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Don't see me as a fragil human, but as a human

**A case study about the shared life and the spiritual dimension of the social work in
a L'arce community**

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Dedication

First and foremost I wish to thank the L'arche community in France that welcomed and hosted me during the two months that was the period of my field study. The thesis wouldn't have been possible without your time, commitment and engagement in providing me information and including me in your amazing work! I want to give a special acknowledgement to my informants that gave me lots of insight in the life and work from a professional point of view. Throughout my stay in the community I have learned a lot and I was deeply touched by the persons involved, something I hope to share in this thesis.

Furthermore, I'd like to sincerely thank people surrounding me who gave me valuable input in my study and lots of support, including my supervisor Johan Gärde and further my friends, classmates and beloved ones who have showed patience and gave me lots of love during the conduct of this thesis.

The title is drawn from one of the interview with I1 where a social worker described what the social work profession is about. In its context, the English translation would be: “The heart of our work is to explore what is happening in a relationship, it's about seeing the other, not only as a fragile human, but as a human”.

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore how professionals working in a French community association perceived the notion of spirituality and a shared life practice, and furthermore what contributions and limits these concepts have in the social work. To attain this, a case study has been done using participant observations and four thematically opened interviews within a L'arche community where persons with varying disabilities are living together with professional assistants. To put the association in a theoretical framework, I propose it to be regarded as a case of milieu therapy with spiritual elements, which are the two areas that will be stressed out in the section about previous research. The theories used in the study are ecological system theory, existentialism and Roger's theory about interpersonal relationships. The result of the thesis illustrate how the notion of a shared life practice has good contributions in the social work, such as equal and personal relationships between the members of the community and furthermore a notion of time that makes the work unstressful and natural as a result of the communal living. However, a limit discovered regarding this practice is the exposed and tiering situation for the assistants that hinder a longterm work in the community for most assistants. Another finding is that the spiritual dimension in the community makes way for a holistic view of everyone and contributes with rituals that create strong moments of fellowship within the community, at the same time it risks to make people who regard themselves as non-spiritual not to feel totally included.

Keywords: Community, shared life, spiritual social work, ecological system theory, interpersonal relationships, communal living

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1. Introduction

The ways of organizing social work are numerous. In most welfare states the main part of the social services is provided by the state, but the civil society plays a big role in providing the need of the people and ensure them their rights (Evers & Laville, 2004). One of the most important persons in the history of social work is the prominent figure Jane Addams, whose ideas have inspired and developed a significant direction in social work. She stated that social problems were to be solved by mutual relationships where the helper and the helped shall learn from and interact with each other (Meeuwisse, Sunesson & Swärd, 2006). Within this direction of social work, the workers are encouraged to live close to or even together with the clients in order to act practically for social justice. Her ideas exist ever since and can be found within several movements and initiatives where the aim is to share life with the clients (a.a.).

In this essay a community association in France named L'arche, that is part of the civil society and that provides professional social services, will be explored. By practicing communal living, where assistants live together with people who have different kind of disabilities (mainly neuropsychiatric and cognitive disabilities) in co-houses and thereby conduct an alternative way of social work that goes in line with the direction originating from Addams ideas. Both within research and practices, the *shared life* seem to play a small role in social work today. For professional social workers, this kind of structure is rare to see, therefore the main focus in this essay is to explore the situation for the assistants living in the co-houses and the outcomes they perceived from the shared life practice. In this thesis I propose the social work of L'arche to be a case of *milieu therapy* that includes *spiritual elements* in order to gain an understanding of how the work can be seen theoretically and furthermore to explore the outcomes of the communal living perceived by the staff in the community.

2. Background

This section wishes to provide information about areas within social work that are relevant for the case studied as well as for the context where the association works. The first section highlights the French societal context and the role of civil society associations in providing social services. The following sections put forward the role and development of milieu therapy and spirituality within social work. The case of L'arche will be presented in chapter 4.

2.1 The context of France – social services, the welfare state and the role of associations

In order to gain an understanding of the context in which the community association, L'arche, exists I will outline what the French welfare state looks like today, and also some important changes and reforms that has created this context. France is a country marked by big historical events that has led to changes in the society and that has created preconditions for social movements and progressive political decisions. Starting from the enlightenment and the French revolution in the 18th century, big words such as "freedom, equality and brotherhood" were central and the criticism towards the rulers was big (Palier, 1997). This came to influence the establishment of civil society associations in the 19th century, where the concept of solidarity was fundamental. Compared to many European countries, the number of philanthropic initiatives was small, since the state largely encouraged organized manifestations of solidarity theories. This led to the establishment of the first social law, a compulsory social insurance, in the beginning of the 20th century (Evers & Laville, 2004). Since that time, the welfare system has developed in a manner that emphasizes the vertical relation between the state and the people, meaning that reforms have aimed to protect the citizen through the social state. By the Danish researcher Gosta Esping-Andersen (1989) and other welfare experts, France is mentioned as a corporatist country that includes a manner of distributing social services based on wage income and status in society (Esping-Andersen, 1989). This kind of structure leaves much space for associations willing to provide social services, which has been the case ever since the establishment of the welfare system. During the first half of the 20th century, associations were mainly created to fill the gap that the social welfare system didn't enhance, while from the 1960s and onward associations tended to arise from a politically critical point of view (Evers & Laville, 2004). Today, the civil society associations are of various sizes, with both religious and secular fundamentals and they continue to play a big role within the welfare system in France (a.a.). Many associations can be seen as hybrid-organizations as they receive tax money for the social services rendered.

2.2 Milieu therapy

In the 1940s a new way of working with vulnerable and social excluded people arose that is called milieu therapy. This created a movement that has had a great impact on how social work is organized and looked upon today that sprang out of the criticism of how classic institutional psychiatric care failed to help people with mental illness in a humane way (Jenner, 2000). According to The National Board of Health and Welfare in Sweden, milieu therapy is an evidenced proved method that is used in social work of various kinds,

including day units and care residents for people with physical and mental disabilities. The purpose is to provide the population a secure social environment that permits a personal development and social learning for the participants (Socialstyrelsen, 2016). Some ground principles can be identified in the milieu therapeutic work, which Håkan Jenner outlined in “Miljöterapi – igår, idag och imorgon” (2000). These will be developed in the section about previous research.

Therapeutic Community (TC) is in another concept that can be seen as an extension of milieu therapy (Dhariti & Kalyanasundaram, 2015). TCs are small cohesive communities based on ideas of collective responsibility, citizenship and empowerment. TC encourages people in a specific context to share their lives with each other and by following several standards a supportive context will be created. The environment following the principles of 'democratization', 'permissiveness', 'communalism', and 'reality confrontation' is in itself therapeutic since the community has therapeutic influences on every member (a.a.). Throughout the history of TCs there have been various structures that implements communal living and a shared life model, although it hasn't been the dominating way (Börjeson, 2000). Today, different kind of establishments and structures are capable to incorporate a TC model as long as it contains the essential key elements (Barone & Buschetta, 2013).

2.3 Spirituality in social work

The foundation for spirituality in social work has ancient roots. In the establishment of welfare in nation states, religious thoughts and concepts were central. Philosophers such as Sartres and Kirkegaard have inspired the discourse of people oriented practices such as social work (Payne, 2015). The notion of spirituality includes traditional religious systems, but is also a wider concepts to address a holistic thinking of a person. This will further be outlined in the section about theoretical framework. According to the authors of the book “Spiritual diversity in social work practice”, the seven biggest religious perspectives have all played an impact on how social work is performed today, and the different religions have several basic values in common (Canda & Furman, 2010). Furthermore, the authors shows that non-religious spirituality concepts such as existentialism and the transpersonal theory, that both grew out of a humanistic intellectual development, can provide social work practices with important perspective (a.a.). The number of Faith-based organizations in the western world is still big and in other parts of the world, religious oriented actors plays a key role in providing people social services (De Cordier, 2014).

3. Research question

3.1 Problem statement

Within social work, structures where clients and workers share their lives have been emphasized as a way to challenge oppression and act for social change since the beginning of the professional social work (Meeuwisse et al., 2006). In spite of these long-standing ideas, I have found almost no research that addresses communal living within professional social work. It is therefore of interest to investigate how the concept of a *shared life* practice is perceived by people working in such structures in order to explore what contributions and limits that appear and to gain a greater understanding of how social work can be formed in alternative ways. Further, the notion of spirituality within people oriented professions has ancient roots and is assumed to decrease as welfare states become more secularized (Payne, 2015). Yet, numerous clients regard themselves as spiritual or religious beings, which is why social work structures ability to address this is important.

3.2 Purpose

The study aims to increase the knowledge about alternative ways of organizing and performing social work in a welfare state like France. By focusing on how the shared life practice is perceived by assistants working in a L'arche community the thesis wishes to contribute knowledge regarding milieu therapeutic work. Furthermore, the thesis wishes to acknowledge the role of spirituality and religious elements within this kind of shared life-structure by exploring how it is perceived by people employed in a L'arche community.

3.3 Research questions

- How do professionals employed in the community perceive the role of the shared life?
- What is the role of spirituality within the work and life of the community?
- What limits and contributions in the professional social work, expressed by the staff, are to be found in the community?

3.4 Terminology used in the thesis

Hereafter follows concepts and vocabulary considered central for the understanding of the thesis and its objectives:

Community –the concept traditionally involves three levels; *geographically* – the community is a physical place, *socially* – the community is a group of interactive people and *culturally* -the community is upholding particular traditions and norms that defines practices and social rules. In the thesis, the word is used to address the specific L'arche community in France where this study was conducted.

Community association – here used to describe whole L'arche as a bigger association, including 104 local communities across the world using the same working method with the same purpose.

The shared life – the notion is used by the community themselves when describing the central component of their work. It links to the subject terms *communal living* and *collective settlements* within research meaning

arrangements where people voluntarily live together with a common ideological base.

Co-house – the word refers to the communal living that members in the community is practicing where about 10 persons (assistants and hosted persons) live together in a household.

Hosted person – the word was used by the members of L'arche to address the people with disabilities living in the community.

Assistant – employees in the community are referred to as assistants. They could either be interns, living together with the hosted persons in co-houses, or external assistants, working 35 hours/week either at the day unit center or connected to one of the co-houses.

Members of the community – hosted persons, employed assistants, the board as well as volunteers counted as members of the community. Some people mentioned that friends and family of the members also could be counted as members.

The work and life of the community – members of the community used this expression when they talked about what was happening in the community. This involves everyday activities at the day unit center and within the co-houses. It addresses the fact that no member of the community perceives the engagement as a work uniquely, it is rather an engagement that goes beyond a duty.

3.5 Outline of the thesis

The thesis is organized in sections where each one is divided into sub-sections. Hereafter follows a presentation of the actual case, which is the community association L'arche. Then, previous research and theoretical framework will be outlined followed by a section where the methods and the material used to achieve the aim are discussed. Thereafter the results are presented divided into sub-sections with the analysis following each theme. In the last chapter I will discuss the conclusions in a broader context and suggest some areas for further research.

4. Presentation of the case

4.1 L'arche

L'arche (in English the Ark) is an association founded in France 1964. The association exists in 36 countries and includes 104 different communities. The founder was a doctor in philosophy, named Jean Vanier who got to know two men living in a big psychiatric institution for people with mental illness outside of Paris. He was touched by their situation and the three persons decided to move in together and share their lives and further on they established the association L'arche (L'arche, 2016). The creation of L'arche can be regarded as a criticism towards the institutional care provided to this group. Since the inception, the association has changed the population of clients due to the need, and today the main part currently living in the communities have various forms of chronic disabilities.

A community is made out of several communal households, where hosted people live together with employed assistants and volunteers. Each co-house include approximately 10 persons, where the majority (up to 7 persons) have different kinds of disabilities. The disabilities are mainly neuropsychiatric and cognitive disabilities that are chronic which most often makes the main part of the hosted persons to remain in the community for a long period of time. Most communities also runs a day unit center that perform pedagogical group work within smaller units, where the hosted persons spend their days together with employed assistants and other people with various disabilities that lives outside of the community.

The association stands on three dimensions; the community dimension, the professional dimension and the spiritual dimension. According to the webpage of L'arche in France the community strives to create a society where all can be together, regardless our mental or physical ability. To work as an assistant within the co-houses, there is no requirement of a university degree but in reality most assistants have diplomas from various fields. Within the day unit center, this specific community tend to employ persons with a degree in social work, pedagogy or other people oriented professions. However, there was no set hierarchy between the different employments in the community, people could work at different positions regardless university degree. There are also psychologists and psychiatric nurses employed by the community that provides different services and treatments for the hosted persons (L'arche, 2016).

The association receives most of their funds from taxes, as they are a "Établissement Medico-Social" (E.M.S), which is part of the public social services in France. Hence, in terms of governance, L'arche can be seen as a hybrid organization, although the definition of a hybrid organization is very broad and varies a lot due to the context (Thomasson, 2009). The hosted persons usually enter L'arche after having lived within other forms of structures, such as institutions for adult disabled people or "Insitut Médico-Educatif" (I.M.E) that is the public structure that hosts minors with intellectual disabilities. Within the E.M.S there are structures of various kind where L'arche belongs to the "Lieu de vie et d'accueil" (L.V.A) that is a structure for different populations of clients (one of them being adults with chronic disabilities) where clients live together in a household with constant presence of assistants. however L'arche differs from most L.V.A since the staff equally lives in the household with the clients and thus works more than 35 hours/week, which is the legislated working hours in France. In the co-house the assistants are on duty 6 days a week with a 2 hour

break each day. At the day unit center all employed assistants work 35 hours/week. Half of the assistants living in the co-houses were employed assistants and the other half were young people doing one year of civil service and were thereby employed by the French State. The specific community that is the case of this study involved around 65 persons and included 5 co-houses. A Swedish comparable structure to L.V.A would be HVB-hem (hem för vård eller boende) that also stands on milieu therapeutical standards.

The association originates from a catholic tradition, as the founder was a practicing believer. The fundamental idea by Jean Vanier was however to welcome people with other religious or spiritual believes and today the association mention themselves as inter-religious. The spiritual dimension vary due to the local region where the community exists and it emphasize the fact that every person is a spiritual being (L'arche, 2016).

5. Previous research

As mentioned in the background, research about social work that involves communal living is hard to find. I have chosen to regard L'arche as a case of milieu therapeutic work since many similarities with their own description of their work appeared throughout the process. Research about how the concept of spirituality is used in social work is also presented since the spiritual dimension within the community is essential. The section wishes to provide the reader with a theoretical understanding about L'arche by presenting the state of knowledge and researches from the two areas of interest for the case.

5.1 Milieu therapy and therapeutic community

The first generation of milieu therapeutic work and therapeutic communities (TC) began in England in the 1940s by a psychiatrist named Maxwell Jones. This generation is called the democratic TC, striving to be non-hierarchical through implementation of decision-making by consensus and with group therapy as a main tool in the rehabilitation-program. In the 1950s' a second model of TC arose in the US as the Synanon community started which was a program for drug abusers, also built on communal living but where the treatment happened within a hierarchic structure (Broekaerta, Vandeveld, Soyeza, Yatesb & Slaterc, 2006). The methods used in these two communities were spread in Europe and the US, mainly in the work with people with substance abuse and mental illness, but also for other populations of clients (a.a.).

The variation within milieu therapy is big, but some core values are to be found. Håkan Jenner (2000) has identified eight concepts that unify the broad movement of milieu therapeutic work and TCs. These being *open communication* – that all members shall have equal access to information and given right to express thoughts and feelings, *democracy* – the power shall be decentralized and decision-making shall involve everyone, *new roles* – the clients are expected to participate in the treatment of others, *tolerance of symptom* – everyone shall be accepted as they are and one shall show tolerance to differences of others, *confrontation with reality* – everyday-life situations are what constitutes the treatment in a therapeutic community, *voluntariness* – the involvement in a TC needs to be voluntary for the treatment to success, *common goals* – the members formulates the group-identity and goals with the stay in the community, *contact with the world outside* – the community needs to stay in touch with the society and people outside (Jenner, 2000). In 1981, Barry Sugerma proposed a third generation of TC, which was a synthesis between the previous ones (Segraeus, 2000). He added two concepts to the previous elements consisting a TC, which were *the participation in rituals* and *the belief in a higher power*, which he proposed could be useful in the work with milieu therapy (a.a.).

The research about therapeutic communities is primarily oriented in programs for drug abusers and psychiatric care institutions. Concerning the population of clients highlighted in this thesis, I didn't find any study that addressed milieu therapeutic work involving people with disabilities. In spite of this, there are many welfare structures, in Sweden as well as in France who works with methods that are comparable and that assert themselves to work with an approach of milieu therapy. However, researchers have stated that by following the basic principles, structures of various kinds and for different populations of clients can be claimed as therapeutic communities (Barone & Bruschette, 2014). Most studies that are to be found about

TCs examine the therapeutic elements and the assessment in the proposed treatment. In the article "Intersecting heterologies" (2014), John Gale appeal to re-frame the discussion about the therapeutic community by addressing the dominant discourse about the therapeutical assessments in research about TC. He problematizes the notion of the TC as mainly a method and technology and proposes a wider understanding about the actual role of the community including relationships and shared life (Gale, 2014). He refers to the work of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and his founding idea of the therapeutic community as a hermeneutical history rather than something psychological precisely (Lacan, 1984). By doing so, he puts forward that "it has largely been forgotten that the therapeutic community is placed within two discourses – that of therapy and that of community – and that this forgetting is, in fact, a disavowal of what is collectively repressed." (Gale, 2014). Gale wishes to re-balance the notion of the TC by upgrading the role of the interpersonal relationships creating the community to place the TC in two distinct discourses. He puts forward that the community is built on exchange and relationships through interdependence and connectedness in language, rather than on treatment (for individuals). Moreover, that the TC is an analogue of the structure of friendship, which is a discourse that needs to be further explored and upgraded (a.a.).

Regarding the kind of TC where the staff lives together with the clients, Bengt Börjeson writes in a chapter in the book "Miljöterapi – igår, idag och imorgon" (2000) about the paradoxical role that the workers are forced to have when living in a community in the longterm. Using the Swedish pioneer project of the children's village in Skå as an example where the ideological motivation of protesting against the societal children's care had overwhelming consequences for the project, and that the children's village later on had to stop due to the difficult working conditions for the staff (Börjeson, 2000). In spite of this, studies have shown that depending on the population of clients and in what way the community is following basic milieu therapeutical principles there are good chances to create a constructive system that works in the longterm and that have therapeutical outcomes for the clients (Hafner & Holme, 1996).

5.2 Spirituality in social work

Throughout the last 30 years, more attention has been drawn to spiritual discourses in professional social work. Studies have shown that the profession tends to lack in the ability to address and support clients need and interest in spiritual issues (Carrington, 2014). In the article "An Integrated Spiritual Practice Framework for Use Within Social Work" the author states that the theorization of this field is far behind and meets many obstacles due to dominating discourses such as the big focus on evidenced proved methods (Carrington, 2014). Scholars have proposed that integrating spirituality within social work could contribute to a more holistic approach towards the clients and their problems (Canda & Furman, 2010). Yet, studies conducted have generally focused on practical methods and assessments in meeting clients spiritual needs rather than framing a bigger picture including theoretical concepts and assumptions that can guide social workers in various arenas (Carrington, 2014). In the article Carrington proposes a framework to facilitate for social workers to meet the spiritual needs and perceptions of their clients. She develops concepts withdrawn from hinduism, buddhism and islam which are three of the world's biggest religions that aim to contribute to a greater understanding about how spirituality and religion can be perceived and addressed. A central concern,

according to the author, is that social workers using the concepts and integrates religious practices in their work must always acknowledge the ethical concerns that follows when doing so. She states that a risk might be that professionals appropriate concepts or practices from ideologies that they are unfamiliar with and origins of other people's belief system, which could have oppressing consequences (a.a.).

Within therapeutical group work, several professions have emphasized the meaning and contributions of spiritual rituals to address the existential needs of different populations of clients. In the article "Healing Rituals in Group Treatment for Domestic Violence" the authors state that rituals can be used to promote individual change as well as to enhance social relations (Wozniak & Neuman Allen, 2014). In their study conducted on women survivors of domestic violence in the US, where most of their informants were raised up protestant but were open towards meditation and other form of spiritual practices, they found that different types of rituals served different purposes for the women. Rituals were found empowering and facilitated a re-conception of self from "victim" to "thrivers" and further to create a sense of community where the members of the group would feel included (a.a.). Rituals can be performed to mark specific events of the year and fills, apart from the religious or spiritual meaning, social purposes. Within social work, the field of rituals and spiritual assessments has expanded during the last decades. Studies have shown that rituals can serve as therapy in cases with traumatized refugees as well as helping maintain group equilibrium and solidarity within communal living (a.a.). A researcher named Wallace has classified five different categories of rituals used within people oriented professions, which are (1) technological rituals designed to control nature; (2) therapeutic and healing rituals; (3) ideological rituals that reinforce group norms and bonds and that include rites of passage, joining, and intensification; (4) salvation rituals that include cleansing and empowering rituals; and (5) revitalization rituals that are designed to control destiny. Regarding the third type of ritual, symbolic gestures are usually performed to manifest an example of how people in a group look upon each other in order to establish equality and fellowship (a.a.).

6. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that will be used while conducting the study has been selected to put L'arche as a therapeutic community with spiritual elements into a context, using concepts that can describe the social work conducted in the community. It is of interest what parallels can be made from their own description of their work to wider theoretical perspectives. The two first theories are bigger perspective and discourses that can be useful to describe the case of L'arche and further they serve to understand the meaning of the shared life and spirituality in a wide perspective. These can be seen as the fundamental ideas of the community that will later on serve as tools in understanding L'arche within professional social work. The theories utilized link together at many essential points and are therefore assumed to create a wholeness that can serve to a theoretical understanding of the case of L'arche. However, they involve various levels within social work theories, starting from an overall perspective about the role of spirituality and how social work can be understood from an existentialistic point of view. Moreover, since L'arche is mainly working at a group level, the ecological system theory serves to understand how the interaction between people in a group looks like and how people's involvement with the surrounding environment can be understood. The third theory is much narrow and was chosen to explore the relationships created in the community on a more detailed level. It talks about qualities required from a social worker and potential therapeutical outcomes that interpersonal relationship can have. They are, together with the previous research, also the tools when analyzing the result and to further attempt to answer the research questions. Two of the chosen theories, existentialism and the theory about interpersonal relationships originates from humanistic practice and the other one, ecological system theory, is chosen due to its many parallels to and impact on milieu therapeutic work.

6.1 Existentialism

Within the existentialism, a person is regarded both as a *subject* and an *object*, which refers to that the person both has an impact on the surrounding environment and is affected by the same. Also, the perspective brings about a focus on the ability for people to gain power over ones life and to change manners and habits that are undesirable (Canda & Dyrud Furman, 2010). Many scholars suggests that *spirituality* should refer to a person's wholeness that isn't reducible to any part. The term also refers to a person's pursuit for meaning and purpose in life (a.a.). This is also one the basis of the value of unconditional positive regard (a concept that will be outlined in the next section) that goes in line with humanistic practice. *Religiosity* equally refers to how individuals are making meaning in their life but inside of a systematic body of belief and practices related to a specific spirituality (Healy, 2014). The relation between the two can be perceived in different ways, people might consider themselves as only spiritual or religious, but most often the religiosity seem to be an included and transcended part within a greater spirituality (Canda & Dyrud Furman, 2010). As perspective, the existentialism and its related practices contributes to social work by focusing on individuals strengths and personal development. The emphasize on the wholeness lifts the focus to a higher level, where the relation to other people and the surrounding world becomes part of one self. Traditionally, this tends to have empowering effects and goes in line with a human rights perspective in social work (Payne, 2015). In the thesis, this perspective supplies an understanding about how the notion of spirituality in the studied case

makes way for a holistic approach and to explore how the concepts form the discourse and the actual work in the community.

6.2 The ecological system theory

The theoretical framework for milieu therapy can be seen as a mix of many different theoretical approaches that has to do with societal and academic flows and different ways of organizing the work with milieu therapy and therapeutic community (Jenner, 2000). The concept of TC regarding the treatment is *holistic* rather than symptom oriented where each act is seen as an expression of the whole integrated personality (Hippchen, 1965). As Erik Gronvold states in the book "Miljöterapi – igår, idag och imorgon", this links together with system theory at some important points. The focus on resources and possibilities are central as well as seeing the individual as part of a group that has mutual impact on each other (Gronvold, 2000). Malcom Payne has in his book "Modern Social work theories" presented an overview on the theoretical ideas and terminology within system theory. It asserts that systems are entities including different levels and where all levels and units affect each other. A system can be a family, a school or a community and it always has limits that can be more open or more closed. It always affects the surrounding environment and is always influenced by higher levels, such as societal norms, legislation and cultural context. Energy and energy flows are important words, which concerns resources, time and actions that somehow has an impact on the system by supplying or abstracting energy from the system (Payne, 2015). Regarding the borders to the society surrounding the system, they can be more open or more close where an open system means that it has dynamic interaction with the environment around the system, it receives information and can adapt to the surrounding system if necessary (McCovery & Matusitz, 2014).

Within the system theory, three different waves have been outlined (Healy, 2014), where we will focus on the second one which is the ecological system perspective. The most famous name within this perspective is Urie Bronfenbrenner who was an American development psychologist who developed the ecological system theory in 1979 (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). In his theory he highlighted the environmental and societal influences on children's development, and thereafter the theory has largely been applied on other "systems" than families. He divided the environment in to 5 levels; *microsystem*, *mesosystem*, *exosystem*, *marcosystem* and *chronosystem* who are all influenced by different societal norms and that all has an impact on a person's development (Healy, 2014). In an article named "Environments in a developmental perspective: Theoretical and operational models" (1999) Bronfenbrenner stated that for a person to develop in a certain system the complex interaction with the direct immediate external environment needs be on regular basis with a sense of involvement from every part. The immediate environment is the microsystem and can include other persons, objects and symbols that all together plays the biggest role for the development of a person. Furthermore, the process of development can never be unidirectional, meaning that persons are mutually involved within each other's development, and that a sense to be needed for the system is required to make progress in the development (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). John Coates is an other scholar that has worked a lot on ecological system theory and furthermore has linked it to spiritual social work. He proposed the bonds created between members within a group to be the most important part for positive outcomes within social work. An ongoing

engagement is also essential in order to broaden the perspective and not focusing too much on the current states and situations, but to regard the system to be in an ongoing transition towards something better and bigger. Additionally, Coates underlined the importance of cooperative networks, meaning that units of the system shall strive to exchange favors and services with the local surroundings and establish positive relationships (Payne, 2015).

6.3 The theory of interpersonal relationship by Carl Rogers

As mentioned above, both system thinking and existentialism reveals the interaction among people in a group on a broad level. These approaches are also involved in humanistic practice, which comes from the humanistic psychology, developed by the psychologist Carl Rogers. He developed several theories and concepts, mostly within single therapy but also for group work, that are widely applied in social work (Rogers, 1969). In order to explore and understand the case of L'arche, Roger's theory about interpersonal relationships will be used. The theory originates from a psychological approach and is therefore to be seen as a narrow theory applicable mainly within the microsystem, i.e between individuals. His theory is part of the person-centered therapy, which mainly addresses the relationship a therapist creates with his/her patient. Yet, Rogers proposed that it could be applied on interpersonal relationships within different groups (Rogers, 1959). For the theory to be applied, one condition is that the persons mutually want to be in touch with each other, that the meeting isn't forced and that a will to discover the other person is present. For a professional that wants to gain a holistic and humanistic view of the clients within a group, three concepts are stated that are qualities that the social worker, for instance, shall seek to embody. *Unconditional positive regard* being the first, which means that the social worker truly cares about the client and shows the client his/her fully comprehension and attention towards the things that the client shares with the worker. Rogers stated that this condition can't be reached in a quantified way and that it is more fruitful to approach the term "unconditional" in theoretical notions. A throughout honest and positive regard can only be measured in the way both parts of an interpersonal relationship describes the relation. *Empathy* is a notion that is desirable in order for the social worker to perceive what the client actually experiences and express. This might enable the social worker to support the client in a manner that the client wishes. *Congruence* is the third attribute that is desirable for the social worker to have in a client-centered therapy situation. This relates to the workers transparency, that he/she shall strive to be as honest as possible. This includes that the worker shall reach for a harmony between what he/she feels and the actual expression of this.

7. Method

7.1 Research approach and acknowledgement of social self

A qualitative hermeneutic approach was the point of departure when conducting this study. Since it aims to explore and understand the experiences of the social work in a specific community, the hermeneutic approach appeared to be the most suitable (Bryman, 2007). The use of qualitative method also refers to the quest of comprehension of the social workers perception of the work in the community, rather than to focus on the assessment of the services rendered by the same. It is of major importance that the researcher acknowledges his/her pre-understanding before conducting a study. As a qualitative researcher, I assume that my perceptions and previous knowledge have influenced the procedure of the study and also affected the results and outcomes of the study (Bryman, 2007). From before, I have a big interest in different types of communal livings, especially combined with social work. Myself, I live in a co-house since a couple of years, and I have spent a lot of time being engaged in different associations that work with socially excluded groups. I came across L'arche as I met a person that used to work in the association, who told me a lot about their work and life. I have studied French since high school and I have been living in French speaking contexts for one year. The fact that L'arche emphasizes spirituality also attracted me as I consider myself religious and believe that the spiritual dimension when addressing vulnerability can contribute in many ways. My preconceptions clearly affected me when conducting this study, as the fact that I lived and worked in the community for one month. According to Aspers (2007) ethnographical researchers often tend to integrate a field that they know something about and might be interested in, which is normal and logical. When studying in familiar fields, though, the importance of self-acknowledgement is even bigger (Aspers, 2007). One has to pay attention so that the field accepts and integrates the researcher as a member instead of a researcher, and also that you as a researcher don't start to feel satisfaction being one in the crowd (a.a.). I continuously tried to acknowledge myself and people around me about my role within the community throughout the study.

7.2 Research design

In the pursuit to answer my research questions I considered a case study design to be suitable. Case study is a research design that might be appropriate when studying a limited unit; a school, a family or an organization for instance, that has common values and manners. This corresponded well to my focus on the community association L'arche, and their way of performing social work in an alternative way. In case studies, emphasis is put on an intense study of a specific environment, often by using several methods, in order to elude findings of principal interest beyond the limited case (Bryman, 2008). By being part of the life and work of the community for two months, my access to the field and key-informants was large-scaled. This also permitted me to focus on illustrating the significant condition of the case, as is suggested in case study designs (a.a.).

7.3 Choice of methods

To enable to gain an insight about the social work in the case of L'arche, several methods were to be used. As the first month of my stay mainly consisted of practical work and being part of the staff in one of the co-houses, I got quite unlimited access to the field of interest. I therefore considered participant observation to be a reasonable method. Bryman (2006) states that participant observation is an ethnographical method that is to be used when the researcher engages in a specific group for a certain amount of time in order to study what norms, behavioral codes and routines that shapes the conditions of the field. The method is to be combined with other methods, such as interviews and study of literature and documents, in order to develop an understanding about the culture of the group and how they construct their reality (a.a.). In this case study, participant observations became an evident tool in collecting data, and also to answer the research questions. The core of this method is for the researcher to be present in the field, watching and interacting with people and trying to find out the field members' own interpretation of the events that occur (Aspers, 2007). Before arriving in L'arche, it was clear that I was to be integrated in the field, which gave me lots of opportunities to talk, observe and to discover how the members of the field constructed their reality.

To better understand what constituted the work and life of the community, I used qualitative interviews as a second data-collecting instrument. In interviews, the researcher is listening to the informants' stories and views, searching to understand the meaning of their experiences. By using the conversation as a tool, the researcher interacts with the informant and pays attention without theorizing their pronouncing (Kvale, 1997). Interviews can be done using different structures, in this study I decided to use thematically opened interviews. These are interviews where the researcher has some identified themes that he/she wishes to talk about. Apart from that, the conversation is open, with the researcher trying to develop the subjects that the informants put up (Aspers, 2007). The reason for me selecting the thematic opened interview was to explore unconditionally what the informants were about to say concerning these themes (see appendix 1). The fact that the employment of informants interviewed varied, different questions were to be asked on the themes, which made me leave out the semi-structured interview.

7.4 Research procedure

I first established a contact with the association by email some months before the field study. By then, I hadn't formulate a concrete research question, but I was guided by my interest of the way that the community organize and perform social work in an alternative way. This contact resulted in an arrangement of my stay, since the idea of conducting a thesis within this L'arche community was new for them. We agreed on that I should live in one of the co-houses, being an active part of the work for one month where I was allowed to do observations and interviews. Thereafter one month of writing followed, when I stayed in the co-house and had time to compose the thesis.

Patrik Aspers states in his book "Etnografiska metoder" (2007) that qualitative research projects always follow a certain cycle. It all starts with the researcher formulating a research question and identifying the subject of the study (Aspers, 2007). This somehow creates the framework of the study, although not only a

scientific one. The second step is to choose theories and methods to conduct the study. Then the empirical data is collected before the procedure of coding and analyzing can take place. Finally, the composition is made where the results are presented (a.a.). Therefore, the procedure never is a chronological path, where one step starts when the previous is finished, but where there is a strong interaction between data collection, theoretical deliberation and problem statement. This became evident in this case study, as I returned to and adjusted the research questions, the theoretical framework and methodological considerations regularly as my knowledge about the field grew. Quite early I did a literature research about the subjects of interest for my study. The data bases used were SocINDEX and Academic Research Complete, and the main subject terms were Milieu Therapy, Therapeutic Community, Spirituality AND Social Services.

Patrik Aspers put forward a pilot study when the researcher enters the field. The pilot study can be done with or without concrete questions, and shall be a period of time where the researcher must be open towards the field with the mind set on stating the problem, adjusting the method and selecting theories for the study (Aspers, 2007). When arriving in the community, this was what I did during the first couple of weeks. I tried to identify what was to be observed, and how the field corresponded to me research questions. Thereafter, I started to do observations in a more structured way and by the end of my first month in the community; four thematically opened interviews were conducted with assistants and social workers in different positions in the community. The interviews were in all in French, as the transcription of them. Later on, after having categorized the transcribed material into different themes (see the section about methods of analyzing data) I translated the quotes that were to be used in the result into English.

7.5 Collecting data

In the pursuit to answer the research questions, participant observation and thematically opened interviews were selected. Using case study as a research design, one strength is the use of multiple data collecting methods. This serves to triangulate the information gathered from different sources to create a more decent image of the case studied (Yin, 2003). The method and the procedure using them will be presented hereafter.

7.5.1 Participant observation

Aspers explains that the procedure of observation in a field is made out of four steps; to get access to the field, to gain confidence from the members of the field, to learn how to act in the field and conducting the study without getting too involved in the field (Aspers, 2007). During the first time in the community, it was hard for me to be in the role of a researcher, since I was supposed to learn and do the actual work as a volunteer in a co-house at the same time. By repeatedly stating and presenting myself as a student doing my thesis, and by clarifying the times when I was to observe events in everyday life, the role of a researcher became more natural. In order to create empirical material out of my observations, I continuously wrote field notes, which is the medium used by a researcher as a first step to process the course of events in the field into theoretical material (Aspers, 2007). The field notes shall include what is happening, different situations, and the appearance of the surroundings, what is said and by whom. After having spent a couple of weeks in the community, I scheduled what times and events that were to be observed, trying to include the essential parts of the everyday life, both formal and informal gatherings and occasions. Moreover, I had several meetings

with staff in different positions, which also became an important source of information where I could ask more specific questions and where I also took field notes. Mainly, I wrote short notes in a notebook during the time in the field, and afterwards I wrote more detailed texts on my computer as soon as I had time (often the same day), as proposed by Aspers (a.a.). In total, I wrote around 20 pages of field notes throughout my stay in the community. The observations consisted of different kinds of meetings, with the staff, in the co-house, with the entire community and scheduled private meetings. Also, everyday routines and events at the day unit center and in the co-house were observed as well as informal chats with the members of the community.

A participant observation requires a theoretical vigilance and continuing methodological considerations. The purpose of the research and theoretical assumptions shall guide the researcher to keep away from an overload of information with detailed field notes (Aspers, 2007). Before my weeks of observations started I identified areas and theories that were of interest for the purpose and let them guide me through the observations. Nevertheless, I found it hard to reproduce a fair description about the events that occurred, particularly since I by then was integrated in the field and in somehow was influenced by the field already.

7.5.2 Interviews

In case studies, the qualitative interview is an important tool to gain knowledge about the field member's own perception and description of the field (Yin, 2003). Since I used participant observations to collect data, it was of interest to interview some of the members from the field, permitting them to formulate their own description of the reality uninfluenced by my theoretical assumptions (Aspers, 2007). I found it interesting to interview assistants and social workers in different positions in the community, to gain an understanding about how they would talk about their work and the life of the community in methodological words in order to answer the research questions of the study. Bryman (2008) states that an interview needs to be done in a context where the informant feels secure, and that it is of importance that a good relation between the researcher and the informant is established to ensure that the data collected by the interview is trustful. I did the four interviews in the beginning of the second month, after having spent one month in the everyday work in the community. Therefore, I assumed that my relation to the informants was well established and that the informants felt secure and comfortable talking about the subjects of the interview. During my first month, I had met all of the informants several times and had talked more or less about their work and also the subject of my thesis. Each interview lasted 60-75 minutes, was recorded and was transcribed afterwards. They were all taking place in offices where no one could hear our conversation. The fact doing the interviews in french, which is not my mother tongue, was an obstacle. In beforehand, I spent a lot of time phrasing and translating potential questions linked to each theme that could be of interest. Before the first interview I presented my questions to one of the assistants that helped me rephrase them in a more correct way (see the section about reliability). An advantage though, was that the interviews were conducted after having spent one month in the community, therefore I was already familiar with most of the vocabulary that is specific for L'arche (Aspers, 2007). The themes for the interviews were selected due to the findings in my observations and were directly linked to my research questions and theoretical assumptions. Although, the procedure can't be seen as a straight chronology, since the data that the interviews composed also helped formulating the purpose and

the research questions (see the section about research procedure).

7.6 Sample

Using participant observations as a method gave me good access to the field and enabled to identify key-informants that I later on could interview. I came to talk a lot, both informally during the workdays and formally in scheduled meetings with staff in different positions who gave me a lot of information about the work and life of the community. Once I found out that several persons in the staff had a social work education I found it germane for the purpose of the study to interview some of these people. I talked to employees in different positions and got advice whom to ask for an interview according to the identified subjects. This goes in line with Bryman's description of a strategical sample (Bryman, 2008), using the research questions to find people of interest for the study. To get a broad picture of the community I paid attention so that the name proposed to me would not be all of one gender, neither with the same spiritual orientation nor all with the same working experience. This is also in line with the goal oriented sample strategy proposed by Bryman (2008).

The informants were both men and women, in the ages between 24-56 years old with 1-10 years of working experience in the community. The first informant (I1) was the head of the day unit center. The second informant (I2) was an assistant working 35 h/week at the day unit who also had 5 years of experience of being an intern assistant in another L'arche community in France. The third one (I3) was an intern assistant in a co-house since 6 months who hadn't experience from social work from before. The fourth one (I4) was a social worker that worked as an intern assistant in one of the co-houses since one year.

7.7 Methods of analyzing data

When using a qualitative oriented method such as participant observations, the concepts of first hand and second hand constructions are important (Aspers, 2007). It serves to put the descriptions from members of the field into a theoretical understanding. The first hand constructions are the terms, descriptions and experiences formulated by the members of field, while the second hand constructions are what the researcher does when he/she is relating these formulations to concepts and theories to interpret and to gain comprehension (a.a.). The gathered material can originate from different sources, as in this study, which needs to be processed in a structural way to enable the analyze and production of second hand constructions. In this study, after the gathering of the data I processed the material by reading the field notes and transcriptions thoroughly. Then I categorized quotes from the interviews that appeared to be central for the subject of the study into different themes, linked to the three dimensions of the community. The field notes from the observations were equally categorized into themes constructed by first hand level information. I used printouts from the field notes and the transcriptions on which I could mark and underline the theoretical assumptions that were useful to me during the analyze. In total, my material included around 70 pages, which according to Aspers is regarded as a smaller amount that permits the researcher to have an overview and thereby not being forced to a use computer program to analyze the material (Aspers, 2007). Further in the procedure, the themes developed into sub-themes aiming to reflect the core of the material. The themes refer to the informants' perceptions in the interviews as well as the observations conducted throughout my

stay in the community. The different sources of information became helpful as they interpreted each other and further on in the formulation of second hand constructions when theoretical perspectives and previous research were used to analyze the data.

7.8 Ethical discussion

Throughout the study, the ethical dimension has been markedly present, both implicit and explicit. In the period of preparation, when I was in contact with the association by email, trying to arrange my stay in the community, I hadn't yet stated a clear purpose and research questions. Thus, one can argue that the informants weren't properly informed about the aim of my field study. The first couple of weeks were therefore marked by informal and formal meetings that served to inform the members of the community about my research and for them to give their consent on their participation in the study. There are a number of rules and laws about ethical considerations in humanistic and social science which aims to protect the persons involved in a research (Bryman, 2008). The guidelines, provided by the Swedish Ethical Research Council, are; *the principle of informed consent, the principle of confidentiality and the principle of use* (Vetenskapsrådet, 2015). Hereafter, the guidelines will be presented as well as my considerations in this study.

7.8.1 Informed consent

The principle of information and consent are two guidelines that declare that the researcher should obtain consent from the participants in the study after informing about its aim, possible consequences and that participation is voluntary (Vetenskapsrådet 2015). According to Bryman (2008), this principle is the most argued, since it can be hard to ensure that every participant of a study has understood the purpose and procedure properly. Also, the fact that explicit consent often is oral might be a fragility. Regarding ethnographical studies, this principle can create problems since a researcher most probably encounters a big number people, which make it difficult to ask every single person in the field (Bryman, 2008). In the beginning of every interview the informants were informed about the purpose of my thesis, that their participation was voluntary, confidential and that the information provided by them would exclusively be used in the thesis to pursue its objectives (Vetenskapsrådet, 2015). Regarding the participant observations I asked for permission and consent in several instances; before my arrival to the person responsible for human resources, to all the members of the community that were present during a big assembly my first week and individually to every member in the co-house where I stayed. This goes in line with what Patrik Aspers calls the principle of acceptability, meaning that the researcher always has to stay in dialogue with the members in the field, in order to involve them in the process and to gain continuously approval for the study conducted (Aspers, 2007) Nevertheless, during the period of the study I also came to meet many of the people surrounding the community, including friends, family, neighbors etc, that all in somehow affected my research and observations. For practical reasons, I did not ask for everyone's consent but since I primary studied them as parts of groups I assumed it not to be necessary to ask every single one. Furthermore since Bryman (2008) states as the principle of content is connected to the risk of harming the informants, which I assumed was almost eliminated in this case.

7.8.2 Principle of confidentiality

According to Bryman this principle refers to the safety of the informants. This means that data that includes personal information should be handled carefully and kept locked-in (Bryman, 2008). When conducting a study in a geographically and organizationally defined unit the principle of confidentiality can be a hard issue (Whitaker, 2004). Even though I have made data such as name, gender and age anonymous there is a risk that other members of the field could deduce the interviewed persons statements and find out whom mainly composed the data from my observations since my presence in the field was connected to a smaller group of people. While taking notes and transcribing the interviews I never typed names and data obviously connected to a certain person. Also I kept all the material (field notes, recorded material and transcription) in a locked room. During informal conversations and before every interview I stated that they would be anonymous and that all names that they mentioned during our conversations would be figured.

7.8.3 Principle of use

As this principle of use states, all the material collected throughout the study will exclusively be used in the research procedure to attain the objectives of the research. The material will also be destroyed after the examination of the thesis.

7.9 Validity and Reliability

To ensure that a study is measuring the specific matter that the researcher is claiming, an assessment about the study's validity needs to be done. This is a measure that seeks to guarantee a high quality of the study. Guba & Lincoln proposes other concepts to determine qualitative studies, since such research has more than one unique and absolute picture about the social reality (Bryman, 2008). Instead, they put forward "credibility", based on the assumption that different people can construct their reality in various ways and therefore, in order to confirm that the researcher has comprehended the informants correctly, the results are to be presented to the informants and giving them a chance to respond to the results (Bryman, 2007). During the gathering of the material, both through the observations and the interviews, I tried to pronounce my findings for the informants to validate that my interpretation of their stories were right and to get their feedback. Due to practical reasons, it was not possible to do this all along the observations, and the feedback was mostly given subsequently by me retelling the events and interpretations. Sometimes, I found this limiting since it was hard to acknowledge to what extent my version of the events was influenced by my own interpretation. Also, I didn't do this systematically but only when the situation permitted or in situations that I found it hard to understand what was happening.

Reliability as well is a concept most suitable for quantitative research, to measure if the results would be the same if the study was repeated. Dependability is an optional concept that wants to measure the trustworthiness in qualitative research (Bryman, 2007). This can be achieved by thoroughly describing all steps in the research procedure, also by letting colleagues review and criticize your findings. However, this is not common since the material gathered in qualitative research tend to be large-scaled. During the conduct of this study, I have tried to illustrate each step properly and sincerely to make it trustworthy. Also, I have had periodical contact with one classmate, to informally get involved in each other's projects and to be able to get feedback. Due to language barriers, the formulated questions risked to be perceived differently as my

intention, I therefore asked for feedback from an assistant in the community, explaining what I wanted to know and rephrased the questions according to our talk. During the interviews, I interrupted the informants when he/she used terms and words that I wasn't sure about and also I repeatedly confirmed what I understood and asked more questions when something wasn't clear.

7.10 Generalization

Since qualitative research in general aim to comprehend rather than to explain, the grade of generalization is limited. By studying a limited group or people acting in a context with specific conditions, the research tend to focus on what significances there are to be found rather than what can be generalized (Bryman, 2007).

Instead, qualitative researchers are requested to give thick descriptions of the details that creates the context. This can provide as a database for other researchers to estimate whether the result is possible to be transferred into other context and on other populations. Linked to the purpose of this study, the results are focusing on the specific community that I visited. Most probably, the results would not be the same in other associations nor in other communities within the same association, since the way of organizing and working differs depending on the regional conditions, the employees and the persons hosted in the community.

However, one can assume that the results of this study could be applicable to communities sharing the same core values and working with the same population of clients. When describing the research procedure and background information, I've tried to be transparent and detailed in order to facilitate for other researchers and practitioners to judge whether the result could be generalized (Bryman, 2007).

7.11 Methodological considerations

This case study addressed the social work in a L'arche community and more particularly the conception of the shared life and the spiritual elements in their work and life. Both observations and interviews have been used to gain an understanding of how these concepts are perceived by people employed in the community. The focus of the study appeared to be pretty broad which made it difficult to comprehend these concepts profoundly. My first intention was to conduct interviews with hosted person as well as with the staff. This procedure however didn't happen due to ethical questionings from different people, and once I got the permission to interview a number of hosted persons I only had some days left in the community. Even though I assume such information could have been a good resource when exploring the contributions and limits with the shared life, the very little time made me skip this idea. If a narrow focus of the study would have been used the result could have become more clear. In the procedure when analyzing the data, I found it hard to combine and collaborate the different sources, which has made the result to predominantly process the material from the interviews.

8. Result and analysis

8.1 Theme 1: Community dimension

8.1.1 Constructing fellowship

Throughout the conduct of the study, including participant observations and interviews, the fundamental idea of the community was described with big words such as mutual friendship and equality, which appeared to be the core of the daily life throughout my stay in the co-house and with the community. People talked about the simplicity of sharing everyday life together, regardless your capabilities or your history, and further that the relationships created when sharing ups and downs, is what makes people develop and make progress in life. I3 put it like this:

There is a two-way direction actually. It's not just the assistants that are there for the hosted persons, but something mixed in the assistance. And it is this mix that is a bit unexpected and that makes way for everyone to grow personally.

When living your life this close to other people, the conditions for creating friendship are good, according to I2. Also, this has to do with the fact that the hosted persons can count on longterm assistance and "That we're having a big confidence" and "are creating strong relationships because of the very strong moments we share together in the community". Throughout my stay in the community, the word fragility appeared as a central concept and the mutual acceptance towards our differences. I1 and I4 put forward that the discourse of fragility is particular for L'arche and that it strives to address humbleness and an acceptance that we all carry things that are fragile and have areas where we are in need of support. The informants talked about that your fragilities tend to be more exposed when sharing your life with vulnerable people and that you are, when entering the community, invited to accept people as they are and also learn to accept your own difficulties and letting people support you. I1 expressed it like this:

The shared life as it is addressed in the community of L'arche, it's this recognition. A recognition of a common fragility, that the fact of being a human is about sometimes living great moments when you feel that you are a superhero, ready to fight at all the fronts. And then there are moments when you feel very fragile and when you're in need of support from the people around you. For me, I think that announcing this is what makes us progress together.

In milieu therapy, a subject-subject relationship is desirable, where the client and the professional strive to find new roles that allow the relationship to be equal. By observing meetings and situations in everyday-life, it became obvious to me that the pursuit for equal relationships was hard. Different events during the week provided the members with different amount of information. For instance, the staff had weekly meetings where they focused on one of the hosted persons in order to work on pedagogical tools that could help the person in what he/she was facing and further to adjust the assistance to what was required in different situations. On regular basis, the important parts were presented to the hosted persons, where they continued the discussion together, also with the person subjected of the discussion present. Assistants expressed that

this manner tend to create unequal forums for issues to be discussed, since the staff pre-negotiated about situations before presenting them for the team of hosted persons. It gave the staff a hierarchical role that is hard to erase within a TC. Further, I1 talked about these hierarchical positions existing in the community, which could be quiet, a dilemma regarding power and the conditions to create equal relationships. The community acknowledged this since “We're on a slippery ground, and therefore we're always about to reflect upon these issues.”

8.1.2 Energy-flows in the community – relation to the world outside

The community of L'arche can be regarded as a system that mainly performs at a group-level, where each member has an impact of the total picture of the group. Within the community, the issue about the borders towards the society and the world outside appeared to be highly debated. In every interview the informants lifted potential problems with them being to close, and that the community needed to have people surrounding the community to make sense in the context where they worked. I4 described what defined the membership in the community by saying that “The people in the community is defined by their engagement in the community” meaning that people is not forced to put equally much time within the work and life of the community which according to I4 made “A community that is really open, which includes personalities and profiles that are very, very different. There are both young people coming to do a civil service, as well as retired persons serving the community by giving their time once in a while”.

Within the community, the employed persons are asked to have an unpaid engagement apart from the employment agreements. This is to allow the relationships to be more honest and equal, and also to make way for experiences that are not connected to the co-house or the day unit center for the hosted persons. This was organized in a way where the employees (and their families) were connected to a certain co-house, which created a resource for the co-house, by organizing events together throughout the year and further that the staff regularly invited hosted persons and intern assistants for dinners or weekends in their home. The employed persons connected to the co-houses added energy to the groups living together, and the controlled way of doing this might regulate the contact to the need of the group. Accordingly, the in-flow of energy that the staff provided could be adjusted and could have positive outcomes for the group, as stated by I2.

For the co-houses, I think that it is quite important to have people outside the group that serves and proposes activities like that. Because it permits the persons to breath and to have some space outside of the home. To not only be within the house and to create relationships with the world outside.

Regarding the relation to the world outside, the community was currently working on “the social use” which shall examine who the stakeholders are and how the relations to the surrounding society look like. I3 thought it was important to investigate “How we as a community can be useful to the society”, and then continued “Also, a community that is closed risks to become a sect..”.

A further motivation to connect with the world outside was that the community seemed to be interested in being an example to the society that highlights the possibility to live together regardless ones abilities, as expressed by I4.

I would say L'arche has a wish to be, I don't know if I can say a role model, but to show the world that the shared life can result in pretty amazing things and that persons who are completely different that lives together can bring each other many good things.

There is no doubt that L'arche as an association used a discourse where they see themselves as a sign. And by their way of living, communicating that an other society is possible. In the international charter of L'arche this is confirmed as it is written that the community doesn't wish to be a solution but a sign that a truly humane society is possible. This links to a dilemma for the community that became obvious when discussing who is able to be part of the community. As an assistant, there were good chances to enter the community, since many of the intern volunteers and assistants don't use to stay more than 1-2 years (which will be outlined in Theme 2). For the hosted persons this was harder. First of all because the community wants to offer longterm places, where the assistance adapt as much as possible. This was expressed by I1 "In the community of L'arche, it is written in our project plan that we adjust the assistance as much as possible, which could mean until the end of the life". A person from the administration board once told me that this creates long lines of people outside, that are interested in becoming a member of the community, and for whom it is hard to know if they will ever get a place in the community. She said that once you get an offer about a place in the community, you have to be the fastest one to answer since the pressure is hard. Although the community has expanded throughout the last decade, with the establishment of two new co-houses, there are still lots of people connected to the community that doesn't get a place in one of the co-houses. Hence, the notion of fellowship is restricted to the fairly small number of people within the community.

8.2 Analysis

In theme 1 we can see that the construction of strong bonds between all members in the community is a contribution that can be seen as a therapeutical tool. Gale (2014) describes that components like mutual dependency, friendship and the experience of being part of a group plays a key role for the therapeutical outcomes people might experience within a TC. These elements are all closely connected to the description of what is the core of L'arche. The ability for the support to go in two directions links to the humanistic practice and the concept of a holistic view of a person, where everyone shall be regarded as a wholeness that carries both strong and weak sides, where an acceptance towards all sides is essential (Canda & Dyrud Furman, 2010). It also confirms what Bronfenbrenner mentioned as a precondition for development i.e the impossible unidirectional process (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). As expressed by I1, the word fragility is a central concept that wishes to announce the equality between all people, that we all have sides where we need support from others. Analyzing this with the concepts of Carl Rogers and his theory about interpersonal relationships, the members of the community want to share everyday life together and letting people be exposed and accepted as they are which could be mentioned as *unconditional positive regard* (1959). Even though Rogers mainly addressed the qualities that a therapist shall embody in relation to a client, it can applicable on a group as a whole (a.a.). Further, the will to let all members of the community to be exposed and not to act as professionals only, relates to Rogers concept of *congruence*. This means that members in a group shall try to be as honest as possible and not try to hide ones fragilities by being congruent between feelings and things expressed (Rogers, 1959). Within TC as a method, the conditions of the community to

create equality are essential. In milieu therapy this pursuit have been addressed in the ground principles *democracy* and *new roles*. In L'arche, this pursuit is obvious, as they seem to struggle with in what ways this can be implemented in the work and life. Jenner states that in TCs, the subject-subject relationship between clients and social workers have always had a central role, as well as among clients. There is no doubt that this goes in line with the L'arche project, where all members are regarded as “one of us” in the community which further is proved to have empowering effects (Jenner, 2000).

From an ecological system theory point of view, the community is a distinct system including units that interact and depend on each other. They aimed to be an open system, which McCoverly & Matusitz (2014) defines as a system that is able to adapt to the surrounding environment and that interacts with the systems around by receiving and giving information. By organizing the staff and volunteers, the community has established resources that both provides the system with energy and abstract energy from the system, and further enable to adjust the levels of involvement so that the system can maintain stability. To be solid and balanced, the system needs to have resilience and ability to preserve it's fundamental identity when it is affected by energy flowing in and out of the system (Payne, 2015) which L'arche appeared to do by evaluating the in-and out-flows of energy.

One of the ground principles that is to be found in milieu therapeutic work, stated by Jenner (2000) is contact with the world outside. The community cannot be an isolated island but needs to relay on an interaction with the society and other people. If a community screen off from the world it risks becoming a sect (a.a.). This highlights the need for L'arche to have further contact with the society a part from people already involved in the community. This was mentioned during several interviews, for instance by I3 talking about the “the social use”. However, this seems to be an ongoing process, where no clear indicators on to what extent the community involves with others were to be found. The wish to play an active role in the surrounding environment can be seen as an attempt to reach what Coates describes as cooperative networks (Healy, 2015).

The discourse used in the community about being an example to the world can somehow be seen as a wish to interact with it, although it might not be an unbiased interaction but with a will to affect the world. Parallels can be drawn to the early form of milieu therapeutical work in the 1960th that arose from a criticism towards conventional social services and institutional care (Broekaerta, Vandeveldede, Soyeza, Yatesb & Slaterc, 2006). Equally, the work and life of L'arche can be seen as a movement that wants to inspire other parts of the society to act in the same manner. Linked to this, the fact that it was hard for new disabled persons to enter the community appeared to be a shortcoming, and a lack of adaptation to the need the of surrounding society. Accordingly, it risks to be hinder an inflow of energy to the system consisting of new persons for the community to host. Meanwhile, a longterm engagement is a condition required for individuals to develop (Bronfenbrenner, 1999) and with an ecological system theory approach, members staying in the longterm facilitate the group identity and bonds within the group to be stable where the hosted persons can relay on the long lasting support provided by the community (Payne, 2015).

8.3 Theme 2: Professional dimension

8.3.1 Methods used in the work

During multiple observations and interviews, assistants expressed what made the social work of L'arche different to other structures, such as institutions. The fact that social workers and other professionals are thought to keep a distance to the clients within more conventional services was often criticized. Informants and other members stated that the vision of the community was something a part from that and that there was a will to create an environment where the support could go in every direction, not only from a professional towards a person with disability. I1 put it like this:

Within social work in general, you have few places where you can meet people at the same level. It is always a bit that you have to keep professional and keep a distance to people. It is often asymmetric with the help going top to bottom, it is really descending. Even though the heart of our work is to explore what is happening in a relationship, it's about seeing the other, not only as a fragile human, but a human.

When raising the issue about treatment and therapy, whether the community aimed to make progress with the disabilities of the hosted persons, it became clear that the fact of staying together with honest relationships in the longterm most often helped the disabled persons to progress and could therefore serve as a treatment. I4 described the issue of treatment like this:

Something that is at core of the project of L'arche is to host people as they are and to allow them to develop with their limits, by hosting them at every point. The fact to be hosted in a community where you know that you are allowed to stay for decades is a repairing thing for sure, there is something caring and gracious about it.

A community thinking mainly influences the methods being used in the work of L'arche. In the co-houses as well as at the day unit center, they have had education in a method where observations are used to state hypothesis and synthesis. I observed these sessions several times and also got to meet the instructor of the method, whom was a psychologist working in an other structure. In this way, the team of employed staff formed a system within the bigger system that is the entire community. I1 clearly stated the importance of the professional social work to be grounded in the team, and that one assistant never should take own decisions regarding the assistance or to decide how complicated situations should be handled.

To hinder that you are not the only one to see, to analyze and to interpret what needs to be done in the assistance you need to go through the team to cross your observations with others all the time.

The mentioned method was that the team of staff focused on a specific person, and once a week they gathered and shared observations that were done and thus talked about the assistance of the person; what could possibly be changed in order to help and facilitate the personal development of the person. Hereafter, hypotheses were raised, that they further on would try and then evaluate the differences. Hence, the assistance could be adjusted to the current need and shape of a person. The method also touched what I1 described as the most central concept in the work of L'arche, which was the active listening.

The fact that when you are in a helping relationship, you always have to start by listening to the other, you have to reformulate without influencing.. we are not here to interpret the speech and will of others.”

To be honest and empathetic towards the other is something that several informants meant came from the fact of being continuously exposed to one and other. I1 acknowledged the role of the assistant by stating that the staff is not only there to help and to serve, but to accompany and to facilitate for the hosted persons to act autonomously.

If you always have everything you need, I think something will turn of within you, if I always come and express what you need before you do it. One have to regard the other as autonomous in his/her desire and life. Even if the other misses something, me as a social worker, I can't come and fill in exactly what you need according to me. I have to come and accompany you in the way that you want, and I have to facilitate for you to reflect and to find your own solutions.

8.3.2 The paradox of the intern assistant

Within the community, the majority of the staff was intern assistants that lived and worked within the co-houses. It was obvious that this kind of employment demanded a lot of presence and could be tiring. In this section, the dilemma of being an intern assistant will be presented. As I4 put forward, there were several benefits working in this kind structure, the first being the notion of time when living in the community that broke ground for unique relationships to be created. Also the fact that the team of staff in each co-house worked in close collaboration, since the main part was living together, contributed as a huge resource to the professional assistance. Furthermore, I4 expressed that the shared life naturally created conditions for equal and supportive relationships with the hosted persons by comparing the work to more institutionally organized social work structures.

Each time that you enter a new structure as a professional, you find yourself in a situation where you know almost everything about the persons you assist. You get to read the stories of everyone in a journal, even the most difficult and personal things, like who they are close to, which persons that have passed away, their hardest difficulties. A huge amount of information that is confidential and intimate. The fact of living together with the persons that you assist makes you expose your own fragilities and you'll have so share personal stuff about yourself as well.

I4 went on describing what the everyday work looked like, and claimed that as a professional you might forget about the assistance and permit yourself to enjoy simple moments together with the hosted persons. The fact of doing this, together with the almost unlimited time most often contributed to create unique and natural relationships, where you can feel that you are there at equal conditions. This could also result in an everyday life that is less demanding than an ordinary job, where you always have limited time to achieve what you wish within the assistance, I4 continued to state this and gave an other example about the notion of time.

It's almost indescribable... there are many small situations that are very simple in this kind of life, where you know that you are here to assist the persons and you keep in the bottom of your head cases you want to put in order or something you want to change connected to your professional role. But in the actual moment you forget about this, because you're sharing a situation that is very natural where you are simply there together with the persons and you spend the time together in an equal way.

There is no doubt that this kind of work wasn't exclusively positive. From all four informants the fact of this tiering duty was problematized. Overall it was an exposed situation where you always have to strive for a balance between your work and leisure time. The intern assistants had two different roles at the same time and very little space where they could protect themselves from this great responsibility that was in their duty. For I3 who lived in a co-house since several months this was part of the everyday life. Nevertheless, it appeared to be an issue that one constantly is forced to reflect upon.

I'm always in this balance where I say to myself 'yes, we live together, we will laugh and make lots of activities together' but at the same time I have to pay attention, because I'm also here as a professional, I have a position that is superior since my employment says so. It is always a balance how I should place myself in relation to this. It's an ongoing movement, but it can also be a limit for me"

I2, that used to be an intern assistant for several years before starting to work 35 h/week at the day unit, stated that the life in a co-house was tiering in the longterm. Due to the lack of personal time and space I2 therefore quitted the work as an intern assistant since "I needed to find a balance in my life, and when you are an intern assistant in L'arche, it is very difficult. That's why I chose to not longer be an intern". Many assistants used a discourse about the work in L'arche as a limited period in their life, since it was taking all the attention and very few counted on doing this for a longer period of time. I4 expressed it as following.

The current place that the community have in my life.. It has obviously a very big place since I spend 90% of my life within the community. I've kind of made a pause in my previous life to live something different, and afterwards I will probably find something else.

According to I4, the main limit in the work was "the lack of possibility to protect myself" since the shared life made it hard to "deal with personal issues and problems" and to "back of when you're facing hard times" which was described as the biggest difference from other kind of work.

For the entire community, I4 wasn't sure that the changes necessarily were a limit "I think the indispensable thing for the community is that there are staff at the day unit center, at the office and psychologists that stays in the longterm". Contrariwise, I1 generally questioned the fact that the intern assistants changed pretty often, and particularly what probable effects on the quality of the assistance this might have. I1 expressed this concern when we talked about the quality of the assistance by describing the beginning of each year as stressful, since at least half of the intern assistants changes which put an immense responsibility on the assistants staying from the previous year

If I try to be clear, in terms of professional competence, I feel sometimes doubtful. Especially in September, in the beginning of the year when we have many new assistants and volunteers. I admit that I can question whether the quality of the assistance is good by then.

Since the foundation of L'arche, a discourse about vocation has been distinct. The structure intended to engage people that felt a calling to enter the community with a longterm perspective. All informants stated that L'arche is adapting to the modern society in various ways. The employments in the specific community had changed throughout the last 5 years for instance, and today a bigger part is external assistants connected

to the co-houses. I1 thought this was a challenge for the community, to adapt to the society and at the same time to keep their values and objectives that were in the beginning

Then, it is still these postures of permanent living for the employed intern assistants that I can question sometimes. I don't know in the society of today, if this kind of vocational engagement is still up-to-date or realistic.

I1 underlined how the fact of regular changes in the team might probably be perceived from the hosted persons point of view.

There, if we talk from the hosted persons point of view, your home is full of new persons that you shall host. Even though the hosted people here are very used to this, and that most of them express that it's a positive thing, they still sorrow the depart of the previous team and you have to recharge to host newcomers. Sometimes, there are language barriers and sometimes there are competence barriers, also it takes time to get to know each other.

The quote links to a dilemma that the community ought to handle. The concept of the shared life is somehow threaten if there aren't enough people engaged in the longterm, according to I1 there was an issue to what extent this is adaptable to the modern society and how L'arche is able to adjust it's work.

There we touch at the core of the project of L'arche, the shared life. It cannot be achieved with volunteers doing their civil service uniquely. It wouldn't make any sense. Especially since they most often don't know the history of L'arche and might not have a vocation to live this kind of life.

During an informal conversation with the responsible for human resources it was clearly stated that when employing people they didn't want all staff to have the same education, nationality or professional experience. Mainly, what made sense was that the person who enters has a will to assist people with disabilities by sharing everyday life together and actively engage in the community. I4 returned to the situation of intern assistants by giving an example "I think there are still persons attracted to live this kind of life in the longterm, I have met several assistants, that in their 30sh and has already been living for 5-10 years in a co-house". Further, by having external persons engaged in the community for decades that "carries the heritage and that accompany the newcomers" I4 was certain that the project could last in the future "the ways of functioning in L'arche is in constant evolution and further there are flows in the french society that for sure will make L'arche move on to something different".

8.4 Analysis

The methods used in the professional work of L'arche originate to a big extent from the core values of the association and were little influenced by conventional methods and theories. It was clear that the fact of staying together in the longterm and the creation of strong relationships were the main methods in treating the disabled persons and make them progress with their deceases. This links to what Gale proposes as the second discourse about a TC, the one where the community dimension is upgraded. He states that most research conducted about TCs have focused on the assessments in the therapy rather than exploring what impact the interpersonal relationships has on the clients progress (Gale, 2014). The employees accordingly

were influenced by the same norms as the entire group, with a pursuit for *community* and *congruence* also within the group of staff (Payne, 2015), (Jenner, 2000). The holistic regard of a person appeared to have a large impact on the method presented in the previous section, where the staff raised observations concerning a specific person in order to adjust the assistance. This also tangents on existentialism since the overall objective is for the staff to regard the clients as capable and independent in expression (Canda & Dyrud Furman, 2010). The aim for the assistance to be shaped by the pronounced need of the hosted person also goes in line with one of the ground principles for milieu therapeutic work, *voluntariness*, which means that treatment and methods shall be client-centered and uniquely include elements that are based on the will of the client (Jenner, 2000).

The group of intern assistants appeared to be the actual implementation and the fulfillment of the shared life model used in this kind of structure. All the informants gave extensive descriptions about the work of the intern assistants, which turned out to be a highly discussed topic and is therefore given much space in the thesis. Seeing the community as a system, the role of the intern assistants appears as something evident as it is permitting the system to be stable which creates conditions for the system to be balanced (Payne, 2015). Also, members in a group need to involve on regular and frequent basis in order to establish a microsystem that have positive outcomes for the development of everyone (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). The TCs want to give the members *new roles* and to *confront with reality* by using everyday-life as treatment. The fact of sharing everyday-life and that the intern assistants and the hosted persons spend equal amount of time in the home facilitated the implementation of these two standards (Jenner, 2000). The advantages pronounced by the informants regarding this kind of structure were mainly about the notion of time that was almost unlimited and furthermore the unique conditions for creating strong relationships with the hosted persons. It made way for an implementation of *congruence*, which according to Carl Rogers serves as a tool for therapeutic outcomes (Rogers, 1959). The shared life could make you forget about your professional role and permit you to start enjoying simple moments together, as expressed by I4 which can be seen as a manifestation of a subject-subject relationship between the professional and the client, that goes in line with the humanistic practice and the acknowledgement of the wholeness of each and everyone (Canda & Dyrud Furman, 2010).

As expressed by I3, the work of an intern assistant is most probably also filled with ambiguously, with constant consideration about your role and the limited personal space to recover. The issue about the double roles has been highlighted within milieu therapeutic work, especially in structures where social workers live together with the clients. Bengt Börjeson quotes Gustav Jonsson, a pioneer in the milieu therapeutic work in Sweden, that explained this paradox by saying “one has become professional of not being professional” (Börjeson, 2000). Likewise, the working conditions for intern assistants is problematized by Börjeson, who means that within TCs where workers live together with the clients, the pressure tend to become overwhelming, and if the organization is only built up on people giving all their life this most often comes to a brutal end since most people cannot handle the conditions where you have to be present for your clients 24-7 (Börjeson, 2000). The main part of the employees in the community was externs, working 35 hours/week and also many persons have worked for many years, and the base therefore seems to be rather stable. I4 expressed that this was a great resource and that people like that carried the heritage of the community for

the intern assistants to relay on. Yet, since the co-houses are held up by the presence of the interns, the changes of staff can be seen as energy-flows in the system and if many persons are replaced at the same time, the stable condition and identity of the group might be threaten (Payne, 2015). This can also hinder the development of the persons in the microsystem, since the hosted persons cannot count on a long lasting involvement of the intern assistant (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). In the beginning of each year, when a big part of the assistants is new, the quality of the work was questioned by I1. This can be seen as a stressor, which Payne mentions as a negative energy that might shake the system and put it out of stability (Payne, 2015).

The constant in-flow of new intern assistants clearly appeared to be a dilemma for the community to handle. On one hand L'arche wished to involve people with a desire to engage in the longterm and on the other hand the main part working in the co-houses were young people that most often wanted to move on after some years in the community. For a system to be open it has to adapt to norms and flows in society, according to McCoverly & Matusitz (2014). It was clear that the norms in society had changed since the inception of the association and that L'arche today are forced to adjust their way of working so that people would feel attracted to their way of working. Still, they struggled to preserve the core and all three dimensions of the association, which is important for the stability (a.a.). McCoverly & Matusitz (2014) stated that if the adaptation is done without consideration to the core principles that the system bears, this might lead to a disruption of the system. The fact that the staff changed a lot and that the community has a will to host different kinds of people hinder the group of people involved to become homogenous (Payne, 2015) which could contribute to the system in positive ways. The issue of constant replacement of workers is discussed by Börjeson who states that the impact of the employed staff leaving a TC where you have lived together with the clients risk to “leave the clients with unprocessed separation problems” (Börjeson, 2000). Although, this varies depending on the structure around the changes and also the orientations of the problems that the population of clients have (a.a.).

8.5 Theme 3: spiritual dimension

8.5.1 Religion or spirituality

As L'arche origins from the Catholicism, throughout the history this has had a big impact on how the spirituality is addressed in the community. The four informants perceived the spirituality in the community differently due to various religious and spiritual orientations. I4 stated that the spiritual dimension of L'arche is strongly linked to religion, and for this particular societal context, the Catholicism was dominating. As an atheist, I4 “don't feel totally comfortable with the religious side” but then continued saying that “it doesn't weigh me down since I know there is a respect to me as a non-believer”. Still, I4 expressed that even though the community accepts different believes and non-believes, the spirituality might cause situations where you don't feel included, especially in the longterm as an intern assistant.

Personally, I am convinced that for someone to live as an intern assistant for many years, you have to have all three dimensions. I don't know anyone who have stayed for a long time in the community without being spiritual in some way. That is something obvious to me.

I1 as well stated it would probably be hard for someone who isn't at all from a religious culture to live in the

community. Even though people are open towards you, you will still have to participate in many rituals and meeting with religious elements.

Anyway, I think that for an assistant completely without experience of religious contexts, there is a big step to take. Even if you are indifferent towards it, it would probably be a bit hard.. I think you have to be pretty smooth with the spiritual dimension after all.

However, through observations and conversations that I've had with many assistants, including people seeing themselves as religious, spiritual or atheists, there is a picture of L'arche being enough open towards different thinking and many people expressed that nothing is imposed regarding this dimension. I4 stated "it makes sense to me because it's not at all imposed. There is a will to propose alternative things and activities for people who don't believe. Both for hosted persons and the staff". There is no doubt that the spirituality of L'arche has religious elements but still, different spiritual orientations seem to be embraced.

8.5.2 Addressing the wholeness and the meaning of rituals

The recognition of a person as a wholeness with a profound search for a greater purpose is the base in existentialism and something that extensively has shaped the humanistic practice. In L'arche, when discussing the spiritual dimension in the work, members described this differently due to personal perceptions. I2 stated that the spiritual dimension of L'arche links together with the creation of strong relationships and that it addressed the fragility of each and everyone.

In the relationship with the disabled persons and me, something extraordinary is happening. There is something about the disabilities and the fragilities in a relationship that is touchable and that will affect me, the parts of me that are fragile or Anyway, there is something very personal that might happen in this kind of meeting for everyone that enters L'arche. It will affect you in some way, and this is one way that we address the spirituality in the community.

For I3, the spiritual dimension was something very central and clearly one of the reasons to enter the community. I3 stated that the fact of having a spiritual regard on events in everyday life can make you more humble if you try to address values that are higher than what is visible. Also, when there are conflicts and problems it can be helpful to not be stuck in your own ideas, but to be more open towards the people around you. Further, I3 thought that for someone who isn't spiritual at all , the fact of living close to vulnerability must be harder."To not believe in anything, in this community life, when you're facing fragility and suffering.. If you don't have hope in something, I think it would be complicated".

Throughout the year, the Christian celebrations are important moments for the community. They have made events such as Easter, Christmas and all-saints to become symbolic gesture that highlights the equality and fellowship in the community. According to I4, these rituals contributed to the sense of community within L'arche.

I see the spirituality of L'arche mainly as a humanist spirituality, and then the connection with the Christianity and Catholicism; it's there more to give a rhythm to the year. To create and share strong moments together and as occasions to gather all the community.

The community has made a compulsory event out of the “feet-washing”, that is part of the catholic easter tradition when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples before getting crucified. I2 talked about it as a powerful ritual.

The ritual of the feet-washing for instance, it's obviously inspired from the gospel, but it makes sense to us.. I washed the feet of a hosted person, and it communicates something like: I'm here for you, I take care of you by washing your feet. By that moment, I show that the link between us is important. And then, the hosted person will come and wash my feet as well, and in the same way showing that she takes care of me.

Within the ritual of the feet washing both cleansing and empowering elements can be found, and as I2 mentioned it has a symbolic meaning that they mutually take care of each other by cleaning a part of the body that often is seen as dirty and shameful.

8.6 Analysis

According to Carrington (2014) the risk of appropriating practices and rituals from other religious belief systems is not probable when staying in the tradition of origin for the workers or clients. As L'arche still keep connections with the Catholicism and that the spirituality clearly originates from such practice the risk of appropriation that might have oppressive consequences seem to be very limited. Meanwhile there are many persons involved in the community that doesn't regard themselves as Christians or even spiritual beings. This distinct dominating religious practice that don't include everyone risk to be excluding (Canda & Dyrud Furman, 2010). The informants without any spiritual or religious orientation as well as many of the members that I've talked to throughout my stay somehow confirm that there is not necessarily a problem involved in this. The community was willing to include other forms of worldviews, which could be described by using the words of Canda & Dyrud Furman (2010) where the religious part is meantime distinct but yet transcended into a bigger spirituality. Yet, the dominating discourse appeared to be catholic due to the origins of the association as well as the societal context, which might have implicit normative elements on people involved (a.a.). As stated by an informant, the life close to people who struggles with deceases and difficulties requires a certain kind of mindset, what I3 addressed as a spiritual concern and an ability to put hope in something. The statement connects to a wide definition of spirituality, where three attributes are; a holistic awareness of the persons around you, the ability to perceive connectedness with the people that you're involved with and further to ascribe hope into the relationships you have with people around you (Canda & Furman, 2010).

The meaning of rituals has been illustrated in numerous studies. As mentioned in the previous research, religious rituals can mark specific events and create a sense of fellowship (Wozniak & Neuman Allen, 2014). For L'arche, the rituals were mainly related to Christian traditions that the community ascribed a significance of their own. The feet washing can be seen as a ritual that Wallace mention as the third one in his classification, an ideological ritual that reinforce group norms and bonds. Further, it has elements of the fourth group that is the salvation ritual (Wozniak & Neuman Allen, 2014) since it contained cleansing elements that are there to manifest an unconditional care given to one another. When proposing a third generation of TC, Barry Sugeran added two concepts that highlighted spirituality that can have

therapeutical contributions and that are integrated in various milieu therapeutic work. These were *the participation in rituals* and *the belief in a higher power* (Segraeus, 2000). It is evident that L'arche implements these standards by emphasizing a spiritual orientation on each member in the community. Overall, the spirituality of L'arche seems to contribute to and interact with the other dimensions within the community that are the community dimension and the professional dimension.

9. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how people working within a community association that is performing social work in an alternative way perceive the concept of shared life and spirituality. The research questions to address the issue have been:

How do professionals employed in the community perceive the role of the shared life?

What is the role of spirituality within the work and life of the community?

What limits and contributions in the professional social work, expressed by the staff, are to be found in the community?

Further, I have wished to put the work and life of the community in a historical context that could facilitate the anchoring to how the social work profession has developed since its inception. Theoretical concepts and perspective have been used in order to understand the contributions and limits that the shared life and the spirituality have in the community. My choice to address their working method as a therapeutical community can be discussed, since the community doesn't use this description themselves and also expressively don't claim their work to be "treatment" or "therapeutical". By lifting examples of therapeutic communities and emphasizing the broad notion of this working method I argue that the case of L'arche implement milieu therapeutical standards and can therefor be seen as a TC. The section where the material is presented and analyzed indicates a number of conclusions that can be drawn from the result. In the following section, the conclusions will be presented linked to the three themes in the result and thereafter they will be discussed. Furthermore, there is a section regarding what meaning the thesis might have for social work on different levels and thereafter incentives for further research will be discussed.

9.1 Conclusions and discussion

The first theme that is the community dimension indicates a number of conclusions. The shared life-model performed in L'arche has positive relational contributions. The relationships between the members of the community go beyond prevalent professional notions and little distinction between clients and social worker is done. The sense of fellowship is also evident within the group of staff, since they acknowledge that they are more than professional co-workers. This is assumed to make way for equal and friendly relationships within the community. As Gale (2014) proposes in his study, the notion of friendship and interpersonal relationships within therapeutic communities plays a major role for the outcomes for the client. From an ecological system theory point of view, the community is a system at the microlevel with open boarders towards the society with an in- and outflow of energy. The identity of the group regarding the hosted persons as well as the extern assistants are stable, since they tend to be engaged in the community in the longterm and have the capacity to carry the heritage of the association. What can be seen as a threat towards the stability of the system is the frequent replacements of the intern assistants and the fact that the community hosts a big number of new people every year. Using Bronfenbrenner's terms the condition for positive development for units within a system requires a repeatedly and long lasting engagement from the different parts, which is hard with the arrival of new assistants at a regular basis. This goes in line with the difficulty,

expressed by several informants, for the community to adapt to the norms and changes in the surrounding society (Payne, 2015). A good precondition for the development of every member in the community is the multi-directional way of involvement that is established by using the model of shared life, which is an other criteria for development within a system (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). The community seem to implement the quality *congruence*, stated by Carl Rogers for interpersonal relationships to have therapeutical outcomes by living side by side within co-houses and encourage all members to expose their fragilities to one another.

The professional dimension, which was the second theme in the results, indicated a number of conclusions concerning the employment of the intern assistants and about the methods used in the work. The professional methods utilized in the community clearly originated from the core values of the community with the fulfillment of the shared life as the most central element. Still, many similarities with milieu therapeutical standards are to be found that is helpful to understand the work in the community. The role of the intern assistant is at the same time the actual achievement of the project of L'arche but also a tiering and somehow doubtful employment for a professional to have. It risks to gamble the quality of the assistance in the beginning of the year, but once the assistants have got to know the hosted persons, it seems to have lots of contributions in the professional work as well as for the sense of fellowship. I assume the major contributions with this kind of employment to be the notion of time and the conditions to create strong relationships. Using Carl Roger's concepts, this might facilitate the implementation of *unconditional positive regard*, *empathy* and *congruence* (Rogers, 1959). As seen in theme 1, the turn over with many new arrivals of assistants somehow threaten the identity of the group and make the system unstable by extracting energy on regular basis (Bronfenbrenner, 1999).

Conclusions connected to the third theme, the spiritual dimension, mainly has to do with its contributions to address the wholeness of everyone. This made way for a holistic practice where people were accepted as they are. Roger's concepts of *empathy* and *unconditional positive regard* are closely linked to this approach, as were the statements by the informants, as something that is at core in the community. There was meanwhile a clash within the third dimension that indicated it to be hard for people with no religious or spiritual orientation since the dominating perspective and practice were linked to Catholicism. According to Canda & Furman (2000) the relationship between spirituality and religion can make people feel excluded if the issue is not dealt with properly. Religious rituals were found to bring a rhythm to the year, and symbolic rituals contributed to create fellowship and sense of community, as shown in the study by Neuman & Wozniak (2014).

There is no doubt that the three dimensions interact with each other on several levels. The fact of living together is the most significant element within the community and the contributions and limits that have been discovered are consequences of this shared life-model. The thesis clearly confirms what Gale suggests in his study, that the discourse of community and interpersonal relationship needs to be upgraded within TCs. The system that the community consists in total appeared to be a stable system, where there are lots of possibilities of support, which gives good preconditions for the members to develop within the system (Bronfenbrenner). Since no studies were found addressing the work with disable persons within TCs, it is

rather difficult to judge whether this study contributes to the actual area that is milieu therapeutic social work in a broader sense. This concern will be discussed in the following section.

9.2 Connection to social work

L'Arche is a specific case within social work that can have further general interests. The idea where social workers strive to interact equally, and even live together with their clients in order to address social problems and act for social justice has ancient roots (Meeuwisse et al., 2010). However, in modern social work practice the shared life is rare to see, particularly within social services provided by welfare states. The conduct of this study has highlighted the human relationships within social work, both between client and professional as well as within groups of professionals. The community with the shared life practice makes this concern constantly in question; what outcomes a shared life brings about for the clients, the professionals and the group. Within milieu therapy and TC this is even more relevant as the case studied indicated that members of such community experienced positive therapeutic outcomes. For clients on an individual level the thesis challenges the fact that professionals are taught to keep distance to persons within their work. The concept of professional social workers could be seen as a social construction, where the conditions of an encounter with a client are set by societal norms as well as the employment agreement. This may hinder a potential relationship to be natural and mutual, if the hierarchy between the “helper” and the “helped” is held up and rarely questioned. On higher group and society levels the issue becomes ideological, what kind of society do we want to live in? How could the interaction between people from different groups and backgrounds be as equal as possible? What is the role of social work within such a society?

The question regarding what role the spirituality should have in social work is also an important issue since numerous clients have spiritual or religious orientations. Having a people-centered profession therefore highlights the dilemma to what extent and in what ways spiritual concerns of clients and groups should be met. As the result of the thesis indicates, the relation between the two might create conflicts and experiences of not being included. According to me, due to secularization and the fact that religion is seen as a private affair, the issue is being little discussed in the social work education and in society in general. How can we be inspired by spiritual worldviews, integrate practices for clients who desire so and at the same time show respect and acceptance to one another?

9.3 Incentives for further research

As the previous section outlines, there are two areas proposed for further research that can be of interest to social work in general. Firstly the one regarding the interaction and relationship between social workers and their clients. The concept with a shared life challenges the perception that social workers must limit their involvement with clients they work with. Other studies that highlight and explore this issue could be of interest, both regarding working conditions for social workers as well as the outcomes of this kind of social work for the clients. Furthermore, the notion of spirituality within social work is of interest. Both how persons with different religions and spiritual orientations are met by social workers and how people's worldview can be enhanced and involved in different areas of social work.

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Appendix – Thematical interview guide

What is your role in the community? What does the community-life brings to you?

What made you enter into L'arche?

What role do L'arche play in your life?

What actual contributions can you say that L'arche has for you?

How would you explain the meaning of the three dimensions (community, spirituality, professionalism) for you?

Would you please describe what actual role the shared life is filling in the community and for yourself?

How do you regard as a member of the community?

What is your experience regarding the contributions to peoples development (hosted and employed persons) due to the community-life?

Would you please mention something about what role that the spiritual dimension has for the community and for yourself?

How do you situate the professional dimension in the shared life of the community?

Are there specific methods in the work of l'arche?

Do the social work in l'arche seem to originate only from the values of the community?

Do you think that the community have tools to protect the assistents in the life of the community (too big workload, complex situations, violence, etc..)

According to you, what are the obstacels in the life of the community?

Could the shared life be an obstacle in the social work that you provide?

What can be said about the benefints and obstacles in the social work in the case of l'arche?

What do you find difficult in working in an organisation like l'arche?

What are the assets of the life in the community?

What do you think about the organisation of the community? (distribution of power, decisionmaking, structural conditions)

According to you, what are the mainobjectives in the work of l'arche?

What are the differences, according to you, between the social work of l'arche and other care providers (governmental and assosiations) in France?

According to you, what makes the social work of l'arche professional?