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Identifying Power Structures in a Municipal Network: The
Decision-making Process Behind Buying Ängelholm-
Helsingborg Airport

Authors: Emma Tapaninen & Otto Nieminen
Supervisor: Stefan Gössling

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Abstract

Small regional airports are known to be economically unsustainable. When the previous private owner of Ängelholm-Helsingborg Airport announced their intention to shut the airport down, seven municipalities in northwestern Skåne decided to buy it. This has raised debate about whether municipalities should allocate resources to an economically and environmentally unsustainable business. The purpose of this study is to identify power structures in a municipal collaborative network, Familjen Helsingborg, and find how they affect decision-making. Additionally, municipalities' ways to rationalise buying the airport and the roles of different stakeholders are examined. An inductive approach and a qualitative method were chosen for this research. Eight local politicians from northwestern Skåne who represented municipalities of different sizes, as well as stances for and against airport ownership, were interviewed. Different narratives were identified and thematically analysed to gain insights into the network. The dominant narratives that emerged from the empirical data include rationalising for and against airport ownership, collaboration in Familjen Helsingborg and the airport holding company, and power structures in these networks. The narratives reveal that the municipal collaboration is successful due to a lack of clear power asymmetries and an open discussion culture. This is made possible by long personal relationships and trust that comes with them, as well as actively maintaining equality between municipalities of different sizes. The politicians, both for and against buying the airport, rationalised their stances using mostly the economic value, or lack of it, that the airport generates for the region. Symbolic values were also used, but only to support the more tangible economic rationalising.

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1 Introduction

Networks are a topic that gains attention in research, but there is a fairly small amount of clear, generalisable insight into them. Many aspects that are beneficial in networking have been identified, such as creating and sustaining personal relationships, and the networking parties' pre-existing ties as well as their similarity between each other (Dagnino, Levanti & Mocciaro Li Destri, 2016; Newell & Swan, 2000). The benefits of networking are also widely recognised, for example in that organisations' relationships with other actors are valuable for them (Bayne, Schepis & Purchase, 2017) and networks are these relationships in action. Still, there are difficulties in defining networks and how they function in clear terms due to them being often described as constantly changing, and because of difficulty in capturing them over time in the same comparable state. What makes the concept somewhat easier to grasp is when the network is a strategic one, one where the actors share a similar goal (Zakrzewska-Bielawska, 2018). These networks do not occur naturally like other less-structured types might, but are built intentionally and actors can give up parts of their independence in the process in order to reach goals that are not reachable alone (Möller & Halinen, 2017). Strategic networks are at the theoretical core of this study, as the characteristics above make them both, an intriguing phenomenon and a great starting point from which to go into the rest of the theory.

Adding a new theoretical point of view, the concept again becomes harder to grasp when power is blended in, as it is an individual trait that actors use and react to differently in co-operative situations. What makes power so important in the context of collaboration is how it exists in both individuals and group dynamics. Magnussen (2016) describes that actors need meaningful connections before obtaining individual power, which they can then use to facilitate collaboration. It is this concept of power going back and forth in co-operative settings that makes it very relevant when looking for ways to describe and develop networking activities, but also so difficult to pinpoint and investigate further. Networks are described as more than just a way of organising business activity due to their superior effectiveness (Grimshaw, Willmott & Rubery, 2005), but power within them needs to be configured first. A considerable risk related to collaboration, networks, and power is for organisations engaging in them to lose more than they gain due to unequal power distribution (Newell & Swan, 2000). Thus, the connection of networks and power can be seen as possibly generating all kinds of results,

ranging from great to an utter loss of resources. Reasons behind such a big gap are where this study enters the field, as explaining the possible problems or successes of networks and power structures is where we are looking to contribute to in a theoretical sense.

The theoretical contributions are based in this study in the context of a network of actors behind a small regional airport in northwestern Skåne in Sweden, called Ängelholm-Helsingborg Airport (AGH). AGH is a small regional airport located in the municipality of Ängelholm that used to be operated by a private owner, PEAB, until the change of ownership to public owners in September 2020. PEAB is an international construction company, based in northwestern Skåne, and thus its core businesses do not include airport operating. According to industry data, regional airports are a rather small part of the aviation industry, an industry that was worth over \$800 billion in 2019 before the Covid-19 pandemic, and still over \$680 billion in 2020 after the pandemic came early in the year (IBISWorld, 2020). The economic performance of small regional airports is known to be problematic, as 71% of them are annually reporting losses worldwide (Airport World, 2019). Environmental issues concerning small regional airports gain less attention compared to big international ones, as they are only responsible for 3% of total air traffic in the EU area (Airport World, 2019).

There is an ongoing debate on how crucial part of the infrastructure AGH is in northwestern Skåne, and what its role is among other airports and travel options. AGH had around 387,000 passengers in 2019 (Transportstyrelsen, 2021). The closest airport to AGH is in Halmstad which is a 45 minute drive from Ängelholm, and had around 124,000 passengers in 2019 (Transportstyrelsen, 2021). The biggest, international nearby airports are Malmö Airport with around 2 million passengers in 2019 (Transportstyrelsen, 2021) and Kastrup Airport in Copenhagen with around 30 million passengers in 2019 (Copenhagen Airports, 2020). They are around one hour and 1,5 hours respectively from Ängelholm. In addition to these airports, there is one more airport in Skåne, Kristianstad Österlen Airport, with around 40,000 passengers in 2019 (Transportstyrelsen, 2021). The main travel destination from AGH is Stockholm, and an alternative way to get there using public transportation is by train. Travel time from Ängelholm to Stockholm is 1 hour flying and 5 hours by train. The airports in the region are summarised in a map in Appendix 1.

Decreasing passenger numbers and environmental and economic unsustainability led PEAB, the previous private owners of AGH, to not be willing to operate the airport further. As a consequence, a discussion about municipalities in northwestern Skåne possibly saving AGH

began, which raised debate in the media, mostly locally, and among the inhabitants of the region. Considering the issues regarding regional airports, and the debate, it was a decision that had to be rationalised to various stakeholders when municipalities together bought AGH about six months into the Covid-19 pandemic. All seven municipalities that are the current owners of AGH are located close to Ängelholm and are all part of a municipal collaborative organisation called Familjen Helsingborg. The organisation is well established and has existed in different forms and under different names for more than 20 years. The organisation now consists of 11 municipalities, all of which were asked about their willingness to participate in airport ownership, resulting in seven accepting and four rejecting the offer. Thus, the current situation is that the seven municipalities assembled a company responsible for airport ownership where each of them has a seat on the board, and additionally they built an operative board which together with airport personnel is responsible for the daily operations, where the municipalities are not active.

1.1 Problematisation

Aviation in general, and regional airports are areas where a lot of academic research exists, but especially when connected to municipalities there are clear research gaps. A hot topic of aviation studies has been airports' importance to the surrounding regions, where small regional airports also gain attention. Studies have been conducted for example with a comparable nature on how different regions have historically developed considering their distances to the nearest airports (Tveter, 2017). Since the economic sustainability of small regional airports is recognised to be problematic, research has also focused on how regional growth can be facilitated even by a loss-making airport by increasing accessibility (Beifert, 2016). The connection between small regional airports and big international ones has also been studied, for example from the point of view of regional airports losing market share to bigger ones due to passengers being willing to travel further to fly from bigger ones for lower prices or other benefits (Lian & Rønnevik, 2011). The transition of municipalities from hierarchical to more network-based, as well as them becoming more business-like due to privatisation and increased deregulation (Hulst & Montfort, 2007; Rayle & Zegras, 2013) are examples of themes that highlight research on public actors, and especially municipalities. Being aware of the nature and issues of small regional airports in the bigger theme of aviation, and the reach of studies about municipal action, the lack of attention paid to how municipalities rationalise their involvement in small regional airports is surprising.

Networks, and the power structures taking place within them have also been researched from various angles. A recurring perspective in studies that combine the two is an attempt to measure their combined impact as some sort of output. An example of combining the two is to define the power structures that are in place in a network of actors, and measure the impact of the network in terms of innovation outcomes (Swan & Scarbrough, 2005). Innovation is an example of the kind of impact from networks that is often sought by studies combining power and networks, and other examples include merely defining power in a network and using it to investigate forms of governance (Kahler, 2017). Another type of approach to combining power and networks is to aim for more concrete ways of defining them and how to work with them, which has been done by defining the use of power within an organisation as organisational politics, and then conducting a guide on how to use those to gain benefits in decision-making situations (Buchanan & Badham, 2008). Considering strategic networks instead of other more unstructured types makes grasping them less problematic, as well as power structures easier to locate. As strategic networks are intentionally formed, often with a specific goal in mind, they make it possible for research to link managerial factors with network-level outcomes (Bayne et al., 2017). Linking what happens in a network to the outcomes is a strength of researching strategic networks, but as mentioned earlier it has been largely studied regarding various types of outcome. Results concerning the outcomes can be very positive or negative, but there is a lack of underlying reasons behind why and how extraordinary success is sometimes achieved and sometimes not. Additionally, placing the research in a municipal context can have added societal value as common people represent the residents of regions who pay for the collaborations with taxes.

1.2 Aim

Regional airports in Sweden are mainly owned by municipalities and they are generally unprofitable, hence there is an ongoing debate within municipalities whether to maintain these airports or to shut them down as they are economically unsustainable. Environmental issues of the aviation industry are hard to ignore, but in the context of small regional airports the economic side is often emphasised over the environmental side. The public continuously questions where municipalities put their resources. However, these debates include multiple actors such as local businesses and politicians, making the situation complex as different actors have different interests. The aim of the study is to better understand how power is distributed in these networks, and how power obtained by actors influences the decision-making and

rationalising of these decisions. Hence, we decided to approach the research through the following research questions:

1. *What are the power structures in the networks involved and how do they affect decision-making?*
2. *How do municipalities rationalise their decision regarding airport ownership against the economically unsustainable nature of regional airports?*

The first research question aims to add to the current knowledge about power structures in municipal networks, and how these structures affect decision-making in them. A special interest is in situations where networks have to quickly respond to changes in their environment, and how power structures appear there. The second question aims to contribute to the understanding of how municipalities rationalise debatable decisions, and what stakeholders are utilised in the narratives that are used for rationalising. By answering these research questions we aim to contribute to the identified research gap.

2 Literature review

In this section we provide an overview of the aviation industry, and the state of it. Following that, we narrow the literature down to regional airports, and introduce the Ängelholm-Helsingborg Airport, which provides the context for our study. Lastly, we take a look at how we currently understand municipal collaboration in academia.

2.1 Aviation

Looking at the aviation industry in a setting before the Covid-19 pandemic, statistics from 2019 show that 58% of all international tourists reached their destination through air travels and a total of 4,5 billion passengers were moved by the industry (ATAG, 2020). In terms of cargo, the aviation industry was responsible for less than 1% of the volume of world trade, but the value still amounted to 6,5 trillion USD which is up to 35% of the worldwide total in 2019 (ATAG, 2020). An aspect of the aviation industry that this study focuses on are the airports, and they are businesses that report very different results between them. In purely economic measurements it was reported that in 2013, 69% of all airports operated at a loss (CAPA, 2015). A clear majority of 81% of the loss-making airports were those considered small airports, as having less than one million passengers annually (CAPA, 2015). This was built on in a more recent report where it was told that 94% of loss-making airports in the world are those considered as small according to the qualifications mentioned previously (Airport World, 2020). The development from 81% to 94% in percentage of small airports within those that operate at a loss builds a two-dimensional picture of the industry. Firstly, the total share of airports in the world that continuously report losses is declining and it is rather the big international ones becoming profitable than the smaller regional ones (U.S. Global Investors, 2021). Secondly, the number of small airports as well as the amount of traffic through them are increasing while they still remain largely unprofitable, making the percentage of them larger within all airports in the world (Airport World, 2019). The statistics explained above describe the aviation industry generally in a time before the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 started to spread internationally during the first months of 2020, and its effect on the aviation industry has been huge. The total number of passengers declined by 60% in 2020 due to the pandemic, and a 40% to 48% decline compared to pre-pandemic numbers is still expected in 2021 (ICAO, 2021). For airports, this resulted in losses of over \$125 billion in 2020 compared to business as usual (ICAO, 2021).

A definition for economic sustainability of airports is provided in a report labelled “Airports in the EU; Challenges ahead” authored by Debyser (2016) and published by the European Union, where it is stated that the economic sustainability of an airport is dependent on its ability to cover the cost of operations and provide a reasonable return on investment. Additionally, this has to be achieved by each sector within the value chain including manufacturers, infrastructure, service providers, and the distribution of freight and passengers (Debyser, 2016). Looking behind the numbers of airports being either unprofitable or profitable, there are different sources for the revenues they make. From statistics about 2015, airports that year made 56% of their profit through aeronautical activity, including terminal, landing, and passenger fees, environmental charges, and other payments directly related to the operation of the airport (Simple Flying, 2018). Of the remaining revenue, 40% is made up of non-aeronautical, commercial activity as in shops, restaurants, and renting out space, while 4% belongs to non-operative revenue (Simple Flying, 2018). In a European context, around the same distribution between 40% of revenues being non-aeronautical and 60% being aeronautical was reported in 2013 (Debyser, 2016). It is also shown that European airports made a collective profit of €3.6 billion in 2013, but still 60% of those airports reported a negative result for the year (Debyser, 2016). The percentage of airports with less than 1 million annual passengers that reported a loss for 2014 in Europe was 77% (Debyser, 2016). All things considered, the industry of small and regional airports can be said to be economically unsustainable.

The importance of aviation in a general sense is derived from its ability to make the world smaller by keeping things in movement. More specifically, the importance comes from the capacity of aviation to move people and cargo, out of which the moving of people is considered more important (Florida, Mellander & Holgersson, 2015). A relationship between airport activity and economic growth was found by Green (2007), namely between passenger boardings and passenger originations per capita, which were deemed to be powerful predictors of population and employment growth. To connect it with Florida et al.’s (2015) findings, it was also found that where passenger activity is a predictor of growth, cargo on the other hand is not (Green, 2007). The connection between air traffic and economic growth is also acknowledged by Mikkala & Tervo (2013a), who then turn their focus onto the direction of causation between the two. A difference was found in how air traffic leads to regional growth in peripheral regions when compared to core regions, and subsidising was mentioned as a suggestion for the former types of regions (Mikkala & Tervo, 2013a). Causes that allow the economic potential of a region to be realised go beyond purely airports, in that a generally well-

developed transport infrastructure was found to be important (Mukkala & Tervo, 2013b). The difference in how an airport affects peripheral and core regions comes from a difference in cause-effect development of the region, in that peripheral regions see that effect go both ways between an airport and regional development, whereas in core regions airport activity does not cause growth, but regional growth causes airport activity (Mukkala & Tervo, 2013b). The question of subsidies and causes and effects related to them connected to airports and regional development is an especially tricky one within the general discussion about airports' effect on their regions. Mukkala & Tervo (2013b) found downsides, such as distorted competition and wasted money, but still concluded that there often might be a case for them possibly yielding increased regional growth and welfare.

When it comes to specific ways in which air transport can facilitate regional growth, Tveter (2017) identified various ones that helped make a case for improvements in the air transport network to be a strategy for local economic development. Those include population growth as a result of increased attractiveness of a region, improved market access, increased productivity through facilitating face-to-face contact between people, and lastly, reduced costs and added specialisation for firms due to increased air transport (Tveter, 2017). There are downsides to developing regions through airport activity as well, often connected to the interplay between public and private actors and distribution of authority between them. An example of such an aspect is reduced decision duration by local public authorities as a result of provision of independent development plans related solely to airports (Ralphs, Shahab & Ahmadpoor, 2020). Another takeaway from Ralphs et al.'s (2020) findings is connected to their claim that the size of an airport is not as significant as the stability of the airport's growth when evaluated through the eyes of regional economic growth. That can make a case for falsely subsidised airports if the aid is handed out according to wrong reasons or measurements, as Mukkala & Tervo (2013b) also claimed positive outcomes through subsidising to be case-specific as there is no guarantee of success.

2.2 Small regional airports

Moving on with purely small regional airports, their importance is highlighted in a few different ways. Using the general definition from Debyser's (2016) report where small regional airports are those operating less than one million annual flights, it can be said that their purely economic status is problematic and the importance needs to be found elsewhere. Considering that 71% of small regional airports are loss-making (Airport World, 2019), a considerable proportion of

them surely have had to rationalise their importance and existence at some point. Small regional airports operate under a different type of pressure about their economic performance when compared to larger, international airports that are seen more purely as businesses. 94% of all loss-making airports in the world are small regional ones (Airport World, 2020), which illustrates how divided the industry is in terms of economic performance and where value is found. How the industry has developed into such a situation is the result of different demands for different types of airports, and different perceptions of what is to be the mission of them. Examples of those aspects were presented in an article by Airport World (2019) where the societal value of air connectivity is an important topic. Social and regional cohesion are facilitated with a network of small regional airports as well as economic and social integration through air, all of which are currently developing with total air connectivity expanding by 42,1% since 2009, which helps in rationalising the existence of small regional airports (Airport World, 2019). The economic unsustainability of small regional airports is also rationalised with a lack of economies of scale, making it considerably harder for them to compete with bigger international ones in terms of economic performance, since it results in higher costs and lower aeronautical and commercial revenues per passenger (Airport World, 2019). Negative environmental effects by economically unsustainable small regional airports, on the other hand, are rationalised by the European Union by those airports only operating 3% of total air traffic in the EU area (Airport World, 2019).

Moving on to findings from academic articles, in a general sense it is said that regional airports significantly add to the economic development of their region, varying largely on the size and scale of the airport (Florida et al., 2015). Regional economic growth can be facilitated even by a loss-making airport when it makes the region more accessible to tourists and businesses, something that is touched upon by Beifert (2016) who claims that “the aviation industry in general and airports’ activities in particular contribute to the improvement of regional accessibility”. The role of small regional airports on the economic growth in their regions is urgent for actors such as airports themselves, regional policy makers, and other relevant stakeholders to recognise (Beifert, 2016). The urgent nature of such realisations comes from a generally increasing competitive situation in the aviation industry that is causing structural and operational problems especially for small regional airports (Beifert, 2016).

A scale of the economic impact of small regional airports on their region was provided by Blonigen and Cristea (2015) where it was said that according to the most conservative estimates a 50% increase in air traffic growth generates a 7,4% increase in GDP over a period of 20 years

in an average city. Thus, the economic effect does not happen instantly when an airport increases its activity, but the long-term effects are clear. The economic growth is explained by evidence that suggests air transport supports businesses by providing quick access to input supplies, stimulating innovation by facilitating face-to-face meetings, and by presenting an overall essential input to the activity of many industries (Blonigen & Cristea, 2015). Significant growth rates are enjoyed especially by service and retail industries, and additionally the overall population rate of regions can likely be increased in the process (Blonigen & Cristea, 2015). The extent to which regions get to enjoy the benefits of an airport, as well as all other airport related issues, are influenced by who owns and operates the airport. Whether an airport is under public or private ownership directly influences the planning, policy, and management activities of the region and the extent to which the state can control them (Budd & Ison, 2020). Operating an airport under regional, public ownership has been known to ensure the implementation of long-term development plans and made sure the airport meets the needs of the communities they serve (Budd & Ison, 2020).

The ownership of small regional airports varies, but generally a change from public to private ownership has been a theme for some decades now. Contradicting that, local authorities have started to re-invest in the ownerships of local airports, either on their own or often in collaboration with private actors, since early 2010's (Budd & Ison, 2020). Further illustration of the general theme of regional airport ownership was provided by Freestone, Williams & Bowden (2006) when they found that airports have been impacted by a theme of privatisation, deregulation, and marketisation of public services for several decades, as written in 2006. Still, possible development plans have had to be approved by state authorities whereas regional planning authorities have been excluded under private ownership (Freestone et al., 2006). The form of collaborative ownership between private and public actors, also existing in purely public ownership that joins forces with operative actors, requires more collaborative skills from the network behind a small regional airport. de Jong & Boelens (2013) found a need to clear the network from complexity and move towards concrete associative opportunities by steering away from complex self-organising collaborative bodies. Policy makers need to cross the boundaries of political agendas and focus on more targeted policies that are open and dynamic without predefined values, instead of collaborative arrangements with ready-made politics in them (de Jong & Boelens, 2013). Decision-making can be improved in complex situations by focusing on uncertainties shared by the network (de Jong & Boelens, 2013).

2.3 Ängelholm-Helsingborg Airport

Ängelholm-Helsingborg airport is a regional airport located in the municipality of Ängelholm, in northwestern Skåne. In 2019, out of the 387,000 total passengers at AGH 97% travelled exclusively on the route between Ängelholm and Stockholm (Ängelholms Flygplats AB, 2020). AGH was owned by a Swedish, government owned aviation company Swedavia until 2011, when PEAB bought it. AGH underwent an ownership change again in September 2020, moving it from the private ownership under PEAB to public ownership organised between seven municipalities in the north-western Skåne area. Currently, the biggest owner is the municipality of Helsingborg followed by Ängelholm where the airport is located, though ownership is run through a company (named Ängelholm Helsingborgs Flygplats Holding AB) where all seven municipalities have authority. Even though both the number of passengers to and from the airport and its economic performance had been declining since 2017, it was only the Covid-19 pandemic that placed it under a risk of going out of business (Ängelholms Flygplats AB, 2020). The risk was realised when PEAB announced they were going to shut down the airport on the 28th of May 2020 (SVT, 2020), roughly three months after the pandemic had put most of the operations at the airport on hold. Thus, it became clear that action was needed to save AGH and the following September the change of ownership from private to public actors became a reality.

As mentioned earlier in a general aviation context, Covid-19 has had a huge impact on the industry and AGH has not been immune to that either. Total number of annual passengers at AGH went from 387,000 in 2019 to less than one third of it, 110,000 in 2020 (Transportstyrelsen, 2021). Statistics from the first three months of 2021 do not indicate a positive change from 2020, as 8000 passengers have been reported during January, February, and March (Transportstyrelsen, 2021). Vaccinations against Covid-19 are increasing internationally and in Sweden, and the aviation industry can potentially begin to recover towards the end of 2021, but it is merely speculation at this point.

Public actors being involved in the ownership has been to a large extent explained by how much AGH means to the region, something that was illustrated in a report by a consulting agency WSP in 2015. Main aspects which the report used to build the importance of AGH were accessibility and growing business opportunities in the region. Growing local businesses was emphasised to happen through the service branch, where benefits additionally spread to the development of tourism in the region. Main figures of the report presented that losing AGH

would mean a loss of 6200 job opportunities in northwestern Skåne, whereas increasing flights daily by two would create 960 new opportunities, both measured in a 38-year scenario and being based on losing the accessibility of AGH without a substitute emerging. Recommendations in the report included a tighter collaboration between the then private owners of AGH and public actors who have an interest in the airport to plan co-operative strategies that can potentially benefit all parties. Other networking activities were also proposed, such as planning future strategies together with local businesses, and collaborative planning with other regional actors who represent infrastructural aspects, for example railways. Also, a platform that different actors can use for marketing themselves and the region was recommended, especially for joint use between tourism and general business industries. (WSP, 2015)

The report (WSP, 2015) was involved in conversations concerning the change of ownership in 2020, where it has been used to illustrate the meaning of AGH to northwestern Skåne. The use of such reports is not completely unproblematic, as in some instances their reliability has been questioned, and they have been used to support arguments both for and against the airport. The conversation around AGH's change of ownership exceeds the boundaries of the airport itself and is concerned with whether municipalities as public actors should be involved in the ownership of small regional airports at all. The debate about AGH is represented by arguments from both sides, those who claim having an airport is a necessity for the region and those who think the municipalities made the wrong choice to purchase it. Main points from the side that wanted to keep the airport follow along the same lines as in the report (WSP, 2015), and add to it by explaining that there are over 10 000 people who work in Stockholm region and pay taxes in northwestern Skåne (Expressen, 2020a). Additionally, survey results from local businesses show that 48% of respondents see flying as their first choice for business travels after the pandemic, and 98% of those see AGH as an attractive possibility for flying (Expressen, 2020a). The other side of the argument acknowledges the importance of having an airport in the region for businesses to some extent but makes it clear that municipalities are the wrong actors to be owners. Risks tied to the financials of small regional airports are brought up, and even though AGH has had a better than average economic performance before the pandemic, it has still experienced a declining trend since 2017 (Expressen, 2020b). Examples are also brought up from other publicly owned regional projects that have proved to be significantly more costly than what was initially planned for (Expressen, 2020b). Another large argument against the public ownership of small regional airports are the negative environmental effects

of flying and buying AGH seems to go against the trend of the city of Helsingborg that has been nominated as Sweden's most environmentally friendly municipality for four years in a row (Expressen, 2020b).

AGH can also be seen as building the environmentally friendly reputation of Helsingborg, even against the widely known negative effects that aviation generally has. That case is made in another debate article published by Expressen (2020c), where the possibility of operating an environmentally friendlier airport, when compared to the rest of the branch, is mentioned as building to the image of an environmentally sustainable Helsingborg. AGH is taking action towards that direction, for example by receiving its first delivery of renewable jet fuel in December 2020 (Ängelholm-Helsingborg Airport, 2020). The first delivery of renewable fuel is a significant step towards AGH's goal of being climate neutral in 2022 by offering all passengers the possibility to fly using renewable fuel (Ängelholm-Helsingborg Airport, 2020). That future is worked towards together with other Swedish small regional airports that, like AGH, are involved in a project called "Grön Flygplats" (Ängelholm-Helsingborg Airport, 2021). Airports that join the project have access to more resources helping with environmental sustainability goals, such as renewable jet fuel (Ängelholm-Helsingborg Airport, 2021). But purely joining such a project and taking action does not take off all pressure from AGH and rationalising its significance. The third debate article by Expressen (2020c) uses the geographical location of northwestern Skåne as an additional rationalising measure, basing the argument on the region lacking a central position on the railway network of Sweden.

2.4 Municipal cooperation

Inter-municipal cooperation, where municipalities cooperate to achieve common goals, including for example service delivery, is common in Europe (Airaksinen & Haveri, 2003; Casula, 2020). Inter-municipal cooperation has multiple forms, differing in size, involvement of the private sector, and legal obligations. Nonetheless, they all exist to more efficiently run municipalities locally (Hulst & van Montfort, 2007). During the last couple of decades the municipal operations have become more network-based and dynamic, compared to them traditionally having been more hierarchical and rigid (Rayle & Zegras, 2013). The new network-based cooperation is a response to trying to satisfy the more and more complex society with higher demands, with limited resources (Hulst & van Montfort, 2007). Markets put more pressure on local governments, as privatisation and deregulation increase, creating a business-

like environment for governmental bodies, forcing them to compete for resources (Hulst & van Montfort, 2007).

For the above mentioned reasons, municipalities are often interdependent on each other. An individual municipality can lack resources or knowledge on solving an issue, but when combining several municipalities' resources together, an issue can be solved much easier. Municipalities' interdependence often applies to for example service delivery or fight against common threats (Airaksinen & Haveri, 2003).

While having mutual goals, municipalities are still independent actors. A municipality's decisions have an impact on its neighbouring municipalities, thus municipalities need to recognise that their decision-making has larger consequences than just their territory. Moreover, the surrounding environment, institutions and norms shape how and what kind of decisions municipalities make. A concern in inter-municipal cooperation is that decision-making would be slower and more expensive than when it comes to individual municipalities making decisions, since inter-municipal decision-making includes more decision-makers and is more non-hierarchical, which could bring them into a dead end. A dead end can lead to a compromise where the ones with ascendancy, due to for example more resources, get their way even though it would not be the most valuable outcome for the cooperation. (Hulst & van Montfort, 2007)

Hulst and van Montfort (2007) differentiate the tasks that inter-municipal cooperation deals with into operational tasks and coordination tasks. Municipalities producing public services together are called operational tasks. The motive behind it is to put limited resources together for everyone's benefit. Examples are for example the public transport or rescue department. Coordination tasks include allocation of resources within municipalities in order to avoid competition, and instead trying to make the whole region competitive in a national or international context, or attempts to try to influence other governments. This can be for example spatial planning or planning of infrastructure.

Inter-municipal cooperation can also appear as loose policy networks (Hulst & van Montfort, 2007). These networks practice joint coordination and decision-making, but local governments are still responsible for the management of tasks in question. The municipalities are still the ones with power, since they are the ones that make decisions, and loose policy networks only coordinate and consult the members of the network. A loose policy network can initially be seen as inefficient because it does not have centralised decision-making power or authority

over the municipalities. However, municipalities being interdependent on each other, and decision-making based on majority voting can enhance the cooperation. Moreover, municipalities may not have any other choice but to cooperate due to lack of resources. (Hulst & van Montfort, 2007)

There are several studies of inter-municipal cooperation and its forms, such as a multinational study on inter-municipal cooperation's present state (Hulst & van Montfort, 2007), cost savings in an inter-municipal cooperation context (Bel & Warner, 2014), and the blurring of the line between private and public sector in municipal cooperation (Citroni, Lippi & Profeti, 2013). Many studies examine joint service delivery, like waste management (e.g. Bel & Mur, 2009; Blaeschke & Haug, 2018), but there is a lack of studies of inter-municipal cooperation in a regional airport context. Running a regional airport, we argue, is above all a coordination task, where a municipality or municipalities own an airport in order to maintain their position as an attractive region. However, it can also be seen as an operational task in the sense that the municipalities jointly provide the airport services to their inhabitants, businesses and tourists.

3 Theoretical framework

In the following section we present the theoretical framework used in this research. We aim to better understand the networks we are researching using strategic network theory and stakeholder theory. To answer our research questions, we approach the study using Purdy's (2012) sources and arenas of power, and Max Weber's four types of rationality.

3.1 Strategic networks

For a long time it has been known that organisations' relationships with other actors are valuable for them (Bayne et al., 2017). An organisation is not in a vacuum competing against other organisations in their own vacuums, but embedded in multiple networks, deriving value from relationships in these networks (Gulati, Nohria & Zaheer, 2000; Möller & Rajala, 2007). Traditionally, the most important relationship has been the buyer-supplier relationship, but now the importance of other relationships and networks have been recognised as well. These are among other things innovation networks, brand networks and networks with competitors (Möller & Rajala, 2007).

According to Zakrzewska-Bielawska (2018), interorganisational relations, or networks, have two main approaches: IMP (industrial marketing and purchasing) approach and strategic approach. The IMP approach recognises that organisations are embedded in their environments and other actors within it, and their interdependence (Zakrzewska-Bielawska, 2018). Strategic approach acknowledges this as well, and in addition emphasises the strategic approach to these networks and how the relationships with different actors in one's environment can be used as a competitive advantage (Gulati et al., 2000; Zakrzewska-Bielawska, 2018). Strategic networks are intentionally built rather than just naturally occurring. They are formed by actors that share similar goals, that agree to be in a strategic network and that sometimes even give up a part of their independence in order to reach their goals in the strategic network that they would not be able to reach alone (Möller & Halinen, 2017). The act of networking itself is an activity to get value and is therefore strategic action, and a tool for resources to flow within the network (Aaboen, Dubois & Lind, 2013; Dagnino et al., 2016).

Networks have a lot to contribute to organisations' performance. Networks give access to resources that an organisation otherwise does not have and gives them competitive advantage (Gulati et al., 2000; Zakrzewska-Bielawska, 2018). An advantageous characteristic of networks

is that what one gets from a network can be hard to copy or get elsewhere. The structure of the network can be copied but the relationships within it are unique (Gulati et al., 2000). Organisations' competitiveness increases with networking rather than competing in today's complex societies (Zakrzewska-Bielawska, 2018). On the other hand, organisations may be stuck in networks that create no value or networks that prevent them from collaborating with other organisations of their interest (Gulati et al., 2000).

An organisation's relationships in a network have an impact on how an organisation sees itself and its power (Aaboen et al., 2013). Gulati et al. (2000) present three types of characteristics of a network to understand them: Network structure, addressing to the "pattern of relationships within which the industry is embedded" (p. 205); network membership, referring to for example the resources and status what the network offers; and tie modality, referring to institutionalised norms guiding how network members act. According to Furlan and Huemer (2008, as cited in Aaboen et al., 2013, p. 1039) "business interaction at any point in time can only be understood as influenced by previous interactions and by actors' interpretations of these together with their intentions and expectations of future interactions."

Sometimes a change in the environment is the inducement that pushes actors to form a network quite spontaneously. These networks are called emergent interorganisational networks. Factors that encourage these networks to emerge are high local clustering and high global reachability. Dagnino et al. (2016) suggest that factors contributing to the building of emergent interorganisational networks are: pre-existing ties between the actors, which positively impacts the likelihood of them building a new network; actors preferring to connect with other actors that are already highly connected; and actors preferring to connect with both structurally and cognitively similar actors. (Dagnino et al., 2016)

We use strategic network theory and emergent interorganisational networks as our framework in studying the power structures behind AGH, as the airport and its owners have built a network, quite spontaneously, to manage the airport and to get the best competitive advantage out of it. This framework best supports us examining how the airport-municipality network functions.

3.2 Stakeholders

The world is more and more connected, and everything somehow affects everything. For this reason organisations are now encountering problems that used to feel distant and irrelevant

before (Freeman, 2010). Organisations have multiple stakeholders to take into account when making any kind of decisions. Not only are stockholders - that have traditionally been seen as the main stakeholder of an organisation - but also customers, suppliers and unions seen as noteworthy for a company, as well as the increasing importance of government in the business world (Freeman, 2010).

A stakeholder is defined by Freeman (2010, p. 25) as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives.” This is a broad definition as according to it almost anyone could be a stakeholder, as no two-way relationship is required (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). This also suggests that there are two ways to see stakeholders: strategically and morally (Frooman, 1999; Goodpaster, 1991). Stakeholders are viewed strategically when they are seen as instruments to achieve stockholders’ interests, and when they might affect the decision-making but only as external factors (Goodpaster, 1991). Moral stakeholders, on the other hand, are those who are affected by the organisation (Frooman, 1999). It is closely related to ethics, and stakeholder theorists aim to find balance between the interests of the organisation and other stakeholders (Frooman, 1999). Goodpaster (1991) calls it responsible management, where both stockholders and stakeholders are included in decision-making, and that this brings ethicality in business. It is even argued that stakeholder management should mainly be about morality and ensuring “fairly distributing the harms and benefits of the organisation’s actions” (Mitchell et al., 1997, p. 857).

The more narrow definition of stakeholders describes them as those that an organisation is dependent on for its existence (Mitchell et al., 1997). Another more narrow way that stakeholders are described as is them being risk-bearers. Despite the risk-bearing being voluntary, or involuntary and caused by an organisation’s activities, the risk determines whether someone or something is a stakeholder (Mitchell et al., 1997). Mitchell et al.’s (1997) conclusion of a narrower view is that only groups with direct impact on an organisation's economic interests are relevant for an organisation.

Jones and Wicks (1999) summarise stakeholder theory as follows: an organisation has relationships with different groups called stakeholders; stakeholder theory is interested in the relationships of organisations and their stakeholders; all stakeholders’ interests are valuable; and the theory has its focus on managerial issues. Stakeholder theory can be divided into two groups: social science-based theory, including instrumental and descriptive approaches; and ethics-based theory including a normative approach (Jones & Wicks, 1999). Normative

approach claims that organisations ought to behave in a particular way, while the instrumental approach claims that specific behaviour by organisations leads to specific outcomes. The descriptive approach tells how organisations actually behave (Jones & Wicks, 1999).

In this research we focus on one angle of normative stakeholder theory called the narrative interpretation. Narrative interpretation focuses on “narrative accounts of moral behavior in a stakeholder context” (Jones & Wicks, 1999, p. 209). This interpretation of the stakeholder theory aims to create accounts of organisations so that they are seen as moral among stakeholders, and that their decisions and behaviour are acceptable. Language, metaphors and images of an organisation affect how people view an organisation and what they think is appropriate behaviour of an organisation. Narrative interpreters try to catch a multitude of narrative accounts about an organisation, using both ethics and business simultaneously for the interpretation. (Jones & Wicks, 1999)

Shifting focus to the power of organisations, the amount of resources they should use on stakeholders has raised debate (Harrison, Bosse & Phillips, 2010). Should they use just enough for the stakeholders to find it satisfactory or should they allocate more resources? According to Jones, Felps and Bigley (2007) organisations can be differentiated by how they value stakeholders: those who consider different stakeholders’ interests at least somewhat relevant; and those who are ready to mistreat stakeholders for the sake of economic profitability. Harrison et al. (2010) point out that for organisations to make the best out of their stakeholders and create value from or with them, they need to understand their stakeholders. It helps organisations to adapt in changing environments, be it change in customer demand, regulations or prices.

Frooman (1999) criticises how organisations’ relationships with stakeholders have been presented as a hub-and-spoke model, suggesting that stakeholders’ and organisation’s relationships are dyadic, while in reality one stakeholder’s relationship with an organisation most likely affects other stakeholder’s relationship with the organisation and stakeholders’ relationships with each other. Also, relationships are determined based on each side’s attributes, instead of the actual relationship, which after all would describe their interactions better than the individual attributes. (Frooman, 1999)

Each relationship with a stakeholder is different from each other and must be managed in their own way (Freeman, 2010). Often organisations’ transactions are seen from an economic perspective where goods or services are exchanged, but there are other types of transactions

too with different stakeholders, as Freeman (2010, p. 71) lists: “relationships with the media, shareholder meetings, meetings with financial analysts, encounters with government officials and day to day interactions with employees and unions.” For example, the media and the technologies involved have forced organisations to reconsider their relationship with the media, as organisations’, especially big ones’, every move is under a lens and the media’s and thus public’s eyes (Freeman, 2010).

As organisations have relationships with stakeholders, stakeholders have relationships with organisations. Reasons for a stakeholder to value its relationship with an organisation are, among other things: ownership, if a stakeholder has its resources tied up in an organisation; sentiment, if there are feelings or traditions involved and the relationship is valued because of that; expectation, if a stakeholder expects the relationship to have some beneficial outcomes; or exposure, indicating that a stakeholder is ready to expose itself to a risk because it values the object in risk so much (Mitchell et al., 1997). However, not all stakeholders have a direct relationship with an organisation. Those stakeholders are called indirect stakeholders, and they are nonetheless meaningful for an organisation and its interests (Rowley, 1997).

How much value an organisation devotes to its stakeholders is affected by the power that stakeholders possess and how much an organisation is dependent on these stakeholders’ resources (Harrison et al., 2010). What kind of strategies an organisation has for its stakeholders depends on the resources a stakeholder has and the power structures in the relationship (Frooman, 1999). Where the power then lies and who has it is based on who is dependent on whom (Frooman, 1999). Etzioni (1964, as cited in Mitchell et al., 1997) categorises power in coercive, utilitarian and normative power. Coercive power is based on force or violence, utilitarian power is about material or financial resources, and normative power is about symbolic resources (Mitchell et al., 1997). It is important for an organisation to recognise why someone has power in order to manage its stakeholders in the best possible way.

3.3 Power structures

Power is an aspect that can be considered in the context of most relationships and collaborative activities across any number of professional and unofficial settings, and as Purdy (2012) explains there are a number of threats and opportunities related to it. For example, power can become a way of advancing self-interested goals of certain actors, and also it might bias decisions towards parties with greater resources compared to others (Purdy, 2012). But all

participants sharing the goal of balanced power in relationships creates a base for successful collaboration as well as promotes equality since behaviour is influenced by the attributions of power people make about themselves and others (Purdy, 2012). A view on how the goal of balancing power could be achieved in collaborative action is provided by Swan and Scarbrough (2005) in what they describe as politics of power. Power is viewed as based on resources, processes, and meaning that actors hold that affect the outcomes of collaboration, and politics is power in action (Swan & Scarbrough, 2005). When organisations want to achieve change in their processes or outcomes, they need to reconfigure the power embedded in their organisational system through the use of politics (Swan & Scarbrough, 2005).

Moving on to more concrete definitions of power, it is beneficial to start from viewing it as an individual trait that affects people differently. Such a beneficial view was provided by van Dijk & Poppe (2006) when they explain power as a will to increase personal agency and decrease the dependence on others. Additionally, social power is defined as the ability to affect others even when they resist such influence attempts, while being subject to social power restricts peoples' personal power (van Dijk & Poppe, 2006). When it comes to achieving personal power without formal authority, the most effective way is to make others involved in collaboration dependent on you through for example expertise or information inhabited (Magnussen, 2016). The available resources that an individual possesses tied to power are referred to as a power base, which is something that individuals can use to steer the direction and outcomes of collaborative processes if they are able to obtain a strong enough power base (Magnussen, 2016). Some people are able to individually build a larger power base than others and use it to empower actors to participate more actively in collaboration, but in most cases meaningful connections with others are needed prior to obtaining individual power and using it to facilitate collaboration (Magnussen, 2016). Thus, there is strong interconnectedness between collaboration, networks, and power.

A claim is often made that power does not listen to truth, but it is rather used to provide justification for existing schemes and opinions of those individuals that exhibit large amounts of power (Haas, 2004). The kind of power that doesn't listen to truth objectively is held by particularly powerful individuals and surfaces in collaboration where knowledge needs to be transferred from experts to decision-makers. According to Haas (2004) the knowledge in this case has to be presented in a way that makes it impossible for decision-makers to ignore the truth. In such a case knowledge is able to surpass individual perceptions of power in a collaboration or a network, thus highlighting the connection between power and networks. For

knowledge to be able to overcome the reluctance to truth from individuals with power, it has to pass as usable knowledge; that is to have a solid core that can be utilised and a mechanism for transmitting it from experts to decision-makers (Haas, 2004). Power is embedded in socially constructed structures and has to be seen as multi-layered (van Dijke & Poppe, 2006), making the role that knowledge plays in the scenarios mentioned by Haas (2004) an especially important one as it aims power towards the achievement of collective goals. Power viewed as embedded in the social structures of networks brings focus back around to the political process behind power distribution in networks. As Swan and Scarbrough (2005) describe it, positive outcomes from political action in networks depend on a generative relationship between power, knowledge integration, and network formation.

As it has been described above, power is something that comes to action in collaborative settings and gains its influence through relationships and networks, but it is still an individual trait that humans possess to different degrees. Power from the point of view of humans is described by Hagberg (2002) through the concepts of internal and external power which when combined create personal power. Personal power is individual power that people possess internally, and through external power they can make others perceive the power they possess by getting themselves in a position of power in an organisation. Just focusing on gaining external power can still get an individual to a position of power, but that makes them lack real power, which means becoming personally powerful human beings as well as externally powerful ones. Additionally, people respond differently to different kinds of power and are motivated by different perceptions of it, not all value a traditional power where ends justify the needs. Further strengthening and clarifying the bond between power, collaboration, and networks, it is claimed that power does not exist without interpersonal relationships. Power is thus absent if there are no relationships in which it can exist since it cannot exist in a vacuum. (Hagberg, 2002)

3.3.1 Power in politics

The theme of interconnectedness between power dynamics and networks continues even when placing power in concrete political processes. Collaboration helps solve intractable problems and thus in a political context is seen as increasing public value, which is the key driver in the public sector (Sønderskov, 2019). Collaboration and public value are complex notions for politicians in terms of power, because involving citizens in problem solving increases the overall public value but can threaten the power obtained by politicians (Sønderskov, 2019).

Collaborative processes in political contexts are tricky, and the reasons behind why that is were discussed by Wolf, Nogueira and Borges (2021) from the point of view of strategic planning for the goals and possibilities of collaboration. Strategic planning of collaboration is unstructured and increasingly concerned with coordination of loose networks (Wolf et al., 2021), making it problematic in terms of power dynamics among a variety of different actors involved. One example of a reason why power asymmetries surface in the collaboration networks is a trade-off between the level of participation and conditions for collaboration, as the conditions created are dependent on active and equal participation of actors (Wolf et al., 2021). When actors put different amounts of effort into the process, power asymmetries arise and conditions for effective collaboration are not fulfilled. Unequally distributed power in political collaborative processes is one of the reasons behind a known problem of planning initiatives getting stuck in viewing facilitation of processes and collaboration as ends themselves instead of actual output that should be expected from the process (Wolf et al., 2021).

Going back to how Swan and Scarbrough (2005) described politics of networking as power in action between the actors and connecting that to how power was explained in overall political contexts by Sønderskov (2019) and Wolf et al. (2021) creates a somewhat confusing cluster of different uses for similar terms. Swan and Scarbrough's (2005) use of the term politics refers to a way of using power to create outcomes at a network level by paying attention to power asymmetries within organisations and between organisations. While that is a relevant way of viewing power and the possibilities it brings, the approaches by Sønderskov (2019) and Wolf et al. (2021) look into power in the context of actual politics and in terms of how politicians view power. For example, when Sønderskov (2019) claims that politicians do not actively support interactive processes because they fear it might threaten their political primacy, it is done in terms of political action either regionally, nationally, or internationally. Terminology by Swan and Scarbrough (2005) concerning politics is more metaphorical, and it is important to acknowledge the difference between the two types later on when this study is concerned with the actions of local politicians.

3.3.2 Power in organisations

The way power is described takes a certain turn when it is shifted to the context of organisations, and how it surfaces within them. As Li, Matouschek and Powell (2017) talk about it, power is informal authority that is fluid and the allocation of it changes over time within an organisation. The allocation changes between divisions according to which ones have

the most relevant and effective output for the organisation at a certain time, and that allocation can remain the same for some time after the output loses its relevance or swiftly move on to the next division (Li et al., 2017). The allocation shifts in ways that are to some extent unpredictable, thus adding to the concept of power in organisations presenting itself as a complex one. The complexity is explained by Hagberg (2002) with her different stages of power that individuals possess, beginning with powerlessness and building all the way up to power by wisdom. The power of individuals becomes more complex as they move through the stages towards power by wisdom and the latter stages present more ways of utilising the power, but power obtained and used within organisations seems to be mostly stuck on the third stage out of six; power by achievement (Hagberg, 2002). Power by achievement is still largely external, meaning that individuals possessing it are concerned with external recognition of their power to advance to a certain role in an organisation rather than becoming powerful individuals themselves (Hagberg, 2002). It is the most common type of power in organisations because it is still also the most rewarded stage in today's culture that requires hard work, competence, a mature ego, and political awareness for it to be achieved (Hagberg, 2002).

The fluid nature of power that Li et al. (2017) talk about is how it is usually presented in organisations, but that nature still leaves room for different types of power to exist and the fact that most organisations are stuck with power by achievement (Hagberg, 2002) leaves room for organisations to create competitive advantage by advancing to the latter stages. Power in organisations is often perceived as being distributed from top to down in a hierarchical structure, and in that case, it becomes visible in informal promises that make the whole concept largely relational (Li et al., 2017). A clear definition of that is provided by Li et al. (2017) as they claim that the central role of power is to serve as a reward mechanism that those at the top can use to influence the decision-making of their subordinates. That can be traced back to a very basic definition of power by Magnussen (2016) where power is used by an actor to make another actor do something they would not otherwise choose to do. Power in an organisational setting as it has been described above presents itself as perhaps a simpler and more one-dimensional phenomenon compared to the overall view of it by researchers. Next, focus will be shifted from power in an organisational setting to how it surfaces when organisations and other actors interact in the context of networks.

3.3.3 Power in networks

The political aspects of processes come into play in an increased amount when moving from organisational settings to networks. Power is distributed within a larger number of actors who are a more diverse group with different characteristics than within a single organisation, making the political actions in networks that Swan and Scarbrough (2005) talk about necessary. Outcomes from networks are the result of politics in them that include a generative relationship between power and knowledge that is to some extent regulated by actors in a position of power (Swan & Scarbrough, 2005). Networks also bring the possibility of regenerating power within them by being able to create new sources of power through effective network coordination and successful innovation outcomes (Swan & Scarbrough, 2005). Specific problems that surface in networks can often be found to be connected to trust and deployment of power, specifically when building and maintaining the networks (Newell & Swan, 2000). The creation and maintaining of relationships are central parts of networking as the sustaining of personal relationships between the parties, where trust is a vital factor, is mentioned as one of the most important aspects of inter-organisational collaboration (Newell & Swan, 2000). Power and trust go hand-in-hand, and the importance of trust increases when moving from power in simpler organisational contexts (Li et al., 2017) to power in the more complex contexts of networks (Swan & Scarbrough, 2005).

In a more general context, the deliberate formation of networks can facilitate an efficient and productive environment for the actors, and they are described as more than just an alternative way of organising business activity due to their superior effectiveness (Grimshaw et al., 2005). It is not that straightforward, of course, and the description above is related to a network that is orchestrated well and is made successful by the participants. Some of the risks of networking are brought up by Newell and Swan (2000) when they say that it is possible for collaboration to result in output that is worse than what could have been produced by the most competent actors alone. That problem is related to power in a fundamental way, and the problems in networks relating to power are touched upon by Grimshaw et al. (2005) as a concept they call segmentation of organisations. Segmentation of organisations within networks means that powerful organisations exploit differences between dependent network members by playing one off against the other (Grimshaw et al., 2005). The joint benefits from networks not exceeding those achievable by an organisation on its own as mentioned before by Newell and Swan (2000) is a theme also agreed by Grimshaw et al. (2005) when they claim that unequal power distribution, or power asymmetries, means that performance improvements enjoyed by

the lead firms may not correlate with reduced costs across the board in the network. To overcome problems arising in networks, an appreciation has to be developed towards the complex dynamics of inter-organisational relationships in the aspects of trust, power, and risk (Grimshaw et al., 2005). Appreciation and awareness are keys when overcoming problems related to power distribution, and they are important when designing networks.

3.3.4 Arenas and sources of power

A framework that can be used to locate power in collaborative processes was developed by Purdy (2012). The framework allows for assessment of power sources of actors in a collaborative process, how power can be used by parties during that process, and how the design of the process shapes the exercise of power. In the framework, power is looked for in two separate entities: the sources and arenas of power. Sources of power identified are authority, resources, and discursive legitimacy, all of which represent the bases where power is drawn from in collaboration and networks. The identified arenas of power are participants, process design, and content, which represent the parts of collaborative processes that are subject to the sources of power and where the effects of use of power can be seen. (Purdy, 2012)

To allow for further use of Purdy's (2012) framework, a brief overview of the six sources and arenas of power is beneficial to be provided here. First source of power is the authority that actors hold in networks which affects relationships and outcomes. It is the socially acknowledged right to exercise judgment, make a decision, or take action (Greenwald, 2008 as cited in Purdy, 2012). Authority, much like other aspects of power, can shift between actors over time as social order is renegotiated. That said, authority is tied closely to the social order of individuals and groups, and it is a source of power that exists in both, reality and perceptions of others, and it also needs both to gain its significance. The second source of power are the resources available to the network. Resource-based power depends on the available resources as well as the ability of actors to deploy those resources to their use. Resources can be used by actors to reward and punish other network actors for compliance or non-compliance. Resources also hold significance in the perceptions of others as actors who are thought to have resource-based power are viewed as powerful, while others might feel disempowered even if they in reality possess alternative sources of power that are not viewed according to their real value. Finally, the third source of power is discursive legitimacy. It refers to the ability of an organisation to speak on behalf of an issue or to represent a certain discourse (Hardy & Phillips,

1998 as cited in Purdy, 2012). Discursive legitimacy is converted into power when an actor uses it to draw power from the status of the values it represents. Actors who are not very powerful can exert power if they are perceived to speak on behalf of a societally important ideal, especially if the values of it are widely shared and the organisation's claim of representation for it is relatively uncontested. (Purdy, 2012)

First arena of power are the participants involved in networks, meaning the individuals involved in the processes, as well as the ones leading them described as the participants. Power presented by participants as an arena includes it being found in those with formal power to make a decision, those able to block a decision, those affected by a decision, and those with otherwise relevant information or expertise (Straus, 2002 as cited in Purdy, 2012). The second arena of power is process design. It describes the where, when, and how of collaborative processes, influencing especially the nature of interaction. Process design helps convey status within a group, signalling who holds a leadership role and whether participants are equal. An aspect that needs to be kept in mind when considering power in process design is that the decision-making of process design occurs before the actual content of the collaboration. The third and final arena of power is content, representing the issues that are addressed and the outcomes that are pursued through the collaboration. An important opportunity to use power related to content is presented when deciding the scope of issues that are to be tackled by the network. Decisions about the content of collaborative processes determine who has a legitimate will to participate in them and about how the processes will unfold, linking power related to content to the participants and process design as well. (Purdy, 2012)

3.4 Rationalising

People have a built-in tendency to defend their self-worth and maintain what they see as their integrity, ignoring facts that could actually improve their decision-making, in order to keep their social or political positions (Hertin, Turnpenny, Jordan, Nilsson, Russel & Nykvist, 2009; Sherman & Cohen, 2002). In politics, like in any other decision-making, discourse and ideas have a crucial role in decision-making, and knowledge can be used in a way that it favours the decision-makers (Hertin et al., 2009). Moreover, decisions follow path dependencies, and decision-making is usually affected by multiple actors' interests (Hertin et al., 2009). Same phenomenon can be explained in various ways by different people, thus leading to different rationalising of decisions (Sherman & Cohen, 2002). A need to rationalise one's decisions is

natural, as people want to explain why they made a decision they did, and why it is right (Cherepanov, Feddersen & Sandroni, 2013). Not being able to rationalise a choice can make the decision-making more difficult (Cherepanov et al., 2013).

Max Weber's interpretation of rationalisation states that both external factors of life, such as laws and economics, and internal factors, like ethics, affect rationalisation of people's decisions (Kalberg, 1980). Rationalisation aims to justify actions and to make them not irrational. What is irrational for some, however, could be rational for someone else (Kalberg, 1980). For example municipal actions can be seen as completely rational by some, and irrational by others, depending on their interpretation of the world. We use Weber's four types of rationality - practical, theoretical, substantive, and formal (Kalberg, 1980) - to examine how municipalities, and the decision-makers in them, rationalise their decision of buying a regional airport. These four types help to understand the ways things can be rationalised and what affects these rationalisations.

The first rationality is called practical rationality. Practical rationality is characterised by a person's actions done based solely on their own interests. Practical rationalists acknowledge the reality they live in and try to make the best out of it. The second type is called theoretical rationality, where people try to give meaning to life and its events. It is done by creating concepts and symbolic meanings to these life events, rather than just adapting to them, like people of practical rationality. Theoretical rationality ultimately seeks to find meaning for life and ways to achieve it. The third type of Weber's rationalities is substantive rationality. It is similar to practical rationality in that it also results in action and their patterns. However, it differs from practical rationality in that the rationalisation process rests not only on how to gain most value, but it does so while considering the past, present, and potential future value. The potential values are seen as groups of values rather than single values. Substantive rationalisation implies the capability of seeing the bigger picture and value in one's actions. The fourth type, formal rationality, is based on economics, laws and science. These structure our lives, and are used in rationalising decisions. Formal rationality is a way to rationalise means-end decisions, similar to practical rationality, but it uses laws and rules as a way to rationalise actions. Formal rationalisation can even outweigh ethical considerations, as these structures are dominant in the industrialised world. However, ethical rationality has the potential to also go against formal rationality, in other words to go against accepted norms. Ethical rationality can also decrease or alternatively reinforce actions rationalised by practical

rationality, as well as contribute to the theoretical rationalisation of giving meaning to life events. (Kalberg, 1980)

4 Method

The method used to conduct this study is described in the following section. We begin by explaining what kind of approach to the research was chosen, as well as how it was designed. Next, the collection of data is explained and categorised by secondary and primary data, followed by how the data was analysed. Last, the trustworthiness, authenticity, and ethics of this study are considered before moving on to the next chapter.

4.1 Research approach

Research starts with taking an epistemological and ontological position. Epistemology refers to what we consider as knowledge, while ontology covers questions regarding the essence of social systems, and whether they are socially constructed or whether they are objective, independent from social actors (Bryman, 2016). We regard our study to be best approached through interpretivist epistemology and to have constructionism as our ontological approach.

Interpretivism emerged to resist the positivist view of studying social entities. In positivism social sciences and natural sciences are studied the same way, while interpretivism distinguishes social entities from natural sciences. Interpretivists want to understand human behaviour, while positivists want to explain it (Bryman, 2016). Interpretivist research results in what Bryman (2016, p. 28) calls “double interpretation”. What this means is that we need to interpret our interviewees’ interpretations, hence the double interpretation. As the research takes an interpretivist epistemological stance, constructionism was evaluated as a natural choice of ontology. Constructionism means the understanding of how the social world is constructed by the actors within it, rather than it being an external world that we have no control of (Bryman, 2016). Constructionist research is about the ideas we have about the social world, and how we understand their relationships with each other (Flick, 2018). When talking about networks, a constructivist approach understands them as constructed and actively negotiated, not as fixed systems that social actors need to adjust to (Bryman, 2016). Although from a constructionist point of view networks and organisations are socially constructed, thus influenced by people, the effects of organisational rules and norms on individuals must be taken into account (Bryman, 2016).

4.1.1 Research design

When designing a research, it is important to understand what is being analysed (Bryman, 2016). The aim of this study is to understand power structures and rationalisation processes in municipalities and municipality networks in an airport context. AGH serves as an interesting case to study the topics, however the airport itself is not the main study object. It was chosen because it was accessible and feasible considering the resources we had for conducting this research. Bryman (2016) describes a research design that aims to make general statements and that are independent of time and location as cross-sectional. However, although our study aims to present generalisable findings, it is hard to ignore the specific features of AGH and its recent history, hence our study has also some characteristics of a case study.

Qualitative research strategies tend to be inductive, even though cross-sectional studies are often deductive (Bryman, 2016). Different research strategies are nevertheless not necessarily conflicting, and should be used because of their compatibility to the research objectives rather than due to what they are called (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2006). This study is mostly an inductive one, although we use Boje and Rosile's (2020) cycle of abduction-induction-deduction (AID) as our inspiration. The AID triad starts with abduction, where we use our intuition of the topic as a starting point to create an initial idea, which we then test during interviews. Each interview contributes to the already existing data and theory, being an inductive part of the research process. From the data and theory we draw new ideas to continue the research process, and we start the AID cycle again. This cycle is repeated with every interview, throughout the research process (Boje & Rosile, 2020).

4.1.2 Narrative method

To answer our research questions, we determined conversational interviews to be the best way to understand power structures and the rationalising of decisions. The method used could be called a semi-structured narrative interview, since it has characteristics of both narrative interview and semi-structured interview, as well as characteristics of Boje and Rosile's (2020) conversational storytelling interviewing. Narratives have become a popular way to study organisations, as they help to unravel power dynamics (Vaara & Sonenhein, 2016) as well as rationalisation processes (Freedman, 2006).

Data used from narrative interviews is collected from the narratives that the researcher compiles from interviewees' stories. The method can be used when the participants'

experiences regarding some certain event or change is of interest (Flick, 2018). The method was first created to study politicians' experiences on decision-making (Flick, 2018), which is quite precisely what we are interested in as well. The aim of a narrative interview is to get the interviewee to tell their whole story regarding the studied topic without the interviewer interrupting (Flick, 2018), thus getting an insight of what the interviewees themselves think is important within the topic. Narrative interview is a considerable method when the research topic is sensitive and the data would be difficult to gather from interrogation-like interviews (Boje & Rosile, 2020; Flick, 2018). Narratives can be used to apprehend how groups collectively create meanings, based on individual pieces of narratives from different actors (Vaara & Shonenshein, 2016).

Narrative interviewing is an alternative for semi-structured interviews, although semi-structured interviews can also employ narrative features in them (Flick, 2018). In semi-structured interviews interviewers use interview guides as support to cover all relevant topics, although the interviewees are free to talk about topics outside the research area as well, but the interview guide still has an important role in steering the conversation (Bryman, 2016). Flick (2018) calls the combination of narrative interviews and semi-structured interviews as episodic interviews. We incorporate some episodic interview features in our method as well, however, we do not consider our interview method to be fully an episodic one. Episodic interviews focus on specific situations that are relevant for the research, and the interviewer has more possibilities to steer the conversation (Flick, 2018), which is in accordance with how our research was conducted. Yet, episodic interviews are usually used in comparative studies (Flick, 2018), which is not the case here. Call it episodic interviews or 'semi-structured narrative interview', conversation-like narrative interview with some semi-structured characteristics was the most feasible method for our research. Another inspiration to our research method was Boje and Rosile's (2020) conversational storytelling method. Using this method the researcher needs to acknowledge that the deductions, inductions, and abductions of the research are subject to change during the research process, thus a strict interview guide is not adequate, rather if one is used it needs to be changed appropriately for each interviewee. The method focuses on finding antenarratives, meaning bets on future, between and before of the story, that reveal a potential story among the dominant story (Boje & Rosile, 2020).

Narratives and stories as concepts can cause confusion due to their similarity. We use Vaara and Sonenshein's (2016) definition, where stories are told and used to construct narratives, and one narrative can be told in a multitude of different stories. Narratives and stories construct

organisations, as they can support stability, or enhance or counter change (Brown, Gabriel & Gherardi, 2009; Vaara & Sonenshein, 2016). A story is then a narrative's 'sub-genre', that contributes to the bigger narrative (Eshraghi & Taffler, 2015). Stories are an interesting way to study power structures, since all stories have a voice, space and time, and they are all influenced by power (Brown et al., 2009). Because organisational narratives usually consist of small bits rather than full stories, the analysis of narratives need to recognise this (Vaara & Sonenshein, 2016), hence the above mentioned Boje and Rosile's (2020) conversational storytelling method. An interpretative approach to narratives means that the diversified narratives are used to create an assembly of narratives in order to understand an organisation (Vaara & Sonenshein, 2016). Narratives can part from actual truth but are "nonetheless real in that narratives allow us to make sense of situations" (Eshraghi & Taffler, 2015, p. 694).

4.2 Data collection

Data collection for this study has been undertaken in a way that supports the narrative methodology generally chosen for the research. Both, secondary and primary data has been collected and used in order to facilitate as thorough investigation of the study object as possible. In order to support and build on the narrative method, secondary data was selected both, to provide a comprehensive background on the study object and overall industry, and to frame theoretical knowledge around that. The role of primary data, on the other hand, is to take advantage of the background and theoretical framework and make it possible for this study to place its contribution on top of them. To make the difference clear, secondary data refers to using data in our research that somebody else has collected, and primary data is collected by us for the purpose of being used in this specific study (Bryman, 2012). Narratives can be seen as a way of communicating personal experiences and social events through analysing stories related to living through and experiencing the times and social systems before and after them (Flick, 2018). That definition helps clarify what exactly was sought after when collecting both, secondary and primary data for this research. Those characteristics have been kept in mind when deeming the relevance of secondary data to our research, and when designing the ways to collect primary data.

4.2.1 Secondary data

The secondary data collected for this study can be seen as twofold; there is a base of peer reviewed scientific articles that builds the theoretical framework, and data in forms of newspaper articles, company reports, and other non-scientific literature related to the study object and investigated phenomena. The latter, non-scientific type of secondary data is mostly used to gain background information on the subject, and to create a literature review that compliments the theoretical framework. The creation of a comprehensive literature review with the help of secondary data was beneficial for building a foundation of background knowledge for readers. The significance of such background knowledge for a narrative study comes from enabling a general understanding into the topic, which is crucial when finding and interpreting different narratives. Bryman (2012) clarifies the same type of importance through the beneficial characteristics that secondary data has for analysing events that took place over periods of time. Secondary analysis can help overcome troubles often related to that kind of analysis in social sciences, such as time and cost (Bryman, 2012). Non-scientific secondary data collected and analysed for this study, namely newspaper articles and company reports, can be concluded to play an important role in facilitating the creation of narratives.

The secondary data collected and analysed in the form of peer reviewed scientific articles, on the other hand, derives its significance from providing conclusive statements from viable sources that are qualified for analyses in a theoretical sense. The narrative analyses discussed above also lose most of their significance if not tied to a theoretical framework, and if no theoretical contribution is made. Scientific data is beneficial for secondary analyses because of the high-quality data it offers, something that Bryman (2012) connects to two main qualities: rigorous sampling procedures and those samples covering whole nations or at least large regions. It is through analyses conducted with such secondary material that allows this study to engage in theoretical considerations and also result in contributions. The scientific secondary data used has been selected out of a large pool of potential literature, from where the articles, journals, and books that were deemed most relevant are the ones included in this study. The platforms used to gather material were Google Scholar and the Lund University database, where keywords and bigger theoretical themes were used to find the most suitable material. Thus, the use of a twofold base of secondary data creates a foundation of knowledge that covers multiple angles into the study object and facilitates further analyses. Primary data is then placed on top of that foundation to get to thoroughly investigate the study object and to make the findings specific for this study.

4.2.2 Primary data

The primary data collected for this study consists of interviews with experts in institutions who have specific insights and knowledge because of their position and expertise. The above is the definition of expert interviews, and additionally the case can be made for most of our primary data to be labelled under elite interviews, including rather high-ranking representatives of organisations or in public life (Flick, 2018). The gathering of primary data began with sampling for potential research participants, which in the case of expert and elite interviews can be problematic due to the limited number of potential individuals and those individuals being rather tough to identify (Flick, 2018). Non-probability purposive sampling was used when searching for potential interviewees. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling, which means that research participants are not sought in a random way (Bryman, 2012). Purposive sampling, on the other hand, means that sampling is done with research goals in mind, and answering research questions is at the heart of the sampling considerations (Bryman, 2012). In the premise of this study, it meant that the network behind AGH was seen to include the institutions and organisations where we would look for experts to interview. When potential interviewees were identified, they were contacted through email and with the ones who agreed to take part in the study the interviews were then scheduled. Thus, the process was non-probability sampling, since it was not at all random, but we actively contacted the most potential individuals. It was also purposive sampling, because the study object was very central in the sampling process, and the themes of power structures in networks and rationalising airport ownership from our research questions were at the heart of sampling considerations.

The sampling process described above resulted in eight interviewees agreeing to being interviewed, and those eight interviews then being conducted. All eight of the interviewees were local politicians in northwestern Skåne, representing different municipalities that were involved in the process that resulted in a change of ownership for AGH. The interviewees ranged from Mayors of these municipalities to regular council members from the bigger and smaller municipalities involved in regional networks and coalitions. To make the sample even more representative of power structures and rationalising behind the airport, there were both politicians who had been for, and against the municipal ownership of the airport. Thus, the eight expert and elite interviews held can be said to be representative of a number of different opinions and stances towards the study object, originating from various geographical and ideological locations. Additionally, the different theoretical aspects of our research questions

can be considered from multiple angles due to a rich and coherent sample resulting from our purposive sampling process.

The interviews themselves were designed and conducted as conversation-like narrative interviews. The interviews were designed and prepared for by mapping out interesting topics that could be talked about, including the specific networks of each participant and how they function, the process behind the change of ownership at AGH, participants' personal political and professional background, the reactions from actors in their municipality about the new public ownership of the airport, and also the reactions and attitudes of different stakeholders tied to the airport and how they have had to be considered. The preparation for each interview was different due to the specific characteristics of each interviewee and the effect of the AID cycle of self-learning that was considered between each interview, enabling us to reposition ourselves in the research process. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, all interviews were done through an online meeting platform called Zoom, which we found to have an effect on the conversational nature of them. The conversations would most likely have been more natural if undergone face-to-face, especially when it comes to back-and-forth storytelling where the interviewer also takes part in telling stories in order to get the interviewee more engaged in the given topics. That is an interview strategy described as effective for narrative interviews by Boje & Rosile (2020), but it was to some extent expected that the interviews taking place online would have this kind of an effect. Hence, the specific type of interview method of partly semi-structured, partly conversation-like narrative interviews was planned from the beginning.

Throughout the interviews, we were able to use back-and-forth storytelling to a certain extent while also finding the design of some talking points and guides with a semi-structured nature beneficial. We were able to get the interviewees to tell their stories uninterrupted, and to then build narratives out of these stories, revealing potential stories among the dominant story. That is already a part of analysis, the next part of what happens with the gathered primary and secondary data. The analysis did play a part when preparing for and conducting the interviews, because measures had to be taken for the gathered data to be as usable for the analysis as possible. Various such measures have already been explained, but the main points have to do with stories uncovered during the interviews being transferable to narratives. That has to do with the fact that a single narrative can be told in a multitude of different stories, and stories are told in order to build narratives (Vaara & Sonenshein, 2016). To build these narratives concerning the AGH, the interviewees had to be encouraged to tell similar stories with each other, but based on their own personal experiences. That was facilitated by our process of

reflecting about the interviews between them and using the AID cycle to help with that. Thus, it was possible to find solid ideological, but still objective, starting points for the interviews and to reflect about them afterwards to clarify the stories uncovered.

4.3 Analysis of data

We found thematic analysis to be the most suitable way for us to analyse the collected material. It fits multiple epistemological research approaches, thus it is a popular way to analyse data that has been conducted in a qualitative way, including narratives among other methods (Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2018). In thematic analysis the researcher identifies themes within the data, and the approach helps to deal with the collected data (Bryman, 2012). The themes should be relevant for the research, and aim to help the researcher theoretically understand the data (Bryman, 2012).

The first step of thematic analysis was to get to know our material by transcribing it and going through the transcripts several times. Secondly, we created initial themes based on what we found to be important theoretically and analytically. We employ theoretical thematic analysis (Flick, 2018), meaning that our themes were largely based on our interview guide, which was based on our theoretical framework and research questions, and partly on our initial ideas of the empirical data. On the third step we divided our interview data in themes, while recognising that some parts of the data can fit into multiple themes simultaneously. The fourth step included that we scrutinised our themes and created subthemes within the themes. The identified themes and subthemes were then used to constitute a table (see Appendix 2), that was used to help us understand the whole data set, and to assist in presenting the results and analysing them.

Different narratives were identified from different themes, and they were connected to our theoretical framework. Depending on the themes, interviewees' stories were distinguished based on the theme characteristics. For instance, a division between interviewees that were for or against buying AGH was made in order to distinguish how their narratives differentiated on the topic. Lastly, the different narratives were used to answer our research questions.

4.4 Trustworthiness and authenticity

It is argued that the traditional ways to evaluate quantitative research, namely validity and reliability, are not necessarily feasible for evaluating the quality of qualitative research, and that it should be assessed with different criteria (Bryman, 2016). Reliability and validity criteria

suggest that there is one universal truth of the social world, rather than several interpretations of social reality, which is an approach not shared with interpretivist researchers (Bryman, 2016). Hence, Lincoln and Guba (2000) present alternative criteria to assess the quality by considering the meaning and usefulness of the qualitative research, acknowledging that there can be several 'truths' regarding social reality. To ensure the quality of our research, we apply Guba and Lincoln's (1994) criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity in our evaluation.

The criteria of credibility, transferability and confirmability regarding trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) were used to confirm good quality. Credibility refers to whether the findings of the research are reasonable, considering that there are many social realities, not just one 'truth' (Bryman, 2016). We believe our research is credible, as it is conducted according to good practice, and the results appear feasible in their social context. Transferability refers to how much detailed data the researcher can provide about the social reality being studied, which can then potentially be transferred to other social worlds by other researchers (Bryman, 2016). We have gone as deep as possible with our available resources to understand the social world of our study, and we are confident that our findings contribute to the existing knowledge of networks and power, although we recognise that each social setting is unique. The confirmability of our research is ensured in that we have not let our personal values take over our study and interpretations of the data, although it must be recognised that total objectivity in any research is impossible (Bryman, 2016).

Authenticity is another way to assess the quality of a research. It deals with fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity, and they are meant to evaluate the process and outcome of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A research is fair when no social group of the studied environment is intentionally left out, and all stakeholders are treated equally (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). We have deliberately conducted interviews with people with different points of view regarding the research topic, in order to get as good an understanding of the social reality being studied as possible, with the resources available. Ontological authenticity means that the participants of the study learn about their social world, while educative authenticity means that individuals around the participants learn about the participants points of views (Bryman, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). To ontological authenticity we contribute to by sending out the final results of the research to the participants. However, educative authenticity, we argue, is hard to measure, since we have little control over who outside the participant group reads this paper. Having said that, we believe that those who do read this, can learn more about our research topic and the social reality embedded in it.

Catalytic and tactical authenticity are hard to measure as well. They question whether the research is a driving force to the researched social group to take action and potentially make a change in their social environment (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Like Bryman (2016) points out, these criteria are not dominant within social sciences, and Lincoln and Guba (2000) even points out that these can compromise the objectivity of the research. We agree that these last two criteria are not as relevant for our research, as we have no resources to follow whether the participants take action, although we of course hope the research has an impact on them.

4.5 Ethics

Ethics are an important part of any research and create a foundation that makes it possible to build findings and contributions on top of them. Considering ethics already when designing a study is something May (2011) found significance in when he claimed that simply knowing about issues concerning values and ethics is not sufficient, but they need to form a part of the research practice itself. When ethics are included in the core of the research design from early on in the process, they become a part of the identity of the study and instead of merely being something that needs to be considered, they can be used as a positive asset. The main ethical issues in research lie in the relations between researchers and research participants in the course of an investigation (Bryman, 2012), which is also where ethical consideration was most visible when designing this study. The relations between researchers and research participants were in this case our contacts with the interviewees, and the course of investigation ranged from our initial contact with them, throughout the interviews, and until the results were analysed and presented.

Four main areas of issues related to ethical principles include there being harm to participants, a lack of informed consent, an invasion of privacy, or deception during the course of investigation (Diener & Crandall, 1978 as cited in Bryman, 2012). We have attempted to actively tackle issues related to these areas throughout the investigation undertaken for this study. Consent was gained from participants as they were informed in initial emails about the upcoming interviews being recorded as well as analysed for the purposes of this study. Consent was asked one more time while conducting the interview, prior to starting the recording. Invasion of privacy was acknowledged when the interviewees were promised anonymity, which was communicated in the initial emails as well as one more time at the beginning of the interview.

Avoiding harm to participants and deception could not be communicated in the same clear way as promising anonymity and seeking consent, but they were considered prior to and after the interviews. The interviewees were always informed about the aim and topic of the research, so that they knew what they participated in. We designed how the interviews would be conducted to be in a way that limits harm and deception as much as possible, and made sure the interviews played out fairly close to how they were planned. This was harder to do due to the conversation-like interview method, which resulted in to a large extent unstructured interviews where the interviewees were encouraged to talk about subjects freely. It could be possible that different interviewees talk about similar subjects in contradicting ways, which could be seen as the interviewers deliberately guiding the interviews to a deceptive direction that could potentially cause harm to the participants. That results in social researchers becoming what Bryman (2012) calls snoopers who deceive people to say what the interviewer wants to hear instead of them saying what they actually want. To avoid such harm and deception to participants, interviews and analyses were done with extra caution in mind to not lose sight of objectivity. Thus, ethics can be said to have been a part of the whole course of investigation throughout this study and that is the main claim that we have for not engaging in unethical behaviour.

Ethical issues relate directly to the integrity of a study, and thus they cannot be ignored (Bryman, 2012). When there are no clear holes in the design and execution of a research concerning ethics, unethical behaviour is largely eliminated, and the resulting study can be said to achieve high levels of integrity. Another aspect that has a direct connection to the ethical integrity of an investigation is its quality (Bryman, 2012). We have paid attention to the general quality in two main ways that are tied to research ethics: objectivity and logical reasoning. Objectivity has been manifested as not taking stances prior to collecting material, or during the analysing, but staying as close to how the material was presented to us as possible. Logical reasoning meant for us that there was no unwarranted reaching or jumping into conclusions too far from what can clearly be identified from the material. The quality of research starts from the very beginning of the process, described by Flick (2018) when he lists the ability of researchers to justify why research about their issue is necessary at all as the first principle of research ethics. Thus, making an ethical study has been the goal with this research from the beginning as well, because a comprehensive problematisation and a generally relevant research area increase the integrity and ethics. To summarise our approach on achieving research that is as ethical as possible, Flick's (2018) ideas can be used when he states that research ethics have

a lot to do with reflection and sensitiveness. Thinking about critical dilemmas can help achieve more reflexive research, and consider participants' perspectives on another level (Flick, 2018).

5 Results

In this section the results from interviews are explained. That is done by dividing them into seven themes, which are represented by the different headlines. Under each headline, the results are again divided by those said by interviewees who were for and against airport ownership. The data in this chapter is kept as close to how it was presented to us as possible, and it is a mixture of direct quotes from interviewees and parts written out based on what was said during the interviews.

5.1 Interviewees

Eight interviews were conducted with local politicians in northwestern Skåne. They represent six different municipalities and five different political parties, some of which were against buying the airport on a party-level, some that were for it, and some that were torn and had different stances in different municipalities. All six municipalities are part of a municipal collaboration called Familjen Helsingborg, which consists of 11 municipalities in northwestern Skåne. Seven of those municipalities built a holding company that owns AGH. The interviewees are presented in the table below according to whether their municipality took a stance for or against buying the airport, and whether their party was for or against it in their municipality. The municipalities are also presented as either big or small, where Helsingborg, Ängelholm, and Landskrona are considered big and the rest of the 11 municipalities are considered small. Results from the interviews in this chapter are divided according to the interviewee's stance on owning the airport, not whether the municipality is part of the ownership or not. The interviewees represent the stances of their parties in their respective municipalities. Themes and subthemes were made according to our theoretical framework, analytical interests, and empirical data. The identified themes were 'Before the change of ownership', 'Change of ownership', 'Airport's meaning', 'Collaboration', 'Stakeholders', and 'Future', and they are summarised in a table together with illustrative quotes from interviewees. Two such tables can be found in the Appendix 2, one representing the interviewees who are for the airport and one representing those against. Since some of the interviews were conducted in Swedish, quotes from those interviews were translated to English. In addition, small grammatical corrections were made to quotes originally in English, if needed.

Interviewee	Municipality	Municipal stance / party stance (owning the airport)
Interviewee 1 (B1)	Big municipality	For the airport / For the airport
Interviewee 2 (S1)	Small municipality	For the airport / For the airport
Interviewee 3 (S2)	Small municipality	For the airport / For the airport
Interviewee 4 (B2)	Big municipality	For the airport / Against the airport
Interviewee 5 (S3)	Small municipality	For the airport / Against the airport
Interviewee 6 (S4)	Small municipality	For the airport / For the airport
Interviewee 7 (S5)	Small municipality	Against the airport / Against the airport
Interviewee 8 (B3)	Big municipality	For the airport / For the airport

Table 1. Interviewees.

5.2 Before change of ownership

AGH had private ownership from 2011 until late summer 2020, when PEAB sold it to local municipalities who represent the new public ownership. The ownership of PEAB has been described by the interviewees who are for the airport ownership as very successful, until the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 created huge problems for the whole aviation industry. “[PEAB] ran it very successfully for about 10 years when the pandemic hit in the spring and summer” said B1. Then again, some interviewees brought up the fact that a change of ownership initiated from PEAB’s side did not come as a surprise. B3 also added that PEAB took contact with the municipalities for the first time already two years ago, and the municipalities answered with “but we have said no the whole time” until the Covid-19 pandemic came. In spring 2020 there was a stronger message from the private ownership: “PEAB were very determined. I mean, ‘we will not operate the airport any more’”, remembered B3. Also according to B3, they added that they will build houses on the airport’s land and make money with it instead.

B1 describes the situation during the last couple of years of PEAB ownership as them actively searching for ways to get rid of the airport by lobbying in order to get the public sector to take more responsibility for the airport, which the municipalities were reluctant towards. PEAB found economic reasons to get rid of the airport, and as S4 mentioned that the municipalities operate AGH with a different mindset concerning economic pressure than the previous private owners, as he said “*that was before. It was with this mindset [less economic pressure] we bought it*”. S4 who was very positive when describing the years under PEAB’s ownership stated “*the pandemic pushed them over the line, so they wanted out*”. An understanding between the interviewees who are for the airport can be seen in how none of them talk about airport ownership as a task for municipalities. S2 summarised the attitudes by clearly answering “no” when asked if he saw it as a possibility that the municipalities would buy AGH in the pre-pandemic era.

AGH has suffered from decreasing passenger numbers for several years, stated the interviewees that are against the ownership of AGH. They emphasised that it is important to notice that this was an existing trend already before the Covid-19 pandemic. This has been known for a long time, as S5 reminded that Swedavia, the company that runs the state-owned airports in Sweden, even released a report a decade ago stating that AGH, together with the closest airport in Halmstad, would not survive and should be closed. Speculations and discussions about PEAB wanting to sell the airport operations, even before the Covid-19 pandemic completely stopped the business, had taken place, according to B2. S5 also brought forth his knowledge on business life, due to his background, and how he “*Somehow knew this was coming*” (S4). Since PEAB is a private company, S5 also pointed out that it is no surprise that a private company does not want to continue with an unprofitable business. The so-called ‘flight shame’ was also brought up as an explanation to decreasing passengers and shrinking business.

5.3 Change of ownership

The process taking place in the summer of 2020 between May and September that resulted in municipal ownership was described by the interviewees who are for the airport as fast-paced and complex. S1 says he remembers that they sat in airport meetings the whole summer, and the meetings were many, short, and often quick. All interviewees who were actively taking part in these meetings remember that there was a general hurry over the whole summer, in the end resulting in the council deciding to buy AGH from PEAB. A lot of the hurry, even panic mentioned by S2, was a result of PEAB wanting to shut down the airport immediately. The

pandemic triggered the whole process, but it also helped in getting it across the goal-line, as B3 said *“it was easier to push through tough decisions during the pandemic”*. According to S2, the communication from PEAB to close the airport came all of a sudden, but neither him nor the other interviewees heard it directly from them. S1 mentioned that there was a meeting called between the Familjen Helsingborg municipalities, and that is where the work to save the airport started.

Even the interviewees who were for the airport found problems tied to municipalities buying AGH, perhaps the biggest one being that *“municipalities by default should not own an airport”* (S2). That was agreed upon by the others, and they also found another reason against airport ownership in climate issues. *“The big question was about the climate. It is not a climate smart decision to buy an airport. It is not possible to talk around, it is a bad alternative for transportation. Period”* (B3). B3 continued on the topic and added that during the change of ownership *“we got in place very strict directives for the new operative board concerning climate work”*.

The possibility of PEAB being aware of the importance of AGH to the region and calculating on the public sector not letting it shut down was raised by B1. He also claims that it was PEAB who had the better hand in the situation, but still supposes that probably their first instinct was not that the municipalities would buy it. Seven out of 11 municipalities in Familjen Helsingborg are part of the airport ownership, and according to S4 the four that did not join said no from the beginning. An exception in the whole process was the municipality of Perstorp, as all others took their stance rather early in the process. *“First six municipalities said yes, and then a little bit later came Perstorp, they changed their mind during the last days”*, said S1. B3 weighed in by saying that he was actually surprised that as many as seven municipalities agreed to join. Ideological differences between parties were also brought up by B3, as he talked about the unique nature of the airport question in that the same parties took different stances depending on the municipality, and there could be completely contradicting situations between the municipalities.

The process of PEAB announcing that they are going to shut down the airport to the seven municipalities in Familjen Helsingborg deciding to buy it went really fast, as described by both B2 and S3, who are both against owning AGH. S3 even argued that *“many didn’t really have time to think about it.”* All interviewees that opposed municipalities owning AGH said that the process started with the topic being brought up in Familjen Helsingborg, and after the

discussions there, each municipality of Familjen Helsingborg made their own decisions within their own municipalities and parties. Economic reasons were brought up as problematic in the process, as B2 said *“We think it is strange that private parties operate the airport when it makes profit, and the region takes it when losses come”*. All interviewees opposing the owning of the airport also think that it is not municipalities’ job to own an airport. B2 said that *“The absolute best thing would’ve been if the businesses themselves owned and operated it”*, since, like all of them argued, AGH is most important for the region’s businesses.

Only S5 represents a municipality that did not go into buying AGH. His party said no to AGH, while in some other municipalities they said yes. This, according to him, upset some people. However, having his municipality’s back, he felt comfortable saying no. For him, it was a quite easy decision, but he acknowledged that it was not that for everyone. The decision was easier for S5, as for the first time all the parties agreed in his municipality. In many other municipalities, it was not an univocal decision, as B2 and S3 stated. For S3 it was still important that even though the decision *“was not made univocally, we still made the decision, and now we have to make the best out of it.”* For S5’s municipality, the share of stocks in the company owning AGH was worth mentioning, as it was quite low. According to him, the only difference their participation would make is a symbolic difference. S5 also referred multiple times to the results of previous reports regarding AGH as reasons not to buy AGH.

The interviewees against the airport acknowledged the importance of it for different municipalities, and the urgent matter of the change of ownership, as S5 described *“honestly, if I was a politician in Helsingborg, I might have had to go another way”*. The mayor of Helsingborg was often mentioned as one of the driving forces in trying to get as many municipalities from Familjen Helsingborg as possible to join in buying AGH, according to S3 and S5. It was said that saving the airport was important for him and his municipality, as well as to the municipality of Ängelholm, where AGH is physically located. According to S5, a new report to show the meaning of AGH to the region *“came out of Ängelholm and Helsingborg. The other nine municipalities weren’t a part of this report.”*

5.4 Airport’s meaning

Most of the interviewees for owning AGH described the importance of it for the region as twofold: for the businesses and tourism. *“The airport is an important piece of infrastructure, it is important for local businesses”*, said B3 and *“this is strictly an investment to companies”*,

added S4 about municipalities buying the airport. Multiple interviewees also mentioned studies conducted about AGH's meaning to the business life in the region. Various studies exist from the last few years where results often follow the lines of how S4 described them "... *the ten million in tax that was directly or indirectly related to the airport*". The total effect of AGH on the region was described through an example by B3: "*a big number of people that actually commute to Stockholm, and if you then live in northwestern Skåne you pay your taxes here. And that is good*". B1 raised the importance to tourism, especially for the northern coastal locations such as Höganäs, Ängelholm, and Båstad as they find meaning attached to being accessible by tourists through a nearby airport. When asked about the airport having other types of meaning for the region, B1 answered that AGH being an old Air Force base creates historical meaning for the residents of Ängelholm in them still having an airport. AGH can continue contributing to the bond between Ängelholm and development of aviation, as S4 referred to AGH as "*one of the greenest airports in Sweden*".

The location of AGH in the northwest corner of Skåne is also seen as an aspect that brings meaning to it. The interviewees for the airport lifted its meaning for businesses, as having an airport in the region facilitates quick work trips that usually take place in Stockholm. The possibility for quick trips was also mentioned by S1 when he said "*Höganäs and Båstad have a lot of summer guests from Stockholm who sometimes have to go work there for a day, so it like, becomes easier for them*". Alongside tourists and all types of businesspeople, the interviewed politicians mentioned themselves as frequent passengers through AGH: "*as a politician you also value family time. If you take the train to Stockholm and sleep there, it takes the whole day*" (S1).

Almost all interviewees agree that the airport is important for the businesses, although all the interviewees that did not want their municipalities to buy the airport argued that it is not a municipality's job to own it. AGH's relevance for companies doing international business is however contested. The bigger, international companies in the municipality that S5 is representing argued that Ängelholm airport is not crucial for them. Both S5 and S3 claim that for international businesses, Copenhagen airport is the main airport. The importance of AGH for smaller companies doing business towards Stockholm was, however, recognised by S3 and S5. AGH shortens travel time from northwestern Skåne to Stockholm, and S3 mentioned that "*it's mostly scheduled flights to Stockholm*" that AGH has. Only B2 argued that "*There is no clear evidence on what the airport means for the businesses.*" The airport's importance being as big as it is suggested to be by many municipalities in Familjen Helsingborg was challenged

from S5's side as well. According to him, the newest report that was to demonstrate the importance of the airport for the municipalities concluded that *“if you don't have that [AGH], all companies that use to fly with it, they will go bankrupt in a month. And I don't think that is true.”* However, S5 admits that *“If the local companies [...] had said to me that if the municipality [...] doesn't go in as an owner and save the airport, we will have to close. Then maybe I had to reconsider my standing in this.”*

AGH's meaning for businesses and politicians was recognised by both S3 and S5. They both mentioned that as politicians they used to use AGH to fly to Stockholm, although traveling is now on hold due to Covid-19. They both, however, argue that the airport is quite irrelevant for leisure travellers within the locals, as

“Common people... If you are going on a holiday, you don't fly from Ängelholm but from Malmö or Copenhagen. So I don't think it is as valuable for common people in that sense, but it's more like a business matter... municipal-state matter, rather than for common people” (S3).

AGH's symbolic value and importance for northwestern Skåne's identity was also recognised by S3 and S5, who are against airport ownership. S5 argues that the airport is a part of Helsingborg and Ängelholm's brand, that *“It's crucial for them to show that they are cities that are growing, and we have an airport and so on”* (S5). It was also pointed out by S3 that the airport is a part of the region's identity, as it has *“always been there”* (S3), and that *“It has marketing value. Then how high it is, I'm not the right one to judge. But value, it's there. You can't ignore that.”* (S3). When discussing why the municipalities ended up with the decision to buy the airport, various interviewees recognised what S5 portrayed as symbolic value, *“yeah, it was symbolic, and it was a political thing”*. They also saw that the Covid-19 pandemic played a part in making all this a reality, *“now the pandemic made it possible, but I think it would have come no matter what. Now you could refer to Corona”*. Furthermore, regional airports' meaning for Sweden in general was recognised by S3. Sweden is a long country with long distances, and he points out that regional airports are needed for police and ambulance flights for instance, although AGH is not used as one.

5.5 Collaboration

Conversations about municipal collaboration in the context of Familjen Helsingborg with all interviewees were similar in that they showcased it as highly effective and successful. *“It's one*

of the most well-developed municipality co-operations in Sweden with co-operation on many levels and many different branches of the local governments”, as portrayed by B1. As for reasons behind how such collaboration has been built, personal relationships between actors and a specific climate within the network were mentioned throughout the interviews. B1 continued his illustration of Familjen Helsingborg by saying that most of the politicians in it are either from the same party or in similar positions politically, but helping more than that is the fact that they know each other well and it is easy to talk to each other. “*Forcing others to collaborate often doesn’t end well*” said B3 and continued by telling how in Familjen Helsingborg every municipality gets to choose whether to join or not in each different project. An illustrative example about how a politician from a big municipality viewed the Familjen Helsingborg collaboration was provided by B3: “*it is almost like Pippi Longstocking. If you are big and strong, you need to be kind.*” Yet, many politicians brought up a tension between Helsingborg and Landskrona, since they have their own, competing projects going on regarding a connection to Copenhagen. S4 even mentioned that Landskrona stated that if they join the holding company, they expect Helsingborg to support them in their tunnel connection to Copenhagen. However, when talking about the way Familjen Helsingborg works, B3 described the climate as the parties involved trying to agree at all times and added “*we don’t touch the really controversial questions. But I mean, it is a good collaboration, there is a good atmosphere, everybody agrees*”.

The question of airport ownership was described by the interviewees who are for it as an especially delicate one, and when discussing the effects of deciding to join that or not on future collaborations, S4 said “*there were a lot of discussions and jokes made about each other, about the municipalities that didn’t join in. But it’s not anymore. The topic is done. Now we focus on other things*”. When it comes to matters concerning operating the airport after it moved to municipal ownership, B1 mentioned having seven municipalities with different majorities and different balances of power as something that requires consideration. From a small municipality’s viewpoint, S2 said he feels that they absolutely have a chance to be involved in decision-making and adds that “*it is important we use that possibility as well*”. As B3 pointed out “*Every municipality has a vote. We do not have a system based on shares [...]*”, however

“If it someday would come to that, then Helsingborg and Ängelholm would decide. But I do not think it is going to be topical. It does not feel like it. I mean, we really want to have the others [municipalities with smaller shares] with us” (B3).

Additionally, small municipalities brought up their own municipality-specific reasons for joining, such as *“for our municipality it was a symbolic act as well”* (S4), and *“in a way, we are only showing that we support Familjen Helsingborg”* (S1).

Familjen Helsingborg is a well established municipal cooperation also according to all interviewees who are against the airport ownership. Everyone saw many benefits of collaborating with each other, and thought that it works very well in general. B2 and S5 remarked that Familjen Helsingborg is one of the best and most developed municipal collaborations in Sweden. B2 brought up the open dialogical atmosphere, and said that *“None of us 11 are complete, but we need each other to create an offering for residents and citizens, and to feel that you live in a mutual place.”* Especially the small municipalities saw the benefits of collaborating with bigger ones. S3 mentioned that *“They [Helsingborg] have a completely different strength in their pool of employees in their municipality, the different posts, and so on. They have said ‘we can fix that, we can investigate’, and that way we have got many co-operations”*, while S5 said that *“Helsingborg is the big guy and handling for us, smaller ones and so on.”* Small municipalities can get ideas from how big municipalities work, as smaller ones have less resources to develop alone, states S3. He concludes that if Helsingborg does well, then his municipality does well, and the other way around.

Both S3 and S5 mentioned that for the collaboration and the region to be as powerful as possible, it would be desirable that all members of Familjen Helsingborg would agree on all matters. S3 said that:

“Everyone realises in fact that collaboration is the way for us to go forward. I mean, if we can collaborate well in this corner, we become a powerful Skåne. Towards the region, or with the region, whatever you want. Even towards the state. It is a joint power when all 11 municipalities point in the same direction. Naturally it is more powerful than if three pointed in another direction. That everyone stands behind it and joins is extremely important.” (S3)

Getting municipalities to join different projects sometimes requires some lobbying, stated S3 and S5, who are against owning the airport. Regarding owning AGH, S5’s municipality said no, and *“Of course, I got under a lot of pressure, ‘change your mind, you need to change your mind”* (S5). S3 said that in cooperative projects in general *“There is constant lobbying, that now we have to reach out to them because we want them in.”* At the same time, he says that *“I have never experienced that Helsingborg would have said ‘it’s we who decide because we are*

the biggest municipality', [...] it has been an open discussion and they have been very helpful.” B2, representing a big municipality, did not talk about how Familjen Helsingborg specifically benefits his municipality, but rather how it benefits the region.

There exists a consensus between interviewees on both sides of the argument, whether to own the airport or not, about the fact that municipalities generally should not own airports. Similar arguments about being forced to save the airport by buying it were made from those who supported the decision, a stance shared by B2:

“When I talk with other politicians who wanted to have the airport, they are saying that it wasn't anything they wanted to do, but it was something that needed to be done to make sure that businesses keep going.” (B2)

From those who are against owning AGH, S3 and S5 mentioned how the airport matter created some disagreements between members of Familjen Helsingborg. All interviewees stated that not all municipalities have to join all joint Familjen Helsingborg projects, and *“Normally that's not a problem at all”* (S5). Regarding AGH, S5 felt that *“It got into a fight, not being a part of it”*, while S3 felt that *“It was a bit sour for a meeting or two, but then we move on to the next question.”* B2 still noticed that *“I think we disagree sometimes but we don't call each other out just for the sake of it.”* Both B2 and S3, being from municipalities that said yes to AGH although their parties said no, agree that once the decision is made, you have to live with it, or like S3 puts it: *“You don't try to sabotage it and say that it's bad. You try to make the best out of it.”*

5.6 Stakeholders

The interviewees for the airport talk about local businesses in northwestern Skåne as an important stakeholder of AGH, and PEAB as the previous owners are often mentioned, even though according to B1 they currently do not have any contact about operating the airport. *“They still own the properties. We rent the runway and the terminal buildings from them to a very low rent, but that's the only connection that is still”* said B1 about the connection with PEAB. Local businesses were contacted when looking for ways to save the airport to see if some of them would be interested in being a part of the ownership, and according to S1 *“it was a very cold reception. They were very positive [towards AGH in general] but did not want to go in with any money.”* However, that did partly become a reality in Båstad, where their tourism and business organisation bought half of the municipality's shares of the airport. S4 talked

about the resulting situation as *“not only the taxpayers in Båstad that pay for the airport, it’s the companies as well that use the airport.”*

Contrasting the positive reactions of businesses was the media, which most of the interviewees for the airport had experienced as negative and even aggressive in the beginning. When talking about the media during the change of ownership, S2 used the term *“third state power”* and S4 stated that *“the media was on this like fleas on a dog”* but added that *“[...] but for us it was meaningless.”* The interviewees did then continue to say that the media stopped paying so much attention to the subject after the first couple of weeks following PEAB’s announcement to shut AGH down, and the municipalities have been able to operate the airport without too much negative attention ever since. Another stakeholder group that was experienced as negative in the beginning, though less than the media, are residents of the municipalities:

“A lot was about the climate, if we are going to use tax money, so much tax money on flying that only benefits a small group. These kinds of arguments. But I can agree, I mean they are not completely wrong.” (B3)

The same goes for residents as for the media, though, as the interviewees clearly stated that reactions and opinions have almost completely disappeared throughout the last months.

None of the three interviewees that resisted owning AGH had heard that much resistance from their respective municipalities’ inhabitants. S3 said that it has been *“surprisingly quiet”*, while B2 recalls discussions about the environment and tax money being used for an airport, although he also mentioned that there were arguments for the airport, as it is important for the region if they want to be connected to Stockholm. The media, on the other hand, was louder. All three interviewees opposing owning AGH said that the media wrote mostly negative texts about the municipalities buying the airport. B2, however, admitted that *“It is also possible that I’m in my bubble and don’t see or hear much more than that of course.”* It also came up that a debate article written by one political party’s representatives was published in local media in order to gain visibility and communicate their arguments against the airport.

Businesses, according to B2, had some expectations that his municipality would not let the airport be shut down. S5 had investigated in his municipality what the companies think about the airport, and found out that for international companies it was less important, while for smaller companies it was important. *“Local big companies didn’t think I should fight for it [AGH], and they didn’t want me to take tax money”*, said S5 while S3 recognised that *“in the*

whole region, here in Familjen Helsingborg, there are a number of companies that of course fly and it is important for them.”

Copenhagen airport and Malmö airport were brought up as competing airports by S3 and S5. Halmstad airport was also mentioned by them, although not as a competitor per se, but as an airport going through similar struggles as AGH. The staff at AGH was mentioned by S3, who pointed out that *“It’s not like you just like that [reopen an airport], you have to have two, three key persons employed, that have a certain education and competence. If you don’t have them you simply cannot operate an airport.”*

5.7 Future

When it comes to the future of AGH, the interviewees for the airport all acknowledged the fact that the near future does not look bright, either for AGH or the aviation industry in general. *“We are calculating that we will make a deficit in the company over the next coming years”*, said B1, and *“we will have to see what happens after Corona”*, added B3 about aviation in general. It was widely acknowledged among the interviewees that AGH is currently bleeding money, but B1 saw hope in the future based on pre-pandemic performance: *“I think Ängelholm is the only one that was making a positive result. So, every other airport of the regional airports is costing the municipalities money”*. The interviewees for the airport also saw other glimpses of hope for the future, for example when S1 said *“hopefully when vaccination increases, and people start to travel again we can show that it is not going so badly”*. The ability to picture a bright future, or any future at all, was considered a driving force in the process of buying AGH by B1, as he stated that *“I think the most important thing is that we save the airport and that we didn’t shut it down because of Covid”*.

Outside the context of AGH, the interviewees who are for airport ownership agreed on the fact that Familjen Helsingborg is a highly successful co-operative system, and they hope it will stay that way in the future and keep evolving. That was summarised by B1 when he said, *“I think that is something we will take with us for the future”*, when discussing the successful collaboration and communication in Familjen Helsingborg during the process of negotiating the change of ownership.

The interviewees against owning the airport, B2, S3 and S5, had various thoughts and ideas about the future. B2 said that they are investigating whether his municipality could sell its share of AGH to businesses instead, while S5 wondered whether both Halmstad and AGH could

survive economically, and if it would actually be Halmstad Airport that should continue, instead of AGH. In that way, according to him, Halmstad Airport could grow, instead of both airports struggling. For S3 the question about the future is how long AGH can continue with the low passenger numbers due to Covid-19. Regarding the uncertain future, S3 said that:

“If it works it’s good, if it doesn’t then it just didn’t go. Then those who said yes when they had the chance, they will get to explain why they did this. We said anyway no, did what we could. Now you can explain where we will go moving forward” (S3),

although he also mentioned that he wishes it goes well and people can start flying again. S3 also brought up electric flights, saying that it would be *“super, very good”* to become more environmentally friendly. He thought that ‘flight shame’ will continue to affect people’s desire to fly. A possible high speed train was also brought up, but according to S3 that would not be topical in the next 15 years.

People’s traveling habits after Covid-19 pandemic were also questioned by those interviewees who are against the ownership. Both S3 and S5 questioned whether people will business travel after Covid-19 pandemic as much as they did before the pandemic. They felt that many meetings that were held face-to-face before, will be held online in the future as well.

6 Analysis

The analysis in the following section contains connecting the data presented in the results chapter to the theoretical framework. This is done by taking one part of the theoretical framework at a time and explaining how it connects to the different kinds of data from the results.

6.1 Stakeholders

When building a narrative about stakeholders based on findings from the interviews, it is beneficial to consider the airport holding company as a central figure. Stakeholders of the holding company identified by the interviewees for AGH include local businesses, the tourism industry, residents of the region, actors in the aviation industry, and other regions outside northwestern Skåne. The holding company's stakeholders differ to some extent from those of Familjen Helsingborg, and they were identified as more relevant to the decision-making process behind buying the airport. The constructed narratives that describe the events and issues resulting in municipalities owning AGH ranges from the times of private ownership, through the hectic process behind the change of ownership, to how they currently are planning and preparing for a post-pandemic era of AGH.

The stakeholder group that appeared most frequently in the results were local businesses. They are considered moral stakeholders (Goodpaster, 1991) of AGH as they are affected by it, but they also possess some qualities of strategic stakeholders (Goodpaster, 1991) since they can in some instances be used as instruments to help achieve stockholders' interests. The interviewees had a positive relationship with local businesses where they were able to discuss each other's views on the subject, and the businesses acknowledged the importance of AGH for the region.

Those supporting buying AGH brought up the media and municipalities' inhabitants as well. These stakeholders have more normative power, meaning symbolic resources (Mitchell et al., 1997), than other types of power over the holding company and decision-making. The media get to decide how the public discourse regarding AGH looks like, and in this case the publicity was mostly negative. The inhabitants too can be seen as having symbolic power, as they are the ones whose votes in the end determine which politicians get to decide how municipalities allocate their resources.

Politicians against owning AGH mentioned several of the holding company's stakeholders in the interviews. The local media mostly questioned and criticised municipalities' decision to buy the airport, although they were loudest during the process of buying it, and not so much afterwards. Newspapers were even utilised to get visibility for one's agenda. Referring to negative publicity and publishing their own arguments against owning AGH is a way for politicians against the decision to reinforce their arguments and to make others understand them.

One of the important stakeholders are the inhabitants of the municipalities that bought AGH. While municipalities' inhabitants do not necessarily have direct relationships with the holding company, their money is being used to operate the airport in the form of municipalities' tax incomes. In this sense they can be seen as moral stakeholders, which should be taken into account in decision-making (Goodpaster, 1991). By emphasising the importance of AGH to companies and businesses in the region, and the importance of the companies to the region, the holding company and municipalities create a narrative where they act in accordance to what is best for the region and its inhabitants. These kinds of stories present municipalities as moral actors towards its inhabitants, which illustrates a normative approach to stakeholders (Jones & Wicks, 1999).

Competing airports nearby, like Malmö and Copenhagen airports, affect AGH's relations with potential customers. The airports in Malmö and Copenhagen are bigger, they offer more flights, and Copenhagen airport has significantly more international connections, which is important for many bigger companies. Thus, the characteristics of both businesses and airports, what they need and what they have to offer, determine how the relationships are formed between them, and how strong they are (Frooman, 1999).

6.2 Strategic networks

When approaching this research from a strategic network theory point of view, we consider Familjen Helsingborg as the main network, from which the holding company that owns AGH emerged. Familjen Helsingborg was described as a network that is well-functioning, developed, and being looked up to nationwide. It can be seen as a strategic network (Gulati et al., 2000), as its members are all intentionally part of the network in order to gain competitive advantage by sharing resources.

An advantage of a strategic network is that it makes it possible for its members to achieve things they would not be able to achieve alone (Möller & Halinen, 2017). Especially small municipalities found that to be important in Familjen Helsingborg, and many different joint projects were brought up. However, regardless of the size of the municipality, free choice to join projects was emphasised. Municipalities still recognise that cooperating is more beneficial than competing, which is in accordance with Zakrzewska-Bielawska (2018). Gulati et al.'s (2000) network membership as a network characteristic explains how municipalities found Familjen Helsingborg so important. According to this characteristic members of a network create identities, gain resources, access, and status, which was notable from how the members of Familjen Helsingborg spoke proudly of their network. The most apparent narrative was about highlighting the benefits of the collaboration, and little negative points were made.

The holding company emerged from the Familjen Helsingborg network as a response to PEAB wanting to shut down AGH. The holding company can be identified as an emergent interorganisational network (Dagnino et al., 2016), as the members of the network had pre-existing relationships, even personal ones, due to Familjen Helsingborg, which makes it more likely for them to build a new network. In addition, they were already highly connected which makes them preferable partners for each other. Finally, they share similar structural and cognitive backgrounds, and maintain open dialogues with each other, which encourages network-building. The stories told by the interviewees about multiple previous collaborations in various municipal assemblies, and how fast the holding company was built, support the idea that the holding company is an emergent interorganisational network.

6.3 Power

There are multiple contexts in which collaborations exist between politicians and their municipalities in northwestern Skåne. The two organisations that are used to construct a narrative about power structures in the network behind decision-making about AGH are Familjen Helsingborg and the board of the holding company built for the airport. Power structures in each of them are affected by the different natures of how they were built, Familjen Helsingborg over the years for multiple purposes and the holding company spontaneously for the purpose of overseeing the airport after it was purchased. Two narratives emerged when considering the power structures, one for big municipalities and one for small municipalities.

The interviewees from big municipalities portrayed sources of power, especially authority and resources (Purdy, 2012), in how they described their views of the collaborative situations. The big municipalities used their authority based on resources somewhat carefully in the general context of Familjen Helsingborg, as equality regardless of the size of municipality was found important, and everyone gets to choose which projects to partake in instead of forced collaboration. The resource-based power was shared as big municipalities did not communicate any problems about joining forces with others. The above views were shared by the small municipalities as interviewees from those confirmed the fact that they do get to choose which projects to partake in, and no municipality experienced that their choices of involvement affected future co-operation. Discursive legitimacy (Purdy, 2012) was sought by the interviewees and their municipalities through help from sources outside Familjen Helsingborg. This was done by both big and small municipalities, as they mentioned for example reports that were conducted by outside sources about topics that otherwise were relatively uncontested in terms of representation in the collaboration. The municipality bringing in outside help was thus perceived as more powerful than they originally would have been considering the topic at hand.

Concerning the arenas of power (Purdy, 2012), Familjen Helsingborg was described by the interviewees as having a process design that effectively shares power between the participants. It was widely acknowledged by interviewees from both big and small municipalities that relationships in Familjen Helsingborg are based on personally knowing each other and that the process of collaboration gives everybody a chance to express their thoughts. It is then the participants, who also are an arena of power (Purdy, 2012), that need to take advantage of the possible power accessible to them. When it comes to the holding company, even though it was frequently mentioned that everybody has an equal chance to engage in discussion, as everybody has one vote, the big municipalities clearly acknowledged the fact that they have the last word in case conflicts occur. Initiating the change of ownership process is an example of how content, another one of Purdy's (2012) arenas of power, is affected by power in Familjen Helsingborg. Especially the interviewees from small municipalities described the process as extremely busy and chaotic at times, where those from big municipalities agreed but referred to it more as business as usual. It is clear that saving AGH was notably important to big municipalities and they were the ones initiating it. Thus, they were the ones choosing the content of collaboration and what Familjen Helsingborg used significant amounts of time for during the process that lasted several months.

The effects of power structures in the airport holding company follow the lines of how Wolf et al. (2021) found power in the strategic planning of future in politics. The interviewees mentioned having seven municipalities with different political majorities in the board to be potentially problematic, but coordinating the co-operation in a structured way and paying attention to all actors getting a chance to partake in decision-making help overall effectiveness. Joint forces and shared resources are facts that contribute to understanding that Familjen Helsingborg has moved on from power by achievement, where most organisations are stuck according to (Hagberg, 2002), to levels closer to the final stage: power by wisdom. Neither interviewees from big municipalities nor small ones showed large tendencies to care about external recognition of their power, as they were willing to objectively evaluate the benefits and harms of decisions, in this case the decision to buy AGH, for Familjen Helsingborg and for their own municipalities. Power structures affected the decision-making process itself, but there is no evidence that interviewees acted in certain ways purely to appear powerful to others.

When engaging in networks, there is always a risk that actors use more resources for networking purposes than they gain from it which can often be a result of power asymmetries appearing somewhere in the process (Newell & Swan, 2000). Power and trust go hand-in-hand in this instance, which in the case of Familjen Helsingborg is used to overcome the aforementioned situation. The narrative that emerged from big municipalities' side showed that they place considerable amounts of trust on small municipalities having the ability to contribute to the collaboration as equals. In the small municipalities' narrative, trust was apparent when they believed the big municipalities also considered their best interests in decision-making instead of only pushing for what benefits the big municipalities. According to Newell & Swan (2000), trust springs from personal relationships within networks and organisations, which is certainly the case in Familjen Helsingborg as the interviewees continuously described their personal relationships with each other.

6.4 Rationalising

In this part we analyse how politicians in their respective municipalities rationalised their views on whether municipalities should or should not buy AGH. We use Weber's four types of rationality (as cited in Kalberg, 1980) - practical, theoretical, substantive and formal - to understand the rationalisations done by the interviewees. The rationalisations are analysed from two points of view: those who were for buying the airport, and those who were against it.

Practical way to rationalise decisions is about one's own interests. The location and convenience of the airport was brought up by those who supported buying AGH. It was said to be important because it shortens the travel time for business travelers, politicians themselves, and tourists coming for weekend trips to northwestern Skåne. Long business trips for example are away from the time spent with loved ones. Practical rationalisation by those who opposed buying AGH mainly used the media coverage as a practical rationalisation. Saying that the media wrote negatively about the municipalities buying AGH further supports their own opinions. Practical rationalisations were the least used types regarding AGH, both from the supporters' and the opponents' side.

Theoretical rationalising gives a deeper meaning for the decision made than just them being what they are. Finding a meaning for the occurred event, buying AGH, was demonstrated in various ways. Those who agreed on buying the airport referred to Covid-19 pandemic, and how they had to save the airport because of it, and in that way gave a meaning for their decision. The ones resisting buying AGH used the Covid-19 pandemic as a reason for it to be possible for the municipalities to buy it. The airport also had a symbolic meaning and was a part of the regional identity for some, thus buying it they preserve these meanings. For the politicians' who wanted to buy AGH, it was also a way to show support for the municipal cooperative network Familjen Helsingborg. A final way by those politicians who agreed to buy AGH to give meaning to this event was to refer to the changes they have made for the airport in order to make it more environmentally friendly, thus mitigating the negative environmental consequences of flying. However, it was also stated that the environmental consequences of flying are bad nonetheless. From the side of politicians opposing buying AGH, theoretical rationalisation was used to express their understanding the symbolic value of the airport for northwestern Skåne's identity and its marketing value. In addition, 'flight shame' was used to rationalise why airports are not as profitable as before, and it gives a meaning to not owning an airport.

A substantive way to rationalise things takes into account the past, present, and the future values in the decisions being made. Those supporting the buying of AGH rationalised their decisions with the airport's profitable past. PEAB had run the airport successfully for years, and that could be used as a reason for buying it. Its importance for local businesses was the main argument, as a functioning business life is not only currently important, but an investment to the future. The tax incomes generated from AGH was a major way to rationalise. Even

though the supporters of AGH understood that the current Covid-19 pandemic is bad for running an airport, they still had hopes for it to generate more value in the future.

The opponents for owning AGH had numerous ways to substantively rationalise the values, or the lack of values, that AGH had in the past, has now, or holds for the future. They pointed out that buying AGH was nothing any municipality actually wanted to do, thus its direct value can be questioned, although its indirect value in the form of tax income is recognised. The talks about PEAB wanting to sell AGH already before the Covid-19 pandemic due to decreasing passenger numbers was used to refer to the past and thus rationalise the reluctance to buy it. Private sector as the airport owner was brought up, as it is for them the airport is most valuable. The politician, whose municipality did not join the holding company, rationalised the lack of value in joining in that it would not make any difference whether his municipality had a share of AGH, as the share was so small. Thus, their involvement would not generate any additional value for the municipality nor AGH. As the airport was not seen as crucial for some municipalities' international companies, and its relevance for the businesses was questioned in the first place, its value for the region can be seen by them as irrelevant. In addition, one politician used the newest report of AGH, that he thought was misleading, to reason why to say no to AGH. The airport was not seen as valuable for common people, as there are other, bigger airports nearby. This further supports the notion of irrelevance and the lack of value of the airport. Potential values for the future were degraded by bringing up a planned high speed train to Stockholm, and by questioning whether people will travel after the Covid-19 pandemic the same way they did before. However, the politicians against owning AGH also see the value in the airport. They could see the value of the airport for small businesses who have business in Stockholm, and its value for politicians traveling to Stockholm, thus they could reason why some municipalities ended up buying AGH. Substantive rationalisation was the most common way to rationalise both for municipalities to own the airport and not to own it.

Formal rationalisations are based on laws, rules, economics and science. The economic impact of AGH to the region can be used as a formal rationalisation as well. The politicians who said yes to buying AGH used reports to show the importance of the airport to northwestern Skåne as a way to formally rationalise the decision. However, it was questioned by the same group whether municipalities' tax incomes should be used to an airport that only benefits a few, especially as owning it was not even seen as a municipality's job. To rationalise not owning AGH was done by using reports as well, by Swedavia for instance, to show the unprofitability of AGH. Environmental issues and climate change were also brought up, as using scientifically

stated facts is a formal way to rationalise. Also, PEAB as a private company was not expected to run an unprofitable business, as a private company's rule of thumb is to make profit. Hence, it was questioned why a public company should be created to take over AGH and suffer the losses once it is not profitable for PEAB anymore.

7 Discussion

The more scattered nature of the analysis is taken a step further in this section, as it is built into a more coherent whole. This is done by describing grand narratives that emerged from the data and discussing them more freely, crossing boundaries between the different parts of the theoretical framework and the categories from the results chapter.

Throughout presenting our results and analyses, various narratives have emerged where the interviewees' different characteristics give access to multiple viewpoints into the same phenomena. Glimpses into a wide variety of aspects have been provided and considered, out of which five main narratives that were deemed most insightful were constructed. The five main narratives to be discussed next are: narratives of collaboration about Familjen Helsingborg and the airport holding board, a narrative about power in the collaborations, and rationalising narratives for and against the airport.

The findings uncovered a picture of Familjen Helsingborg as a well-developed and well-functioning collaboration that is based on democracy, voluntariness, and close personal relationships. That image was shared among the interviewees in this study and according to them also recognised in a larger scale, as in other regions and the state who have observed and praised the collaboration. Such an effective collaboration is the result of municipalities joining forces and appreciating each other's contributions, which have been ongoing for a lengthy period of time. We argue that what contributes to a functioning collaboration is the adaptiveness of smaller municipalities, as collaborations are often crucial for them, as well as the bigger ones considering the small ones' interests equally important to theirs. Close, personal relationships were described by the interviewees to exist between actors in Familjen Helsingborg, possibly due to many of them being from the same political party and some of them being familiar with each other prior to collaborating in the context of Familjen Helsingborg.

Familjen Helsingborg operates on a voluntary basis in terms of giving municipalities the right to always choose which projects to join. All interviewees perceived that the fact that nobody is forced to join projects was highly significant to the collaboration's effectiveness, and they also felt it was true as there was no evidence of municipalities of any sizes being forced to take part. Although, the small municipalities mentioned that sometimes their main reason to join projects has been to merely show their support to Familjen Helsingborg, which for some was the case

even with airport ownership. In the case of showing support, it can be questioned whether it is a legitimate reason to take part in municipal collaborations that cost tax money. In general, tax money is thought to be something that should be used to gain measurable benefits instead of symbolic value. In addition, although the municipalities together tackle many problems by cooperating, little controversial issues are addressed. This can be seen as one reason why the municipalities work so well together. However, if little controversial issues are brought up, one can contest the larger societal impact the collaboration has. Having said that, it can also be argued that making a societal impact is not the idea of this kind of municipal collaboration. Yet, if it is not municipalities' task to solve societal issues, then whose task is it?

A holding company was set up when municipalities purchased AGH and a board was chosen quickly, with all municipalities that decided to join the ownership getting a seat each. This demonstrates the democratic nature of Familjen Helsingborg, as different municipalities hold very different amounts of shares of the airport and yet they all get the same amount of seats and votes on the board. Of course, the holding company is a separate entity than Familjen Helsingborg, but it comprises to a large extent the same actors and operates under the same "umbrella" as the interviewees mentioned. Assembling the holding board was quick and efficient and it was described as an example of the kind of various similar ones set up for previous projects. Thus, the strong characteristics of Familjen Helsingborg can be transferred to emerging projects and functional interorganisational networks can be built as a result.

Power structures are especially interesting to be looked at within Familjen Helsingborg and the networks where the actors are active. The interviewees communicated surprisingly little visible power structures, or their effects on collaboration. Big municipalities described the importance of small municipalities in making the whole northwestern Skåne more competitive, and small municipalities saw the value of big ones especially in the resources they were willing to share. Aspects such as trust between actors due to close long-term relationships and a decision-making process focusing on democracy help with spreading power to a wide range of actors, but power asymmetries are still bound to arise. A practical example of latent asymmetries is how only the name Familjen Helsingborg, although its marketing value is recognised, puts the municipalities in different positions. Helsingborg is put in a position of power, as it is their name, and the others one-sidedly benefit from it. Interviewees from small municipalities acknowledged their position and that it is beneficial to disagree as little as possible with the big municipalities. The right to choose between projects and high levels of democracy were agreed upon, but it was clear that big, more powerful actors are the ones initiating projects and

choosing the content of collaboration. An example of that is how an interviewee whose municipality is not part of the airport ownership had experienced pressure from big municipalities to join, but refused anyway. If significant power asymmetries existed, smaller actors could end up in a situation where they would not have an option but to join, even against their will. Even after continuing to say no to airport ownership under pressure, the interviewee in question had not experienced that the decision would have had an effect on other collaborations with the same actors. The example of Landskrona using their tunnel project to Copenhagen as a means to negotiate their part in AGH shows that if tensions arise, at least big municipalities are willing to show their power. This could potentially lead to future problems with powerplay.

On the subject of the board of the holding company, interviewees were clearly aware of the effect that the different amounts of AGH shares they possess have on how the board functions. Instead of seeking to create a truly equal collaborative process, the interviewees often acknowledged the foundational differences in power and were instead talking about ways to make the collaboration as equal as possible given the circumstances. The holding board was portrayed as an especially delicate project, and the fact that all interviewees who are a part of the board agreed on having the feeling that they can affect decision-making about AGH demonstrates the collaborative capacities of Familjen Helsingborg. An aspect that is a result of many of the above mentioned qualities of Familjen Helsingborg, which has an effect in limiting power asymmetries is the actors' lack of need for external recognition of power. The interviewees did not describe themselves as being motivated by being perceived as powerful by others, nor did they mention situations where others would have done the same within the collaborative contexts. Visible, strong power structures could make the municipal collaboration harder, as it can be difficult to see the benefits of a collaboration where one does not have a say in things. The municipalities have learned to overcome problems related to power structures within Familjen Helsingborg and the emerging networks, which helps make them the well-functioning collaborations that they are.

The narrative for rationalising municipal ownership of AGH is highlighted by it being a crucial facilitator for a thriving business environment in northwestern Skåne. On the other hand, the narrative that rationalises against airport ownership focuses on tax incomes that are being used for a business with declining economic performance and insecure future prospects, where environmental issues and unknown effects of the Covid-19 pandemic to traveling have a big role. Interviewees on both sides of the arguments agreed on the fact that it is not the

municipalities' job to own an airport by default, and it should rather be the state or private parties who operate it. It can be questioned if the consequences of not being able to fly are as big for the local businesses as some politicians imply, as business travel has been more or less seized for more than a year. This has forced businesses to adapt to new technologies, often successfully, and it can be questioned whether the number of business travellers will go back to the pre-pandemic level, especially considering the globally rising environmental consciousness.

The main narrative to argue for buying AGH emphasised its economic impacts for northwestern Skåne, and its importance to local businesses. Those against buying AGH focused on the economic side as well, but on wasting tax money on a declining business. We argue that these narratives are dominant due to it being relatively easy to demonstrate the value, mostly economic, or the lack of it, to others. It seems logical that narratives on both sides of the argument showed tendencies to use numeric ways of rationalising, because both sides use counter-arguments against each other's numeric arguments. In some instances, both sides even used the same statistics to support their contradicting arguments. This shows that even if substantive ways of rationalising seem unambiguous, they can leave room for interpretation. Narratives of symbolic meanings, like how the airport is a part of the region's identity, or its symbolic meaning for marketing, were mentioned several times, but as supporting narratives for the dominant one. Symbolic values are harder to measure, and they are subjective in nature. What has a symbolic meaning for someone, might not have any kind of value to someone else. Thus, it could be harder to rationalise using tax money on an airport if its value cannot be measured objectively. Some rationalisations based on rules, laws, and other institutions and norms were identified as well. They were mostly used by the ones who opposed buying AGH, as a way to prove a point. It can be hard to argue against scientific facts about the aviation industry's connection to climate change, or a nationally produced report about regional airports. However, reports and numbers were used from the supporters side as well, because the same argument about numbers being hard to argue against goes there as well. Only a few narratives related to practicality and convenience, but it is not surprising that they were not widely brought up in a municipal decision-making context. Values gained from practicality and convenience are easier to outweigh with values gained from something else.

Going back to the topic of the airport using tax money being a way to rationalise against the ownership, it is also a fact that makes the inhabitants of the region an especially important stakeholder group of AGH. In reference to this, the interviewees reflected surprisingly little

over regular inhabitants' opinions, as in the end they are the ones with voting power to decide which politicians are elected to represent the municipalities. Local businesses and visiting tourists were more thoroughly discussed, while the inhabitants were mentioned to have raised some concerns early on in the process, but that it only lasted for a couple of weeks before they were content again. Media is a stakeholder that was said to be vocal in the beginning of the process, even more so than the residents, but similarly their interest had decreased quickly when the change of ownership became a reality. The interrelationship between media and residents becomes evident when the fact is considered that both of their interests and opinions followed a similar curve. Media presents events and issues in a certain way, according to the interviewees a rather critical and challenging way in this case, and residents of the region then build their perceptions at least partly on what the media has written.

8 Conclusion

The aim of this research was to better understand power structures in municipal collaborations and how they affect decision-making, as well as how they affect decision-making when sudden changes occur. In addition, the aim was to identify how politicians rationalise their decisions in whether municipalities should own a regional airport or not. AGH, the holding company owning it and the municipal collaborative organisation Familjen Helsingborg were chosen as the context where these research questions were attempted to be answered. The empirical data conducted through expert interviews unfolded thematically analysed narratives. Fractures of various narratives were used to identify five main narratives: the narrative of how politicians against buying AGH rationalised their decision, the narrative of how politicians supporting buying AGH rationalised their decision, the narrative of collaboration in Familjen Helsingborg, the narrative of the emerging of the holding company owning AGH, and the narrative of power structures in Familjen Helsingborg and the holding company.

When it comes to the power structures found in Familjen Helsingborg and the holding company, the narratives reveal that some municipalities have clearly more power due to bigger resources. However, power was not exploited nor was it clearly visible, thus no clear power asymmetries were identified. Since all municipalities in Familjen Helsingborg are considered as peers, no clear hierarchies were identified either, which leads to little power based on authority. Power based on discursive legitimacy was used in lobbying, both for and against buying AGH, and if it was used in this specific process, we argue that it is likely that it has been used in other processes too. These above mentioned power structures seemingly do not affect decision-making, since all the municipalities are equal. We argue that power asymmetries are being reduced by the smaller municipalities actively taking a role in Familjen Helsingborg. Absent power asymmetries facilitate the role-taking, but at the same time some small municipalities did show tendencies to follow the big ones as a symbolic act. Lastly, collaboration is crucial for small municipalities, which makes them more adaptive when changes occur. The same characteristics are replicated to some extent in the holding company as well, as they also strive to reduce power asymmetries in similar ways as in Familjen Helsingborg.

What contributes to the functioning power structures in Familjen Helsingborg are the personal relationships that the politicians have with each other in the network. This results in a good, open discussion climate, where no clear hierarchies are needed. Another major factor is how

the members have internalised that in a strategic network they gain the most competitive value when they all truly collaborate, and that includes that one municipality's well-being directly affects the other municipalities' well-being. The findings further support that cognitively and structurally similar actors are more likely to build a network together. The narrative of the emerging interorganisational network, the holding company, showed that it is possible for a well-functioning networking organisation to quickly transfer its attributes to emerging projects.

The different rationalisations used to reason the decision of buying AGH were many, although one stood out. The substantive rationalisations, relating to economic value in the past and in the future, were the most used way from both the opposing and the supporting side of municipalities buying AGH. It is the easiest and most effective way to illustrate AGH's meaning for the municipalities, as it can be hard to argue against numbers, although they can be interpreted differently depending on one's standpoint. Rationalising with symbolic value was used mostly by those who were for buying AGH, but they were used mostly to support the substantive rationalisations. Symbolic values are harder to measure, and they are subjective in nature, which makes it harder for them to compete against economic values.

We believe that these findings help to better understand how the power structures come into being, how power structures affect strategic networks, and how they affect the emergence of new networks in times of change. Furthermore, this research contributes to the knowledge of rationalising, and how it is being used in a municipal context.

8.1 Limitations

During the research process some limitations were identified. First, as we used expert and elite interviews, we needed to be in contact with specific people. We found it hard in some cases to get responses from politicians we initially contacted. However, we are confident that the eight interviews we conducted were a wide enough representation of politicians representing various municipalities. Second limitation was that, typical to expert and elite interviews, the time available for interviewing was dependent on interviewees' often tight schedules, thus conversations about some topics remained shallow due to time limitations. In addition, the interviews taking place online affected the natural flow of conversations and could be seen as impacting the stories being told.

A third identified limitation is related to the interviewees' identities as politicians representing both their municipality and their political party. Although we specifically wanted to hear

politicians as expert interviewees, it must be recognised that it can be hard to get answers or insights that, for example, go against their political parties' views or their municipalities' best interests. It can also be hard to avoid empty answers, if the topic is sensitive, which can be seen as a fairly typical trait of a politician.

8.2 Managerial implications

When it comes to networks, building them and developing functioning ways of collaborating between the actors takes time. As the collaboration that has been established within Familjen Helsingborg showed, close personal relationships and trust are aspects that help greatly in creating a successful network. Those are qualities that need time to be achieved, which was also confirmed in this study as Familjen Helsingborg is benefitting from having existed for years. Thus, a newer collaboration should not be expected to function effortlessly from the beginning, but the organising parties and all actors need to be willing to put in long-term effort for it to become successful. Generating output that benefits a wide variety of actors gives positive experiences to participants and creates a culture that encourages them to join forces, which highlights the need for patience when setting up a network. This was also evident in Familjen Helsingborg and is something that should be kept in mind when designing networking activities, as success feeds success. Another thing that can be applied to a larger context from the findings is how showing democracy can be used as a practical means to prevent power asymmetries from arising. Concrete ways of practising democracy, such as each municipality getting a seat in the holding company board despite their share of the company, are beneficial in spreading power across the network. Other ways that can be done more continuously on a frequent basis are to activate less powerful members to keep taking part in network activities, and at the same time reminding those with more power about the importance of other members. Power structures should be acknowledged and taken into consideration when designing emerging networks and when reconfiguring existing ones, as it is then concrete ways to prevent power asymmetries from arising can be found.

8.3 Future research

Although this study shed light on what we know about ways of rationalising, it did not consider which ways are the most effective in a municipal context. Therefore, further research on the effectiveness of different ways to rationalise in different contexts would be recommended. Strategic networks, based on this research, benefit from established, personal relationships. In

order to better understand how networks function, it would be valuable to examine younger, newly established networks, to find whether there are other factors that make a strategic network successful, and whether the age and the personal connections of the network in fact are determining factors at all. Longitudinal study of power in municipal collaborative organisations, based not only on how the different actors themselves describe the collaboration, would allow a better understanding of how power appears in collaborations. In addition, further research on how much the level of a strategic network's level of establishment affects the stages of power the actors have, or how the stages of power affect the establishment of strategic networks, would contribute to the existing knowledge of the complex relationship between networks and power.

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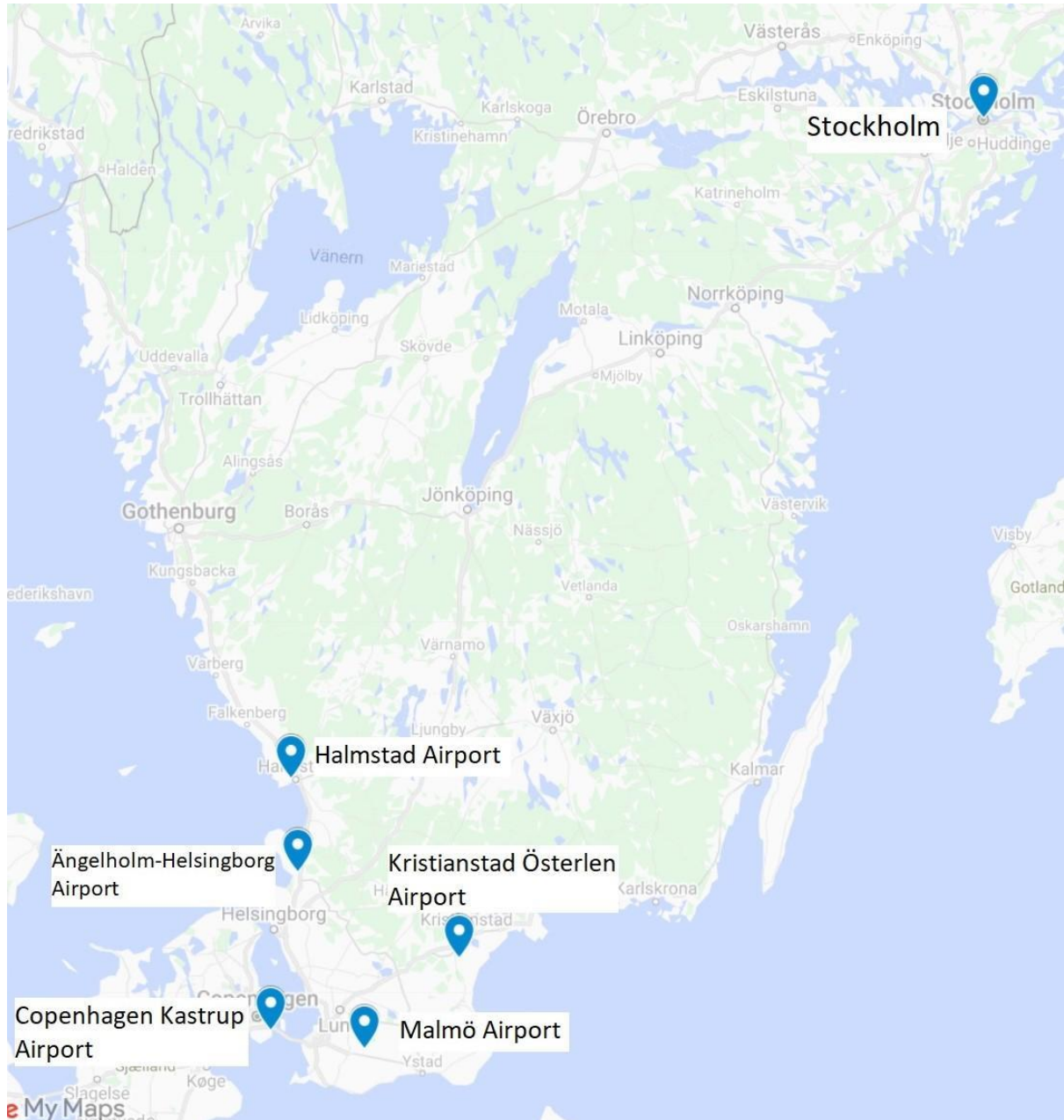
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10 Appendix

10.1 Appendix 1



Source: Google Maps, edited

10.2 Appendix 2

Table for airport ownership

THEME	SUBTHEME	EXAMPLE
Before change of ownership	Private ownership (PEAB)	<p>“The pandemic made them shut it down. I think I still think it is a short-term decision, just because the pandemic they have made. It's not like they don't have money. It's a big company” (S4)</p> <p>“It was so that PEAB was extremely determined, I mean ‘we are not going to continue operating the airport.’” (B3)</p>
	Future visions	<p>“PEAB started discussion already in 2019 to possibly get rid of the airport” (S2)</p> <p>(When asked if he thought municipalities might buy the airport in 2019) “No” (S2)</p>
Change of ownership	Process	<p>“And that was the start of a pretty long process that culminated in that we took over the airport” (B1)</p>
	Initiation	<p>“What came all of a sudden was when PEAB communicated that no, now the losses are getting so terribly big that we need to close the airport and lay off the personnel” (S2)</p> <p>“Of course Ängelholm (initiated), as that is where the airport is, and Helsingborg as well, because of the local companies, businesses” (S4)</p>
	Reasons	<p>“I think they had to calculate that the public sector wouldn't allow the airport to be shut down. So I think they had the, of course they had the better hand, if you would say” (B1)</p> <p>“I think the most important thing is that we save the airport and that we didn't shut it down because of COVID” (B1)</p>
	Municipal participation	<p>“Helsingborg and Ängelholm have the biggest economic responsibility, we have a very small part of</p>

		<p>it. In a way, we are only showing that we support Familjen Helsingborg” (S1)</p> <p>“Some small municipalities, it was... it is partly because of the money, environment, climate that weighed in [...] I was actually surprised that we were as many as seven” (B3)</p>
	Outside actors	<p>“It was our negotiators who brought the information to the board and then did the actual talking to their lawyers and company lead” (B1)</p>
	Party politics	<p>“In our municipality we had luck that all parties said yes... in the beginning there was some uncertainty from some parties. No, wait, no. The green party naturally did not agree to this” (S2)</p> <p>“And you cannot see clear ideological differences either. In some municipalities Moderaterna wanted to buy and we didn’t, in some other municipality we wanted to buy and Moderaterna didn’t, for example” (B3)</p> <p>“For our municipality it was a symbolic act as well” (S4)</p>
Airport’s meaning	Region	<p>“I mean, the airport is an important piece of infrastructure, it is important for local businesses” (B3)</p> <p>“This is strictly an investment to companies” (S4)</p> <p>“The coastal municipalities have a lot more attached to that [tourism], of course” (S4)</p>
	History	<p>“Ängelholm is an old Air Force city where the Air Force and the fighters have been” (B1)</p>
	Location	<p>“It would be very complicated to have to go to Malmö airport every time” (S1)</p>
	Politics	<p>“Now it has become very different with the pandemic, but there used to be so many meetings, a lot in Stockholm etc. As a politician you also place importance in seeing your family” (S1)</p>

Collaboration	Familjen Helsingborg	<p>“I would say it’s one of the most well-developed municipal co-operations in Sweden, with co-operation on many levels and many different branches of the local governments” (B1)</p> <p>“I think it's on the level where we know each other personally, so it's not just that we have the same positions or that we are mostly from the same party” (B1)</p> <p>“It is almost like Pippi Longstocking. If you are big and strong, you need to be kind” (B3)</p>
	Change of airport ownership	<p>“There were a lot of discussions and jokes made about each other, about the municipalities that didn’t join in. But it's not anymore. The topic is done. Now we focus on other things” (S4)</p> <p>“We said that we politicians are on the holding company’s board, but in the operative board we want to have competent people who can drive the airport in the right direction. We were able to get together a very good board” (S1)</p>
	Airport matters after the change of ownership	<p>Absolutely [there is a chance for smaller municipalities to be involved in decision-making], and it is important we use that possibility as well” (S2)</p> <p>“It was our vision when buying the airport that it would be an environmentally friendly alternative to fly from Ängelholm. That we would be the first ones in the country, that’s a little bit where the driving forces are” (S1)</p>
Stakeholders	Businesses	<p>“They still own the properties [PEAB]. We rent the runway and the terminal buildings from them to a very low rent, but that's the only connection that is still” (B1)</p> <p>“It was a very cold reception [from local businesses to be part of airport ownership]. They were very positive but did not want to go in with any money” (S1)</p>

	Tourism	“It is like a more intimate airport than Malmö and Copenhagen airports” (S2)
	Media	“The media has let it go a little bit now, it was really a lot in the beginning. There is not a flood of news anymore, it has gone more quiet. A flood comes whether it goes good or bad, it is just like that” (S1)
	Residents	“It is natural to react that way [to think there would have been better use for taxpayers’ money], and the reactions came, especially during the first weeks. But it did not continue after that” (S2)
	Aviation	“Other local airports in the close region contacted airlines and said that you can come and fly from here. So, we had contact just to make them feel more comfortable in this” (B1)
	Regions outside northwestern Skåne	“I’ve gotten some questions from the neighbouring municipalities to the east, like Hässleholm and Kristianstad and so on, due to their experiences” (S4)
Future	Ängelholm-Helsingborg airport	<p>“We are calculating that we will make a deficit in the company over the next coming years” (B1)</p> <p>“Hopefully when vaccination increases and people start to travel again we can show that it is not going so badly” (S1)</p> <p>“If more municipalities want to join and share the losses in the future they are more than welcome [on possibility for rest of the municipalities to join airport ownership later]” (B3)</p>
	Aviation	<p>“I think flying will remain in the future, so then it is about making it as climate smart as possible” (B3)</p> <p>“In 30 years we might have passenger flights with electric power, right now there are only small planes that fly with electric power but the development goes unbelievably fast” (S2)</p>
	Familjen Helsingborg	“So I think that’s something we will take with us for the future [Good collaboration and communication in

		Familjen Helsingborg during the change of ownership]” (B1)
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Table 2. For airport ownership.

Table against airport ownership

THEME	SUBTHEME	EXAMPLE
Before change of ownership	Descending trend	“ ... fewer and fewer were flying. The business was shrinking.” (S5)
	Future visions	“Somehow I knew this was coming.” (S5)
	Environmental awareness	“‘Flight shame’ came into the picture already before [the Covid-19], so to speak.” (S3)
Change of ownership	Process	<p>“We talked to the region, to the government. We talked to the big companies, and no one of those three wanted anything to do with this.” (S5)</p> <p>“It was a very fast process. I mean... Many didn’t really have time to think.” (S3)</p> <p>“We had many long discussions within Familjen Helsingborg with the 11 municipalities there, whether the airport should exist, and how important it is for our region.” (S3)</p>
	Reactions	<p>“... it’s nothing we actually would want to do. [...] But still we ended up in a situation where we have to buy it in order to keep it.” (B2)</p> <p>“I was not surprised either that some municipalities, with Helsingborg in the front, said that we need to save this.” (S5)</p> <p>“We think it is strange that private parties operate the airport when it makes profit, and the region takes it when losses come” (Helsingborg MP)</p>
	Municipal participation	<p>“ ... he was quite upset that I said no.” (S5)</p> <p>“I don’t think that it will be better if 11 municipalities own this and 11 voices somehow should point out the way.” (S5)</p>

		<p>“We chose to go into this, decided it in the municipal council. Not univocally, but we made the decision, and now we have to make the best out of it. Make sure it works.” (S3)</p>
	Party politics	<p>“They had different opinions within parties.” (B2)</p> <p>“I was a little bit in a tough situation because my party [...], they were like, we need to save this, of course.” (S5)</p> <p>“Honestly, if I was a politician in Helsingborg, I might have had to go another way, because that will be a game changer” (S5)</p> <p>“My party was one of those that was against the airport in all municipalities. One of the few.” (B2)</p>
	Initiation	<p>“I think especially Ängelholm, where the airport is located, and Helsingborg, the big municipality [initiated the change of ownership].” (B2)</p> <p>“And then the last one [report], that one came out of Ängelholm and Helsingborg. The other nine municipalities weren't a part of this report.” (S5)</p> <p>“It [the initiative] came from Familjen Helsingborg, from the mayor of Helsingborg, among others.” (S3)</p>
Airport meaning	International aspects	<p>“They [local big companies] said that Ängelholm airport is not crucial for them, because their customers are international [...] So for them, the most important airport here is Copenhagen.” (S5)</p> <p>“If you have international contacts, then I don't think it's that important. You look more towards Copenhagen, you look at Malmö region, I mean Malmö-Copenhagen region.” (S3)</p>
	Stockholm	<p>“So I had to go down to smaller companies that had some business in Stockholm, and for them it was crucial.” (S5)</p> <p>“Travel time and so on becomes shorter to Stockholm, naturally, but...” (S3)</p> <p>“It's scheduled flights to Stockholm, basically, that have existed.” (S3)</p>
	Identity & brand	<p>“I think that for Ängelholm and Helsingborg, this is a</p>

		<p>part of their brand, so it's important for Helsingborg to have an airport, even if it's based in Ängelholm, they think that it's their." (S5)</p> <p>"It's crucial for them [Helsingborg and Ängelholm] to show that they are cities that are growing, and we have an airport and so on." (S5)</p> <p>"It has, not the least, a quite big marketing value." (S3)</p> <p>"I mean it gives status to have an airport." (S3)</p> <p>"Ängelholm airport has always been there for many. It's a natural part of logistics in our corner [of the region]." (S3)</p>
	Business vs. leisure	<p>"There's no clear evidence what the airport means to businesses." (MP)</p> <p>"If the local companies [...] said to me that [...] if the municipality [...] doesn't go in as an owner and save the airport, we will have to close. Then maybe I had to reconsider my standing in this." (S5)</p> <p>"Yeah, for politicians, I think [important]. If they are in the parliament, then Ängelholm is the closest to many of the people in an office in Skåne. Otherwise, for holidays and vacations and so on. No, I don't think that Ängelholm-Helsingborg Airport is that crucial. Then we're back to Copenhagen airport." (S5)</p> <p>"I, for example, as a politician, have flown many times up to Stockholm. [...] I mean... Common people... If you are going on a holiday, you don't fly from Ängelholm but from Malmö or Copenhagen." (S3)</p>
	Exaggerated meaning	<p>"But that conclusion was that if you don't have that [airport], all companies that used to fly with it, they will go bankrupt in a month. And I don't think that is true. But yeah, my opinion." (S5)</p> <p>"And they put something together that, like, okay If we don't have the airport, we might lose billions of Swedish crowns. But no one could show me how did you do the math behind that one." (S5)</p>
Collaboration	Establishment	<p>"If you look at Sweden, our co-operation between the municipalities in northwestern Skåne is well developed." (B2)</p>

		<p>“I think we’re pretty good at working together, if we put aside the airport.” (S5)</p> <p>“None of us 11 are complete, but we need each other to create an offering for residents and citizens, and to feel that you live in a mutual place.” (B2)</p>
	Benefits	<p>“The more joins in organisations like that, the cheaper it is for everyone.” (S3)</p> <p>“We have to co-operate, we do not survive without. We cannot raise the municipal taxes forever. It doesn’t work like that.” (S3)</p> <p>“We don’t have to reinvent the wheel, we can ‘steal’ their ideas, or ‘borrow’ them. Yeah, tag along. We don’t have the same development potential as Helsingborg has with their resources.” (S3)</p> <p>“Marketing-wise, if you want to look at that, it is Helsingborg that is more known than the other municipalities. Just like Copenhagen has more strength and is more international marketing-wise, than what Malmö is. Malmö often thinks that Malmö is ‘oh we are so well-known’.” (S3)</p>
	Power of collaboration	<p>“If he [mayor of Helsingborg] could get the other 10 municipalities and the mayors, me included, to say yes [to buying the airport], it gives more power to the deal itself.” (S5)</p> <p>“It is a joint power when all 11 municipalities point in the same direction. Naturally it is more powerful than if three pointed in another direction. That everyone stands behind it and joins is extremely important.” (S3)</p>
	Influencing in municipal co-operation	<p>“But at the end [of deciding to buy or not to buy the airport], there was a lot of pressure. And a lot of people tried to change me as well.” (S5)</p> <p>“I have never experienced that Helsingborg would have said ‘it’s we who decide because we are the biggest municipality’, [...] it has been an open discussion and they have been very helpful.” (S3)</p> <p>“There is a constant lobbying, that now we have to reach them because we want them in.” (S3)</p>
	Disagreements	<p>“I think we disagree sometimes but we don’t call out</p>

		<p>each other just for the sake of it.” (B2)</p> <p>“ ... if you go to Landskrona’s website, you will not see the brand of Familjen Helsingborg. They don’t want to show off with that, because they don’t like the name Helsingborg to be a part of the name.” (S5)</p> <p>“Even though it maybe looks weird that you get involved [to a project after saying no to it], I think we have to do it as well as possible, I think that’s your job as a politician towards the residents. You don’t try to sabotage it and say that it’s bad. You try to make the best out of it.” (S3)</p>
Stakeholders	Residents	<p>“They [inhabitants] think we need to be a part of Sweden, with Stockholm. There’s this image that it [the airport] is crucial for businesses and for companies to establish in our region.” (B2)</p> <p>“It’s been surprisingly quiet. I mean there were mostly protests before the decision was made. ‘You can not buy an airport. How stupid is that?’” (S3)</p>
	Businesses	<p>“We don’t have that many companies in our municipality that fly due to their business. However, in the whole region, here in Familjen Helsingborg, there are a number of companies that of course fly and it is important for them.” (S3)</p> <p>“When we talk about the airport matter, I think the expectations from businesses and companies. At least there’s an expectation that we would do it, which is quite important.” (B2)</p>
	Media	<p>“I think the majority of those who wrote [in the media] were those who didn’t want to have the airport and were upset. It is also possible that I’m in my bubble and don’t see or hear much more than that of course, but that’s something you have to consider as well.” (B2)</p> <p>“I haven’t heard anything afterwards. There were some texts in Helsingborgs Dagblad a while ago, about how much money you had put in this and how much money there was left. [...] But otherwise there haven’t been any bigger discussions.” (S3)</p> <p>“Newspapers. They were not happy that we saved it. There were articles showing that this might not be the right thing.” (S5)</p>

	Competitors	<p>“So for them [international companies] the most important airport here is Copenhagen.” (S5)</p> <p>“Ängelholm airport and Halmstad airport, those two cannot survive.” (S5)</p> <p>“At the same time, we have the Halmstad airport.” (S3)</p>
	Ängelholm-Helsingborg Airport	<p>“If there is no one who wants to fly, you cannot fly an [airline’s] airplane.” (S3)</p> <p>“It’s not like you just like that [reopen an airport], you have to have two, three key persons employed, that have a certain education and competence. If you don’t have them you simply cannot operate an airport.” (S3)</p>
Future	Ängelholm-Helsingborg Airport	<p>“The question is how long you can continue to operate an empty airport” (S3)</p> <p>“If it works it’s good, if it doesn’t then it just didn’t go. Then those who said yes when they had the chance, they will get to explain why they did this. We said anyway no, did what we could. Now you can explain where we will go moving forward” (S3)</p>
	Aviation	“After Covid-19, will we travel as before?” (S5)
	Region	“I don’t think anytime soon that Landskrona will leave [Familjen Helsingborg] because they can’t see that going anywhere else is better” (S5)

Table 3. Against airport ownership.