Danish University Colleges

Youth work in a marginalized area and its contribution to social mobility and social justice
Paper presented at the 44th NERA Congress in Helsinki, Finland, 9-11 March 2016

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Link to publication

Youth work in a marginalized area and its contribution to social mobility and social justice

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This paper addresses the question of how professionals involved in social pedagogical work in a marginalized area deal with young people's possibilities of social mobility. Based on interviews with teachers, social pedagogues, pedagogical assistants, educational supervisors, street workers and municipal employees and observations in youth clubs this paper carries out an analysis of the conditions for social pedagogical work in a socially deprived area in Copenhagen as experienced by these professionals. The paper puts special emphasis on the fact that the youth work takes place in an area that in itself poses a potential risk for the young people living there. One of the main conclusions is that the professionals do not include the specific terms and conditions that the marginalized residential area represents in their practice. The professionals' good intentions and initiatives for youth mobility therefore results in a form of social reproduction.

The paper draws on data from an ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Copenhagen in 2013-2015 as part of a larger research project: "Youth, Social Communities and Educational Challenges"[1].

Introduction

Approximately 15-18 % of a youth generation in Denmark either drop out or do not even start a secondary education after elementary school. Minimizing the number of the 'residual group', however, seems to be difficult and more complex than assumed. It is a mixed group consisting, among others, of young people from ethnic minority and working class backgrounds. The group also consists of young people whose parents have received public benefits for a long time and of young people living in vulnerable areas, including the rural areas (Phil, 2013). Studies have shown (Jensen & Jensen, 2005) that there is not a single fact that can explain the lack of education among the 'residual group', but an explanation can be a combination of sociocultural background, gender and ethnicity on the one hand and education and teaching practices and structure on the other (see e.g. Sørensen et al. (eds.), 2013). Studies (Jensen & Nielsen, 2010) have also emphasized that there is not a single political and pedagogical 'fix' that can reduce the number of young people without a secondary education.

Welfare state

In Denmark the social pedagogical work with young marginalized people is embedded in the structural conditions of a welfare state. The Danish welfare model is based on an extensive prevalence of the state in the welfare arrangements, and this overriding involvement of the state implies a weak influence of

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[1] https://www.ucviden.dk/portal/da/projects/unges-sociale-faellesskaber-inklusions-og-eksklusionsformer-blandt-unge-i-uddannelse(418726fe-9d0f-4798-91ca-0d19f093dc01).html

intermediary structures (church, voluntary organizations, etc.), but includes relatively uniform and integrated institutions, e.g. "Folkeskolen" or kindergartens, funded by a high level of income tax-(Alestalo, Hort & Kuhnle, 2009). As in the other Nordic countries, the Danish welfare state is also based on the principle of universalism, which means equality for all in terms of high standards of welfare services and benefits (Esping-Andersen, 1991). The Danish welfare state provides free access to a wide range of welfare services such as education and medical treatment. The organization of the welfare state implies a state with a strong influence on people's lives. Denmark is one of the most institutionalized countries in the world when we look at children's lives. 97, 2 % of all children (aged 3-5) attend kindergarten[2], 81 % attend "Folkeskolen" (aged 6-16)[3] and 26 % of young people (aged 13-16) attend after-school facilities like youth clubs (Ungdomsanalyse 2010). All of these educational and pedagogical settings are regulated by legislation formulated by the central government.

In this context, it is incomprehensible how a relatively large and constant percentage of young people end up in 'lacking' an education with the risk of unemployment and perhaps crime or other inappropriate behavior.

Studies have pointed to the school and the educational system as an important player in social and cultural conflicts and in differentiation and marginalization processes. Research has shown how educational institutional practices produce social and cultural categories of legitimate and illegitimate behavior (Øland, 2007, 2012; Bourdieu & Passeron 2006). The school as an institution also plays a significant role in studies about marginalization, shown in studies of the working class' meeting with the school's middle and upper class standards (Willis 1977) and ethnic minority students' meeting with 'Danishness' through the teachers Danish middle-class values (Gilliam, 2009).

The purpose and structure of the paper
In this paper we look into the professionals'[4] concerns regarding young people in youth clubs in a socially marginalized area where young people are believed to be at risk of marginalization in several respects. Youth clubs – in Denmark at least – have the aim to develop young people's ability to enter into binding relationships and communities that make young people aware of the educational and cultural activities and opportunities and to support young people in their future opportunities in education and the labour market. Therefore, it is of interest to look into the professionals' reflections and practices to understand what can make this aim difficult to fulfill. We look into their reflections regarding the influence of the local area and regarding their views on education and young people's experiences in school.

The paper is organized the following way. First, the analytical approach of the paper is determined as an inductive inquiry into the professionals' reflections and experiences with working with young people in this certain area of Copenhagen. Here we pay special attention to the significance of 'place' by referring to Bourdieu's analytical concepts "physical, social and embodied space" (Bourdieu, 1996) and Wacquant's use of Bourdieu's and Goffman's (2009) theories in his concept of "territorial stigmatization" and "advanced stigmatization" (Wacquant, 2013). Second, we present empirical examples from our study exemplifying how the local area is perceived as 'dangerous' and how 'the school' is seen by the youth workers as a place

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[2] Nyt fra Danmarks statistik. 20. marts 2014, nr. 146.
[3] Ministeriet for børn, undervisning og ligestilling.
[4] We use the term 'professionals' as a collective term for the different people involved in youth work on many levels, e.g. teachers, social pedagogues, pedagogical assistants, educational supervisors, street workers and municipal employees. It is a cross-professional and a cross-sectorial term. In this paper we do not look into how position, level of education and context play a part in how the professionals understand the conditions for their work.

where young people from the area experience symbolic violations. Finally, in the conclusion of the paper, we discuss the role of youth clubs in marginalized areas.

Main concepts and analytical approach

Based on Bourdieu's concept of capital Wacquant describes the city as an expression of spatial accumulation and concentration of different forms of capital, which together highlight the interacting relations between the simultaneous existence in the physical space and social space, called the "effect of place" (Wacquant 2013). The social space in the theory of Bourdieu is a metaphor for the society. The society will nearly always be what he named a hierarchical society where there is no space that is not hierarchized. The social space expresses the social dominance and power through social distance and the way these distances are naturalized based on two differentiation forms (Bourdieu, 1996); the economic and cultural capital. Bourdieu explains the relation between the physical space and the social space as the fact that human beings are both biological beings and social agents. The physical space is imagined as a location and the social space as positions and even though they have a lot in common, the physical space is defined by the mutual externality of parts and the social space is defined by the mutual exclusion, distinction or differentiation. It is the distance that separates them, and the physical and social space are both a consequence of and battleground for agents' attempts to improve their positions (Bourdieu, 1996). This dual effect is expressed through the concentration of capital in a particular place and the agents' ability to internalize and convert capital in this location.

Wacquant uses this part of Bourdieu's analysis to develop the concept of territorial stigmatization. In his study of poverty, marginalization and the city, he found a dominant form of stigmatization called "territorial stigmatization", a form which legitimizes some local areas and makes other areas in the same city 'illegitimate' – with consequences for the people living in the illegitimate areas. Territorial stigma is, in the theory of Wacquant, simply a term describing the process by which certain areas are discredited, degraded and treated negatively because of the place they are associated with (Wacquant 2013). With the concept of "territorial stigmatization" Wacquant expands Ervin Goffman's concept of stigma with one more dimension[5]. The local area is therefore an agent, which is produced by the discourse in multiple ways but also by the poverty, social and cultural circumstances in the area. Whether or not this is in fact true of the area, it is constructed in discourse as a "dangerous place", "social ghetto", "crime headquarters" and a "no-go area". *Financial and material deprivation* is another part of the construction. Economic capital moves out of the area or does not invest in the area. There is a lack of resources and opportunities for employment and education. House prices decline and it is difficult to rent out apartments. The place is constructed as "unlivable" in policy discourse and residents' experiences. It is "meaningless" to stay in an area with so few resources and so many problems.

This means that the *population is identified as the problem*. The problems in the area are coupled with residents' characteristics, for example ethnic and social background. The structural emptying of opportunities is overlooked and instead the residents' culture, religion, ethnicity, level of education are seen as the cause of the problems.

The importance of territorial stigmatization of residents may be different from place to place. Wacquant, Slater & Pereira (2014) points out two main coping strategies for dealing with territorial stigmatization:

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[5] Where Goffman distributes stigmata among three broad classes based on 'abominations of the body', 'blemishes of individual character', and 'tribal' affiliation 'transmitted through lineages' adds Wacquant "territorial stigmatization" as a fourth dimension to the concept of stigma.

1) *Internalization*, where residents accept the territorial stigma. They agree that their neighborhood is a bad place and it does not seem like there is much to do about it. As a consequence they hide their addresses from others and live with this stigma.

2) *Resistance* strategies, where residents deny the mainstream perception of place and highlight the positive aspects of the place, or, alternatively, pretend to be proud to live there in order to show their opposition.

Conditions for social pedagogical work in a stigmatized area

Professionals share different concerns about the young people living in this particular area of Copenhagen. By looking at these concerns we get a picture of the conditions for the social pedagogical work and a picture of some of the difficulties you face as a professional when you work with young people's (aged 15-17) possibilities of social mobility.

The local area as "place"

The reputation of the local area

The local area, Udeby[6], is part of Copenhagen and is located in an area characterized by great diversity. It is bordered by an area with single family houses on the one side and urban areas that are characterized by the media and politicians as being marginalized on the other sides. Characteristic of these areas is a certain concentration of residents who receive benefits (retirement, social security, unemployment benefits, etc.) and are without the prospect of becoming self-reliant in the foreseeable future. In these areas there is also a certain concentration of ethnic minorities. Udeby itself is also characterized by great diversity, but, generally speaking, it is an area with low-income families, unemployment, lack of education and a concentration of ethnic minorities. But Udeby is also an area that attracts young students in search of cheap places to live.

One of the key characteristics of stigmatized areas – as Wacquant (ibid.) has pointed out – is the presence of a *negative discourse* on the stigmatized area. In our qualitative research, we find that discourse (re)produced in different versions in the way the professionals talk about their local area. In the following, we show some empirical examples of how the discursive (re)production takes place.

The professionals describe Udeby as a place with a bad reputation and blame it on the surrounding areas that often appear in the media and in the political spotlight for 'troublemaking' and for being unsafe areas. The professionals feel burdened by the area's reputation but at the same time their perceptions and experiences support the public view of the place. They see the area as an unsafe area with many challenges and a place where 'dangerous' things happen. The negative reputation weakens the professionals' position as 'professional' since, as Goffman points out, they are equated with the clientele they are working with (Goffman, 2009). The manager of a youth club points out: *"Oh boy, if you tell – if you get a little outside the area, and someone asks you where you work, yes, in Udeby. No, it must be a damn hard environment. So, I can be surprised myself."*

The local area as socially and spatially divided

The local area offers a wide range of social housing, and the residents here are 'socially disadvantaged'. It is partly about – such as the professionals experience it – the level of education and that the residents do not

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[6] Anonymized.

have much money. The residents are retirees, unemployed or people with sporadic contact with the labour market. Poverty is a problem in the area, and people do not have much money to spend. As mentioned above the area is also bordered by an enclave of single family houses and these house owners are perceived as relatively wealthy since they own a house and have a car parked out front. The professionals experience that the interaction between young people from the area with one-family houses and young people from the area with social housing is almost completely nonexistent, at least when it comes to how and where they spend their leisure time. They do not use the same sports facilities and youth clubs. That worries the professionals because the resources that young people from the one-family houses possess do not benefit the young people from the social housing (and vice versa). This is seen as important because the young people that the professionals meet need to get different and new perspectives on life and on their own possibilities in life.

The local area is not only socially divided, it is also spatially divided. Young people choose to be together with people like themselves – both in their spare time, time spent in the youth club and, sports clubs, and even in their choice of school they prefer schools with people like themselves. They form a community by drawing a line around themselves, differentiating them from others (Bauman, 2003). The communities differentiate themselves based on either socio-economic or ethnic differences. As mentioned before, young people from residential neighbourhoods avoid the young people from housing projects, but ethnic Danish youths from both areas avoid young people from ethnic minorities when it comes to school, spare time activities, youth club and also in how they move around in public spaces around the city. The "Folkeskole" which is located on the border between residential neighborhoods and social housing is dominated by "the Danish" (not only in student composition, but also the social space is Danish) while the "Folkeskole" among social housing is largely "ethnic". The professionals emphasize that it is very common that young people are willing to choose youth clubs and spare time activities far away to avoid certain types of young people (certain ethnic groups or social groups). A manager in a youth club equates the spatial division of the local area with the Berlin Wall. He says: *"So the wall around the school has just been opened for Udeby during the last four or five years, where they also admit children from it. ... And so we can sit here and talk about integration, right. So what can I say, I think it is more 'one-family housed'. But you asked about why there are only these children here? So yes, the reason why there are so few Danish children is because the resourceful Danish families actually move away from social housing."*

As we have seen in the above, the urban space is not only divided physically, but also socially. The social space is generated through the meanings attached to a physical space, which produce the geography of the social world (Bauman, 1998). Accordingly, in our case, the schools, buildings, shops, parks, streets and other public areas were loaded with certain meanings. That results in a form of "ownership" of public places, and some places were attributed to women, the elderly, young, Danes, people from ethnic minorities, etc.

The social division of space makes it possible both to create hierarchies between citizens, and then – as we know from Goffman and Wacquant (ibid.) – to accuse some people of causing different problems in the local community.

Hash selling and other crime

The local area represents potential danger. The professionals point out several places in the neighborhood that pose a risk. They mention a park near the school as a place where you can buy hash and the police tell that if they try to prevent the selling, the young people just find another place in the neighborhood. It is not only the purchase of hash and the potential risk of drug addiction that is seen as dangerous; the professionals also worry that the younger children can be recruited as henchmen for the biker gangs

(rocker) who organize the selling. A pedagogical assistant tells: *"So, there are some who – that is, the bikers coming into Udeby and selling cannabis, right? And then the young ones tell me: "yes, have you heard?" Yes I know. "They are really sweet". So I said to them, try to listen to me, they are not nice. It is street politics".*

There are not a lot of gangs in Udeby, but the professionals worry about gangs coming from other areas of the city to recruit new members. According to a pedagogical assistant it is not only "the losers" who join the gangs, it is also the many well-functioning children: *"You just need to know that so many, right, so many well-functioning children and youths who are ten times more intelligent than I am, and who can work and can study, and I do not know what, are gang members who pay dues, 1000, to be member or to become a member of a gang".*

Once the area is described and experienced as "problematic", it is obvious to understand the place as somewhere that you need to move away from. Hereby the place is perceived as "troubled" and "unlivable" as Wacquant has pointed out. The place is mostly seen as "unlivable" for those who have socio-economic resources to move away from the area. For others who do not have the resources, the area is perceived as "livable" and even understood as a decent place. These differences in perception probably stem from the fact that some young people have internalized the territorial stigma – cf. Wacquant's tenet of "internalization" – and for others it is because they are born in the community and therefore feel a strong sense of belonging to the neighborhood.

Young people outside the youth clubs

There are groups of young people hanging out in the local area and who are not members of a youth club. They are expected to have a bad influence on both girls and boys who are attracted to "street life". They sometimes harass the residents of the area by shouting and by riding mopeds in the district. Sometimes the residents also feel harassed even though the young people do not actively do anything. Hanging out on the streets is seen as a sign of potential marginalization in the longer term of these young people with the risk of them ending up as criminals. A professional tells: *"So, but I would say the majority, hanging on the street all the time, they end up getting into trouble. It is not, because obviously they play – they can also play ball and everything out there or stand and enjoy themselves and talk with their friends. But I would say that all the groups that have consistently hung around in the streets, they end up in crime. So I think it is reasonably clear that if children are hanging around in the street, they will get into trouble".*

Street workers seek out these young people to persuade them to use the youth clubs. Youth clubs are seen as good and safe communities where they can become part of good groupings made up of young people who keep each other on the "right track" in terms of getting an education, getting a job and staying away from violence, drugs and other types of crime. A professional points out: *"It's about, I really think it is very much about the friends you have. Because if you have the right friends, they invite you into a club, and they help you to think that education is a good thing. I think. ... If they have started in an after-school centre (fritidshjem) at the school and afterwards continue in a youth club and all that, then there is a reasonably good ... there are very few that get into trouble."*

Including these groups of young people in the youth clubs poses a dilemma. Part of the youth clubs' mission is to keep young people off the streets and help them to use their spare time in a productive way; forming 'good' friendships, being engaged in educational and cultural activities and becoming good citizens. But inviting more troubled youths into the clubs has in some clubs had the effect that the existing members of the club have experienced these new members as aggressive and transforming the club from a 'safe place' to an 'unsafe place'. As a consequence they (and their parents) have sought out clubs in other areas of the city. For the pedagogues working in the clubs this has meant a difficult task of having to balance

between accommodating all or accommodating those who need it the most. A balance between being a social pedagogical setting and being a general pedagogical setting.

School and education – the pedagogical fix

In studies on causes of crime, education and employment are seen as protective factors that can help to minimize the risk of criminal acts and are therefore worth incorporating into the preventive work (Tranæs & Geerdsen, 2008, Andersen & Tranæs, 2011). In the political debates a skilled workforce is also seen as a necessity in relation to Denmark's economic growth in a global economy where competition and growth are central. Education is viewed in this way both as a necessity, but also as a means to creating opportunities for the individual and ultimately better the quality of life. The social pedagogues in the youth clubs have great faith in education and their expectations of education leading to a better life are in alignment with policy objectives that the largest possible number of young people should get an education[7].

Education as a way out

For the professionals education represents a path to a good life with employment, free from crime and the opportunity to become part of a community where everyone contributes and is of use. They see a close connection between education and employment, and even though they understand that education is embedded in ideas of democratic formation, education is understood primarily as a means for future employment. Seen in this way, getting an education becomes something that has to be worthwhile and has to be useful and realistic. Simultaneously, education is understood as a protective factor that prevents crime, bad company and provides a way away from an area of town that does not in itself offer opportunities and security.

Education is understood as something good, but the picture is not equally clear when social pedagogues talk about young people and their experiences within the school. Some of the informal conversations that take place between young people and social pedagogues when they cook together or are having fun in the club are about young people's experiences with a school where they feel unfairly treated and where they cannot understand the judgments that they are exposed to, such as education readiness assessments[8]. It is also about teachers who do not recognize them and peers who bully and exclude. These experiences form the basis for certain skepticism about the school as an institution, which does not tally with the confidence the social pedagogues generally have in education. They see a school that cannot accommodate all children and where youth clubs must step in when the school gives up. In the personal talks about education and school the young people tell about personal assaults they have experienced and in these talks the social pedagogues are both a friend but also an educator and a 'word of caution' pointing out inappropriate behavior and encouraging the youths to also look at his/her own role and behavior in the given situation.

Concluding remarks

The analyses have shown that social pedagogical work with young people in a socially deprived area faces challenges embedded in territorial stigmatization and which complicate the work of social mobility. Youth clubs in the area are navigating between *forming* young people to become able and skilled citizens and *protecting* young people from the risk of the area and from 'bad company'; they are to handle the difficult task of having to balance between accommodating all young people or accommodating those who need it

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[7] A political objective that 95 percent of school leavers should achieve at least a secondary education.
[8] Known as"uddannelsesparathedsvurderinger" in Danish.

the most. Traditionally, the pedagogical methods have been activity-based perspective such as playing football, making music or cooking together. The work has been focused around creating good relationships between the pedagogues and the young people attending the clubs in order to create a confidence-inspiring and cozy atmosphere where the individual growth has been central combined with the aim of educating democratic citizens. The work has been centered on the club itself where the club has been understood as a good and safe community. Having had to grow up in a marginalized area means that the young club members bring with them experiences of stigmatization, personal assaults and also 'bad behavior'. This challenges this activity-based approach if you want to address young people's possibilities of social mobility. The pedagogues are to discuss how a youth club can become an active player in these young people's lives by discussing the schism between *normalization* (getting an education, getting a job, moving away) and that which can *empower*[9] these young people.

In our study it is excluded from the professionals' perceptions and practices that they are working with a group of young people living in a stigmatized area – and thus they are automatically stigmatized in the larger societal context. To work with social mobility and social justice with such a group of young people entails as the first step to recognize their suffering and to jointly draw the outlines of a better self-perception and self-assessment but also a better understanding of their living conditions related to discussions of place, stigmatization, class, race, gender and power (Sernhede, 1996, Bladt, 2013). Instead, we saw professionals installing (imagined) ideals of normality – education – as the target for young people and for their intervention. In this context, we see the professionals as a power of reproducing status quo.

What is not focused on by the professionals

As shown in this paper, the professionals are very aware of opportunities and (especially) limitations of the local community. They have prepared a mental map, so to speak, where different groupings, dangerous places, hangout places etc. are plotted in. The mental map generates their (crime) prevention work and also appears in their instructions to the young people when they constantly urge them to keep on the "school track". What is not focused on and worked with, however, is the youth's own resources in social and familial relationships – social capital. We have elsewhere analyzed how young people's social communities and close family are experienced by the youth themselves as being a very important resource for their relation to education, for the desire to learn and even for school attendance and attending the youth clubs. These forms of capital are not recognized by the professionals who instead see families with poor educational backgrounds, who are not willing to cooperate with the school/club and who do not understand the needs of the young person.

It is not interesting for the professionals to connect young people to some more well-functioning, well-established and reputable groups in and outside the community. It does not appear as an intended educational goal or practice. The reason we emphasize this bridging capital (Putnam, 2000) is that this is emphasized as a necessary orientation in working with marginalized youth.

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[9] E.g. Neil Thompson's work on"anti-discriminative practice". In: Thompson, Neil (2012): *Anti-discriminative practice - Equality, Diversity and Social Justice*. Palgrave Macmillan.

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