

The development of the Therapeutic Community for Addictions in Denmark: A short report based on an interview with Hanne Holm Hage-Ali.

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Even though there is much information available with regard to the development of the Therapeutic Community (TC) for addictions in Europe, little is known about the particular situation in Denmark.

Approach: In order to address this dearth, the methodology of the following historical account is largely based on an interview and personal contacts with Hanne Holm Hage-Ali, current director of Therapeutic Community Opbygningsgården and star witness of the development of therapeutic communities in Denmark.

Findings: In 1971, the Freetown "Christiana", Copenhagen, where TC Opbygningsgården started up, was based on communal, anarchic and hippie ideas and values. In the beginning, TC Opbygningsgården was not well accepted by TC pioneers promoting the classic hierarchical TC, as it was seen as a social experiment with anti-authoritarian roots. Later, in its turn, it became influenced by TCs Veksthuset and Phoenix House Haga, Norway, which were part of the common European TC movement. At this moment, TC Opbygningsgården functions as a well-accepted member of the European Federation of Therapeutic Communities.

Implications: The interview revealed information that it is line with current trends in and challenges for therapeutic communities throughout Europe, as outlined in a recent EMCDDA-study: (1) therapeutic communities in Europe can be considered as 'children of the late sixties'; (2) TCs are embedded in the anti-psychiatric movement, existentialism and the promotion of alternative community living; (3) European TC leaders had different origins and professional background; and (4) the TC never belonged to one religion or ideology. The common human value system always transcended the different visions.

INTRODUCTION

Background of TC development in Denmark

The development of the Therapeutic Community (TC) for addictions has been widely described in grey literature. It has also been documented in a few papers published in ISI-ranked peer-reviewed scientific journals. A rare overview article was published in 2006, which reported on '*The third generation of therapeutic communities: The early development of the TC for addictions in Europe*' (Broekaert et al., 2006). However, little is known about the situation in Denmark.

Based on an internet-query and a search in *Web of Science* using the keywords therapeutic communities AND Denmark, we hardly found any information on the development of the TC in Denmark in the English language. In the EFTC- (European Federation of Therapeutic Communities) and WFTC- (World Federation of Therapeutic Communities) conference proceedings since 1984, we only found one short contribution by W.B. O'Brien (1984). Based on information provided by TC pioneer Dr. Martien Kooyman, a second relevant source was retrieved in a book chapter (Kooyman, 2001). Both texts do not draw a positive picture on the origins of TC for addictions in Denmark in 1971. O' Brien, founder of DAYTOP New York and of the World Federation of Therapeutic Communities (WFTC) wrote a short sharp remark: "*What we had hoped to be a promising TC in the former military barracks in Copenhagen, Christiania was swiftly aborted by the haphazardly in planning and even in concept*" (O'Brien, 1984, p. 12). Kooyman, the founder of the leading TC Emiliehoeve in The Netherlands, reported that the first TC in Christiania, Denmark, became a commune instead of a treatment modality. It was rather seen as part of a social experiment with anti-authoritarian roots, abhorrent of hierarchical (TC) structures.

In a certain sense, O'Brien and Kooyman followed the common criticism on the illustrious "*freetown*".

"As it will already appear from the description of Christiania, the majority of the inhabitants live in dilapidated, ramshackle houses, most of them in wood, where heating presents enormous problems during the winter months. This resulted in the construction of one of the most successful factories in Christiania, the forge, where, among other things, ovens, kerosine heaters and stoves were manufactured from scrap, finding a ready market, not only inside, but even outside Christiania. However, other consequences of the heating problems crystallized in unlawfulness: criminal offences like the theft of ovens and firewood, illegal installations, disregard of the minimum demands laid down in the fire protection regulations, etc." (Blum & Linneman, 1982, p. 444).

O'Brien as well as Kooyman pointed out that the "hippie freetown Christiania", where this first therapeutic community was located, was an environment that was too liberal and anarchistic for the implementation of a 'classic' TC for addictions. The TC was an integral part of the 1960s' hippie movement, which is clearly shown in the contribution by Kjeld Pries Nielsen on the origins of TC 'Opbygningsgården' (Pries Nielsen, 1989). This book details the endeavors at the freetown Christiania, which laid the basis for a new experiment to treat drug addicts based on an active and free horizontal

philosophy. Kjeld Pries was clearly engaged in the philosophy and daily action in Christiania and explained the efforts to build out the therapeutic community in the Freetown. The hippie movement promoted values such as communal life, sexual revolution as genuine freedom, anti-war as obligation, eastern philosophy and meditation, a vegetarian lifestyle, and psychedelic spirituality. From a philosophical point of view, it was in essence a romantic movement that was associated with the aspirations of German immigrants in California that promoted “the Wandervogel movement” with a focus on re-vitalization in nature, the works of Nietzsche (anarchy), Hesse (romanticism) and the American philosopher Emerson (idealism) (Grunenberg & Harris, 2005).

The two TC traditions

In the 1960s and 1970s, addiction treatment in Denmark was most influenced by milieu therapy and its psychoanalytical background. Kornerup (2009, p. 17) states: “*Development in psychiatric wards in Denmark, Norway and Sweden has, interestingly, been dominated since 1976 by group analytic thinking as originally formulated by Malcolm Pines’ teacher S.H. Foulkes (and to a lesser degree by Maxwell Jones’ approach)*”. Foulkes can be considered as a “trend setter” in group psycho-analytic therapy, theory and practice, while Maxwell Jones is commonly considered as the ‘father of the democratic therapeutic community’. Democratic TCs have often been described in relation to their hierarchical namesakes, with whom they share the name, but with whom they also differ on several aspects (Kennard 1998).

A hierarchical TC, or ‘drug-free’ or ‘concept’ TC, is mostly defined as “*a drug-free environment in which people with addictive problems live together in an organized and structured way to promote change towards a drug-free life in the outside society*” (Broekaert et al., 1993, p. 55). Democratic TCs and milieu therapy rather aim at creating a climate, a transitional space of experience in which people live together in a horizontal, democratic milieu (Vandevelde & Broekaert, 2009). Throughout their existence, there has always been some tension between these “two therapeutic communities” (Kooyman, 1992). The essence of this distinction is probably related to the psychoanalytical emphasis on the own expectations and desires of residents in democratic TCs, versus the behavioral impetus on the values and norms of the therapeutic system and external moral goals in hierarchical TCs (Bratter et al., 1985). Yet, hierarchical concept TCs and democratic TCs are “condemned” to live together. This was already underpinned by a important lecture of Maxwell Jones in 1984, entitled “*The two therapeutic communities*”, in which he pointed towards the complementarity of both TC branches.

Christian Messel, daily responsible for TC Opbygningsgården, reports in 2003 on an a remarkable evolution (Gjerdrun, 2003). Even if he did not explicitly refer to the prevalent Foulkes model, he states that TC Opbygningsgården is influenced by TC Vexthuset (Norway) and TC experts such as psychotherapist Lee White and Anthony Slater, the former director of Phoenix House Haga (Norway). Those TC were no doubt part of the European TC evolution at that moment. Today, however, the website of Opbygningsgården clearly states: *the “Building farm” provides inpatient treatment for drug abusers. The treatment method is the Therapeutic Community “Phoenix House model”* (own

translation from Danish) (Opbygningsgården, 2015). This last statement illustrates the further far-reaching influence by the current European tradition of TC for Addictions.

Objective

Although the development of TCs is well-documented in many European countries (Vanderplasschen, Vandeveldel & Broekaert, 2014), the previous short outline underscores that little is currently known about the particular situation of TCs and its development in Denmark. In order to address this dearth, this paper aims at providing a short historical account on this development, based on an interview and personal contacts with Hanne Holm Hage-Ali, director of Therapeutic Community Opbygningsgården and star witness of the history and evolution of therapeutic communities in Denmark. These findings about the situation in Denmark, will be discussed based on some current trends and challenges in therapeutic communities for addictions in Europe (Vanderplasschen, Vandeveldel & Broekaert, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

This manuscript is based on an in-depth interview (December 1st, 2012) and personal contacts with Hanne Holm Hage-Ali. She started working in TC Opbygningsgården in 1993 and is the director of this facility since 2006. TC Opbygningsgården has a capacity of 15 beds. The staff consists of 9 men and 6 women, including 7 counselors. Treatment and therapy include methadone and buprenorphine detox, group therapy, individual therapy and self-help groups, gestalt therapy, couple therapy and relapse prevention (DANRIS, 2010).

We chose for a non-essentialist study approach. Essentialist studies allocate essential characteristics to reality. Non-essentialist studies consider reality as a human (existentialism) and/or social (social constructivism) constructions. This implies a focus on the “own narratives of key informants in a context of questioning by the other”. It emphasizes the relativity of objective universal knowledge and applies dynamic qualitative approaches to reality, such as open interviews. This should be clearly distinguished from an N=1 trial, which applies a quantitative-deductive nomological approach.

After the transcription of the interview, Hanne Holm Hage-Ali has proofread the transcript, indicated mistakes and provided additional comments.

The results section focuses on the highlights of the interview, which are presented as verbatim transcribed excerpts and citations.

The discussion and conclusion section is based on a comparison of the TC in Denmark with global TC findings (Vanderplasschen, Vandeveldel & Broekaert, 2014).

RESULTS

Hanne Holm Hage-Ali: In 1971, the freetown “Christiania” was created in Copenhagen (Denmark), based on communal, anarchic and hippie ideas and values. Christiania consisted of plenty of barracks, which were fit to be used as housing.

In 1977, it was decided to throw all heroin addicts out of Christiania and to take away all the heroin sales. They called heroin a hard drug and accepted only milder drugs like hash at that time. There was a group of people then, who said they should offer treatment to these addicts. They collected people who wanted to go to treatment, bought a bus and they drove up to Sweden. They worked at a farmhouse in Sweden, took the old wood from this farm with them, and drove it back to Denmark. They bought a little place up in the countryside where we are now, near to Aalborg, very close to Thisted, and they started building up this farmhouse using the wood they brought over from Sweden. They were also building up the people. That's why it's called "Building up farm", or "Opbygningsgården" in Danish. People lived together in the community, there was no difference between staff and residents, everybody had the same money.

Interviewer: So, it was very democratic for staff as well as residents?

Hanne Holm Hage-Ali: Yes, very democratic. I came to visit Opbygningsgården every now and then at that time. And I never knew who was in treatment and who were the educators (*laughs*). And the one who wrote this book is the founder. His name is Keld Pries, he was a journalist and his wife a designer, they were putting their life into building this place. And they did well.

(...)

They lived with their children as well. They made also a shop, and restored old stoves. They built a very strong community .

(...)

Martien Kooyman told me that in the beginning at Christiania the residents were in a type of army barracks.

Hanne Holm Hage-Ali: Yes, Christiania is a former army place that was empty and then the hippies occupied it in the beginning of the seventies, I think, or late sixties. It is a huge military area.

Interviewer: And still is now?

Hanne Holm Hage-Ali: And now, the government has tried to throw them out over the years and there was fighting and troubles. And now, finally, they have found out that it is a big tourist attraction (*laughs*). Now the residents have bought Christiania.

(...)

Interviewer: But how did you become involved ?

Hanne Holm Hage-Ali: Well, as I told you, I had a house nearby and I now and then came to Opbygningsgården for a visit.

Interviewer: And then you decided ...? (*laughing*)

Hanne Holm Hage-Ali: No, I decided not to work with them because I was, in the beginning of the seventies, in a sailing ship project where we had some drug addicts on board and we thought, while we sailed around the world, we could also help them to get out of drugs and save their lives.

(...) I was in the sailing project and we tried to do rehab, but we had no clue. We didn't know what we were dealing with. And you know, it was me personally, I had to deal with it and I had no method, no assistance, no whatever. We didn't know what we were doing.

Interviewer: You didn't know what you wanted?

Hanne Holm Hage-Ali: No, we were just ... For us, it was fantastic to sail around like this and we had some drug addicts on board and we thought sailing was enough to get out of drugs, but of course it was not just like this.

(...)

And then, I said I would never work with addicts again. Never ever. So, I started a financial course of study and worked in the financial sector.

(...)

Life is sometimes strange. This community was going on like a hippie community until 1991. At that time, people were not interested in living in a community like this anymore. Nobody would work like this anymore. It were new times. So this man, Keld Pries, who wrote this book here, the owner of the place, went up to Norway, up to "Veksthuset" in Oslo, Norway. Keld thought that the principles of the Phoenix House approach would be beautiful. So, he took a couple of the Norwegian staff with him to implement it back in Denmark at "Opbygningsgården", where I started working in 1993.

And that time, you know, I became enthusiastic, yes, but there were many things that I didn't like or that I didn't understand. For example, the 'no sex' rule, I did not understand this. But I thought maybe it's because of something I didn't understand so I'll be humble. But I've hated to see the girls come in and wanted to change their lives and they of course did what they used to do. They found a guy, another resident and then they both got thrown out. I hated it. I said this was not good enough. We had to deal with this in another way. The program we had at that time came directly from Norway into Opbygningsgården, they didn't change anything and that was difficult during these early years of TC in Denmark. And even though Norway and Denmark are very close, we have different cultures.

(...)

Hanne Holm Hage-Ali: In 2006, I became director. I took on this challenge and decided to give it a try for three years to see if it was something I liked to do. Because it's different work than working as a therapist. And then, I was back again in the administration you know (*laughing*), mainly being a director who is acting therapeutically.

(...)

I'm occupied with developing our place. I'm now very occupied with a prison project. It took us a year to make it come through. It was hard work, and it is hard work.

(...)

Hanne Holm Hage-Ali:

(Two researchers) started to look into what happened with the ones who were in treatment in 2007. That's 5 years ago. So, we have a good contact with all of them. Look, we have interviewed 84% of all the residents from 2007. Today, 5 years after treatment, over 80% is drug-free.

(...)

But it's too much almost, it's incredible. So we didn't just ask if they were free of drugs, we also asked about other qualities of life, economic, criminality, education and work (...) finances, criminality, before and now, during the last 5 years.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In a recent EMCDDA Insights Publication on therapeutic communities for addictions in Europe, Vanderplasschen, Vandeveldt en Broekaert (2014) list some important common features of the development of the European TC for Addictions:

- The therapeutic communities in Europe can be considered as 'children of the late sixties';
- TCs are embedded in the anti-psychiatric movement, existentialism and the promotion of alternative community living;
- European TC leaders had diverse professional backgrounds: psychiatrists, educationalists, psychologists, priests. There were also recovered addicts amongst TC staff and TC leaders, albeit less frequent in comparison to the United States.
- The TC did never belong to one religion or ideology. The common human value system has always transcended various visions and philosophies.

Based on the written sources on TC development in Denmark and the historical account, based on the interview with Hanne Holm Hage-Ali, we take the view that these conclusions equally apply for the development of the TC in Denmark. Below, we shortly review each of the four conclusions.

Therapeutic communities in Europe can be considered as "children of the late sixties"

As illustrated above, the TC movement in Denmark originated in the freetown Christiania, which is without doubt an exponent of the hippie movement that flourished in the 1960s. It favoured an alternative way of living and tried to contribute to a new way of education and development of people. In fact, these original communities were part of a global new striving for communal life, which was certainly promoted in the United States by the communal life of the first settlers and their romantic

nostalgia for the past. By the 1960s, however, many young people have become disenchanted with what they saw as a fragmented society. They reinvented the extended family in new constellations.

TCs were embedded in the anti-psychiatric movement, existentialism and the promotion of alternative community living.

Christiania was often seen as a child of the revolution of the 1960s and opposed to capitalism and neoliberalism (Coppola & Vanolo, 2014). It is clear that the roots of TC Opbygningsgaarden fit with the aspirations of many early TCs for addictions. At the start, there was no link with the hierarchical behaviourist-oriented TCs and the first Danish TC was not very well accepted in traditional TC networks (O'Brien, 1984; Kooyman, 2001). Later, it became influenced by the TCs Veksthuset and Phoenix House Haga in Norway, which in turn were affected by the European TC movement with its own cultural development. The European identity did not relate to the present-day neoliberal tendencies in society, but rather was a child of humanism and existentialism. The TC in Denmark was not only influenced by the hierarchical TC-model, but also by democratic TC principles. This was also the case in other TCs, such as Emiliehoeve in The Netherlands (Kooyman, 1992) and De Sleutel in Belgium (Maertens, 1999), which were initially more devoted to the democratic 'Maxwell Jones' community, but changed towards the 'concept' system because of the target population.

European TC leaders had diverse professional backgrounds and there were less recovered addicts amongst TC staff and TC leaders in comparison to the US

European TC leaders were often psychiatrists, educationalists, psychologists, teachers, ..., of whom several were influenced by the democratic TC movement and psychoanalysis (with proponents such as Maxwell Jones, Harold Bridger and Wilfred Bion) (Broekaert et al., 1999). Moreover, from the start and especially since the 1980s, the TC development and evolution in Europe was influenced by researchers (Broekaert et al., 2002; 2006). Due to the fact that hierarchical concept TCs for addictions are in essence self-help groups, there was never a strict rule on the professional degrees of staff and directors. Lakoff (1978, cited in Kooyman, 1992, p. 85) states: *"The ex-addict has much in common with a therapist. He is often bright, highly motivated and resourceful. His drives, which through therapy have been diverted from drug taking behavior, find useful sublimations in helping others. For this reason, with proper training the ex-addict may become a useful para-professional."*

However, governmental rules on organizing care and financing conditions, required training and certification for TC staff, especially in Europe. This explains why TC tasks are attributed to psychiatrists, psychologists, educationalists, social workers, educators and so on. In some cases, ex-addicts are excluded from staff functions if they lack a proper degree. Some of them study "in-service" to become educators and be appointed as a staff member (Broekaert et al., 2006).

The TC never belonged to one religion or ideology. The common human value system has always transcended different visions.

TC have always been places of diversity, which may have been stimulated by the fact that TCs are – in essence - educational entities in which different ideas, positions, and therapeutic approaches can be integrated in meaningful action (Broekaert et al., 1999). Diversity in TCs is seen as a challenging opportunity for the therapeutic community. It is defined as the encouragement of the quality of human beings to be different in position regarding politics, philosophy, religion, science, culture, arts, and race while acting in challenging educational situations. TCs have tried to overcome anxieties and uncertainties through arts in the never ending search for new and better creations, through science in the search for truth and evidence, and through the belief in higher spiritual values in religion. This diversity may be reached by the integration of at first sight contradictory angles of incidence, while creating new insights and more balanced behavior, feelings and attitudes. This diversity embraces a new unity and satisfaction in life, a profound happiness and integrates the “old” values of detachment and virtue.

Finally, some strengths and limitations should be noted. First, the paper addresses a topic that has not received much scientific attention up until now. Interviewing a star witness is a particular strength, as historical information that may otherwise get lost is preserved. The main limitation of the study is the fact that only one person was interviewed, which may have biased the results. Therefore, this paper should be regarded as a first attempt to reconstruct the TC development in Denmark. Future research should focus on further corroborating the pilot findings and comparing these with data on the development of the TC in other countries.

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