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Community Work in Danish Non-profit Housing Areas: A Case Study

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Abstract

Over the past four decades, community work in Denmark has seen significant developments. It has transformed from a focus on types of interventions in communities to broader understandings of the role of institutions and actors from different sectors (Vincenti, 2009). The aim of this thesis is to learn more about what types of community work are practiced in Denmark today, and the challenges that it is currently facing. This case study is specifically focused on the context of community work practiced in Danish non-profit housing areas. Data was collected through analyzing the responses from questionnaires of three individuals with different relationships to community work in Denmark. Additionally, document analysis was performed on a report about a specific community work project organized by a non-governmental organization. Four themes were identified from the data analysis. These four themes were collaboration, importance of local institutions, avoiding ghettoization, and the influence of New Public Management. These themes were discussed in relation to the theoretical frameworks presented. Results highlighted the complex nature of community work, as well as the growing challenges caused by neoliberalism and the difficulties of integrating immigrants into society. Further research should aim to include the voices of the members of these communities to better understand their experiences with community work.

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Introduction

Community work is practiced all over the globe, and as a practice, is as diverse as the countries that it is implemented in. While the term community work may be used to describe a wide range of practices, it is always concerned with “improving the lives of individuals and groups, in designated areas, communities or geographical localities, and it is nearly always seeking solutions to and working with people experiencing poverty, disadvantage and discrimination” (Popple, 2015, p. 135). Internationally, community work can range from well-funded, state administered projects to local and non-government programs that typically rely on the hard work and commitment of a small number of people with limited resources. Regardless of what form it may take, the success of community work anywhere depends on “harnessing the skills, knowledge and vision of those who are committed to addressing the shared concerns and key issues that impact on localities and communities of interest” (Popple, 2015, p. 135).

This thesis is not meant to offer a comprehensive review of every understanding of community work in Denmark, as it is far too diverse a field to do so. Instead, it focuses on describing a few understandings of the practice in the context of Danish non-profit housing areas, and frames them within some of the broader discourses around community work in Denmark. To do this, I will first construct the field and review the literature surrounding community work in Denmark by providing a brief historical background of the Nordic welfare state, along with how social work fits into this broader context. Then I will present the field of community work by describing its relation to social work, and outlining some of its key aspects--particularly as it is practiced in Denmark. Finally, I will consider the

growing influence of neoliberalism and New Public Management on the Nordic welfare state, before discussing the various theories that have influenced community work's development over the years.

Constructing the Field and Reviewing the Literature

The Nordic Welfare State

To understand how community work is practiced in Denmark, it is important to understand more broadly how social work is organized. And to understand how social work is organized, we must acknowledge the broader welfare state model that it is part of. Therefore, it is important to first provide a brief description of the Nordic welfare state model.

The welfare state originated in the late 19th century in Europe, but did not fully develop until after World War II (Castles et al., 2010). Looking back, we recognize that the founding period of the welfare state coincided with what we now know of as the "first era of globalization" (beginning in the 1870s and ending abruptly with the declaration of World War I in 1914). In the 19th century, the state was more of a warfare state (meaning a significant portion of public funds was spent on the military), but dramatically changed to a welfare state at the beginning of the 20th century. The Great Depression in the United States had a significant effect on the growth of the welfare state across the globe. In the Nordic countries, the Great Depression served as evidence for the necessity of an advanced welfare state. World War II once again made the warfare state a first priority, but its

conclusion provided the impetus for further social welfare policy reform (Castles et al., 2010).

Danish sociologist, Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1990), outlines three main types of welfare models in his influential book, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Esping-Andersen's (1990) models are liberal, conservative, and social democratic regimes. In the liberal regime, the market is central, while the family and state play a more marginal role. In the conservative regime, the family is central, the market is marginal and the state is subsidiary. Meanwhile, the social democratic regime, of which Denmark's model falls under, is characterized by the state playing a central role in providing welfare services, while the market and family play a marginal role (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Furthermore, it is one in which the public sector is "authorized to intervene in the lives and living conditions of individuals, families, groups and communities and in structures affecting these living conditions" (Vincenti, 2009, p. 90).

One of the fundamental reasons that a welfare model like Denmark's is able to thrive is that the country has both high levels of trust among its citizens and between its citizens and the government. With the government taking control of the majority of welfare services, this trust is critical in order for the citizens to be willing to pay relatively high tax rates. They only do so because they know that the government will fulfill their needs and provide services such as education and health care. Denmark, along with the other Nordic countries, consistently ranks near the top in studies that measure levels of trust amongst its citizens, and the government (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2018). These high levels of trust in

Denmark are key in the collective orientated welfare state that is supportive of social inclusion and participation (Vincenti, 2009).

To understand how social work fits into the larger welfare state, it can be helpful to consider the laws in the Nordic countries that outline the goals of the welfare institutions. In all of the Nordic countries, except for Sweden, one of the goals is to prevent social problems, and in four of the Nordic countries (including Denmark) there is another part of the law that is focused on “improv[ing] or promot[ing] living conditions” (Hutchinson, 2009, p. 23). Lastly, the goal of participation in society is expressed in all of the Nordic countries in various ways. In the Danish law, the “purpose of improving the person’s capability to be self-reliant is stressed” (Hutchinson, 2009, p. 23). This gives an overview of the framework in which social work is practiced within, and the general aims of the profession in Denmark.

Community Work’s Relation to Social Work

Traditionally, community work has been viewed as a type of social work, along with casework and group work (Payne, 2014). However, many people who practice community work conceptualize their methods as being in opposition to the more problem-solving oriented nature of individual, family and group social work. Payne (2014) describes this difference, writing, “Community work is to them partly about transforming the present way of organizing society and includes resistance to authority; individual practice, however, aims to help individuals and families to adjust to potentially harmful social pressures or to

mitigate the pressures on individuals, rather than seeking a change that will affect wider society” (p. 215).

However, by examining the current definition of social work developed by the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), it is clear how community work fits into the broader field. The current definition reads:

“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance well-being. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels.”

(IFSW & IASSW, 2014)

While this definition is quite broad, it nonetheless provides some common ground for understanding what social work consists of and aims to do. As I discuss below, community work similarly promotes social change, social cohesion and the empowerment of people with similar principles that guide it such as social justice and human rights. For this reason, I consider community work to be part of the broader field of social work.

Defining Community

Since its inception, social work has been attentive to the idea of “community.” And even though the profession has been most focused and interested on the individual as the target for intervention, it also understands that the individual cannot be separated from the environment in which they live, work and play (Staller & Mafile’o, 2010). Understanding

what constitutes a “community” is integral to the broader understanding of community work theory and practice. The following section will not attempt to provide one concrete definition of community, but instead provide some different understandings that reflect the complexities and imprecision around the term.

Staller and Mafile'o (2010) outline five organizing features that are quite thorough and encompassing of what the word community may include. First, the term community may relate to a specific geographical area, whether that be neighborhood, city, region, or nation. Second, community may refer to a special institutional or social structure, such as a public housing area (which will be discussed in greater detail later), schools, prisons, nursing homes, etc. Third, community can also be centered around racial, religious, ethnic or cultural identities that one may hold. It should, however, be acknowledged that even within one religious community, there may be multiple smaller communities that exist within it--for example the Jewish community is made up of Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative sects. Fourth, community may be defined by some type of shared identifying characteristic, such as a mental or physical health feature (i.e. cancer survivor, disability status), sexual orientation, or gender identity. This may also be extended to other statuses such as homelessness, refugee, expat, etc. Lastly, they suggest that communities may be organized as communication networks, which are made possible by the internet, cell phones, radio, TV, etc. (Staller & Mafile'o, 2010).

For social workers, these different communities play out in a variety of ways. Staller and Mafile'o (2010) outline how each of their categories of community may be relevant to a social worker's practice. For example, a community may be the context or setting in which

the practitioner works. This means that social workers must be culturally aware and responsive to the particular communities they are working in, especially when they are not part of that community. Second, a specific community may be the target population that a social worker is working with, for example immigrants who have severe Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Third, community can provide the place or site of service delivery. For example, a community based social service organization may try to meet the specific needs of the local residents by establishing a community-based mental health clinic or social welfare office. Lastly, social workers may target communities for the purpose of organizing and promoting social justice issues, for example engaging community members to improve housing conditions and neighborhood safety (Staller & Mafile'o, 2010). All of these examples illustrate how complex defining community is and how intertwined the social work profession is with the idea of community.

While the term community work will be used throughout this thesis, I acknowledge that this is a generic term that includes aspects of other disciplines (many of which will be discussed), including, but not limited to: community development, community organizing, and community social work, among others.

Defining Community Work

Identifying a universally agreed upon definition of community work is difficult for a number of reasons. First, community work is not solely associated with the field of social work, as it also has elements of many other professions. Second, community work, at least historically speaking, has been a largely British practice, and since then, other countries

have adapted/developed their own term to describe their own version of community work. However, it is worth mentioning that Jane Addams, who is often thought of as one of the pioneers of social work, was practicing what we would now consider community work in 1889. It was in that year that she founded the Hull House, which was a settlement house that was opened to recently arrived European immigrants in the West Side of Chicago. When Hull House was first opened in 1889, its main purpose was to provide social and educational opportunities for working class people in the surrounding neighborhoods (Addams, 1990). Even from over 100 years ago, we can see the ways in which Addams adopted a community-oriented focus to the profession, where she looked to her surrounding area and resources to help individuals improve their lives.

Despite the challenges in developing one widely-agreed upon definition of community work, there have been many practitioners and researchers that have attempted to define the term. Popple (2015) describes the term “community work” as being a generic term that refers to the level of intervention within a typology of social work, which falls in line with the different levels that social work practice occurs at. Popple (2015) adds that although community work may be seen as a narrow, localized activity, it can have a significant impact on those individuals living in the target community. Hutchinson (2009) has a more nuanced explanation, as she writes, “Through community work, social workers could contribute by helping to mobilize groups, organizations and local communities to action, and by cooperating and working towards changing the conditions which had contributed to creating, strengthening and prolonging social problems at the individual level and making people powerless” (p. 11). Through both of these definitions, the

similarities between community work and social work are apparent, and this is why I consider community work to be part of the broader field of social work. Within this thesis, I employ the definition provided by Hutchinson (2009), because I appreciate the attention to the collaborative nature of the practice, as well as the structures (she refers to them as “conditions”) that create these social issues.

Community Work in Denmark

Explicating the detailed history of community work in Denmark is beyond the scope of this thesis (primarily because it has already been well documented), but a general historical understanding is needed to understand how it has reached its current form. Community work first started in Denmark in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a result of the growing concern of social fragmentation, in which poor, ethnic Danish families were concentrated in certain communities. Then in the late 1980s and 1990s, the focus began to shift towards immigrants and refugees that were similarly concentrated in particular areas. (Andersen, personal communication, April 17, 2020; Vincenti, 2009). Understandings and developments in community work in Denmark have largely been influenced by the national programs implemented during this time. For example, de Palo and Uggerhøj (1995, as cited in Vincenti, 2009) identify four overarching goals of one community work program of the nineties:

1. Based upon holistic understanding of the problems of local communities
2. Aimed at reducing criminality in local areas
3. Work towards the integration of minority ethnic groups

4. Reduce the burden upon the most exposed municipal councils

Two of those goals, increased integration and reducing criminality, have inspired and qualified many of the community work programs for funding over the years. De Palo and Uggerhoj (1995, as cited in Vincenti, 2009) argue that the “concepts of social integration and disintegration are central to the political discussion” (p. 77) around community work in Denmark. Furthermore, community work in Denmark is primarily led by programs coordinated by the public sector (i.e. municipalities), and they have set the framework and dominant discourses around community work (Vincenti, 2009). Vincenti (2009) claims that community work is seen as an instrument of government led policy and as such is used as a response by central and local governments to changing problems in specific neighborhoods. These specific neighborhoods are most commonly non-profit housing areas, many of which have recently been labelled as “ghettos” by the Danish government. This identification of specific neighborhoods further highlights the need for community work to provide solutions and create “social communities characterized by integration and non-violence” (Vincenti, 2009, p. 78). However, Vincenti (2009) adds “there is a danger that community work is associated with one mission and one discourse: that of creating peaceful communities through social policing” (p. 78). Unfortunately, this association of community work with social policing is not new. As Jones and Novak (1999) describe, “The view of social work from below has been largely negative. There is a widespread sensibility that in many working class neighborhoods that social workers are to be avoided because of their powers to remove children or commit people to mental hospitals. There is very little trust” (p. 84-85). While Jones and Novak (1999) are not

explicitly writing about Denmark, the same trends can be seen as there has long been a discussion of the role of social workers in local communities (Vincenti, 2009).

Ghettos

These non-profit housing areas are a particularly interesting setting for this case study (and community work as a whole), because of the current political discourses which surround them. Having a general understanding of the histories of these areas, as well as an overview of the current conversations around them is important in identifying how community work fits into the situation. The term “ghetto” was not used as a label by the Danish government for these areas until 2010, but these non-profit housing areas have been around for decades. Previous to being called ghettos, these areas were most often referred to as “poor neighborhoods” or “neighborhoods at risk” (H. Winther, personal communication, February 20, 2020). Even before they were labelled as ghettos, these neighborhoods were monitored, and government agencies carefully measured statistics such as income, employment, crime, and education. Then in 2010, the Danish government, led by Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, a member of the center-right party, implemented the “ghetto list” (Hoffmann Schrøder, 2019). Winther described how the conservative government was in need of a scapegoat and they “accepted to be kind of racist in a non-racist way... They can’t say that they don’t like Muslims, but they can make it very hard for people with a Muslim background by focusing on social policy” (H. Winther, personal communication, February 20, 2020). Since then, the term “ghetto” has become a

very common term in Danish political discourse and newspapers, despite it being criticized (Birk, 2017).

For a neighborhood to be labelled as a ghetto, it must meet at least three out of five criteria defined by the government. The criteria include the area having (1) an unemployment rate over 40%, (2) more than 50% residents with a non-Western background, (3) more than 60% residents with only basic Danish schooling, (4) a crime rate over three times the national average (which was 2.03% in 2019), and (5) an average income less than 55% of the average income for the region (Transport- og Boligministeriet, 2019).

Not only are the criteria that ghettos are measured by discriminatory, but the term “ghetto” itself carries a lot of weight; Nazis used the term during the Holocaust to describe the areas where Jews and other minority groups were segregated. Today, it is often seen as a derogatory term used to describe neighborhoods where black Americans in the United States live (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Yildiz Akdogan, a Social Democrat politician who represents one of the ghettos in Copenhagen says that Danes have become so desensitized to harsh rhetoric about immigrants that they no longer register the negative connotation around the word “ghetto” (Barry & Sorensen, 2018).

These housing areas that appear on the ghetto list are now subject to a new set of laws passed in 2018, called the “Parallel Societies Act”, that are being implemented in these areas to regulate life (H. Winther, personal communication, February 20, 2020). These new laws include children (born in these areas), starting from the age of one, being required to spend at least 25 hours a week separated from their families for mandatory instruction on

Danish values, including Danish language courses. Non-compliance with this new law will lead to welfare payments being suspended. For comparison, other Danish citizens have the choice of enrolling their children in preschool up to the age of six. Another big part of the new Parallel Societies Act is the government's demand that large sections of these housing blocks be demolished in order to attract private investors, thus forcing out many current residents with the intention of changing the overall demographics of the area (Hoffmann Schrøder, 2019).

In July 2019, the new housing minister from the Social Democratic party that now holds power said that he wanted to stop using the word "ghetto" in order to avoid stigmatizing the areas. Especially given that the term's connotations in other cultures has no basis for comparison to these areas in Denmark, he would instead refer to the neighborhoods as "underprivileged residential areas." However, the word "ghetto" is now part of Danish law, so it remains in official usage (Hoffmann Schrøder, 2019).

Project Flyv

All of the information presented about community work thus far has been centered around the public sector's approach to the practice. In addition to exploring community work as carried out by the public sector, I was also interested in exploring how and if it was being practiced differently by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). One specific project that has been well documented, and took place in two different non-profit housing areas was a project called "Project Flyv." Project Flyv was organized by Dignity, an NGO that "fights for a world without torture and offer torture victims the vital rehabilitation they

need” (DIGNITY - Danish Institute Against Torture, n.d.). Project Flyv specifically was a project that was part of a larger effort designed to “...increase collaboration between municipal, residential and non-governmental social work actors, for the benefit of traumatized refugee families, local communities and relevant municipal departments” (Ligon et al. , 2017, p. 22). Previous to this project, the majority of Dignity’s rehabilitation efforts in Denmark took place in a clinical setting, but there have since been more efforts to move rehabilitation efforts out of the clinics and into the communities in which their target groups conduct their daily lives. This is part of their broader theory of change which states,

“... the quality of life of traumatised refugee families can best be improved through a holistic approach to social work, which augments the efficacy of existing services and strengthens both civil society efforts and the capacity of the primary target group. This involves a community-based approach to social work.”

(Ligon et al., 2017, p. 22)

For this reason, Project Flyv seemed to be the perfect case study within a case study of sorts, because it was a specific project that was trying to implement more community work theories/models into their practice, and also would provide a unique context in that it was being carried out by an NGO, versus the municipality.

Theories in Community Work

The term “theory” often gets used in social science investigation, and is used to explain social phenomena. However, despite its frequent use, the term is rarely examined and its implications critiqued. For this reason, it is valuable to briefly consider what the term means before reviewing some of the theories that have informed community work. At the most basic level, the purpose of theory is to create a better understanding of the world

and to make our daily encounters less threatening (Popple, 2015). A theory is a system of ideas that explains a group of facts or phenomena, however theories are neither totally objective nor ahistorical, and this aspect is too often overlooked (Popple, 2015, p. 58).

Despite the many shortcomings of theories, a general understanding of community work theories is essential if we are to have a basis for action (Popple, 2015). Community work theory comes from a wide range of disciplines, including psychology, law, education and philosophy. However, Healy (2006) points out that it is important to recognize that none of the theories used in social work and community work are primarily developed or intended for these fields, and for this reason, it is necessary for social workers and community workers to approach these discourses both critically and cautiously, rather than look to them as the one truth (p. 93). What these theories all have in common with each other is a focus on developing social capital, social inclusion and capacity-building (Payne, 2014). The following will be an overview of some of the most influential theories that have shaped social work and community work into what it is today, as a well as a discussion of some of the strengths and weaknesses of the theory in relation to community work.

Systems Theory

One of the oldest theories that has been used in social work is systems theory. Mary Richmond, who many consider to be one of the pioneers of social work, argued that social workers must balance personal and social change orientations as she asserted that “social reform and social case work must of necessity progress together” (Richmond, 1917, p. 365,

as cited in Healy, 2006). During the middle part of the 19th century, a psychological focus dominated the field of social work (Kemp et al., 1997, p. 21, as cited in Healy, 2006). It was not until the 1960s that the focus on both person and environment returned to prominence in social work practice (Healy, 2006). Then, in the mid 1960s, Florence Hollis, a leading social work theorist at the time, urged social workers to adopt a “psychosocial approach,” that is to recognize both the social and psychological aspects of assessment interventions (Woods and Hollis, 1990, p. 14, as cited by Healy, 2006). This is where systems theory provided a foundation for reintegrating the more psychological with the social discourses by acknowledging that a variety of systems impacted individuals in a number of ways.

There are many ways of representing the various components of systems theory, but one of the models that is most often used by social workers is psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecomap model. In this model, a series of concentric rings are used; each represents a different system level, to assist in making assessments about clients. In his model, he outlines three systems, the microsystem, the mesosystem, and the macrosystem. The microsystem is the smallest unit and is made up of the individual, family and the local community. The mesosystem is made up of formal systems that have a direct impact on the individual’s life, such as school, social services, religious groups, etc. The macrosystem refers to society as a whole, including the larger social institutions of government and business (Healy, 2006). There have since been three waves of systems theories, and all of them have emphasized the role of these systems in contributing to individual and community well-being (Healy, 2006).

The key strength of systems theory is that it provides a framework for understanding how people fit into their environment, which for community workers, is critical. Systems theory encourages community workers to not pathologize an individual or their surroundings, but instead analyze the interactions between and within the various systems at play (Healy, 2006). Even though systems theory has had a considerable impact on the broad field of social work over the years it still does have significant weaknesses. One of the major weaknesses that has frequently been identified is the lack of acknowledgement regarding power structures between the various systems. Similarly, many feminist theorists have highlighted the fact that the functioning of the family system often depends on the exploitation of women's labor (Healy, 2006). Other critics have explained how systems theory "does not necessarily enable us [social workers] to use the enormous back of information gathered in the development" to form systemic action strategies, which is a concern for community workers as well (Healy, 2006, p. 148).

Strengths Perspective

Unlike systems theory, the strengths perspective is a much more recent addition to social work theory. While social workers and theorists have long stressed the importance of service users' strengths and capacities, it was not until the late 1980s that the strengths perspective was fully developed into a practice approach. While originally, it was developed in the mental health field, it has since been adopted into multiple other fields including child protection, addiction, developmental disabilities, corrections and community work (Healy, 2006).

At its core, the strengths perspective focuses on “the capacities and potentialities of service users. It concentrates on enabling individuals and communities to articulate, and work towards, their hopes for the future, rather than seeking to remedy the problems of the past or even the present” (Healy, 2006, p. 152). To fulfill this goal, it takes a significant commitment from practitioners to adopt an optimistic attitude toward the individuals and service users with whom they work with. (Healy, 2006). Some proponents of the strengths perspective question whether this approach constitutes a theory. Weick et al. (1989) suggests that “if anything, a strengths perspective is a strategy for seeing; a new way to learn to recognize and use what is already available to them [the service users]” (p. 354, as cited in Healy, 2006). However, Healy (2006) refers to it as a theory because like other theories, it “offers guidelines for analyzing and developing practice responses” (p. 153).

As the strengths perspective has received increased attention all across the globe, it has been important for people to understand how its geographical and contextual origins have shaped its development and application (Healy, 2006). The strengths perspective originated in the United States, which is significant because “North American social work is more strongly aligned with the professions of psychiatry and psychology than is the case in other countries” (Healy, 2006, p. 153). The original proponents of the strengths perspective sought to challenge the dominant psychiatric discourse that was prevalent at the time. The strengths perspective’s core insight--that social work is based on a deficit model--has resonated with social workers across the world (Healy, 2006, p. 154). This has often been attributed to the historical foundation of social work in religious charities and the assumption that service users’ problems could be attributed to moral failings (Weick et al.,

1989, as cited in Healy, 2006). To this day, there are many proponents of the strengths perspective that argue that “despite the stated commitment to values of client self-determination and respect, dominant practice approaches remain mired in the language of pathology and deficit” (Healy, 2006, p. 154).

The strengths perspective embodies much more than a simple “catch phrase” emphasizing the capacities of service users. Healy (2006) has outlined five key assumptions of the strengths perspective. They are as follows:

1. All people have strengths, capacities and resources.
2. People usually demonstrate resilience, rather than pathology, in the face of adverse life events.
3. Service users have the capacity to determine what is best for them and do not need human service workers to define their best interests for them.
4. Human service professionals, including social workers, tend to focus on client’s problems and deficits while ignoring their strengths and resources.
5. Collaborative partnerships between workers and service users reflect and build service user’s capacities. Yet human service professionals, including social workers, are reluctant to collaborate with service users in a spirit of mutual learning and genuine partnership, preferring instead to protect their professional power.

(Healy, 2006, p. 157-158)

Healy (2006) also outlines five practice principles that arise from the assumptions listed above, which will be briefly defined here:

Practice Principles 1: Adopt an optimistic attitude

While it may be easy for social workers to adopt a negative attitude toward some service users because of the challenging circumstances they may find themselves in, it is still critical that social workers work to have a positive and optimistic attitude. This requires social workers to be skeptical and critical of labels that may suggest that service users are incompetent and incapable of improving their life quality. Instead, they must seek

to recognize all of their service users' resources and capabilities, as well as their aspirations for their own life (Healy, 2006, p. 158).

Practice Principle 2: Focus primarily on assets

Similar to the previous principle, and the perspective as a whole, the second principle highlights the importance of focusing primarily on service users' assets. Healy writes, "While advocates of the strengths perspective do not deny the reality of problems such as mental illness and addiction, they assert that we should resist making them the focus of our assessment and intervention" (Healy, 2006, p. 159). Instead social workers must primarily recognize the assets of the service user because they can only build on strengths, not on deficits (Healy, 2006, p. 159).

Practice Principle 3: Collaborate with the service user

Advocates of the strengths perspective again stress the importance of a partnership between social workers and service users. The solutions developed collaboratively will likely be much more useful to the service user than those decided upon by solely the social worker. Additionally, Healy (2006) suggests that "partnership work, of itself, is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for service user empowerment" (p. 162).

Practice Principle 4: Work towards the long-term empowerment of service users

Similar to adopting an optimistic attitude, this principal is focused on the future possibilities rather than past problems. This involves "recognizing and affirming service users' resilience and capacities in the face of adversity" (Healy, 2006, p. 164).

Practice Principle 5: Create community

This principle stresses the “importance of social support for achieving resilience and enhancing quality of life” (Healy, 2006, p. 164). Saleeby (1996) outlines how belonging to a community is the first step toward empowerment because “[m]embership means that people need to be citizens - and responsible and valued members in a viable group of community. To be without membership is to be alienated, and to be at risk of marginalization and oppression, the enemies of civic and moral strength” (pp. 298-299). Furthermore, “from a strengths perspective, community support can build and draw on the capacities of service users to help themselves and to help others” (Healy, 2006, p. 164).

Asset-Based Community Development

The final principle, “create community,” is a perfect segue into why the strengths perspective has had a significant influence in community work. One particular approach to community work that has developed within the broader strengths perspective is called asset-based community development (often referred to as ABCD practice) (Healy, 2006). This approach shifts away from the need-based approach that, according to Kretzmann and McKnight (1993, p. 25), has characterized community work and instead focuses on the skills and assets within a community (Green & Haines, 2002, as cited in Healy, 2006). Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) have outlined the key features of the ABCD approach:

- *Change must begin from inside the community:* The community itself must drive the change process, and this is important because the community will own and support changes and initiatives that it has developed. When the community owns the initiatives, the process of sustaining change will build pride and independence within the approach. Kretzmann and McKnight

(1993, p. 5) add that in the current climate of neoliberalism [explained in greater detail in a following section], it is impractical to depend on outside help and therefore “the hard truth is that development must start from within the community”.

- *Change must build on the capacities and assets that already exist within communities:* Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) suggest that there are at least four sites where assets can be uncovered: individuals, informal networks (such as neighborhood relationships), civic institutions (such as libraries), and formal institutions (such as schools, businesses, or government agencies).
- *Change is relationship driven:* The asset approach fosters collaboration across different sectors, such as informal, community service, business and government agencies.
- *Change should be oriented toward sustainable community growth:* Advocates of ABCD are often critical of community work approaches that focus on maintenance versus growth, and also on approaches that look outside the community for change initiatives. In contrast, they “seek to achieve the long-term social and economic empowerment of disadvantaged communities by building assets within the community” (Green and Haines, 2002, as cited in Healy, 2006, p. 166).

Now that I have presented an overview of the strengths perspective, as well as its connection to the field of community work, I will discuss its strengths and limitations. One of the key strengths of this approach is that it recognizes the power of optimism, on the part of both the service users as well as the workers, for achieving significant improvements in the quality of service users' lives (Healy, 2006). Additionally the strengths perspective challenges many of the dominant discourses, such as the biomedical and legal discourses, by promoting collaboration between service users and workers, and encouraging a critical stance towards expert knowledge (Healy, 2006). Lastly, it stresses the importance of building sustainable community support networks for and with service users, especially in situations where service users' concerns are not susceptible to the types of short-term structured interventions that often take place in social work (Healy, 2006).

Despite many of its significant additions to the practice of social work, there are many criticisms of the strengths perspective as well. Perhaps most notably is the perspective's naivety in relation to the structural barriers that many service users face in realizing small goals, let alone their hopes and dreams (Healy, 2006). Furthermore, a related concern is that the strengths perspective puts too much responsibility on individuals and communities for achieving change. Many critical social work advocates argue that there is another option, and that is to "transfer economic and social resources to disadvantaged communities as a way of minimizing the impact of global economic and technological change upon them" (Healy, 2006, p. 168).

Critical Social Work Theories

While the strengths perspective often overlooks the structural barriers to service user empowerment, critical social work, by contrast, focuses on understanding responses to structural injustices. The term “critical social work” is broad, and includes radical social work, structural social work, feminist social work, anti-racist social work, and anti-oppressive social work. While these different types of critical social work are quite diverse, they all share a foundation in the critical science paradigm (Healy, 2006). The key feature of the critical science paradigm is the claim that macro-social structures shape social relations at every level of social life (Healy, 2006). For instance, Healy (2006) uses the examples of “capitalism shapes relations between middle and working class people, or that patriarchy shapes relations between men and women, or that imperialism constraints relations between European and non-European peoples” (pp. 173-174). Furthermore, “[c]ritical social scientists also argue that the world is split between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ and that the interests of these two groups are opposed and irreconcilable” (Healy, 2006, p. 174). In these divisions, social workers are placed in the ‘haves’ category, because of their professional status and access to institutional power, while the service users with whom they work are considered ‘have nots’. Critical practice therefore requires social workers to reflect on their access to power and develop strategies that allow them to share their power with service users (Healy, 2006). Lastly, another feature of the critical social science paradigm that is especially relevant to community work, is “the emphasis on empowering oppressed people to act, collectively, to achieve social change” (Healy, 2006, p. 174). With this in mind, critical social workers then aim to create opportunities that allow

service users to participate in collective action toward their concerns, rather than an individual response (Healy, 2006). The following will first provide a brief overview of the works of Antonio Gramsci and how his work has influenced discourse around social inequalities, then empowerment theory will be discussed along with Paulo Freire's work, followed by a more detailed look into critical community work specifically, and finally the strengths and weaknesses of the theory will be discussed.

Introducing some of the work of the Italian social theorist Antonio Gramsci, provides a valuable perspective in understanding how community work can play a role in addressing many of the inequalities that are present in society. According to Gramsci (1971, as cited in Popple, 2015), there is a dominant group in society (whether that be based on race, gender, age ethnicity, nationality, etc. is less important in this specific case), and they maintain their dominance by having a set of beliefs or ideas that are generally accepted by all members of the society, but in essence only serve the interests of the dominant group. He adds that the non-dominant groups, or the marginalized groups in society, do not necessarily have the conceptual tools to understand the situation they are living in, and thus are not able to formulate any alternatives to overcome the dominant forces at play (Gramsci, 1971, as cited in Popple, 2015). This dominance is maintained by a process of hegemony, which is described as "the relation between classes and other social forces. A hegemonic class, or part of a class, is one which gains the consent of other classes and social forces, through creating and maintaining a system of alliance by means of political struggle" (Simon, 1982, as cited in Popple, 2015, p. 75).

If any change in society is to take place, Gramsci believes that “external agents,” in the guise of intellectuals, organizers and leaders are necessary. His definition of intellectuals extends beyond the traditional definition, to also include civil servants and political leaders, as well as engineers, technicians and others who work in the production sphere. He also describes what he calls an “organic” intellectual as those who have been created by the dominant class and “give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic, but also in the social and political fields” (Gramsci, 1971, as cited in Popple, 2015, p.76). To tie this discussion back to the topic of community work, we can then ask the question, are community workers “organic” intellectuals? On one hand, we can say that most community workers, especially in a welfare state like Denmark, are employed by the state, and therefore are acting with particular instructions, so in that case they could be considered to be part of the dominant “organic” intellectual group. On the other hand, the fact that many community workers may be at odds with the ideology of the dominant class, and are encouraging individuals to articulate their own views suggests that they do not fully agree with the dominant system. Thus, it could be interpreted that community workers play an important and strategic role in society by helping individuals make connections between their current position in society and the need for social change (Popple, 2015).

Empowerment Theory

“Empowerment” has unfortunately become somewhat of a buzzword in the field of social work recently, and through that process, much of its meaning has been lost. At the

same time, the fact that it has risen to such prominence, nonetheless highlights the importance of the concept in social work (as well as community work). Empowerment theory can fall under many broader approaches such as systems theory, but in this thesis, I consider it to be a part of the critical social work theories because of its focus on oppression and critical reflection. Before describing what empowerment theory suggests, I will first introduce the work of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian philosopher and what we would now call a social worker, who is often seen as one of the fathers of empowerment theory.

Paulo Freire's main contributions are focused on using education as a tool to challenge the concept of hegemony that Gramsci discussed. Freire developed much of his thinking through working with poor communities in Brazil during the 1960s. He developed approaches that allowed individuals to express their feelings and experiences, and in turn, regain their sense of humanity, and then take action to change their circumstances. He argues "that the dominant social relations create a culture of silence that results in oppressed negative and usually suppressed feelings about themselves [marginalized groups]" (Poppo, 2015, p. 79). His educational approach was aimed at alleviating these suppressed feelings by having educators work alongside oppressed groups in a way that allowed them to reflect on their life experiences and question many of the things they may have previously taken for granted (Poppo, 2015). Freire was keenly aware that this was by no means an easy task, but his great optimism has inspired educators (and other professions) to take on this challenge. He argues that educators have to acknowledge and work with the wide range of experiences that are brought to the table by marginalized groups. The educational process allows for these people to have their experiences, culture,

dreams, and histories validated, while recognizing that these expressions simultaneously carry the seeds for radical change, as well as the burden of oppression (Popple, 2015).

So again, how does this relate to community workers? While Freire's work was focused within the field of education, I would argue that almost all of his teachings can extend to the field of community work as well. Many community workers believe that it is necessary to start working with an individual from their own understanding of their position in society. Freire says that the skill is to work with people with a "problematizing approach" rather than a "problem-solving approach." According to Freire, problem solving involves an expert being distant from a person's reality, while engaging in an analysis that efficiently resolves difficulties. Freire believes that this approach reduces human experiences and difficulties to that which can be "treated." Problematizing, however, means immersing oneself in the struggle of disadvantaged communities and engaging in the task of codifying total reality into symbols which can generate critical consciousness (Freire, 1976, as cited in Popple, 2015). There are claims that Freire's ideas have begun making their way into mainstream education, but given the underlying ideology of the approaches, they are likely only being used selectively (Allman, 1987, as cited in Popple, 2015).

Freire's work has had a great deal of influence on what we now call "empowerment." Empowerment at its core aims to help individuals gain "power of decision and action over their own lives by reducing the effect of social or personal blocks to exercising their existing power, increasing their capacity and self-confidence to use their power, and transferring power to people who lack it" (Payne, 2014, p. 294). Empowerment theory is closely tied to the history of the struggle for equality by black Americans in the

United States, and is used in other important theories, including critical, feminist and anti-discrimination theories (Payne, 2014). Furthermore, empowerment theory is underpinned by an understanding that it is “not something that is ‘done to’ individuals or communities; rather, the role of the social worker is to work with individuals and communities to create environmental and social conditions that build community capacities and enable self-determination” (Pittaway et al. 2010, p. 246).

Empowerment theory does not exist without its critiques and challenges. There is an ongoing critique about whether empowerment is a critical theory of practice whose main goal is social change or if it is aimed at improving the position of particular individuals, families, and communities. Critical theorists argue in their explanation of social issues that empowerment is not structural and fails to seek social changes (Rojek, 1986, as cited in Payne, 2014). For example, Payne (2014) says that critical theorists would argue that crime committed by ethnic minorities in poor areas is produced by structures of inequality in society that have led to poor education services, in areas of poor housing with few positive leisure activities. Therefore, empowering young people in such areas to appreciate education, and advocating for better work opportunities in such areas, are insufficient to overcome the way in which social attitudes and services are organized to the disadvantage of young people in this position (Payne, 2014, p. 296). One of the big challenges that community and social workers often encounter is that the empowerment of one or some individuals may be taking power and resources away from others in their already oppressed environment, rather than taking it from the wider society (Payne, 2014).

Despite its critiques and challenges to implementing it, empowerment theory still offers a useful way for practitioners to think about their work. It offers them ways to reflect on issues of oppression, critical thinking and joint work with service users (Payne, 2014).

Critical and Radical Community Work

Empowerment theory, along with the works of Gramsci and Freire, is often used throughout social work practice, but now we will shift to focus on critical and radical community work specifically. Margaret Ledwith, a professor of community development and social justice at the University of Cumbria in the United Kingdom, has written extensively on the topic of radical community work. In her 2005 book, *Community Development, A critical approach*, she outlines five main points at the onset of the book that are helpful to better understand some of the main goals of radical community work. These five points are as follows:

1. Radical community development is committed to collective actions for social and environmental justice.
2. This begins in a process of empowerment through critical consciousness, and grows through participation in local issues.
3. A critical approach calls for an analysis of power and discrimination in society. The analysis needs to be understood in relation to dominant ideas and the wider political context.
4. Collective action, based on this analysis, focuses on the root causes of discrimination rather than the symptoms.

(Ledwith, 2005, p. 1)

Butcher and colleagues (2007), have also written on the topic of critical community work, and have echoed many of the same themes Ledwith has identified. They write, “our model of critical community practice draws its theoretical inspiration from contemporary

critical theory, and entails a commitment to working for social justice through empowering disadvantaged, excluded and oppressed communities to take more control over the conditions of their lives” (Butcher et al., 2007, p. 17). In their book, *Critical Community Practice*, they outline three demands that community workers must address in their work:

1. To engage in critical theorising to better understand how power dynamics in contemporary society generate and reproduce disadvantage, exclusion and oppression in communities, as well as to provide them with a perspective on how power can be used by communities to promote a more just and equal social order;
2. To engage with communities in critical action directed at transformational change;
3. To continuously hone and deploy their capacity as critically reflective practitioners – to advance their learning, and ultimately to improve their practice.

(Butcher et al., 2007, p. 35)

Butcher et al. (2007) and Ledwith (2005) both argue for social justice and anti-discriminatory values as the theoretical base of discourse for radical community work. Unlike other discourses around community work, the ideas of integration and inclusion of marginalized groups are not the main concern within this discourse, but instead, it is more aimed at achieving a socially just society and individual fulfillment. These ideas around radical community work suggest that the goal of community work is the self realization of individuals, an approach that goes against the Danish tradition of a collective orientated welfare state supportive of social inclusion and participation (Vincenti, 2009).

The sheer number of publications on the topic of critical social work highlights the popularity of this approach, at least among social work educators and authors, but again, there remain some concerns, especially among practitioners. I also acknowledge that the field of critical social work theory is much more diverse and broad than what has been presented here, and thus generalizing about the strengths and weaknesses is challenging,

but I think still valuable. First, I will discuss some of the strengths of this theory. The major strength of this theory is its emphasis on challenging practitioners to reflect on the “societal, cultural, and institutional contexts of social work practice... This emphasis on the broad contexts of practice requires social workers to shift their analysis and action beyond a focus on individual capacities and ‘choices’ to seeking to understand and change oppressive social conditions” (Healy, 2012, p. 11). A second strength of critical social work is how it has been well developed into an approach that is applicable to many fields of social work, community work being one of them (along with case work, family work, group work and policy work) (Healy, 2012). However, despite it being developed as an approach that can be widely used in many contexts, the reality is that it still holds a marginal status within social work practice, which is one of its major weaknesses. As discussed above, it receives significant attention in academia, but has not found success in the field for a variety of reasons. One often cited shortcoming is that critical social work proponents often fail to “reflect on how this choice may be easier for service providers in some contexts than in others” (Healy, 2006, p. 191). “The tensions between critical social work and the organisations of social work services have become pronounced as a result of the shift in the institutional contexts of social work practice” (Healy, 2012, p. 202). Healy (2012) goes on to explain how critical social work emerged during a time of growth and optimism about the welfare state, but now it is at odds with the growing effect of neoliberalism and New Public Management, and its efforts to simplify and streamline services, as opposed to the more holistic approach that critical social workers advocate for. It is evident that critical social work faces an uncertain future due to the changing landscape of the welfare state as

a whole, but if it is to remain relevant, particularly in social work practice, it will need to adapt to these new challenges and develop “the capacity to both understand and engage critically, and constructively, with these changed conditions” (Healy, 2012, p. 203).

Neoliberalism and New Public Management

While the theories presented thus far have had a significant influence on social work and community work for a number of decades, there is arguably no other theory or ideology that has had a more dominant influence on social work since the turn of the century than neoliberal ideology and New Public Management (NPM) (Marthinsen, 2019). When speculating about the future of social work in the 21st century, Fred Powell (2001) writes:

Social work exists in a cold climate dominated by the resurgence of the market and the hollowing out of the welfare state. But its ethical imperative and moral purpose have become more urgent than ever. However, it is essential to acknowledge its changed circumstances and the impact of postmodernity on its historic mission. The old paradigms that defined the role and task of social work are in doubt, if not in eclipse, but new paradigms are emerging that challenge social work to adapt or perish in the face of the deconstructive forces of the market. (p.23)

Despite being written almost two decades ago, Powell’s words remain true, perhaps even more so now. Denmark’s social welfare state is built on the social democratic ideas of building a just society and happiness for mankind based on redistribution and respect. And that is now being replaced by a market of symbolic goods where everyone may have a share depending on their own agency (Marthinsen, 2019). In addition, social work practice is being challenged by the growing dominance of new public management (NPM), which is being implemented in social service organizations as a way to become more efficient

(Healy, 2012). NPM has introduced new systems that are hyper focused on goal attainment, often “deploying variables constructed for databases with little relevance for social work efficiency if the quality of social work is to be regarded as better coping and improving quality of life” (Marthinsen, 2019, p. 355). These institutions affected by neoliberalism and NPM are being “redesigned in the image of the market” (Powell, 2001, p. 24). NPM has brought “the rationality of corporate capitalism to bear on social services. It has created unbearable strains for social workers as their professionalism is reshaped in the form of hierarchical practice” (Powell, 2001, p. 24). Moreover, it has created a “reduction in the opportunities for social workers to practice in holistic, creative, and critical ways” (Healy, 2012, p. 10).

A study conducted a number of years ago provides a valuable example of the ways in which these NPM ideals have affected social work, and in turn community work. The study asked social workers in northern Norway about whether and how they were using community work methods, and whether or not they experienced any barriers for using community work (Hutchinson, 2003, as cited in Hutchinson, 2009). Nearly all of the social workers responded that they were not spending as much time doing community work as they, from a professional point of view, thought was necessary. Many of them cited the workload as the main obstacle. Another important barrier they mentioned was their supervisors who prevented them from doing such work (Hutchinson, 2003, as cited in Hutchinson, 2009). While this study did not take place in Denmark itself, I expect that similar trends could also be observed.

Problem Statement

Over the past four decades, community work in Denmark has seen significant developments. It has transformed from a focus on types of interventions in communities to broader understandings of the role of institutions and actors from different sectors, helping individuals express their hopes and dreams for their community (Vincenti, 2009). Over a decade ago, Vincenti (2009) explained how community work was at a crossroads. On one hand, it could build off the positive experiences, such as the development of a critical consciousness in regards to the multi-sectored approach needed to create meaningful change, in addition to an emphasis upon citizen participation and involvement in decision making. Additionally, community work had the opportunity to take on a leading role in “community regeneration and developing into a recognized specialization with a framework of social work understandings” (Vincenti, 2009, p. 96). On the other hand, community work could stay stuck “within a focus upon methods of interaction, of interventions without critical reflection” (Vincenti, 2009, 96).

The aim of this thesis is to learn more about what types of community work are practiced in Denmark today, and how these practices relate to the paths described by Vincenti (2009). Furthermore, it will explore some of the challenges that community work is facing at present--e.g. the growing influence of neoliberalism and integrating immigrants into Danish society--and hypothesize about what the future of community work might look like. From this aim, my research question is “What types of community work are practiced in Denmark today and, how is community work responding to the growing influence of

neoliberalism on the welfare state and the challenges of integrating immigrants into society?"

Methodology

As described before, the aim of this project was to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of community work practice in Danish non-profit housing areas/areas labelled as ghettos by the Danish government. The methodology that best suits this type of project is descriptive case study. Yin (2014) defines a descriptive case study as a type of case study used to describe a phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurs. In this project, the phenomenon is the practice of community work, and the context is the Danish non-profit housing areas/areas labelled as ghettos by the Danish government. Another reason behind selecting case study as my methodology is that one of the trademarks of case study research is the use of multiple data sources, a strategy that also enhances the data credibility (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, case studies focus on "relation to environment," which is fitting given community work's close ties to these non-profit housing areas (Flyvbjerg, 2011).

Case studies are not without their drawbacks however. Case study research is often criticized because of the very nature of it, focusing on a single case. Some argue that a single case study "cannot provide reliable information about the broader class" (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 301). However, as Flyvbjerg (2011) points out, that is largely dependent on the context of the case study. The purpose of this thesis is not to make generalizations about all of community work in Denmark, but rather explore some types of community work practiced

in Denmark. Another often cited criticism of case study research is that it is a method that contains a bias towards verification, meaning there is a tendency to confirm the researcher's preconceived notions (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Flyvbjerg (2011) provides a thorough discussion of why this common criticism is false, but essentially he says that "case study contains no greater bias toward verification of the researcher's preconceived notions than other methods of inquiry" (p. 311). Again, in the context of this case study, I did not start this project with any preconceived notions about the topic of community work in Denmark as it was completely new to me.

The Setting

The physical setting for this case study was Danish non-profit housing areas, because historically that has been the focus area for community work in Denmark. In Denmark, the majority of immigrants and refugees live in these non-profit housing areas, many of which are categorised by the government as disadvantaged neighbourhoods, or "ghettos" (Ligon et al., 2017). In this thesis, the specific housing areas that are referenced are three different areas in Aarhus and Aalborg. The two neighborhoods in Aarhus, Gellerup and Bispehaven, are currently categorized as ghettos, while the one neighborhood in Aalborg, Aalborg East, was previously listed, but is no longer on the list. The project run by an NGO, Project Flyv took place in Gellerup as well as another non-profit housing area called Mjølnerparken in Copenhagen.

Data Collection

Data collection was done using a combination of in-person narrative interviews, questionnaires sent over email, and document analysis of official reports about specific programs. Conducting this case study during the COVID-19 pandemic presented a number of challenges that will be discussed throughout this thesis. Perhaps its biggest effect was on the way I was able to collect data. Field work is often the most associated method of data collection for case study research, and was intended to be used in this case study research as well. Informational interviews with two individuals were collected at the end of February 2020. However, two weeks later, the nationwide shutdown due to COVID-19 occurred. Originally, the plan was to reach out to social workers working in these non-profit housing areas following the informational interviews, set up a time to meet with them, and if possible, do some shadowing of their jobs in the field. However, due to the restrictions on travel and the orders to stay at home that began in March 2020, I did not have the opportunity to conduct any further in-person interviews or field work. While I had hoped that all of the in-person interviews could be conducted over Skype, due to scheduling complications, all of the interview questions were transformed into questionnaires that were sent through email.

The in-person narrative interviews done early on in the research process were solely for background informational purposes, and while none of the data collected in them were directly used for analysis in the thesis, they nonetheless were quite influential in the development of the project as a whole. Narrative interviewing is a qualitative method of data collection that is used to “understand the subjects, their meanings, and their

experiences. The narrative is used as a means of obtaining this understanding” (Kartch, 2017, p. 2). Narrative interviews are primarily used as an initial tool to elicit narratives for further investigation, which is why I chose to use them in this project (Kartch, 2017). When I first conducted these narrative interviews, I knew that I was generally interested in social work in neighborhoods labelled as “ghettos,” but I did not have a specific lens through which I intended to analyze the topic. Furthermore, I did not have enough background knowledge about community work at the time to do semi-structured or open ended interviews, thus another reason why narrative interviewing was a good fit. It was then through these narrative interviews, that I was able to learn a great deal about what kinds of work were actually happening in these areas, which led me to the topic of community work.

After it was determined that interviews were not going to be possible, (either in person or via Skype), I developed a questionnaire as the main method of data collection. Questionnaires are relatively easy and quick to construct for the researcher, and are flexible, in that the respondent can fill it out on their own time, which was also important given the extenuating circumstances at hand (Gillham, 2007). Given the descriptive nature of this case study, I only selected open-ended questions to ensure that the data produced was appropriate for my desired analysis (Holyk, 2008). The questions were developed from key themes I identified while reading background literature. These themes included: definitions of community work, goals of community work, and challenges to community work. These themes were then adapted into questions like “How would you define the term “community work” in your own words? What is the Danish term/word used to describe

community work?” and “What challenges does community work face in Bispehaven/Gellerup as well as Denmark as a whole?” Respondents were told that they could write as little or as much as they wanted for any question, and that they were allowed to skip any question(s) they did not want to answer. Additionally, the questionnaire was written in English and all respondents were asked to reply to the questions in English as well. I considered translating the questionnaire into Danish and letting respondents answer in Danish as well, but ultimately decided that the challenge of interpreting/translating their responses into English would be more difficult than the benefit I may have obtained from respondents feeling more comfortable responding in Danish.

While using a questionnaire was a useful data collection method given the circumstances I was working under, it was not without its limitations. The major limitation, especially in the context of a case study, is that questionnaires often lack the ability to elicit detailed descriptions. For example I did not have the opportunity to follow up with my respondents about a particular response that I may have found interesting. Another limitation is around the questions themselves. While I tried not to use any leading questions, the questions were nonetheless representative of what I thought to be most pertinent to the topic of community work, and thus there could have been other topics that the respondents felt were important but did not have a chance to convey in the questionnaire. One of the strengths of questionnaires for the researcher is that they are a relatively quick and easy way to collect data, but at the same time, a major limitation is that they are often time consuming for the respondents to complete. I knew my respondents

were all quite busy when I was collecting data, so with that in mind, I tried to find the balance between not making my questionnaire too long (thus risking them skipping questions or providing very short answers), while at the same time, making sure it was thorough enough to gather data that I would be able to effectively analyze.

The document analysis conducted in this thesis was done on an in-depth report on Project Flyv, titled “Social Work Models in Addressing State and Authority-Based Violence in Denmark and the Philippines”. Document analysis is a “systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents both printed and electronic material” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). It “is often used in conjunction with other qualitative research methods as a means of triangulation-- ‘the combination of methodologies in the same study of the same phenomenon” (Denzin, 1970, as cited in Bowen, 2009, p. 28). By triangulating the data, the researcher can enhance credibility and “...guard against the accusation that a study’s findings are simply an artifact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator’s bias” (Patton, 1990, as cited in Bowen, 2009, p. 28). More specifically, document analysis involves “skimming, reading and interpretation. This iterative process combines elements of content analysis and thematic analysis” (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). Again, given the extenuating circumstances of the COVID-19 shut downs, using document analysis was quite helpful, as it is both an accessible and efficient research method. Document analysis has its limitations however. Although documents can be a valuable and rich source of data, it is important to look at documents critically: specifically, one should consider the original purpose of the document and who it is from (Bowen, 2009). The authors of the report used in this paper did not explicitly mention their relation to the project or to DIGNITY, but did

mention that it was a collaborative effort, which suggests that DIGNITY did play an active role in its production. The report is written pragmatically and without any personal opinions or reflections, which I would argue makes it more valuable, but at the same time, there is little critical discussion of the project as a whole, which may suggest that they wanted to portray the project in a positive light. Another often-cited limitation of document analysis is that documents provide insufficient detail, because most documents are designed independent of a research agenda (Bowen, 2009). However, in my case, the document that was analyzed provided sufficient detail and seemed to be written for academia.

The Participants

The participants that were given a questionnaire consisted of three individuals all with differing experiences/relationships with community work. Two of the participants were recruited through connections of my thesis supervisor at Aalborg University. The last participant was identified through reading various articles, and then contact was made through one of the first respondents. Two of the individuals with more direct experience working with community work responded to one questionnaire that was focused more broadly on community work and how it was practiced (See Appendix A). One of the individuals, Henning Winther, is a consultant for Østjysk Bolig, a public housing organization working in one of the non-profit housing areas in Aarhus, Denmark. The other individual, Anne Kristine Andersen, is the Network Coordinator at the Center for Tværfaglig Forebyggelse (Center for Interdisciplinary Prevention) which is part of Aalborg

municipality. The final respondent, Louise Mejnertz, was the project coordinator for Project Flyv. The questionnaire that she responded to covered community work briefly, but was then more focused on Project Flyv and how community work was implemented in that project (See Appendix B). All respondents consented to having their names and responses identified in this thesis.

Analysis

Analyzing case study data is especially difficult because many of the methods often used in case study research have not been clearly defined. For that reason, the analysis carried out in this thesis is inspired by a couple of other well defined methods. Unlike many other research methods, case studies are not meant to be summarized into specific theories or propositions. While this is often identified as a drawback by critics of case-study, to the case-study researcher, this is not a problem at all, but in fact a sign that “the study has uncovered a particularly rich problem” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 237). A rich problem is one that cannot be easily defined, which community work precisely is.

With this in mind, the analysis carried out in this thesis was inspired by Braun and Clarke’s thematic analysis and Yin’s analytic strategy for developing a case-study description (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Yin, 2014). Thematic analysis is a method of analysis designed to identify, analyze, and report themes within a dataset. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that a theme captures “something important about the data in relation to the research question” (p. 82). Thematic analysis can be used in a number of different ways. In this thesis it is used to describe the data in great detail, which was appropriate given the nature

of the case study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was first used as part of the document analysis to identify themes that would then guide question development for the questionnaire. Then, thematic analysis was also used following the completion of the questionnaires in order to identify major themes.

Following the identification of major themes, Yin's analytic strategy for developing a case description was used. This strategy is often used when the original and explicit purpose of the case study was to be descriptive, which is the case for the present study. Using this strategy entails organizing data within a descriptive framework. The descriptive framework is developed from the initial review of the literature on the subject, which may highlight particular topics of interest, and reveal gaps in the literature (Yin, 2014). After the themes were identified and described using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis, and Yin's (2014) analytic strategy, they were then connected to relevant theories and models for further analysis.

Reflexivity

It is a common misconception in case study research that the role of the research is to be neutral. However, this is not so. Even before my research started, simply choosing the topic that I did made it not neutral. In fact, I would argue that no research is entirely neutral. Researchers can influence the data being collected both intentionally and unintentionally, and to varying degrees. In my case, any bias was unintentional yet unavoidable simply due to my various identities and the ways in which they influence my

perspective. For this reason, I continuously critique and critically reflect on how my own biases and assumptions have influenced my research process.

More specifically, even though I was not able to conduct any field observations as part of my data collection, my role as an “outsider” still had a significant effect on multiple aspects of my project. First, my role as an outsider to the topic of community work and to broader Danish society had a significant influence on what resources I had access to. As an international student with minimal Danish language abilities, I was limited to articles, journals, books, etc. about community work that were published in English. Naturally, that led me to much of the literature on community work that has been published in the United Kingdom. Fortunately there have been some articles and books written about community work in Denmark published in English. In addition to the limitation I faced with only being able to use literature written in English, the COVID-19 pandemic also restricted my access to literature that was available online, and thus a number of original texts that were only available physically were not accessible because of the library closures.

Second, as somebody without any personal connections to the field of community work in Denmark, I relied on connections made through the university, which while I am very appreciative of, certainly had an effect on who I had access to as respondents. Additionally, as somebody who does not speak Danish, I had to be sure that my respondents were comfortable speaking/writing about community work in English. Third, the content of responses from the interview and questionnaires were also affected by my status as an outsider. Both as an outsider to the topic of community work and an outsider to Danish society at large. Perhaps they wanted to portray community work in a more

positive or simplistic manner, which was likely much easier to do as I did not have significant background knowledge on the topic. At the same time, perhaps they were more negative or critical of the field because they realized that as a researcher, I would be able to shed light on an aspect that may go overlooked otherwise. These are all examples of the way in which my identity as a researcher, outsider, non-Danish speaker, etc. may have impacted my research. Likely, there are many other ways in which my identities impacted the research that I cannot even identify, which shows the ways in which it can be largely unintentional.

Findings

Community Work in the Public Sector

In this section, the findings from the questionnaires about community work in general are presented, both from the individuals working in the public and private sector. The descriptions are presented following the same order the questions were given in the questionnaire. Given that these three respondents have different experiences/relationships with community work, and thus may have differing perspectives on the subject, I felt it was important to explicitly identify their names with their responses.

Defining Community Work

One of the topics I was most interested in exploring in this project was understanding more about what community work is, as described by the people practicing in the field. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to define “community work” in their own words and also asked how the term “community work” is translated into Danish,

as a way to understand the literal translation and perhaps further highlight the different ways it is understood.

Winther described community work as “making local institutions, leisure activities and -areas and the people who live there work together in the best way possible.” His response is reflective of his type of work, which he described as more structural and macro-level. Andersen wrote the following when asked to define community work, “Community work is working with a community as a whole. All individuals, all institutions, all local shops and cultural offers are important players when working in and with a community.” Mejnertz described her understanding of community work as “Context-based co-creation and involvement of professionals, volunteers and local citizens in the development, effectuation, implementation and evaluation of specific work.”

All three responses highlight many of the themes of community work that were described in the introduction, such as individuals and multiple institutions working together, but interestingly, when asked about the Danish word they use to describe community work, they had different responses. Winther used the term *Lokalsamfundsudvikling*, which he said roughly translates into “community development.” Andersen used the term *boligsocialt arbejde*, which translates to housing social work. Lastly, Mejnertz said that the English term “community work” is often used even when speaking in Danish, but noted that the Danish terms *kontekstbaseret Lokalsamfundsinddragelse*, which translates to “context based local community involvement”, and *Samskabelse*, which translates to “co-creation” are also terms that were used in Project Flyv.

Community work vs. social work

Similar to the ways in which I positioned community work theoretically within the broader field of social work, I was also curious how my respondents saw community work either fitting in or differing from social work in practice, particularly because many community workers see their work being at odds with social work. Similar to the differences identified in the theoretical section, all of the respondents noted the different levels of intervention between community work and social work. Winther commented, “Social work is mainly on an individual or family level. Community work is about the individual’s contribution to the community and vice versa. No man is on an island.” Andersen added, “Community and social work differs in their primary focus. Community work is based on seeing a community and everything that is in it as a whole – while social work is more focused on individuals. In other words, community work is based on moving/developing the community from a to b. And social work is based on moving the individual from a to b.”

Professions represented in Community Work

Similar to my interest in exploring respondents' understanding of community work in relation to social work, I also wanted to learn more about who, as in what types of professions, were practicing community work. Winther described a special category of social/community workers called *boligsociale* (housing social workers), that work closely with the civil society and municipality. Andersen’s response highlighted the complex nature of community work, and the many actors that may partake in community work. She writes, “As mentioned earlier all local actors are important players when developing a

community. – teachers, social workers from the municipality, social workers employed in the housing companies, healthcare persons, police etc. ... People that are employed directly in the community project, are often social workers – but of course it differs from project to project depending on which initiatives are the priority.”

Types of Community Work Projects

As stated from the beginning, the goal of this thesis was not to get a comprehensive understanding of community work in Denmark, and instead is focused on describing some types of community work that are being practiced today. With that in mind, one of the questions on the questionnaire was “Can you briefly describe one or more community work projects/programs/plans that are happening in [the specific neighborhood that they work in] right now?” The responses to this question were wide-ranging, which was to no surprise, but still gave a glimpse into what community work in practice actually looks like.

Winther described a program called *Beredskabet* (which he translated as “contingency board”), which is “a group of local citizens, who along with the police and the municipality youth people work together to make sure that young people in the neighbourhood go to school and act properly.” He also described a *Samvirket* (which he translated as “cooperative”) of “a locally elected board of people living or working in Gellerup, who make community meetings and distribute money to fund local leisure activities.”

Andersen’s response noted that it is somewhat difficult to just pinpoint one specific community work project, because they are all intertwined. Nonetheless, she still went on to describe a community project (*Boligsociale Helhedspaner*), which plans to develop certain

neighborhoods in Aalborg East. The main goal of this project is “to make sure that the local communities stay in a positive development according to different socioeconomic factors. For example there are different initiatives which support that children graduate, that the young people get an education, that adults get in the labor market, crime prevention, psychical and mental health etc.”

Goals of Community Work

In order to better understand the practice of community work, it is also important to explore what the goals of community work are, as described by individuals who practice it in the field. Winther said that the goal is to “make an attractive part of the city with great institutions and lots of good leisure activities.” Andersen had a similar response, saying “The primary goal is, not only in east [Aalborg East] but all over the city, to ensure that all housing areas in Aalborg are well balanced. That people all over the city, as far as possible, have the same possibilities in life no matter social heritage – and to support the development of social capital in the local areas. In other words, to avoid ghettoization.”

Changes in Community Work

In addition to exploring community work as it exists today, I was also interested in what changes have occurred in the field over the past five to ten years. Winther described the situation as follows, “It has become more and more apparent that community work alone and social work alone won’t do the job. They have to work together, so the social work done for the families and the individuals connects to the local community. If not, none of the social work will be successful, unless they connect what they do to the normal routines and institutions of the neighbourhood.”

Andersen commented more on Aalborg municipality's general approach to community work over the years, stating:

"Very briefly – community work in Aalborg municipality is more and more looked upon in a strategic view. More and more the initiatives that are developed contain larger areas – and larger "glasses". The local areas are viewed as parts in the larger city, and therefore talking about development in the local areas is part of a bigger talk of strategic development of the city as a whole. We want local areas to open up to the rest of the city. And we want to invite the rest of the city into the local areas. More and more Aalborg municipality is deliberately working with mixed types of houses (apartments for rent, apartments for sale, student housing, elderly housing etc.) in both old and new communities. In this way Aalborg municipality is somewhat able to control a mixed group of residents within a community."

These comments about the changes in the municipality's approach to community work echo some of Andersen's earlier comments about the goals of community work, which was to create neighborhoods that were "well balanced" and provided residents with equal opportunities regardless of what part of the city they grew up in.

Challenges to Community Work

With any type of work, there are sure to be challenges and reasons for why a particular practice is not more widespread, and the practice of community work in these non-profit housing areas is no different. Winther wrote, "Varying perspectives in the effectiveness of the work. In these times everything has to be measured and evaluated, and for that to be effective, you need to have a controllable environment which a neighbourhood is not."

Future of Community Work

Given that I asked respondents about the past and current state of community work, it seemed important to also ask about what direction they thought community work was

headed towards in the future. I asked, "What do you think the future of community work looks like? Does it look the same? Are there any shifts that you are starting to see now?" Winther responded with "I sincerely hope we get to have more focus on what the local community means to the well-being of the people living in it. And that social work and community work get to develop even better methods to cope with the problems in poor neighbourhoods." Andersen's comments again emphasized the importance of maintaining a balance in who is living in specific areas. She writes, "Many years of intensive presence of initiatives in Aalborg East seems to have worked, and most areas in this part of the city are well balanced. Therefore future initiatives will probably focus on prevention and supporting positive development."

Community Work in Project Flyv (NGO)

The previous section presented the findings regarding community work broadly, and was focused on community work from a public sector perspective. In this section, the response from the project coordinator of Project Flyv, in addition to the findings from the document analysis are presented.

Motivations for implementing community work in Project Flyv

The challenges that Dignity faced in implementing a more holistic approach was the main motivation for starting Project Flyv. Assessments in the clinic no longer covered the client's experiences prior to arriving in Denmark, and thus the social workers had a very limited understanding of their past experiences and how that was affecting their current situation, so they often found themselves relying heavily on the psychosocial approach

(Ligon et al., 2017). To address this, they looked to a more community-centric approach that allowed for social workers to engage in more relational work and to “employ a more holistic approach, based on the observed needs of the individual, the family and the community” (Ligon et al., 2017, p. 25). Ultimately, “the project seeks to reposition people in the target groups in such a way that they can regain agency in their own lives. The aim is to empower the primary target group of people with traumatic refugee experiences, to boost the functional capacity of its surrounding community and to mobilize them for action. Secondary target groups include professional agencies and actors working in the neighbourhood, as well as the local community, such as volunteer groups and associations.” (Ligon et al., 2017, p. 22).

The Many Actors in Project Flyv

The two housing areas that Project Flyv took place in are both areas where there are numerous other interventions already taking place. As a result, it was important for Project Flyv to map out and understand the many different actors in the areas, as well as the various power relations at play, before entering the field. Additionally, they wanted to ensure that they were developing an intervention that complemented what was already in existence.

One of the main parts of Project Flyv was a capacity development program called the “Competency Development Course.” It was a ten-month course that was designed for mixed groups of professionals, including social workers, public workers, educators, and child-care providers. While the core component of the training was to pass on knowledge about PTSD and trauma, the organizers of the project came to realize that more powerful

component of the course, which was “working with and teaching the network method, with the goal of organizing and coordinating the different actors and interventions” (Ligon et al., 2017, p. 27). Before the course had even started, these professionals expressed the challenge of feeling alone with “insurmountably complex cases” and a lack of knowledge about other interventions happening in the area (Ligon et al., 2017, p. 27). Thus while gaining some knowledge about the target group was necessary to create a common understanding, meeting the other actors working in the same field was almost just as valuable (Ligon, 2017)

Challenges to Community Work approaches in Project Flyv

As briefly mentioned before, prior to Project Flyv starting, Dignity faced a common problem in regards to implementing more holistic approaches. The social work interventions at the clinic are “informed by a particular framework and funding condition that make it difficult for social workers to employ a holistic approach” (Ligon et al., 2017, p. 25). This restraint to work only within a particular framework, because of funding is widespread within the broader field of social work. Additionally, Mejnertz, commented on the difficulties in balancing the different agendas of the participating entities (the community, the funders, the NGO, etc.). Again, these challenges discussed here are a result of the growing impact of NPM and the need to fulfill all of these specific criteria laid out by the multiple actors.

In addition, social workers in the project described the challenge of people misrecognizing the value of their work. Especially in areas like Gellerup and Mjølnerparken, where there is already a multitude of interventions occurring, it can be

difficult to stand your ground and justify the importance of the work. "When social workers are not able to clearly articulate and explain how they work, it is sometimes challenging to document, justify and legitimize their interventions. This further perpetuates the perception of a hierarchy of professions, in which social workers are often positioned at the very bottom" (Ligon, 2017, p. 29).

Another challenge, that neither Mejnertz nor the report about Project FLYV explicitly mentioned, but is related to the challenge faced by community workers when they are not able to clearly articulate what it is that they are doing, is presented by Turunen (2009). She writes about the challenge of community work being very loosely defined, and thus open for interpretation. This is an issue because in the Nordic countries, "when a concept is losing its power to convince politically, a new concept is invented in order to create new expectations of opportunity for invention, development or change" (Turunen, 2009, p. 57).

Future Programs Similar to Project Flyv

Similar to asking the other respondents about what direction they thought community work was headed, I also asked Mejnertz about whether or not she thought that there would be future projects similar to Project Flyv. To that she responded with "I don't know – for me what is important is not a new project – but that the project has left some footprints and will keep influencing and developing the way professionals, volunteers and citizens work together and understand each other in Gellerup." The report written about Project Flyv, suggested similar ideas to Mejnertz. After the conclusion of the program, "it decided to not to establish yet another intervention, because they felt like it was already a

very saturated field, but instead worked to coordinate activities there. This intervention focused on what they have called relational work, implicitly the systemic theory and community development models” (Ligon et al., 2017, p. 29).

Analysis

Reviewing the findings from the questionnaire through the lens of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis led to the identification of four main themes. These themes were: collaboration, importance of local institutions, avoiding ghettoization, and influence of New Public Management. The themes of collaboration and importance of local institutions relate to the first part of my research question, which is about the types of community work being practiced. The themes of avoiding ghettoization and aspects of NPM relate to the second part of my research question which is focused on the challenges that community work is currently facing.

Collaboration

The collaborative nature of community work was the most often referenced aspect of the practice, which highlights how integral it is. Collaboration between both service user and community worker, as well as the collaboration between all of the various actors in community work, were discussed.

In all three respondents' definitions of community work, they mentioned multiple actors working together to improve the well-being of the community. For example, Winther described community work as being “about making local institutions, leisure activities and

areas and the people who live there work together in the best way possible.” Andersen added, “All individuals, all institutions, all local shops and cultural offers are important players when working in and with a community.” Mejnertz used different terms in her definition, but also noted the collaborative aspect of community work when she wrote, “My understanding of community work is precisely that: context-based co-creation and involvement of professionals, volunteers and local citizens in the development, effectuation, implementation and evaluation of specific work.” All of these mentions of collaboration fall in line with the strengths perspective, whose third practice principle is titled “collaborate with service users” (Healy, 2006). Healy (2006) adds that solutions developed collaboratively will likely be much more useful to the service user than those decided upon by solely the social worker. These discussions around collaboration can also be tied back to the critical social science paradigm which emphasizes empowering people to act collectively to achieve social change (Healy, 2006).

Winther also describes the importance of collaboration between social workers and community workers, which can bring together families, the community and local institutions. When looking at it from a system’s theory perspective, the families and community could be placed in the microsystem, while the local institutions are placed in the mesosystem (Bronfrenbrenner, 1979).

Another instance in which collaboration was brought up was when Winther was asked about the future of community work. In his response he wrote, “I sincerely hope we get to have more focus on what the local community means to the well-being of the people living in it.” While Winther did not mention any specific theoretical framework that

supports this argument, parallels can be made to what systems theory emphasizes in this response. Systems theory is all about understanding how an individual fits into their broader environment or community, and Winther here is commenting about the importance of social workers recognizing how service users connect to their local community.

Another example of the collaboration theme arising in one of the respondent's answers, was when Mejnertz was asked about the likelihood of projects like Project FLYV being started again. Her response emphasizes that a new project is not the important part, but rather it is important for all of the various actors and existing projects in Gellerup to work more effectively with each other to improve the well-being of the members that make up this community.

Importance of Local Institutions

Multiple times throughout the questionnaires, the importance of local institutions was brought up. Winther and Andersen both highlighted the importance of local institutions working together with the individuals in the community. If we are to place these interactions within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecomap model, the local community is placed within the microsystem, and the local institutions are part of the mesosystem. Community work as a practice is aimed at facilitating interactions between the micro and the meso systems. Looking at two of the types of community work programs that Winther described, we can see this interaction. Winther described the *Beredskabet* (contingency board) which is "a group of local citizens, who along with the police and the municipality

youth people work together to make sure that young people in the neighbourhood go to school and act properly.” The local citizens along with the young people that Winther mentions, can be placed in the microsystem, while the police and the school, as local institutions are part of the mesosystem. In the other program, *Samvirket* (cooperative), which “is a locally elected board of people living or working in Gellerup, who make community meetings and distribute money to fund local leisure activities,” the same types of systems are represented in a different manner. In this example, the microsystem (locally elected board members) makes decisions about where money is invested on the mesosystem (leisure activities).

In addition to analyzing how local institutions play a part in the programs that Winther has described through the lens of systems theory, we can also use critical theory to discuss some of the possible shortcomings of the programs. If we were to critique just the *Beredskabet* (contingency board) without knowing about the *Samvirket* (cooperative), one could argue that it is deficit-based (which is the opposite of the strengths perspective) because of its focus on the community’s issue of children not attending school (Healy, 2006). Additionally, the program seems to fail in addressing reasons why these youth may not attend school or commit crimes (the structural causes that systems theory often overlooks) (Healy, 2006). Perhaps the reason they do not attend school is the fact that they do not feel like they fit in at school for a number of reasons (language barriers, culture differences, etc.). Additionally, one could argue that these youth commit crime because there are not other activities that they can get involved in (for example, sports clubs, a job, etc.). To address these issues, a critical approach may suggest that more emphasis needs to

be put on the structural forces that are making these youth feel unwelcome at school, or reasons why there are not more activities in their community (Healy, 2006). However, the second program that Winther discussed is aimed at improving what he calls “leisure activities” in these neighborhoods. He did not specifically mention that these two projects were intertwined, but if we look at them as being related to each other, it seems to suggest that the organizers of this project recognize the structural reasons for why youth may commit crimes in these neighborhoods, and address these causes instead of the symptoms.

Avoiding Ghettoization

The term “avoid ghettoization” was not only specific words that one of the respondents used when responding to the question about the goals of community work, but also was an underlying theme in some of the responses to other questions.

One place in which avoiding ghettoization was mentioned was when Andersen described the goals of one specific community work project that is currently happening in Aalborg East. She writes, “The primary goal of both projects is to make sure that the local communities stay in a positive development according to different socioeconomic factors. For example, there are different initiatives which support that children graduate, that the young people get an education, that adults get in the labor market, crime prevention, psychological and mental health etc.” While she does not make specific reference to the criteria on the ghetto list, all of the different “socioeconomic factors” that she describes line-up with the criteria that the government assesses to determine whether a neighborhood is on the ghetto list (Transport- og Boligministeriet, 2019). This suggests that even though

Aalborg East is not currently on the ghetto list, community workers are still very focused on ensuring that it stays off the list.

Using one of Ledwith's (2005) main goals of critical community work offers a valuable lens in which to analyze the topic of ghettoization. Ledwith (2005) writes, "A critical approach calls for an analysis of power and discrimination in society. The analysis needs to be understood in relation to dominant ideas and the wider political context" (Ledwith, 2005, p. 1). When community workers and community work projects are so focused on avoiding the ghetto label, they in turn accept the hegemonic discourses around what a ghetto is and risk failing to address the actual needs of the community members. Furthermore, this may lead to community workers focusing much more on the symptoms of the situation as opposed to the causes of discrimination, which Ledwith (2005) also identifies as one of her main points of critical social work.

Influence of New Public Management

While none of the respondents explicitly mentioned the term "New Public Management (NPM)," there were several references to how NPM has influenced the field of community work. When asked about the challenges that community work faces, Winther discussed how everything has to be measured and implemented, and more specifically, how difficult that is to do in community work given that a neighborhood is not a controllable environment. This increased focus on measurement and effectiveness is one of the most present effects of NPM (Marthinsen, 2019).

Once again we see how the influence of NPM affects social work practice even in the private sector. Ligon et al. (2017) discussed how assessments in the clinic no longer covered the service user's experiences prior to arriving in Denmark. These types of restrictions are a fitting example of how NPM has created a "reduction in the opportunities for social workers to practice in holistic, creative, and critical ways" (Healy, 2012, p. 10). However, in this particular case, it can be seen as somewhat of a positive, because it encouraged them to think critically about how else they could use a more holistic approach to working with their target group.

Theories in Conjunction

Different theories can be applied to the different aspects of community work. A systems theory lens can help us understand the interactions between the different system levels. Community work is mostly positioned on the level where the micro system (community) and meso system (local institutions) interact and promotes interaction between these actors. However, it also branches out beyond that because it touches families and individuals, who are even more in the middle of the micro system, if you will, and it also reaches out to the macro system. For example, Winther describing that he works more on a policy level, or Ligon et al. (2007) talking about the opportunity of citizens to interact with government officials (on a municipal level).

As it was mentioned previously, all theories have their strengths and limitations. But at the same time, they have the opportunity to interact with and complement each other. One of the limitations of systems theory is that it ignores power dynamics that might be at

play, whereas critical theory and strengths based perspectives can bring in a new perspective on power dynamics. Looking at Winther's example of the *Beredskabet* (contingency board) again, if only the police patrol a community to ensure that the young people of the neighborhood go to school, the youth may be reluctant to listen to them because of the power dynamics that exist. This imbalance may be due to the status as an authority that police hold, or a possibly a racial difference, or due to the fact that most police officers probably don't live in the community themselves. This power dynamic can not be erased, but by adding local community members to the group that walks around, the imbalance between the youths and the *Beredskabet* may be reduced because the community members are neither state authority officials nor outsiders to the community. For this reason, they may be able to relate better to the youth than the police officers, and therefore increase the likelihood that the youth attend school. This is an example of how multiple theories can interact with each other to provide a more holistic understanding of a phenomenon.

Personal Reflections

In addition to analyzing the data collected through a theoretical lens, it felt important to also critically and personally reflect on some of my findings. I again want to acknowledge that I was only able to send my questionnaire to people who are somewhat removed from the direct work that frontline community workers are a part of. This undoubtedly had an effect on the responses I got to particular questions, as my respondents mostly talked about things that they knew, but not things that they had direct

experience practicing or participating in. Relatedly, none of my respondents had an educational background in either social work or community work, but were still involved in the practice. This is interesting because it again reveals how diverse of a field it is, and how it has its roots in many other disciplines (i.e. my respondents had educational backgrounds in sociology, anthropology, management, etc.). At the same time though, it also meant that they may not be as familiar with either the historical or theoretical foundations of community work practice, and thus may not have been able to convey that aspect in their responses.

Another particularly interesting response from the questionnaire was Winther's answer about the future of community work. He writes, "I sincerely hope we get to have more focus on what the local community means to the well-being of the people living in it." This response highlights one of the aspects of community work that I feel has often been overlooked. There is so much talk in the literature and some of the responses presented above about the importance of developing or improving the community, but there has been little talk about why this is important. In some ways, it feels like it somehow dehumanizes the individual people that make up the community, and instead just assumes that they are all one homogenous group with all the same desires--which is far from the truth. With that said, I too hope that the future of community work focuses much more on what the community means to the well-being of people living in it, and achieving this by taking the time to build relationships with individuals living there and allowing them to have some say in the decisions that directly affect their lives.

One challenge to community work that Turunen (2009) identifies but that did not come up in any of the responses is tied to what types of professions practice community work. Turunen (2009) explains how community work has been taken over by other actors in several sectors of society (who often lack the theoretical and practical knowledge and skills in mobilizing community-oriented methods that exist in social work. This creates a paradox though because the mainstream of professional social workers, educators, and researchers have largely neglected the need for community work in social work (Turunen, 2009). Andersen's response about who the actors are in community work seems to suggest that all of the actors partaking in community work practice are not as much of an issue as Turunen suggests. However, the main takeaway for me from both of these perspectives is simply the importance of actors having the knowledge (both practical and theoretical) to effectively improve the well-being of a given community.

Lastly, when discussing critical community work in the theoretical section of this thesis, I presented a claim made by Vincenti (2009) that suggested critical community work was an approach that goes against the Danish tradition of a collective orientated welfare state supportive of social inclusion and participation. However, thinking about it this way suggests that these two discourses are at odds with each other. But I think that these two different goals, outlined before, can be achieved simultaneously if we frame it differently. I believe that an individual cannot fully participate in working toward a collective goal if they do not first have some self-realization about how they fit into the broader society or collective goals. For this reason, it is vital that community workers and social workers alike

continue to adapt a critical approach to their work that makes it a priority to address the structural change needed to prevent further discrimination.

Conclusion

The findings and analysis presented here have sought to describe the current status of community work in Denmark, and present some of the challenges that community work currently faces. This study has supported the previous literature that acknowledges that community work is a broad field that is not easily defined. Nonetheless, I have attempted to identify some of the key aspects of the practice within the context of non-profit housing areas in Denmark. These aspects include its collaborative nature, recognition that all individuals in a community play a role in the well-being of the community, and ultimate aim of developing and improving communities. In addition, I have discussed the challenges of integrating immigrants into society as well as the growing effect of neoliberal policies on community work. With this in mind, we can reflect back on what path community work has taken since Vincenti (2009) argued that it was at a crossroads over a decade ago. The findings presented in this thesis suggest that community work has taken the path to develop a critical consciousness, in addition to emphasizing the importance of citizen participation.

In regard to how community work is responding to the growing challenge of neoliberalism, my findings did not provide any definitive answers. Multiple respondents acknowledged that neoliberalism presents challenges to community work, but there was little mention of community work directly addressing it. Perhaps this is reflective of the

field of community work not knowing exactly how to respond to these challenges. Perhaps the people working in the field do not consider it to be as big of an issue as academia does. Regardless, one finding shed light on what community work needs to do. Ligon et al. (2017) noted that community workers and programs need to work together more effectively with the people living in the communities as well as with each other to improve the well-being of the community.

In terms of how community work is responding to the growing challenge of integrating immigrants into society, it is clear that the practice is at the forefront of this work. As mentioned, the majority of immigrants in Denmark are living in areas where community work is present. Therefore there is a lot of pressure on community workers (as well as social workers) to decide how to best integrate these immigrants into society. The findings from this thesis discuss some of the ways immigrants are being woven into communities, but an issue that community work has failed to address in earnest is structural barriers to integration. This is something that is critically important if community work is to, as Vincenti (2009) puts it, take a leading role in “community regeneration and developing into a recognized specialization with a framework of social work understandings” (p. 96).

Future research

This study makes a novel contribution to the literature on community work in Denmark, while highlighting many directions for future research. First and foremost, future research should aim to actively include the voices of individuals who belong to the

communities of focus. Just as Freire stressed the importance of educators working alongside oppressed groups, researchers can also work alongside community members in a way that allows them to reflect on their life experiences (Poppo, 2015). This method may reveal areas for further research that I would not anticipate because of my disconnect from the lives of people living in Denmark's non-profit housing areas.

Future research should also focus more on how community work is addressing the structural injustices that are impacting their community members' lives. If it reveals that they are not addressing these structural barriers, then it would be critical to learn about why this is not being addressed. Furthermore, as the political discourse around ghetto laws changes, it will be important to see how this impacts the role of community work in the area of non-profit housing.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Questions about Community Work in Bispehaven/Gellerup

Please write as little or as much as you feel comfortable with, and feel free to skip any questions if you prefer.

1. How would you define the term “community work” in your own words? What is the Danish term/word used to describe community work?
2. How (if at all) does that differ from your definition/understanding of social work?
3. Can you briefly describe one or more community work projects/programs/plans that are happening in Bispehaven/Gellerup right now?
4. Which professions are mostly working in these types of projects? (Social workers, community organizers, teachers, police, doctors, etc.)
5. What is the primary goal of community work in Bispehaven/Gellerup?
6. How has community work changed over the past 5 years? 10 years?
7. What challenges does community work face in Bispehaven/Gellerup as well as Denmark as a whole?
8. What do you think the future of community work looks like in Bispehaven/Gellerup? Does it look the same? Are there any shifts that you are starting to see now?
9. Would it be okay to use your name and job title in my paper or would you prefer your responses to be anonymous? If you are okay with me using your name and job title, how would you like your name and job to be identified?

Appendix B

Questions about Project FLYV

Please write as little or as much as you feel comfortable with, and feel free to skip any questions if you prefer.

1. How would you define the term “community work” in your own words? What is the Danish term/word used to describe community work?
2. How (if at all) does that differ from your definition/understanding of social work?
3. What were the motivations behind starting Project FLYV in Gellerup?
4. Which professions were mostly working on this project? (Social workers, community organizers, teachers, therapists, doctors, etc.)
5. What were some of the successful parts of the program?
6. What were some of the challenging parts of the program?
7. Do you think a program similar to Project FLYV will be implemented in the future? If not, why?
8. Would it be okay to use your name and job title in my paper or would you prefer your responses to be anonymous? If you are okay with me using your name and job title (related to Project FLYV, not your current one), how would you like your name and job to be identified?

