

“Did you imagine that old people could be like this?” A kaleidoscope of ageing, health and processes of identification in an urban Danish context

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Chapter 10

Pedagogy and identification of target groups in institutional settings

As we have seen in the previous chapters the process of identification is an individual as well as a collective act. It goes on in the different spheres of human life constituted by the individual, the interactional and the institutional order. This chapter focuses on the interactional and institutional order by shedding light on what goes on between professionals and participants and members of the three empirical settings and what markers of identity are placed on the old people by the professionals in the institutional settings.

I will describe the ideas and purposes of the different institutional settings from the perspectives of managers and instructors and elucidate how the professionals identify their target groups and how the members and participants of the club, the activity centre and the qigong class respond to the way they are met in each setting. I will first look at the qigong class, then the club, hereafter the activity centre and, finally, I will have a more general look at pedagogy with older people as the target group.

The senior qigong class

As mentioned in chapter 2 the weekly qigong class takes place in the gym of a club for old people. When the participants have arrived and sit in the circle with a cup of green tea in their hands the instructor asks them one by one how they are doing and how they have been since the last qigong class.

This is followed by 30 minutes of meditation. The instructor guides the participants' concentration through different parts of the body before being silent while the participants meditate to the sound

of quiet background music. The meditation is followed by another round where everybody is asked how they felt during the meditation and how they feel now.

Then there is a short break before the physical part of the qigong session begins. The same programme is followed every time with the same movements in the same order. This lasts for around 30 minutes and includes self-massage and small movements or massage of all body parts from toes to scalp, and in between movements the participants concentrate on collecting qi from nature and the universe and concentrate the force in their own body (for a more detailed description of the movements see Sagli 2008).

When the participants first join the class the meditation and the movements might feel a little strange the first couple of times. But little by little they get used to it and become more and more familiar with everything that goes on in the class. They all have a CD, which can guide them through the exercises at home, and some of the participants do practise qigong at home.

The qigong instructor is a resource of support for the participants in different matters. Besides being a qigong instructor she is also a nurse educated in the biomedical system and employed in the public healthcare system. This has several advantages. She can give health advice and explanations within the biomedical health discourse that the participants are most familiar with and, thus, she can translate messages from the biomedical discourse into an everyday life perspective that the participants can understand. She can also provide an alternative frame of interpretation and solution by turning to the discourse of traditional Chinese medicine, which might make sense to the participants when the biomedical explanations of their general practitioners do not.

Her empathetic role and willingness to share her knowledge and help the participants in the class correspond with findings of master-student relationships in a study of qigong classes in the UK; here the relationship was characterised by trust, respect and mutual understanding (Posadzki 2010a).

The immediate purpose of the class is clear, and the tight and repeated programme creates a certain predictable and safe room for the group community and for health-related talks and the exchange of experiences between the participants; this is also noted by Sagli (2008) on the subject of Biyun qigong classes in Norway.

Identifying old people in the context of Biyun qigong

It is obvious that a philosophy and exercise programme like Biyun qigong, with a particular programme for seniors, draws on a certain identification of old people as a special group of participants. However, old people are not identified according to their chronological age or social position. Identification in this case is a process that is not fixed; it is negotiable, and it is mainly based on functional level as something changeable. This means that just because an individual is once classified as old, he or she does not necessarily stay old, if old people are people for whom participation in senior qigong is suitable. About the identification of such participants the instructor says:

'Senior qigong is a basic form of qigong for the oldest, whereas jichu gong is too challenging for their balance, knees and hips. Fan Xiu Lan¹ has focused particularly on knees and hips in senior qigong. And the last exercise where you go up on your toes and let yourself bump down gives extra energy and flow in the meridians. Who can be included among the oldest is decided by the instructor together with the person who wishes to learn qigong according to the Biyun method.'

This underlines the criteria for identifying participants as old or not old. Participants in senior qigong are mainly those who physically are unable to practise basic jichu gong. And with regard to the functional level the programme designed for the oldest participants emphasises protective exercise of knees, hips and the need for extra energy and flow in the meridians. As such certain common physical conditions are expected and emphasised in the programme.

The dynamic position of oldness in the context of qigong is emphasised by the following quote by the instructor:

'A relatively young woman of 70 years, who learned jichu gong, but found it too difficult for her to stand, participates in the Friday class. I asked if she wanted to try senior qigong, and she feels good about that. She may return to jichu gong when she has gained more strength?'

Again, the physical and functional level of the individual is stressed as a marker identifying a person as old or as a possible senior qigong participant. 70 years is considered a relatively young age, which might be linked to the fact that the average age of the participants is above 80 years. The

¹ Fan Xiu Lan is the grand master and originator of Biyun qigong.

quote also shows the negotiability of the identification by leaving open the opportunity of the particular participant returning to the basic jichu gong programme. Since the whole purpose of qigong is to heal and strengthen, the individuals' prospect of improving their general health and functional level guides the view on the participants. They are seen as people with prospects of something better, as 'windows of opportunity'. It is believed that each of them has the power or, at least, the possibility of gaining the power to act in order to make positive changes in their own lives. While the 'young' 70-year-old woman might be challenged in the basic programme, it is not seen as impossible that she might once be able to reach a functional level allowing her to return to jichu gong.

According to the philosophy of Biyun qigong it is not only the participants of senior qigong who have to be of a certain age. The instructor says:

'Fan Xiu Lan says that senior qigong instructors preferably should be above the age of 60 years in order to have some understanding of and an eye for what happens with ageing. However, younger instructors have been trained. In Sweden they hold on to the principle that the senior instructors who do not have the long instructor training we have in Denmark have to be over 60 years of age.'

This points to a focus not only on the physical aspects of ageing, but also on other possible experiences of getting older. It also facilitates a different form of identification between participants and instructor that would or could be different if the age difference was even greater.

Personal relations and individual needs

During the qigong classes the instructor is sensitive to the participants as individuals as well as to the participants as a group. Due to the repeated programme the instructor does not need to spend much energy on the course of a class or on telling participants what to do next. Instead she can focus on the needs of the participants. This strengthens the participants' trust in her. An example of this is when she helps them and touches them:

'Did you notice how much they enjoy being touched? I try to get to all of them in every class and massage their kidney area where they cannot really reach with their own hands. The times I have

given them individual massage after class they become completely relaxed and open. They tell me a lot of things about their lives that they do not usually share with the class’.

The instructor observes them carefully, listens to their talk in the group and follows up with questions if she finds it necessary and appropriate. At the same time she is very aware of being discrete and respectful and never reveals or exposes individual challenges or private matters. Kofod (2009) has shown that this discretion and etiquette is not always exercised by staffs in nursing homes and that it is not unusual for them to discuss details about residents in the common areas of the nursing home, even though this compromises the wishes and well-being of the residents. In the qigong class the participants would only reveal such details if they felt like sharing them with the group. Being alone with the instructor, she might say things like, *‘Did you notice how much has happened to X’s balance and Y’s control of her body? Isn’t it wonderful?’* She would never ask such questions in the presence of any of the participants, because she knows that it would compromise their sense of dignity and etiquette. Goffman (1963:197) notes that people signal through their body language that they will not exploit a situation and assault others in social situations, since this is a general ‘danger’ people expose themselves of in the company and sight of other people. Only after receiving such signals can people feel secure in situations involving other people. Also the qigong class can be seen as a micro-community with norms of appropriate behaviour and the instructor shows clearly that participants can feel safe without the fear of being revealed or presented in any compromising way.

While the qigong instructor shows a high degree of discretion and respect for the participants, she also emphasises that the aim of qigong is good health. However, she stresses the inclusion of both soma and psyche in the qigong health concept that she uses and she underlines the importance of individual understandings, preferences and strategies regarding health:

‘I would like to be quoted saying that medical qigong according to the Biyun method strengthens the body’s own healing powers and, in this way, underlines the participants’ own strategies of healing’.

While the instructor is very loyal to the philosophy of Biyun qigong and to the words of the grand master Fan Xiu Lan, she is also very loyal to the participants of the class. She respects their individual ways of using qigong in their everyday lives and praises their different strategies

regarding health-related behaviour as well as interaction with the health and care system of the welfare state. It seems that to the instructor reflection of what feels right in the life of the individual participant is by far the most important thing – even when that in some cases goes against official recommendations from municipal and state levels of the health care system. An example of this is her comment to me after listening to participants' accounts of meetings with local health care workers:

'The participants know very well what to say to the preventive health care workers and the medical officers of the municipality. They know what the professionals want to hear. And additionally they do what they find is best for them'.

The qigong instructor acknowledges that even a recommendation that might make sense and be legitimate in isolation needs to be considered in the larger perspective of the everyday lives of individuals. The consequence of this is that since individual daily lives are not the same things such as health recommendations should not necessarily be assigned equal weight in the everyday context of one individual or the other. This also becomes evident when she offers the participants different explanations and advice following models of traditional Chinese medicine, Western biomedicine and everyday life in a Danish urban context. One interpretation, explanation and solution is never presented as more correct than the other. That interpretation and judgement of validity is left for the participants to make.

We shall now take a look at the reactions of the participants to the way they are identified by the institution of qigong as well as by the particular instructor of this class.

When different maps of classification fit

Above I have shown how old people are identified by the institution of qigong, which is a philosophy and understanding of old people that has led to a specific programme for what is called seniors. This understanding draws primarily on the functional ability of the individual old person, but other aspects of ageing are also considered, which is evident from the emphasis of senior instructors being above a certain age and thus having a better understanding of life in old age. I have also shown how the instructor in the qigong class of this study identifies the participants in the class as individuals with very different lives and, above all, as adults capable of making the best

choices and evaluations and, thereby, the right decisions, interpretation and philosophy in the context of their particular everyday life experiences. Now we shall have a closer look at the participants' reactions to the identification they are met with in the qigong class.

In connection with a presentation of senior qigong the instructor had asked the participants to write down points that they wished her to touch upon in her speech. In the following I will use some quotes from these letters as well as material from my own observations of and talks with the participants.

About the institutional identification of seniors in a Biyun qigong context one of the participants wrote, *'Senior qigong shows understanding for us old people and respects us – Especially, I have trained my concentration. It has been good'*. She obviously feels understood and met in a way that corresponds with her own experiences of ageing.

Several participants stress the health-related talk and the advice given as an especially valuable part of the qigong classes, which is illustrated by the following quotes from the letters:

'We get good advice about minor and major disorders. The time we spend together is nice. Before we start the participants can ask for advice and everyone can make use of the answer. It can, for example, be a particular exercise or acupuncture point. I have enjoyed this a lot and found it very useful'.

'I enjoy the breaks and the serenity. The tips about taking care of myself have done me good'.

It seems clear that they have positive experiences with the structure of the classes allowing talk and advice and that they benefit from advice given to them personally as well as to other participants.

As mentioned, earlier accounts from qigong classes in other countries (Pozadski 2010) emphasise that a special attention or energy is present when several people practise qigong together. Several participants in this study underline the difference between doing qigong in the class and at home:

'The instruction we get when the class is together is very valuable and I can concentrate better here than at home'.

'At the weekly meeting the exercises are performed to the letter. Of course one can do the training at home but here the risk of being interrupted is bigger.'

At first glance the exercises look easy and one quickly finds out that the hard part is the deep concentration. Women are experts when it comes to concurrent thinking. Concentration is absolutely necessary for the exercises to be useful in depth. Also this is more difficult at home since there are too many things that can distract one's attention'.

It seems clear that the concentration part of qigong is easier for some participants to focus on or reach in depth when they are in the class compared to training at home. It might be related to the fact that the classes are led by the instructor and that the energy of several other participants have some influence. Besides, it is a time which has been planned and devoted to qigong and the class, while training at home is often placed in between other things during a day or a week.

The relations between instructor and participants

We have already seen how the instructor meets the participants of the qigong class in a discrete and sensitive way. At the same time she has confidence in their ability to make the right decisions regarding their lives, and they are the ones who choose what is right or wrong and what is best for them. The participants' reactions to and their relationship with the instructor reflect the identification they are met with. They feel respected and comfortable in the qigong class. And even if they are not all convinced that the philosophy of qigong is what they need or believe in, they are still welcome and no one is questioning their attitudes. It is completely acceptable *'not to believe in it'*, as one of the participants often states. As long as she has some benefit out of the exercises, it is not important how the classes benefit her. While her interpretation and identification of herself as someone who does *'not believe in it'* are respected, the exercises are designed to address some of the challenging experiences she has with her knees and balance.

This is noticed by the participants who feel safe with the instructor and know that they are taken seriously when they bring up a problem or issue that they want to discuss or be advised about. They also know that they are not pushed into 'buying' a certain model of explanation.

The few times I have been with the class without the instructor all the participants have praised her for being a nice person and a good and respectful instructor. She is very appreciated by the participants and they always mention her kindness when they talk about the qigong classes. There is no doubt that the instructor is a very important person in the small community (cf. Goffman 1963)

and atmosphere of the qigong class.

On the institutional level, or in the institutional order (cf. Jenkins 2008), which in this case is constituted by the qigong programme, the participants are mainly identified and treated in a way that fits with their self-identification. And identifying with the beliefs of traditional Chinese medicine is not necessary to be part of the institutional order, which is also framed by the instructor. In this way, the participants feel respected and understood on account of an underlying philosophy of individual healing powers and strategies on the one hand and the personal and respectful approach of the instructor on the other.

We shall now direct our attention to the club, which has a much looser structure and organisation and a more significant self-organising element with regards to the role of the members.

The club – ‘This is a place of opinions’

In chapter 2 I described the club, its facilities and the organisational structure with a manager, a corps of volunteers who are also members of the club and a few hourly-paid instructors. In other chapters I have presented different individual members and groups as well as specific situations in the club. Here I shall go into the role of the manager, his ambitions for the club and his views and understanding of its members.

The guide

When I first contacted the manager of the club to ask if I could do fieldwork there he replied:

‘It is okay for me, but I don’t decide. The members do. If I just allow it I will pay the penalty for the decision on our next community meeting’.

After this my assistant and I put up some posters informing about several information meetings where we would tell about the project and listen to people’s opinion. No one ever objected to our presence and project, so we came to the next community meeting and presented ourselves and the

project again.

Later, in an interview, the manager once again emphasised that the members owned the place:

'The activity centre is the house of the members where I am allowed to be. But the house is theirs. The user democracy should be visible – and that I do not decide too much. I decide because I am responsible for the economy'.

It appears that he is humble about his role in the club. He has responsibilities as a manager, but he is certainly not a king and the club is not his kingdom. However, it seems clear when the manager talks about his role that the feeling of ownership among the members only emerges because it is nursed and nurtured, which is an underlying acknowledgement of the following quote:

'The volunteers who take ownership make it safe and stable and serious, who make it nice for everybody else. People ask me how I dare to work with so many volunteers. But I say that it is easier to work with volunteers than with employees because the volunteers engage in the place because they wish to. Voluntarism is the base and I'm the dictator. I love to decide, but they don't let me. I should manage the larger framework and sell the idea. The volunteers should agree with me that this is the way forward. If I just decided, it wouldn't work. It is a negotiation technique. This is life inside and outside. They are adults who have always decided for themselves and this is not decreasing with age'.

The manager is aware of how he sets the framework within which the volunteers work. He also mentions negotiation techniques used to convince the volunteers of the ideas he has about the place. And obviously he is playing with the tension between the different roles as dictator or (just) leader and as someone who leaves the decisions for the volunteers. While downplaying his personal influence he is, however, not rejecting or denying it. He knows that his actions and behaviour are reflected in the actions and behaviour of the members:

'If I was mad and angry and showed it, everybody would be mad and angry. But if I am angry one day and tell them why, it works. Honesty is the driving force with the volunteers – there is cash settlement – and it goes both ways. That is what makes it special: everybody comes here of their own free will and even pay. We have employees paying to come to work. This is unique!'

The manager is a person who seems to give much of himself in terms of sharing experiences and feelings with the members. He talks about honesty, but he also acts in an honest and giving way towards the members. He does this by letting his opinion shine through, thereby showing people his honest opinion. If, for example, a member comes to him with a complaint about something or a new idea for changing certain procedures or starting a new activity, he always listens and lets the person know his opinion. He will try to see the idea or complaint from a broad perspective and explain why he might find it useful or not or how it can be made realisable.

The manager of the club is convinced that there has to be a leader in the background of the huge corps of volunteers working in the club. At this point he has revised his understanding over the years and according to experience, as it appears from this quote:

'Ten years ago I would have said that my goal for the place was that it should be based solely on volunteers with no staff after ten years. If you ask me now: I think the voluntarism will always thrive here, but there has to be someone showing the way. Not someone deciding the agenda, but who creates the framework, takes care of the economy and attends meetings with the authorities'.

As we saw in chapter 6 in the story about Karl, who was led by the manager into the care taker position that Karl holds today, the manager had an idea of what Karl's needs were and how he could push a little and negotiate a little until Karl himself realised how the role of care taker would benefit him. In the manager's words, one of the things that they are able to do in the club is to make timid people blossom. This leads me to the point regarding the process of identification of old people from the perspective of the manager.

Robust and fragile pensioners

The manager often labels old people as "pensioners" or "members" rather than, for example, old. However, he distinguishes quite distinctly between the people who are suitable members of the club and fragile people who can easily experience failure because the club is not *'geared to hold peoples' hands'*:

'A criterion is that you are self-transporting. This means that you have to be quite mobile. And that is why it is a group of pensioners with more resources than the referred pensioners [in other places,

such as the activity centre].

You have to be able to navigate chaos. There is a tendency to chaos here – often. [...] If people say that pensioners are timid and sit down waiting in a corner it is not here. The timid ones are here but they blossom. [...] Some are scared away from this place. They expect to be taken care of when they arrive. We are not geared for that. We provide the frames – they fill them. I also got wiser in this area. We are not supposed to be geared for everything. [...] What we can learn is to be better to refer people to other places. That is better than people suffering defeat, which fragile people can experience here. Because this is a place of opinions and some people take up a lot of space. I think it is positive, but at times it can suffocate fragile people – not on purpose. [...] And if you are the quiet type who needs more professional staff this is not the place. We have to acknowledge our limitations’.

Thus, the manager operates with two major categories of older people: the robust ones who can navigate the chaos of the club and the fragile ones who may be suffocated in chaos and strong opinions of other members and volunteers. He acknowledges that the club is not the best choice for all pensioners and he makes it clear that the purpose of the club is not to take care of fragile people who need more professional support. The club is only the best choice for people who are able to take care of themselves, albeit with smaller supportive nudges in a developmental direction. In this way, the manager identifies the members of the club as rather independent old people who can navigate chaos and who have to defend their own boundaries from being crossed by other more intrusive or loud characters who speak their minds and want to decide. This identification of the club members is aligned with the policy identification of the citizens and users of preventive and activating activity offers, as described in the previous chapter.

About the different groups of members the manager says that the majority come for planned activities and some groups mainly use the facilities of the club in the evenings. However, the large group of volunteers and different circles of people around them might be a minority among club members, but at the same time they are the people who take up the most space in the club when it comes to creation and maintenance of structure and practicalities as well as the particular atmosphere in the club:

‘To many of our members the volunteers are guaranteeing the place. [...] Many have great respect for the work of the volunteers and for their ownership. And people take more ownership when they

experience the ownership of the volunteers. This helps create the special vibe. [...] This place has a tone that I am part of setting. We speak our minds. Things are not hidden under the carpet. People can feel that and we are having lots of fun. [...] Humour fills the rooms. A lot of people never get it, but many come here because there is often laughter. People who come here know that. [...] I feel, and I have been told, that this place gets under your skin. Very quickly you become part of it and feel good. I don't know what it is. It doesn't matter – as long as it works'.

The manager acknowledges his role in setting 'a tone' and the volunteers' role as ambassadors of the club. They are the people who, besides taking care of important things in the daily running of the club, convey and play out the special vibe, which is believed to be including – while at the same time excluding 'fragile' people or people who do not thrive with the frankness and rough humour characteristic of the club.

Independent and dynamic users

It appears from the above that the club is characterised and profiled by the manager as a place for strong and independent individuals and a place with a certain rough but supporting atmosphere. The manager acknowledges his role in this, but also emphasises that the club belongs to the members who are ambassadors of the place and personify its norms and atmosphere. But how does this fit with the members' identification of themselves and each other as a group and of the club? This is what I attempt to elucidate in the following.

There is no doubt that most of the members who spend a lot of time in the club are very happy about the place and its vibe. Throughout the fieldwork I was often asked by different members, '*Don't we have it nice here? Isn't it a lovely place? We are so happy to come here*'. As the manager said, the place '*gets under your skin*'. It was the case for him, the case for the members, and it was the case for me too. While I enjoyed spending time there, I did think about the fact that not all people would appreciate "the tone". It should come as no surprise that the members and volunteers spending time and working there do it because they enjoy it. They enjoy the vibe as well as the work they do and not least each other's company.

A sentence that would usually follow questions about love for the place was, '*It is all because of our manager!*' The manager and his way of leading the way and creating the larger framework of

the club were often mentioned during my fieldwork, and a part of the members' shared narrative about the club was a story about a fantastic club with an even more fantastic leader creating a fabulous atmosphere.

Praise as an institutional order

One might say that the mutual praise of the manager and the members is part of the special atmosphere, where those who are included are acknowledged and appreciated as individuals. At the same time, it is an underlying premise that the community is highly valued, and what is especially good is when the individual contributes in his or her own way to the community. The common praise of individual efforts for the community can be understood as an institutional order in itself, if we understand the institutional order of the human world as suggested by Jenkins (2008) and explained in chapter 1 as established-ways-of-doing-things. In the case of the vibe or atmosphere in the club it is very much constituted by a 'tone of acknowledgement' between the members and between the members and the manager.

In the case of Albert and the rye bread situation presented in chapter 4, Albert was criticised for not taking part in the rye bread tasting. However, after a bit of gossiping some members pulled the others back into the common institutional order of praising individual efforts for the community, which in this particular situation meant emphasising Albert's efforts regarding the morning exercisers. In this way, the institutional order of praising individuals for community work or roles works as a form of social control. Thus, groups and individuals challenging the common narrative or who act differently are quickly guided back to the established way of doing things (cf. Nørtoft 2008): to praise and acknowledge individuals who in their own ways support the community with the personal resources available. In contrast, Finn who was introduced in chapter 7 never got to understand or follow the institutional order of the club and the morning exercisers. Rather than being in a position to negotiate the order, he was excluded for challenging it.

Good, social and motivated individuals

The institutional order of praising individual efforts influences the individual order constituted by what-goes-on-in-their-heads (Jenkins 2008). The manager mentioned how they – that is, he and the volunteers – make timid people blossom, and he mentioned the view of ageing as a continuation of

the lifelong process of development. This thesis is full of stories of people from the club who were motivated by individual interests and drive, for example Claire in chapter 5, Anna in chapter 5 and Doris in chapter 7, as well as people who needed a bit more support to unfold new potential, like Karl and Marianne in chapter 7, just to mention a few. The institutional order of praising the kind of work they do affects the interactional order (ibid.) by setting the frames for the way people interact with each other. But it also touches upon how people identify or begin to identify themselves. We have seen how Marianne became more confident after challenging herself and being encouraged to continue to play the piano and run the singing group. Doris running the puppet theatre and arranging events and partnerships with actors from the local community did not need much encouragement to dare do this. However, being given the frames and shown trust and being able to do it confirms that she still knows how to do such things, maybe even better than earlier. Both can be identified as good at something specific, which they are motivated to use in a social way for the benefit of a common activity or community.

We shall now turn to the activity centre, which according to the strategic categorisation described in chapter 9 should be targeting individuals in need of some professional assistance from staff members to engage in and initiate activities.

The activity centre

As showed in chapters 2 and 7 the activity centre is a place with more staff and a predictable structure. Most activities are planned and facilitated by staff members, at times, however, encouraged or suggested by members. I have also mentioned that the vast majority of the members need more support and help than the members of the club, and the average member of the activity centre is probably 10 years older than the average member of the club.

Ageing in present time

During the fieldwork the manager often talked about his different visions for the place, emphasising modern times and trends as something important in connection to his and the staff members' work with old people. Both the decoration of the place, the furniture and several activities are centred on

the conviction that although the members of the activity centre are old, they live in the present and not the past. Therefore, they should be presented with current trends rather than preferences of the past regarding age appropriate activities and furniture. The manager uses this as a tool to push the members in a certain direction. It is not that he wants them to adopt specific preferences, but rather that he wants them to be able to contribute to discussions and share experiences and opinions connected to things also experienced by people who are younger than themselves in the surrounding community. He does not care if the individual member of the activity centre likes the modern cuckoo clock, the big golden lamps or the transparent rococo style chairs as described in chapter 2. The important thing to the manager is that the members know these things and can take part in discussions about them, whether they like them or not. And not only does the manager wish for the members to discuss modern things, he also wishes for them to go out and take part in the life of the city and be visible as active elders in the streets and shops and cafés. In this way, some of the things that staff members used to take care of have now little by little been handed over to some of the members. He explains:

'You can say that we appear as a centre with people who start to leave more traces in the life of the city. We have people who go out shopping when we need to buy paint. And people have different attitudes about doing Nordic walking or recruiting people from their neighbourhood. And we have confidence in this: that the best ambassadors are our own members'.

It seems that the manager is much concerned about the knowledge and the image of the centre in the outside world. He wishes for the centre and its members to earn respect and acknowledgement and to be recognised for its active and less dependent older members.

Active elders with stale resources

The manager wishes to change the composition of members little by little and with time create a group of members who are more visibly active than is currently the case:

'[...] the new active elders say that the last place they want to go to is a place like ours. I would like to break with that. Because having confident members who are still active will strengthen the whole project of educating people here to be able to get out. So we hope to come out and show that it

doesn't need to be a pretext for inaction to be in an activity centre. You can find the stale resources and make them shine again'.

He is aware of a new group of old people who have different preferences than those who are over the age of 80 and constitute the majority of the current members of the activity centre. As it appears from the above quote he believes that more younger members who are more active and visible also outside of the activity centre can change the atmosphere and activity level inside the centre and have a contagious effect on the less active and self-confident members. Besides, it seems as if he prefers certain activities over others and sitting on a chair observing does not seem to count as activity although it is mentioned as such in the policy documents described in chapter 9.

His way of talking about old people and about potential new members shows that he focuses on potential. It seems as if the manager understands old people as persons who are stuck in the past and need help to get on with their lives. His job appears to be to help the members with lifelong development – a development that has stopped for many of the members. He is convinced that more active members can help solve that task.

One of the outcomes of restarting a development that has stopped or making the stale resources of old members shine again is assumed to be that the people in question have been unattractive or uninteresting, but are now turning into attractive discussion partners with experiences to share in conversation and maybe even in action:

'We have learned about the user education we want to create so that people can become more self-confident and open up. We also have families contacting us and telling us that their elders have become more present and can join in conversations about things and take more interest in themselves and thereby become more attractive to their families'.

The view of old people clearly reflects some of the features that are shared by many members, such as restricted mobility – either physical, mental or both. In chapter 7 we saw how some members are very attached to 'their' table, and many of the members are dependent on aids such as zimmer frames or walking sticks.

In chapter 7 I also showed how Benny used his experience of dining with his family in a restaurant as an entry point of social contact with other members during the billiard session. In this case the experience he had with others showed him as an attractive person to spend time with and he could

invest this experience in other social relations than the ones with his family. The same frame of understanding is applied by the manager of the activity centre, but the investment runs in the opposite direction. When they experience something interesting in the activity centre the members have something to invest in their relationships with their families, who can then see that their old relatives are attractive persons. In this way, experiences inside as well as outside of the activity centre start a positive feedback mechanism that makes people more attractive to others in social relations.

This view does not seem to include the view of older people as attractive and wise qua their age and following accumulated life experiences, as mentioned in chapter 5.

Nice time and social contact

The members who use the activity centre do not appear to do so as part of a strategy to make them more attractive in social relations. While some members enjoy the activities offered and frequently take part in them, many others do not and mainly come to the activity centre to meet other people, drink coffee and maybe exercise regularly to maintain their physical functional level. To some of those who take an active part in the offered activities, being together with others seems to be more important than the activity in question. This also comes into view in Benny's story of his days and his thoughts and emotions related to the activity centre:

'I'm happy every day when I get up and make something out of the day. All of it makes me happy. To come here, for example. Then I listen to music and drink a cup of coffee ... and have bread with cheese. Just the hygge² ... But I also go and exercise and I play billiards.

My granddaughter took me here. I began with two days [a week], but that was not enough. After I had been here for one day I knew that I wanted to start. I started by exercising on the second floor, but that was too easy for me. On the third floor it is more about weights and kilos on and raising them. It is not the same machines. On the third floor it is more weight training, yes it is, and that doesn't harm you when you don't do anything else.

² 'Hygge: Often translated, inadequately, as 'cosiness', this is a desirable social atmosphere or feeling characterised by small-scale settings, informality, relaxed intimacy and inter-personal warmth, and is related to the notion of 'home' (Jenkins 2012:xiv)

Before I came here the days were long. Now I can't do without it. The best thing about the place is activities and hygge. It is almost like joining a family party here. I am most closely attached to August, but I chat with everyone – also the women. It was not good when August was away because we sit and hygger from around 10 until the afternoon'.

Benny enjoys coming to the centre and chatting with everyone. However, he has become more attached to August than the other members, but he feels comfortable at the activity centre and he states that coming there twice a week was not enough; therefore, he now comes every day. To him it is a nice way to spend his days.

To another member, Gorm, the attractive thing about the activity centre is also meeting other people as well as the food. Gorm says:

'I like the atmosphere here and the friends you meet. I am happy to meet them. I get new acquaintances in this way.

K: *Do you see anyone outside the centre?*

G: *No, actually not, but some come to the church where I was married in 1939. My wife died in 1989. I have a girlfriend who helps me a lot. She's got a car and picks me up. On Sundays we go to church. I eat when I am here. At home I receive food from the central kitchen. They deliver it, but unfortunately they come very early. Warm food at lunch. In the evening I eat bread'.*

Gorm's story about how he started at the activity centre is different from Benny's, though, but rather typical for many of the members, who have enrolled at the activity centre after a period of rehabilitation:

'In January 2006 I had to go to the mail box and the supermarket. My knees shook when I reached [road name] after the shopping. Then I had to lie down on the ground. My legs could not carry me. It was right by the pharmacy. They took me in, gave me water and called a cab. At home I was put on a chair where I sat most of the day. Then my own doctor came, but couldn't see anything and referred me to treatment in the centre. I went for rehabilitation training for a couple of months and then I started in the activity centre'.

Gorm's account does not suggest that he had an unfulfilled social need. He started in the activity centre for rehabilitation purposes, and while he does enjoy the company of the other members he

also emphasises the warm food he gets here. Besides, he has a girlfriend and friends in the church as well as a big family. As a member of the activity centre whose main reason for joining was physical training, Gorm resembles many other people who join clubs and activity centres. His account reveals his focus on physical experiences with an old and tired body in need of different kinds of attention and investment than previously. The emphasis on the training facilities in clubs and activity centres was also illustrated in chapter 4 in Hans' story and in chapter 6 in Karl's story. However, as Meta's story in chapter 7 showed, for some it is the chance to meet other people that motivates them to become a member.

Managerial visions and practical and social needs

When members of the activity centre expressed their opinions about the staff and management in the activity centre it was often in relation to activities. Thus, the staff could be talked about in a general way as 'those' who have to 'offer and plan activities'. Some were disappointed with the selection of activities offered, others were satisfied, and some looked at the situation from a broader perspective considering the realistic possibilities when taking the number of staff, members and material and practical obstacles into account. Some members expected to have activities 'served on a silver plate', while others thought members should contribute with suggestions and support initiatives. Although the centre had a board of members with elections and the opportunity to discuss problems and dissatisfaction with the management, the general attitude among the members was not that they owned the activity centre together with the staff and the manager.

Benny's idea of one big family was not widespread, and the distribution of roles between staff members and members also suggested that the centre was an institution, not a family. Thus, Benny was in this case not representative for the general attitude among neither staff members nor members.

At the time of my fieldwork there seemed to be a discrepancy between the manager's visions for the activity centre and the way the members used and felt about the place. This might not be particularly surprising since the activity centre was in a process of transformation and development partly initiated by the administrative and strategic level of the department of health and care. However, it meant that the visions expressed by the manager did not necessarily correspond with

what seemed important to the members. In this way, there seemed to be little connection between, on the one hand, the manager's visions of opening the centre up to the surrounding world and making the centre more visible in the local area through the presence of the members and, on the other, most members' focus on closer relationships in small groups and communities often centred around tables and regular seats, as we saw in chapter 7. It is possible that the two perspectives have become more similar in the years following my fieldwork there.

Pedagogy with older people as the target group

Hansen defends the Danish term 'ældrepedagogik' meaning old people pedagogy. She argues that old people should not receive pedagogical services just because they are old. Rather pedagogical traditions, knowledge, skills and attitudes should be introduced in areas especially concerning old people (Hansen 2000). Humans have a potential for development throughout life, but in most cases development is possible through different kinds of support. This implies taking into account the life stage and conditions of participants in a pedagogical relation. In 1992 Nielsen argued that in the future the need for cultural and leisure activities targeting old people and relying on a general pedagogy would increase as a consequence of more and more active older people in Denmark. In addition, she noted that social pedagogical interventions can contribute to continued personal development and better quality of life for old people in the long run (Nielsen 1992). The pedagogical settings presented here two decades later are examples of the development of the pedagogy targeting old people, and while institutions based on general pedagogy for old people are under continuous development, the goals seem to be the same as 20 years ago, albeit with a twist in the way health has become a major focus point today.

Building on the pedagogy targeting older people as presented by Hansen and Nielsen (1992), Møller (2000), almost a decade later, introduced another model which he called a culture-based and individual-oriented pedagogy. He emphasised that where models of pedagogy for children and adults within the area of lifelong learning are focused on community, productivity and contribution to the productive society, a pedagogy for old people can leave the last point out and thereby be oriented towards the individual rather than the community. This is an important point, he notes, because the model embraces perspectives of lifelong learning, development, quality of life and democratic participation, while at the same time considering values, life course and cultural aspects.

He argues that the most important points of relational culture-based pedagogy are that focus is moved away from an authoritative pedagogy and that the users – the older people – are not subjected to other systems, but are, rather, managers of their own lives in communication with other systems (Møller 2000:21). He underlines that professionals in this areas should see themselves as empathic supervisors (Møller 2000).

Looking at the pedagogy used in the qigong class, the club and the activity centre it seems clear that individual development on each person's own terms is the final goal for both managers and the qigong instructor. They all see their target groups as individuals with different life stories, wishes, goals and qualifications. However, the structural differences between the settings mean that the pedagogy has very different conditions in each setting. In the club the members can do most things on their own and the manager can create the larger framework and manage the facilities. In the qigong class the programme is determined by the qigong agenda and all the participants use the programme as a chosen part of their personal development, well-being and work with themselves. The members of the activity centre generally need more help. This means that while there is more staff to support, guide and facilitate them, there are also more limits to what is possible since a few staff members have to support many members who might not have the same wishes and needs. Therefore, the constitutions of the target groups of the three settings have a crucial influence on what is pedagogically and practically possible, although the ultimate goals and views on older people might be very similar. People who can manage their daily lives with no help basically need the physical frames and can support each other if the norms of the setting are supportive and demand individual initiative. People who come together because of a shared interest and shared goals of participation can also support each other and be approached professionally as a group that respects individual differences. The last target group here is more dependent on professional guidance in different directions and this leads to more limitations, simply because the group is much more dependent on professional 'hands' than others. Thus, similar goals and pedagogical ambitions are heavily influenced by the different settings.

Therefore, what might seem like different ways of identifying and treating the participants and members, might not be a result of different identifications, but can be structurally determined and influenced by different institutional orders.

It should be clear that the three pedagogical settings provide very different frames for social interaction and have different target groups. The pedagogy reflects the target groups as well as the

structure and organisation of each setting. Besides, while the qigong class is guided by the principles prescribed by the grand master of Biyun qigong, the activity centre is referring to the policies from the municipal department of health and care. The club seems a bit more independent as long as a few criteria concerning the offered physical activities are met.

While the pedagogy to varying degrees is guided by external principles the personal approach and choice of the instructor and the managers, however, is also evident. In the club the characteristic “tone” is loved by the members, but might scare off other potential members. In the activity centre the manager might initiate a certain atmosphere, but with a group of staff members with different personalities and attitudes there is not one particular “tone” and this might give opportunity for a wider range of potential members to feel comfortable there. In the qigong class the atmosphere is appreciative and sensitive and embraces potential participants in an open manner. However, with the more narrow scope of health and qigong and the tight structure the frames for social activity are more controlled than in the other settings.

In sum, it can be said that the variety is important when the welfare state and the municipality want to offer health promoting settings and activities. Throughout the thesis I have told the stories of individuals with various affiliations to social groups, with various interests and with very different life courses (cf. Elder 1994), identities (cf. Jenkins 2008) and goals for the near and far future. It is obvious that these individual persons need a wide range of institutional choices. And in contrast to the symbolic choice regarding home care as presented in the previous chapter, this area is one where they actually have something to choose between. The question then becomes if they have the resources to do the required research on different possibilities, since this kind of information is scarce in material provided by the department of health and care as I showed in chapter 9.

Through the last seven chapters I have presented a range of individuals, groups and larger institutional settings across themes of performance, health, community, death, engagement and pedagogy. In the following and last chapter I will gather the threads and discuss them in relation to the overall question of the thesis posed in chapter 1.

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