can move it - regardless if this means they want to be able to frequently travel to new places with their tiny house, or just move it more irregularly for longer periods. Having the possibility to take your house with you and move it to a new location was an important motivator according to 51.6% of the respondents in the study of Boeckermann et al. (2019). The mobility of tiny houses was also deemed as one of the most important aspects of the study by Mutter (2013) as well as Carras (2019). The findings from previous studies are supported by this study, as mobility was expressed by most of the respondents as one of the most important things with their tiny house. Except for one respondent, all of them live in a tiny house on wheels. For Birk (age 30) it was both an aesthetic choice as well as a practical one to put his house on wheels. For Madicken it was the fact that she knows she wanted to live in the countryside, but she didn’t know where she wanted to live. Another respondent, Ronja (age 50), has been living at her current spot for the last 13 years and has no plans on moving her tiny house anywhere. But if external factors such as bad neighbors make the area unpleasant to live in, she has the freedom to easily move.

*I like the freedom as well, the feeling that... if it moves in a couple of  
alcoholics to the neighboring property, I can roll away to somewhere else  
(Ronja, age 50).*

Ronja adds that external factors can impact the value of the house, and with a regular permanent building you can't really do anything about that. So by being able to move her house, she can also maintain the value of it, independently of external factors. The respondent Emil also points out the advantage of not having to clean out if you have to move, you can just drive off and then you have your whole house and all your stuff with you - it's practical. For most of the respondents, it seems like the motivation is mixed - both the uncertainty of maybe having to move their tiny house at some point, as well as the positive aspects of not having to choose where to live permanently. The possibility of taking your home with you when you move makes it possible for tiny house residents to both own a house, yet not have to decide where to live, which some of the respondents expressed as a motivation. Several of the respondents in the study by Carras (2019) also said that living in a tiny made them more flexible in terms of relocating for a job, something that Carras points out as "taking responsibility for their housing, to ensure that they are housed no matter their location under the current unstable economic situation defined by unstable housing and job market" (2019: p. 118).

#### **4.1.5. Community & relationships**

A part of the allure with tiny houses is that it improves the sense of community of its residents (Boeckermann et al. 2019; Mangold & Zschau 2019; Mutter 2013). Whether this is a community feeling based on physical aspects (building process, tiny house community) or non-physical ones (online community, more time to nurture relationships, etc). Half of the respondents said that wanting to be a part of a community was one of their main motivators for moving to a tiny house. For Abbe it was mainly the community life that appealed to him, the tiny house just came along with it. Another respondent, who also lives in a tiny house community, expressed some critique towards the more conventional lifestyles, which has less focus on community and more focus on career and being successful.

*People are moving further and further away from things that really give pleasure and happiness, close relationships and many friends. People are so busy working to pay for a really expensive house and a really expensive car, some trip that they will go on so that they can be happy, for a week (Emil, age 37).*

The increased feeling of community is often partially attributed to the building process often being executed with help from friends and family, this was seen in both the literature study and the interviews. As a tiny house owner, you also have to rely on other people for a

place to park it, which creates a natural interaction between landowners and renters. Furthermore, several tiny house owners reside in tiny house communities sharing a plot of land with other tiny house dwellers, something which greatly increases their social interactions and arguably sense of community (Boeckermann et al. 2019; Mutter 2013). But you don't have to live in a physical tiny house community to be part of it, living in a tiny house and interacting with other tiny house dwellers through Facebook and online forums is also a way to get a greater sense of community (Boeckermann et al. 2019).

*I feel included in some sort of movement, that it becomes a sort of community around the lifestyle and the life choices, so it's very easy to meet like-minded people through this. People that have other values than materialistic and prestige and stuff (Jonatan, age 36).*

Another respondent expressed something similar: "It is a new world for a new type of people or a new group, that thinks in the same way and that fights for the same things that I believe in and that I haven't seen so much where I come from" (Pippi, age 29). She further highlighted not only personal gains from being part of a community but also things on a more societal level. "[It's] not just about living small, but cooperating on a larger scale. To try to have less space to live on and more shared spaces for homesteading or buying things locally and support each other" (Pippi, age 29).

#### **4.1.6. Building & design**

The motivation for building and design does not necessarily mean that the resident has built their tiny house themselves from scratch, although many of them have. About half of the respondents in this study have built their tiny houses themselves and explicitly mentioned their interest in building in the interviews. One of the respondents expressed her motivation to build her own house with that it enables her to fix things on her house herself, and not be relying on someone else.

*It's my heat and my water and the toilet is also very simple, so everything is simple. It's not complex systems that require someone really smart to fix them, I can fix my house myself (Ida, age 29).*

However, residents' interest in building and designing their home is also showed in the smaller works of the tiny house, in the customized interior and renovating it to their needs or changing the style of it to fit them more personally. According to the findings in the

study by Boeckermann et al. (2019) 37.1% of the respondents stated a high motivation to live tiny due to an interest in building and design. This includes planning the house and building it to fit their needs (Mutter 2013). In order to make the most of a small space it's important for the residents to be active in the design process of their tiny house, whether they build it themselves or not (Mutter 2013). For some, the possibility to design and create their own home was one of the primary reasons that they went tiny in the first place (Mutter 2013). One of the respondents revealed during the interview that he is planning to build a bigger tiny house in the future, mostly because he thought it was so fun to build his current one (Birk, age 30).

#### **4.1.7. Sustainability & environment**

The tiny house movement is often claimed to have an environmental ethos with sustainability motivations (see for example Anson 2014; Ford & Gomez-Lanier 2017; Kilman 2016; Shearer & Burton 2018). However, according to Mangold & Zschau (2019), predominantly environmental motivations are rare. The inherent lower ecological footprint from the tiny houses is not necessarily a sign of environmental motivation (ibid.). In the cases where environmental arguments were presented, they were most often related to a financial benefit or increased autonomy (Mangold & Zschau 2019). In a study by Saxton (2019a), 36% of the respondents stated environmental concerns as motivation to go tiny, and in the study by Mangold & Zschau (2019), around 20% of the respondents stated environmental reasons. Although other respondents in that study made references to environment and sustainability, they did so as to more of a benefit following a primary motivation (such as financial or a desire to live more “off-grid”). In the study by Boeckermann et al. (2019) environmental motivation was the fourth-strongest reason with 50% of the respondents rating it as a high motivation to go tiny. Notably, 50% did not agree on it as a strong motivator for them. In the interviews, a few of the respondents expressed environmental sentiments, apart from that there were some implicit statements about overconsumption and the environment among some of the respondents.

*It seems sensible not to work as much as people do, because the only thing they do with their excess is to destroy the planet (Emil, age 37).*

Ronja (age 50) who has lived in her tiny house for around 20 years spoke about the potentials of tiny houses in terms of lowering the ecological footprint, and another one of the respondents strives for her tiny house to be as much of closed system natural cycle as possible as she considers every step of her water usage as well as how to use the ashes from her fireplace after the wood has burned up: “For me, it's very positive to live in a closed

natural cycle and I think that's simple to do when you live in a tiny house and have access to land to cultivate" (Ida, age 29).

## 4.2. Challenges

The challenges (see *Figure 4*) from the interviews and the literature has been divided into six categories; *Legal*, *Placement*, *Practical*, *Social perceptions*, *Transportation* and *Financiatio<sup>n</sup> & insurance*. In these diagrams, we can see that while there were four challenges that were mentioned by more than half of the respondents in the interviews - only one challenge was found in more than 50 percent of the literature. The graphs also show that the practical challenge is the lowest in the literature, but among the highest in the interviews.

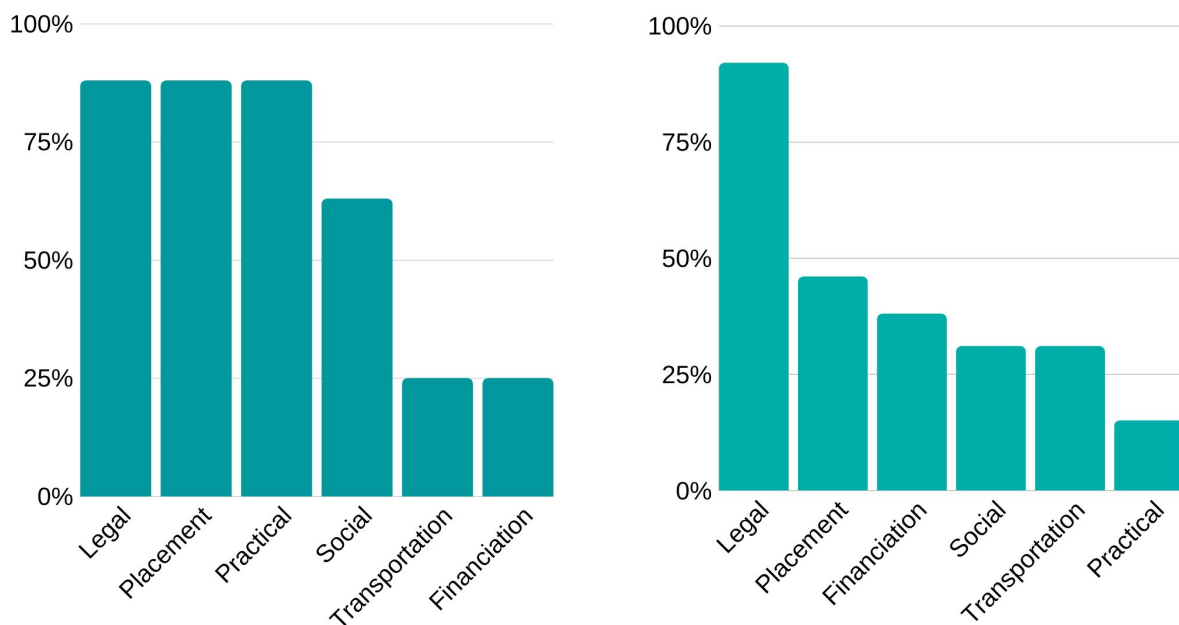


Figure 3. Frequency of challenges in the interviews (Left) and in the literature (Right). Presented with the most common challenge to the least common in a falling order from left to right in both the diagrams.

### 4.2.1. Legal

From the interviews it became clear that the unclear and locally dependent rules make it very uncertain as a tiny house owner, since you become very dependent on how the planning department, and maybe even a specific officer from it, interprets the rules. This seemed to be the case in at least a couple of the interviews. Because of this, several of the respondents don't have fully legal housing arrangements, this is also supported in the

literature study where people living in tiny houses are referred to as having to “fly under the radar”.

The legal challenges include all types of challenges that relate to laws, codes, regulations, policies and things that impact on an individual level. Most eminent in the literature are legal barriers in the form of zoning and other restrictions on land use (Evans 2018; Ford & Gomez-Lanier 2017; Mutter 2013; Shearer & Burton 2018). Due to its recent history, there are no legal frameworks covering tiny houses (Mutter 2013), and because there is a lack of consensus about what a tiny house really is, it is unclear what regulations should be applied to it (Evans 2018; Shearer & Burton 2018). These legal grey zones often force tiny house owners to “fly under the radar” or rely on legal loopholes and getting into trouble with officials or neighbors in order to live tiny (Carras 2019; Ford & Gomez-Lanier 2017; Saxton 2019a). Because of this, many tiny houses are illegally placed and are not permitted as a primary residence (Brown 2016). One of the respondents from this study believes that he formally is not allowed to live in his house permanently - but does so nonetheless. He also said that because the process of getting permission for permanent housing is arbitrary and uncertain - due to every planning office deciding independently - he would rather lie about his residency in the tiny house than try to get a legal permit (Birk, age 30). These types of challenges was found in this study to be one of the biggest concerns for the respondents, and as found in the literature study, they are sometimes a reason for people to sell their tiny houses (Carras 2019; Mutter 2013).

According to Evans (2018), the practice of zoning has shifted from addressing urban problems connected to safety and hazards, to the protection of private property values. People who want to place a tiny house in a certain area might encounter resistance from the neighbors who think that it will affect the value of the surrounding properties (Evans 2018). Thus, zoning regulations impact where tiny house owners can place their houses, often requiring them to be placed in rural areas with less strict regulations (Saxton 2019a). This means that tiny house residents are restricted in terms of where they can live and might require them to commute longer (Brown 2016; Carras 2019; Saxton 2019a). From the findings in this study, the majority of the respondents lived in rural areas and this could be due to necessity or desire. Regardless, integrating tiny houses in urban areas is difficult since most areas prohibit tiny houses as urban infill (Evans 2018; Hutchinson 2016).

Codes and regulations regarding housing often have a minimum size requirement (Brown 2016; Carlin 2014; Kilman 2016; Mutter 2013; Saxton 2019a). In order to counteract these regulations, tiny homes are often put on wheels, which allows them to be classified as trailers or caravans (Carras 2019; Shearer & Burton 2018). This creates another problem since trailers or caravans are not permitted for permanent residency (Mutter



2013; Shearer & Burton 2018). Ida (age 29) said that while her municipality's website didn't mention tiny houses specifically, they did cover rules for caravans. According to the rules she found, a caravan needs to be moved every 6-10 weeks (they don't specify how much it needs to be moved), something that Ida admits she doesn't do. Because of the rules on tiny houses, one of the respondents is now planning on building a larger, permanent house. The increased size is not primarily due to his own needs, but because the building permit for the property he bought requires it.

*It's hard to get a building permit for only my tiny house, so I need to build a bigger house. But that house will be like 40 m<sup>2</sup>, so it's not really a mega-house (Emil, age 37).*

Most of the respondents wish that there either were fewer rules or that the rules were more adapted to the tiny house concept. One way to get around the rules is if you place your tiny house on a plot that already has a primary building on it, something which a couple of the respondents are looking to do.

#### **4.2.2. Placement**

This category contains challenges that are connected to the placement that might be due to legal issues, but that stretches beyond that. This can be social aspects (such as longer commutes, feelings of isolation, unhappiness with where they live), or issues connected to land availability as well as other factors affecting them due to placement (service access, etc.). The challenges of placement is to a large extent connected to legal issues, but many sources mention this aspect separately from the legal challenges (Brown 2016; Hutchinson 2016; Keable 2017; Kilman 2016). This is because it is possible to live legally in permanent tiny houses, but often this means significant restrictions on where you can live. Typically, the tiny house owner live in on of four locations: (1) *parked on their own property*, (2) *parked in a friend's or a neighbors backyard*, (3) *placed in an RV park*, (4) *placed in a tiny house community* (Kilman 2016). Furthermore, land is a scarce and expensive resource, making homeownership much less affordable and accessible to the average person (Brown 2016; Carlin 2016; Hutchinson 2016; Keable 2017).

The challenge of placement is expressed by at least half of the respondents. Ida (age 29) didn't think it would be a problem for her to find a place since she had good connections to people who owned land, but it turned out that a lot of them said no, something that surprised her. A few other respondents mentioned the challenges of finding a place to stay from an anecdotal point of view since they themselves didn't have any issues with this. Emil said that it helps if you look trustworthy and don't have a



“weird” looking tiny house, but most importantly, that you have contacts and references. His impression is that it’s also more difficult finding a location that is close to the bigger cities, such as Stockholm and Gothenburg. This is something that also Madicken expressed during our interview. She is looking to find a place in a specific area, but since the area is so popular among people with more “alternative” lifestyles, there is a high competition for the spots for tiny houses. She also experienced some negativity among the landowners towards tiny houses when she approached them with her request (Madicken, age 49).

Finding a place to park is a quite common challenge for tiny house dwellers, and this partly inhibits the sense of autonomy since the owner cannot really choose where in the country to set up their house. Because of legal reasons living in a tiny house often requires the residents to live in rural areas. This can in itself be challenging due to longer travel times to work and school, as well as missing out on social activities (Brown 2016; Carras 2019). The challenge of placement can also have unexpected consequences, as one respondent from the study by Maria Saxton demonstrated: “I wish recycling was available where we are currently parked” (Saxton 2019a, p. 336). Most of these services require an established and legitimate location, something which many tiny house residents simply don’t have.

The challenge of finding a good place to stay is also depending on what kind of demands you have on the plot. Some of the residents need to be able to connect their tiny houses to water and sewage systems, and then, of course, the challenge to find a place will be greater. Another aspect that many of the residents thought were important was joining a community, and finding the right community with the right people can be very challenging. Something that almost all of the residents brought up during the interviews was the possibility to have access to shared facilities at the plot. Only a few of the residents actually lived in a setting with shared facilities, but almost everyone said that this was something they wanted to have. Having shared facilities is also resource-efficient as one of the respondents points out.

#### **4.2.3. Practical**

The practical challenges include; access to tools or lacking technical building skills, challenges with utilities (water, gas, sewer, electricity, alternative energy) as well as issues with finding people that can repair tiny houses. Furthermore, the practical challenge can also appear in the planning stage of the tiny house, such as finding the right material and making the initial calculations prior to construction. Several examples of practical challenges were found in the literature study. Because of the many benefits, tiny house speculators often build their houses on their own. However, it’s a challenge to do this in a

safe and efficient way, since many lack prior experience and knowledge of construction (Brown 2016). Computer tools that are commonly used in the planning stage of house construction, to make sure the final building meets the building codes, are generally not designed to work for tiny houses. Furthermore, it is a challenge to get access to the right tools and materials they need for constructing a house to fit their needs (ibid.). One of the respondents wanted to use as much second-hand material as possible and found it a challenge to find the right material.

When the planning and building part of the tiny house experience is done, several challenges occurred to the residents in their daily tiny house life. Tiny houses tend to get cold faster and becomes messy quickly, and one respondent said that the small size of the building makes the air quality an issue, since it can easily become stuffy if you cook food or don't ventilate properly. Many tiny houses are built with lofts where the bed is usually placed, and since hot air rises toward the ceiling, one respondent said that this caused the sleeping area to get overheated.

Birk (age 30) said that the size of his house (about 12m<sup>2</sup>) is good if you live alone, but when his girlfriend visits he thinks it's a bit too small and he wants to have a bigger house in the future. This doesn't necessarily mean a conventional house though - he might just build a bigger TH. He said that the size you need is very individual and that people should consider their needs before building a house. In the beginning, he used to have a lot of guests over, but it was crowded. He further added that living in a tiny house makes it difficult to have family gatherings. Furthermore, some of the residents said that the lack of space makes it difficult to have people sleeping over, and for someone striving to be more self-sufficient, the lack of storage can be a disadvantage.

*You try to live with as few possessions as possible, but if you still want to be fairly self-sufficient you need stuff. And then it's hard to find storage (Ida, age 29).*

Tiny home residents are also often not able to connect their tiny house to utilities (such as water, gas, sewer, and electricity), and have to work around these limitations (Brown 2016). Many of the respondents expressed that living in a tiny house village, which offers shared facilities, would have made their tiny life easier. While a couple of the residents do live in tiny house villages today, it is difficult to find a spot in one as there are only a few tiny house villages and the requests are more than the villages can provide.

A couple of the residents mentioned the challenge of cutting down their stuff and adapting to a new way of life: "Just the thing that you are used to something, that was an adjustment challenge, to not have water from the tap" (Pippi, age 29). However, more

than half of the residents now live without running water or a toilet in their house, instead, they rely on external facilities for these needs, e.g. a couple of the respondents said that they go to a public bathhouse once or twice a week to shower. But going completely off-grid is not for everyone, one of the respondents previously lived in a tiny house which was off-grid, but found this challenging since he couldn't enjoy the simple luxuries - such as listening to music.

*I don't live off-grid anymore, I have electricity now so I can have heating. If you don't have [electricity] then you can't have speakers, you can't have instruments and stuff like that. Especially I could miss listening to music when I lived [off-grid] (Emil, age 37).*

When living in a tiny house there are also challenges connected to repairment as it takes special knowledge to work with the miniature systems in tiny houses - and there is a lack of people with this kind of training. Generally, the kind of people that could work on these smaller sized systems are only permissible for insurance for work in RVs and are therefore unwilling to conduct repairs in tiny houses.

#### **4.2.4. Social perception**

The social perceptions challenge is connected to opinions and critiques that affect individual tiny house residents. On an individual level, you can get harassed or look upon negatively if you live in what others see as a “trailer-park” house, because of its many negative associations in culture. Or you might struggle to find a place to park your house if the neighbors think your house will hurt the value of their property.

*Because we follow the American trend that we should be bigger and cooler and more expensive and that's the status, so downsizing can be perceived as a bit weird. So it's a social challenge - that you need to explain (Jonatan, age 36).*

Skepticism among municipality and people around are frequently mentioned during the interviews. However, none of the respondents declared having issues with neighbors disliking their houses. In fact, Ronjas 80-year old neighbors decided to build their own tiny house on their plot, and another respondent said that the reactions from neighbors had been that of curiosity. However, most respondents reported a negative perception and lack of support from the municipalities. Birk, who also works in the housing sector, said

that he believes that there is a “fear to create slum residential areas” in Sweden - and therefore a strong resistance towards initiatives that could be perceived as that. While the tiny house movement in the US is more connected to the educated intellectual upper class, he believes it is viewed differently in Sweden. He also says that Sweden has very high requirements for what can be considered a residential house, something that can obstruct the development of alternative housing solutions. An example that he gives during the interview is the resistance towards allowing permanent residence in Swedish allotment cottages. Another respondent also reports resistance within the municipality, saying that “People are skeptic in this municipality. Like they think it’s weird or questions it and wants to make it a bit difficult” (Pippi, age 29). Emil says that he experiences less negative opinions from other people now that he lives in a bigger tiny house (17m<sup>2</sup>), compared to when his house was just 7m<sup>2</sup>.

*Then it was many that said ‘Will you live here for real?’ and my parents were quite shocked and a bit scared of what was about to happen, because they thought my life was going well, and then they thought it went wrong (Emil, age 37).*

For another respondent, a challenge for her is that she sometimes gets unwanted attention. She says that this was fun in the beginning, but now when people come to her house just to have a look around, she thinks it’s annoying (Ronja, age 50). She also says that the reactions from people are different towards her housing choice now, when she is 50, compared to when she moved in 20 years ago: “20 years ago, when I built this, it was like this ‘Wow, cool girl building her own place’, but now when I am 50, people that I haven’t met for a long while, you meet them and they are like ‘Oh, so you still live there’... It’s like I’m some kind of loser even though that’s really not the case. It was cool being 30 and building a tiny house, but it’s not cool being 50 and still live in it” (Ronja, age 50).

The tiny house movement is still quite new, and this inevitably means that uninvolved people can be very critical of it (Mutter 2013). As found in the literature, tiny house residents might receive negative feedback when they have appeared in media, or from people around them (Mutter 2013). These negative social perceptions could, according to Brown (2016), contribute to lack of legitimization of tiny houses and prohibit the inclusion of them in urban development plans. Tiny houses are often perceived by people as non-liveable (Brown 2016; Mutter 2013) and the unconventional size of them often requires residents to explain their choice of housing to people (Keable 2017). Because of their unconventionality and “weirdness”, opposition to them is not uncommon and there is a societal fear that tiny homes can become the new trailer-parks

(Brown 2016; Hutchinson 2016). In addition, they are also seen as a threat to property values (Brown 2016; Evans 2018). However, this perception might have to be re-evaluated, since recent studies have shown that mixed-use neighborhoods, on the contrary, can increase the value of property in some places (Evans 2017).

#### **4.2.5. Transportation**

The challenges of transportation includes costs and accessibility of resources to move a tiny house from one place to another. As found in the literature study, several tiny house owners have encountered challenges when it comes to the mobility of their house (Brown 2016; Carras 2019; Hutchinson 2016; Saxton 2019a). The mobility of tiny houses is perceived to allow for easy travels, as Mutter writes “you can just hitch your home to a trailer and go” (Mutter 2013, p. 21-22). One respondent in the study by Saxton (2019a) said that mobility was one of their strongest motivations for moving to a tiny house. However, despite tiny houses often being possible to move does not mean that they easily do so. They are still fully equipped houses and moving them is quite heavy work requiring large machinery. In theory, houses on wheels sound simple enough, but in reality, this might be a different story, as one respondent in the study by Saxton (2019) got to experience.

*The freedom to go anywhere was also a motivation, but our tiny house is expensive to move so we didn't move her around much (Saxton 2019a, p. 287).*

This realization was also seen in the interviews, as one of the respondents declared: “I don’t think it’s very easy to move it. I have tried to move it a little bit, but you can only drive 30 km/h [when transporting it]” (Birk, age 30). Another respondent also commented on the limited mobility in the interview: “I don’t move mine. But I did move it here with a crane lorry and that went well. The house is on wheels so it is possible to move it with a tractor, but if you are going any longer distances you need to lift it onto a truck” (Abbe, age 41). It seems that it is not uncommon that the mobility of tiny houses is lower in reality than the owners first expected (Brown 2016). Considering that they are built like traditional miniature houses, their total weight means that they will require a truck to be moved. Whether you hire someone to move your house for you or buy a vehicle capable of doing the job yourself, it will, either way, be difficult and expensive (Hutchinson 2016).

#### **4.2.6. Financiation & insurance**

This category includes challenges connected to getting loans and mortgages (whether these are private or from banks), private financiation and insurance issues. Despite tiny houses being highlighted as affordable housing, one of the most common barriers mentioned in the literature is financiation regarding the construction of the house (Anson 2014; Brown 2016; Shearer & Burton 2018). Unlike traditional houses, tiny houses are viewed as a risky asset and thus many banks will not approve loans (Keable 2017). Mortgages are also rarely accepted for housing that is less than 400 sq.ft. (around 37m<sup>2</sup>) which contributes to the challenge of financiation (Mutter 2013). Considering that the tiny house industry is still small, there are few actors offering financial support (Kilman 2015). This means that people that want to buy a tiny house have to rely on own savings, or on private loans from family and friends (Mutter 2013; Kilman 2016). These limited possibilities for financiation restrict some people from entering the tiny house community (Keable 2017). There are also challenges connected to insuring a tiny house since they are not properly defined and therefore fall in a grey area (Brown 2016). Insurance companies might not consider tiny houses as a “home” and therefore not approve a homeowner’s insurance (ibid.) Although insurance was a quite common challenge in the literature, none of the respondents from the interview study mentioned this. However, for a couple of the respondents, the financiation of the tiny house was a challenge.

# 5. Discussion

This part of the thesis discusses the results, reflections on research methods, as well as ideas for future research. The objective of the first part of the chapter is to discuss the findings from the results chapter and this is then followed by a discussion of the research methods used, and the limitations of them. The chapter is concluded by a suggestion of research ideas for future research.

## 5.1. The results

Despite the rising popularity for tiny homes in popular media, there is little research existing on the topic and the academic discussions on tiny houses as a long term housing solution are few (Boeckermann et al. 2019; Mutter 2013; Ford & Gomez-Lanier 2017; Mangold & Zschau 2019; Shearer & Burton 2018). With housing being one of the most resource-intensive sectors and housing shortage a pressing challenge for many urban areas, tiny houses have been looked at as a solution for both of these issues (Carlin 2014; Carras 2019). The objective of this study was to contribute to the understanding of what motivates Swedish tiny house residents to go tiny, as well as to understand what challenges they encounter. A second objective was to compare how motivations and challenges among Swedish tiny house residents compare to the ones found in the literature and to reflect on what the tiny house movement can mean for the Swedish housing market. The aim of the study is not to make a case for, or against, tiny houses. While I do see benefits with a more diverse and loosely regulated housing system that allows homeowners to build according to their needs, I also acknowledge that tiny houses could be a sign of a flawed housing market, which fails to offer affordable alternatives to regular people.

### 5.1.1. Discussion of the motivations

The respondents in the interviews all expressed being motivated by economy and simplicity in regards to their choice to live tiny. These motivations have also been found as the most important ones in previous studies and literature (Boeckermann et al. 2019; Brown 2016; Kilman 2016; Mangold & Zschau 2019; Mutter 2013; Saxton 2019a; Shearer & Burton 2018). Apart from these, the most common motivations expressed during the interviews were connected to Freedom & autonomy, Mobility, Building & design, as well as Sustainability & environment. The connection between “a simple life” and “less

material stuff” is apparent in almost all of the interviews. There is a notion among the respondents that material things are a burden that needs to be “taken care of”, and the reduction of material possessions is a common theme in the interviews. This theme can also be found in previous research. For instance, Boeckermann et al. (2019) found in their study that respondents who were highly motivated by living a simpler life were also more likely to be satisfied with their choice of housing. In fact, this was the only motivation that showed a link between motivation and satisfaction of living in a tiny house. The authors explain that fewer possessions make it possible to spend money on things that increase life quality, such as experiences, rather than material stuff (Boeckermann et al. 2019).

As previous studies have suggested, environmental concerns were less important compared to other motivations among this group of respondents. However, in the literature *Sustainability & Environment* was among the more common motivations. This difference of frequency could be explained by that previous studies were based on a questionnaire style with statements that the respondents could agree or disagree with - rather than an exploratory open approach as used in this study. This could be an indication that we often assume a sustainability motivation, even when there isn't one, or it's not as strong as we might assume. However, previous research on tiny houses has also shown that the type of housing we live in can influence and alter the way we consume as well as reduce our ecological footprint (Carras 2019; Saxton 2019a). So even if the objective of this study was not to look at consumption patterns, it was clear from the interviews that the residents were very reflexive of their consumption habits - supporting the findings in the studies by Carras (2019) and Saxton (2019a). However much we want the environment to be a top priority of people, oftentimes it is not. But with the tiny house lifestyle, the environmental benefits can still be harvested regardless of the residents degree of environmental concern. It's also important to note that the tiny house movement encompasses a wider array of sustainability than just being “green”, as the residents often make connections to the economic and social aspects of sustainability, something which is often lost in the general sustainability narrative.

During the writing of this thesis, I have gotten the question many times if apartment buildings wouldn't be a more efficient way to deal with the issues tiny houses are argued to meet - affordability and sustainability in housing. They might. However, tiny houses are not intended to replace all other forms of housing. If we want to solve long-term urban housing shortage, apartment buildings definitely have an important place in that equation - but so does tiny houses and all other forms of housings. As much potential as they have, tiny houses are not for everyone. While they contribute to the diversification of housing options, living in a tiny house will not appeal to all people. For some, they are just not a viable option due to physical limitations or their life situation,



and some just don't see the allure of them. That is all fair. But if we only stop at the practical analysis of tiny houses we lose a big part of the message. Tiny houses being produced large-scale as the solution to climate and housing crisis is neither realistic nor the message these houses convey. Analyzing the tiny house trend is less about the architectural aspects, and more about a broader societal and lifestyle analysis, as tiny houses are in a way a materialized critique against contemporary society and a symbol of resistance.

### **5.1.2. Discussion of the challenges**

The primary challenges identified in this study are connected to legal issues, practical challenges and placement of the tiny house. While legal and placement challenges are certainly intertwined, placement is not always connected to legal aspects - thus these two are usually separated in the literature and have also been in this study. In addition to these challenges, this study has also identified social perceptions, transportation of the tiny house, as well as financing and insurance as common challenges for tiny house living.

Apart from one study, previous research has not included challenges as part of their research objective - but challenges to tiny house living are still mentioned in a lot of the literature. The empirical findings from the interviews in this study are very much in line with what the literature has indicated but appear with different frequencies in the interviews and literature. The most apparent difference is found in the *Practical* challenges category which was the least common challenge in the literature, but among the highest in the interviews. This could be due to the fact that previous research hasn't focused on collecting empirical data on challenges and thus the challenges that appear in the literature are not from a first-hand experience point of view. This could mean that purely individual challenges, such as practical ones, are easily overlooked unless you include a first-person perspective, as this study does.

Despite tiny houses being highlighted as affordable housing, one of the most common barriers mentioned in the literature is financing regarding the construction of the house (Anson 2014; Shearer & Burton 2018). There is therefore a strong reliance on friends and family for lending money for building the tiny house (Anson 2014; Evans 2018). Furthermore, tiny house owners often have to rely on social networks for land to set up their tiny house onto (Anson 2014; Ford & Gomez-Lanier 2017). This partly inhibits the sense of autonomy since the owner cannot really choose where in the country to set up their house. However, this challenge was not as common among the respondents of this study and only two of the respondents mentioned this as a challenge. Several other respondents instead made claims supporting the affordability of tiny houses during the interviews.

The mobility of tiny houses is common in marketing and social media, but previous studies, as well as this one, has shown that the mobility of tiny houses is really more of an ideal than a reality. Most of the respondents in the study don't move their tiny house regularly, or at all, and a couple of them expressed difficulties with prior transportation of their tiny house. While tiny houses can be moved, it is an expensive and complicated process to do so, thus it should be clarified to potential owners that tiny houses are not a cuter version of the caravan and should not be bought with the idea of treating them as such. Being clear about the limitations of tiny houses is important, especially in terms of sustainability. Otherwise, this could result in people buying or building tiny houses just to realize that the house doesn't live up to the expectations they have on it. Then these houses, that were supposed to provide an alternative to overconsumption, might just become another commodity. However, the idea of having a mobile house might not solely be due to the possibility to bring your house for a vacation. From the interviews in this study, the mobility of the houses was more an extra layer of security. If the conditions in the current area changed - the residents have the ability to move their house to a different area, without having to go through the whole house hunting process. This gives owners of tiny houses more control over their lives and in a society with high rates of housing shortage and limited options of the housings available - tiny houses can provide residents with an attractive alternative.

Due to the small size of tiny houses, they are generally not accepted in planning, and thus it is next to impossible to get a building permit for a tiny house on a piece of land you have bought. Thus the alternative is to rent a piece of someone's plot to put your house - which was the solution for most of the people interviewed for this study. This counteracts the security of being a homeowner because you still need to rely on other people providing for you in order to live in it - oftentimes this leads to tiny houses being placed illegally. The dependency on others for placement and the illegal status of many tiny houses makes them a risky investment. Even though they are more affordable than conventional housing, they still require a quite large initial investment. Due to this, investing in a tiny house is a risk that can seem daunting and might discourage potential downsizers from buying one. The issue of illegitimacy is one of the biggest obstacles for the movement, and also something that advocates work hard to change. Their illegal status also makes it very difficult to get a statistical understanding of how widespread this form of housing really is. Considering the rising popularity of tiny houses in the new media, it is reasonable to assume that the trend of living tiny will increase - and the illegal tiny houses with it. By finding a way to incorporate more varieties of housings into their urban planning schemes, municipalities could get a greater understanding of their housing market.

### 5.1.3. General discussion

Tiny houses make us reflect on what we really need to live a good life, and provides inspiration and solutions to use living space more efficiently - which saves important natural resources. However, as one of the respondents said, “you don’t need a tiny house to live tiny”. Living tiny is maybe most of all a mindset in which residents contemplate not *how much* they can have - but *how little* they can take while still living a good life.

One of the most prominent features of the tiny houses themselves is that they have great potential to be customized for personal needs. This was a common reference during the interviews, where the respondents made references about how their tiny house provided them with what they “needed”. It was not only about the respondents finding that the smaller size of the accommodation suited them better, but also that they had a greater opportunity to influence the exterior and interior of the house so that it suited their lifestyle and taste more. All respondents were very clear about what they wanted to get out of their house and what needs it needed to fulfill - which supports that the respondents in this study have chosen this type of accommodation voluntarily.

However, it should be added that while this thesis, and the tiny house movement in large, assumes that the tiny house lifestyle is voluntary, a deeper analysis could be done of the structural conditions forming the foundation of the decision - such as unaffordable housing options and a general housing shortage. Choices are based on the factors and the circumstances known at the moment of the decision, and thus, if the underlying conditions changed - the outcome could look different. Looking at the results from this and previous studies, one of the primary reasons that people choose to live in tiny houses is because of their affordability. Many people, especially in the United States, live in tiny houses because they offer a viable option for homeownership to these people, and this could mean that, for many people, tiny houses are more than just a desire to “live tiny”. Instead, it points towards wanting to have the security of owning your house, while also having the money to live a good quality life. This indicates that the housing market is failing in providing options that are affordable and that homeownership has become a thing limited to only the wealthiest.

One might think that the model that caused the US housing crash - which soon rippled out in a global financial crisis - would be replaced, not reproduced. But, after the burst of the housing bubble “even countries with a long tradition of social rental housing redesigned their systems in favor of homeownership, ‘free markets’ and competition” - and an example of this is Sweden (Rolnik 2019). We could only speculate on how this change in the Swedish housing system might be connected to the increased interest for tiny houses in Sweden. There are likely more than one driving force behind the rising popularity of

tiny houses in Sweden, but seeing that the economic factor is one of the strongest motivations for people choosing to live tiny, the increasing unaffordability of housing could very well be one of the culprits. The growing trend in tiny houses could then be seen as an indication that the current housing market is not up to par with the values of today's residents, and people might be unable, or unwilling, to spend their money on what the housing market offers. If this is true, widening the perspective of how we look at tiny houses might show that they are in fact not a solution to the housing crisis, but a symptom of it. If we revisit the quote by Carras (2019) that tiny house owners are "taking responsibility for their housing, to ensure that they are housed no matter their location under the current unstable economic situation defined by unstable housing and job market", the question we might have to ask ourselves is; just how much responsibility can we put on individuals to solve the housing crisis?

#### **5.1.4. Concluding discussion**

Tiny houses are an alternative to the conventionally sized house, but maybe most of all the tiny house movement makes us question underlying housing trends, as well as societal pressures that might not work in favor of our quality of life. Many of the respondents in the interviews were negative about the mortgage system and being in debt, and living in a tiny house makes it possible for them to free themselves from this narrative. Tiny houses are an alternative to the options that the market is offering, but as of now, living in a tiny house is something which is limited to people that have the right pre-conditions in terms of a social network, and are willing to take the legal and financial risk. However, with a growing tiny house movement, the inherent obstacles could be overcome, which could open up new possibilities for this housing option.

## 5.2. Reflections on the research methods

As there is no data available on people living in tiny houses in Sweden, I have had to rely on resources such as Facebook, mass media coverage and other information available online. This only gives an indication of how big the movement of tiny houses is in Sweden but doesn't give a full picture of how many are actually living in tiny houses. The novelty of the topic also contributes to the difficulties of studying it. There is a lack of academic literature, and the literature that exists has had to rely on blogs, news articles, media sources, and other non-peer-reviewed literature as part of their material.

However, for the purpose of this study, the in-depth interviews was a suitable method to better understand the underlying motivations and challenges that tiny house residents encounter. Because of the legal issues with tiny houses, it is difficult to find data on how many, or who, is living in tiny houses. For this study, I was able to find a sufficient amount of respondents through varying Facebook-groups, but for a bigger study with more respondents, it would probably become a challenge to find participants.

The finding of this study is limited to the material used (in the form of interviews and academic literature). This means that other categories and themes might have been uncovered if the material had been more extensive or other sources had been used. I have categorized the material based on my interpretation of it and someone else could possibly have made different connections and came up with different categories. Some of the categories flow into each other and what is included under what category is depending on my decisions as a researcher and the research questions I have formulated.

Finally, my interpretation of their motivations and challenges is based on what I learned during the interviews and the findings from this study are limited to the information that was given to me during the interviews. This means that the respondents might be motivated or challenged by more than what they shared with me, this is not possible for me to know.

## 5.3. Ideas for future research

For anyone wanting to conduct further research on the topic of tiny houses it would be interesting to study:

- How tiny houses could be included in urban planning schemes
- How building codes could be adapted, or developed, to promote residency in tiny houses

## 6. Conclusions

- Financial aspects is a more common motivation to live in a tiny house than sustainability.
- The empirical findings from this study confirm that the primary challenges for tiny house residents are connected to legal issues and placement, this has been assumed in the literature, but not investigated.
- While it is not possible to make generalized conclusions from a small qualitative study, the results from this study have been very much in line with what previous studies have found. This could mean that we might be reaching a general understanding of motivations and challenges in the tiny house movement.
- Tiny houses are best viewed as an eye-opening alternative and a counterweight to the culture of overconsumption, rather than the new big thing in planning.

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# Appendix A

*Information about the study that was sent out to the respondents prior to the interviews.*

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*Information om studie om tiny house boende i Sverige*

Syftet med intervjun är att bidra med information till intervjuarens examensarbete inom masterprogrammet Hållbar samhällsplanering och stadsutformning vid KTH. Uppsatsen ämnar till att bidra till förståelse för vilka faktorer (positiva som negativa) som påverkar valet att bo i ett TH.

*Sekretess*

Som deltagare i studien kommer du att vara anonym och i uppsatsen kommer du tilldelas ett pseudonym. Du kan när som helst under studien avbryta ditt deltagande och kräva att de svar du delgivit intervjuaren kasseras och inte inkluderas i studien. Intervjun kommer (vid ditt godkännande) att spelas in, inspelningen kommer enbart vara tillgänglig för intervjuaren och syftar till att förenkla arbetsprocessen med studien.

Intervjun kommer ta cirka 30 minuter. Vi bestämmer tillsammans en tid för genomförande under april 2019.

Tack på förhand för ditt deltagande!

Om du har några frågor får du gärna höra av dig, antingen på telefon, mail eller Facebook messenger.

Melanie Olsson

Masterstudent vid Hållbar Samhällsplanering och Stadsutformning (KTH)

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# Appendix B

## *Survey on background information of the respondents*

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1. Ålder \_\_\_\_\_

2. Man                                      Kvinna                                      Icke-binär                                      Annat

3. Högsta uppnådda utbildningsnivå  
Grundskola                                      Gymnasieskola                                      Högskola/universitet

4. Inkomst per månad (tkr)

All inkomst före skatt från samtliga arbetsgivare (inklusive OB-ersättning, alla former av ersättning från Försäkringskassan samt ersättning från a-kassan). Lämna denna fråga blank om du ej vill uppge.

0-10      10-15      15-20      20-25      25-30      30-35      35-40      40+

Om du ännu är i planeringsstadiet av ett tiny house, vänligen fyll i svaren enligt dina preliminära planer.

5. Boendekostnad per månad (inkl. el, värme och vatten) \_\_\_\_\_

6. Bostadsyta \_\_\_\_\_ m<sup>2</sup>

7. Mobilitet av bostad

- Permanent (står på fast grund, ej flyttbar)
- Semipermanent (kan fraktas på fristående trailer)
- Mobil (byggd på trailer, "hus på hjul")

8. Uppställningsplats

- Egenägd mark
- Hyr av vänner/familj
- Hyr av annan hyresvärd
- Annat \_\_\_\_\_

9. Antal år/månader boende i "tiny house" \_\_\_\_\_

10. Nuvarande bostadsort \_\_\_\_\_

11. Materialursprung till bostad

Andel procent

\_\_\_\_\_ % Nyproducerat

\_\_\_\_\_ % Återbrukat

\_\_\_\_\_ % Återvunnet

12. Byggnadsprocess

- Begagnad (köpt av tidigare ägare)
- Egenbyggd
- Färdiglevererad av tillverkare

13. Finansiering av inköp/konstruktion (flera svar möjliga)

- Banklån
- Personligt lån (vänner, familj, etc)
- Avbetalning
- Egenfinansierad

14. Totalpris vid inköp/konstruktion: \_\_\_\_\_ SEK

15. Vilken tid och dag under denna eller nästa vecka vill du bli uppringd?

\_\_\_\_\_

16. Telefonnummer? \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix C

## *Interview guide*

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Typ av intervju

- Telefonintervju
- Personintervju
- Annat \_\_\_\_\_

1. Antal boende?
2. Vad motiverade dig att flytta till ett TH?
3. Vilka fördelar ser du med att bo i ett TH?
4. Vilka nackdelar ser du med att bo i ett TH?
5. Vilka utmaningar har du stött på med flytten till ett TH?
6. Vad skulle göra det enklare för dig att bo i ett TH?
7. Hur har TH boendet förändrat din livsstil?
8. Andra reflektioner, ändringar eller tillägg?

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