6 Developing Social Work Competencies to Empower Challenging Communities: From an Empty Foyer to a Shared Social Space

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Abstract The chapter offers a descriptive analysis of an enhanced integration project in Hervanta, one of the largest multicultural suburbs in Finland. The focus of this chapter is on how social work competencies developed in a process of collaborative learning. The three-year pilot project aimed at enhancing refugee integration into Finnish society through community social work and two-way integration. The project established a community drop-in centre, Kototori, where a social worker and social instructor worked to develop community initiatives and local projects. Social work basic competencies transformed in the dialogical process of collaborative learning and emancipatory social development. This required analytical thinking and stepping outside the city's institutional framework for adult social work. This meant deconstructing power relations between individuals, community members and social workers. The approach included analysing both the community and individual residents' needs, treating people as equal partners, developing possibilities to participate and offering new meaningful roles to service users. In effect creating an experimental working culture. The transformation of professional competence was classified into four competency elements: forming relationship-based social work, promoting a sense of community and community-based social work, experimentation and shared action for social change, and finally creativity and analytical thinking.

Keywords: community social work, relation-based social work, competencies in social work, deconstructing power, collaborative learning, experimental working culture

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6.1 ´Street-Level Bureaucrats' Tossed into the Community

It all began when two social work practitioners who worked in an office-based statutory setting stepped into the role of community social work practitioners. From there began a social experiment to explore what happens *when professional street level bureaucrats are tossed into the community* (Lipsky, 1980). Alongside working with the community, these two social work practitioners continued performing their statutory duties with the city's immigrant social services. This combination was made possible by allocating half their office hours to community social work.

The aim was to turn an empty foyer of a local recreation centre into a drop-in community centre called *Kototori*, offering support to new residents. The name Kototori is an invented word, derived from the Finnish words home *(koti)*, market square *(tori)* and integration *(kotoutuminen)*. This drop-in centre is located in Hervanta, a multicultural suburb of 25,000 residents in the city of Tampere, Finland. In 2018 every fifth (21.1%) resident in Hervanta had a foreign background, which is the highest in Tampere (Tampere alueittain, 2018).

The city of Tampere is geographically sub-divided into seven areas, which are compared with each other by statistical indicators. The areas resemble each other, but there are some factors which are characteristic of Hervanta, the Southeastern area. Hervanta was built in the 1970s and it is described as a city-like area with imposing blocks of flats, surrounded by parks, nature areas and forest. In the overall number of blocks of flats in Hervanta, 16.1 % of blocks are now exclusively occupied by residents who speak a foreign language other than Finnish, Swedish or Sami language. In the other areas, the corresponding rate differs from 1.7 % to 7 %. Many newly arrived immigrants find their home in Hervanta.

The population of Hervanta is socioeconomically diverse, including well off middle class and less affluent groups. Birth rates are higher than elsewhere in Tampere. The poverty of families with children is high. The median socio-economic level of residents in Hervanta is lower than in neighbouring areas, with more people living in tenements. The unemployment rate is 17.2 %, the highest in the Tampere region. Regarding average income, 24.3% of residents earn below 10,000 euros per year compared to 18.7 % in Tampere (Tampere alueittain, 2018). At the same time, Hervanta has a strong economic outlook, providing work in industry, education, communication, social and health services. To stimulate growth, the city of Tampere has invested significant resources to boost social and economic development.

However, potential risks include segregation, social exclusion and possible hostilities between different social groups. Consequently, the aim of the TEKO project was promoting two-way integration, self-efficacy and supporting people seeking support.

Kototori began in 2016 as a part of a larger three-year pilot project, 'Enhancing Two-Way Integration through Community Work' (abbrev. *TEKO*). The co-operating partners were the city of Tampere, the Evangelical Lutheran Parishes of Tampere, Tampere University and Tampere University of Applied Sciences. The main target group was immigrants who were in the early stages of integration into Finnish society. The first objective of the project was to create an interdisciplinary operational model for enhancing integration, based on the strategy and service model of the city of Tampere, and the shared equal participation of all residents. The second objective was to enhance and support the target group's ability to manage their own lives. This was achieved by developing low threshold counselling services, organised through Kototori, which included personal assistance and guidance in various languages without booked appointments. The third objective was to enhance multifaceted integration. The fourth and final objective was to develop cross-sectoral cooperation in services.

The project initiated an experiential and collaborative learning process, whereby the participating practitioners reassessed and updated their work methods to reflect community needs (Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1983). The project endeavoured to reach its objectives by supporting individual immigrants to become *experts by experience*, recruiting local volunteers, developing a community social work model and by organising discussion groups, *expert by experience* training and community training (Community Action Based Learning for Empowerment (CABLE) (Valve, 2013). Kototori was an outcome of the project TEKO, and the four objectives continue to guide the development of community activities and values. Kototori was selected the best new social work innovation of 2019 (Talentia, 2019, Union of Professional Social Workers in Finland).

The two social work practitioners were not given any fixed structures or 'off the shelf' methods for their work. Kototori required something different in comparison with their usual office-based work. It required figuring out how statutory social work should change when operating outside its headquarters. The social workers had the freedom to experiment and develop new structures and different ways of working. Their statutory responsibility was to provide and co-ordinate counselling and guidance services at the drop-in centre. The idea was to develop preventive community social work strategies (Stepney, 2014) that harness migrants' capabilities so that they become active residents. This required structural changes in the work environment and working methods.

The lack of guidelines and existing structures made the process both exhausting and at the same time rewarding, reflecting a process of learning by trial and error. Monthly supervision and project team meetings at Kototori offered shared space for reflection, adapting the culture of not-knowing (see Dore, 2020) and managing uncertainty. A completely new understanding developed concerning professional roles and responsibilities.

Our aim in this chapter is to analyse Kototori as a case study of how social work competence can be understood, defined and transformed in the social and professional context of a drop-in community centre. We begin with a literature review through which we will explore roots of experimentation and the concepts of competency, competence and contextual expertise. We will also briefly describe the data and methods used as the basis for the analysis. The results of this process will then be subject to further examination in order to capture and portray the transformation of social work practitioners' roles and identity at Kototori.

6.2 Developing Competence and Expertise for Collaborative Community Practice in Challenging Communities

The aim of Kototori is to promote two-way integration and communication between newcomers and long- term residents. Consequently, when the problems newcomers face become too complex, they can pop into face-to-face encounters at Kototori. This is the time to support the active role and identity of a resident to enable them to hold their life situation in their own hands. It follows that social work at Kototori creates a preventive social frame, whereby service users bring their questions, problems and stories about their everyday life (Goffman, 1974; Garfinkel, 1967). These conversations tell about the world of residents and their local cultures (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995; Juhila et. al., 2013). Local culture refers to the shared meanings and interpretations that residents in relatively disadvantaged communities use to construct the content and shape of their lives (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995). The Kototori approach is based on dialogue (Seikkula & Arnkil, 2006) and co-development between professionals and residents. Social work in Kototori is informed by theories of relationship-based social work (O´Leary et al., 2012) instead of the neoliberal, new managerial and technical models that have dominated social services management during recent decades.

Kototori was designed as an experiment-driven project. It was informed by pragmatic ideas in which knowledge production is based on a consideration of practical consequences and the belief that all knowledge is uncertain and can be used as a practical tool for social improvement. When the experiment is conducted in everyday practice, it allows service users to influence and work in cooperation with prac-

titioners. Experimenting requires a pragmatist attitude, reflective dialogical discussions, thorough reasoning, mutual recognition and respect, agreed leadership and a fair division of participants' responsibilities (Muurinen, 2019b).

Definitions of competency and competence are contested (Short, 1984), and the project challenged many dominant assumptions. Competency refers to a specific attribute that may be possessed by someone within a system of related competencies, connoting a concrete category on which a person´s sufficiency may be judged. It is also a quality related to a state of being which characterises a person as being competent, able, adequate, or sufficient within such a category. Competence has normally been reserved for the latter of these connotations, the quality or state of being competent.

Fook, Ryan and Hawking (2000) have chosen to use the term 'expertise', when they scrutinise contextual knowledge and know-how in social work. Further, in Finland novice social work is defined using the components of novice expertise (Lähteinen et. al., 2017). In this chapter social work expertise is viewed as contextual social work, where expertise takes shape as a result of the compilation of different specific competencies. At the beginning of Kototori, the social worker and social instructor had basic professional competence from their higher education and office-based work. The social instructor had the Bachelor's degree in social services and had developed competence and skills in:

- Ethics
- Client service
- Social service system
- Societal analysis and influencing
- Reflective development and management

The core of the degree programme is ethical competence. The work of the social sector is guided by the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and by Finnish laws and regulations of social rights (Tampere University of Applied Sciences, 2020).

The social worker´s academic Master´s degree programme produces broad-based knowledge and skills for work with service users at the individual, family, community and societal levels. At its core social work involves reconciliation of different societal and individual interests in an ethically sustainable manner, defending human rights, promoting equality, strengthening people´s social functionality, alleviating suffering and enhancing well-being. Social work novice expertise can be described in terms of several components:

- Social sciences

- Research methodology
- Ethics
- Interaction
- Theory and working methods
- Legal knowledge and decision
- Comprehensive command of information on the system of services
- Knowledge and skills in the areas of development and change
- Leadership
- Structural social work

In addition to mastery of these components and responsibilities, successful performance also requires expertise in a specialised branch of social work (Lähteinen et al., 2017).

According to Fook et al. (1997, 2009), professional social work expertise is theoretically difficult to define. The theoretical knowledge base is broad, constantly being critically evaluated and ever expanding (Thompson & Stepney, 2018). Nonetheless an interesting model was developed by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) concerning the stages of skill acquisition and especially the stage of proficient and the stage of expert which are context-free and concern experienced practitioners. It is notable that proficient decision-making is analytical while the expert is intuitive. Therefore Fook et al. (2000) prefer the analytical proficient definition. They criticise the traditional way of conceptualising professional skills, which are individually based rather than contextual. In their own research, they have tried to identify and contextualise expertise in situations where social workers and community development practitioners locate themselves within a specific practice context and are able to act relevantly within that context. It is important to reveal how knowledge and its acquisition are conceptualised. When practitioners learn to practise, they develop knowledge about phenomenon and knowledge about how to use that knowledge. It is also important for practitioners to reveal the basic values of the profession in their work and broader commitment to values of social justice and human rights. (Fook et. al., 1997, 2000.)

Experts relate in a holistic way to the social context of their work rationally, emotionally, subjectively and morally. Professional development includes the dimensions of contextuality and reflexivity. Contextuality refers to the extent to which practitioners are context bound and the degree to which they are aware of contexts and how these are conceptualised. Reflexivity refers to the degree to which practitioners are able to locate themselves in their contexts as responsible and influential agents in which they feel empowered to act. Their influence is recognised as purposeful involvement and participative, rather than having a purely intervention or

service-delivery focus. An expert professional can operate according to a broader set of human and social values, without being stultified by organisational boundaries. Fook et al. (2000) suggest that expert practitioners recognise multiple viewpoints, conflicts and complexities. Further, they are open to the possibility of change and use knowledge creatively from diverse sources. Their broader vision gives them meaning and a sense of continuity in unpredictable situations. They are therefore able to deal with uncertainty by maintaining a higher order of meaning which is flexible enough to adapt and respond to a variety of situations. It also involves creative ability to devise new categories of understanding and appropriate strategies (Fook et. al., 2000).

The kind of expertise described above can be adopted in community work in challenging or disadvantaged communities, where situations can be unpredictable and where the histories of the community do not always guarantee readymade trusting relationships between residents and with state social services.

Procedural knowledge is information about how to use substantive knowledge in situations which are unpredictable and conflictual. Substantive knowledge constitutes information about facts, concepts and relationships. Procedural knowledge is information about how to use substantive knowledge in situations, and it is not usually context specific. Substantive knowledge may be characterised by specialist knowledge, specific to a domain or context. Doubtless both kinds of knowledge are needed for competent practice. Relevant substantive knowledge might be better learned in relation to specific settings reflecting agency expectations and procedures. Success in new situations demands above all the ability to bear uncertainty, unpredictability and solve conflicts. (Fook et al., 2000.)

6.3 Research Data and Method

In this research, the transformation of social work competencies was studied in the experimental working culture of a drop-in community centre. We asked the following question: How do social work competencies transform in an experimental work culture of a drop-in community centre supporting two-way integration? The data for our research derives from participant observation of the social work practitioners. Critical thinking and interaction with other participants during observations were an essential part of the research process. Participant observation requires an understanding of the context and work culture. This can be achieved by participating actively in the community and experiencing everyday reality. The observational method used could be best described as open and informal and was formed through action and interaction. It also required the observers to have their own experience

of Kototori (Vilkka, 2018). Further, two of the authors have been participant observers at Kototori in their role as supervisor, researcher, educator, project team member and chair of the steering group.

Kototori's designated practitioners performed their observations within their social worker's role. They also observed the drop-in centre as community members who have an active, visible and responsible role. The observation method can also be seen to have an ethnographic dimension since the drop-in centre is strongly linked to the project workers' own contribution and way of working (Vilkka, 2006). Active, frequent participant observation made it possible to achieve a good match between direct services and community needs.

The second type of data comes from tape-recorded discussion in November 2019 where practice at the drop-in centre was discussed, inspired by articles written by Leppänen and Kiviranta (2019) and Stepney (2019). The recording was transcribed (28 pages) and analysed. The basic approach to analyse and interpret the data was Goffman's (1974) frame analysis. A frame includes a set of concepts and theoretical orientations that organise experiences and direct the actions of individuals, groups and communities. The drop-in centre can be understood as a social frame, which is different from the social frame of statutory, office-based social work. Following Goffman, we explore 'What happens here and what are the roles and identities of the workers?' (Goffman, 1974, p. 9). In the frame analysis the action and interaction pattern of workers are studied as well as their capacity and role function. This enabled the type of expertise and compilation of competencies for community social work produced in Kototori to be tracked. According to Goffman (1974), it is possible to study the actor status in context, transformation and their competences. The actor – their role, person and identity – is in relation to the social frame and its interaction. On the other side actor transformations indicate frame limits and tell us something about their character.

6.4 Social Work Practitioners' Roles and Identities at the Community Drop-In Centre

Kototori was established as an open access, low-threshold community drop-in centre without pre-booked appointments. It emphasises the availability and accessibility of services in several languages (Arabic, Persian, Dari, Somali, Russian, English, Finnish). The central location makes it possible for visitors to 'pop in' on their way to the nearby shopping centre. At the drop-in centre, visitors are empowered to decide when and why they use services, and it is the social work practitioners' responsibility to assess how to meet their needs.

The new social frame found at Kototori was *informality within formality*. This meant that the drop-in centre soon became an environment that helped deconstruct power relations between practitioners and visitors. Professional workers ability to create informal relationships was a vital element in promoting equality and building trust. Informality means sharing power and responsibilities by working together (Fook & Napier, 2000; Muurinen, 2019a) and actively engaging the community in the development of Kototori. The very basic structures at the centre created an inclusive and relaxed learning environment. Guidance and counselling were given at round tables where visitors and workers stood together as equals.

The deconstruction of power relations supports Kototori visitors to become active citizens. This means social work practitioners giving visitors space, time and recognition (Honneth, 1995; Turtiainen, 2018). This helps individuals regain power over their own lives, strengthen self-efficacy and become less dependent on social work services. By observing the everyday life of Kototori, it was found that visitors had four types of needs:

- Need for help – 'Would you help me fill this form?'
- Need for guidance – 'How do I reply to this request for clarification?' 'Where do I go for help with this issue?'
- Need for support – 'I just came to make sure I'm filling this application form correctly.'
- Need for community – 'I'm just here for coffee.'

Dropping into Kototori meant visitors being able to ask questions and then define and describe their own needs, which often transformed into motivated action. This process gave the visitors control over their situation. For the social work professionals, it meant adapting to a shared situation and being seated on 'the passenger seat'. This shift in power relations and visitors acting for themselves played an important role and led to feelings of self-accomplishment. This process also locates Kototori as an arena that practises preventive social work (Stepney, 2014).

Giving spoken recognition and understanding of the competence and skills of the visitors are essential for the standing of Kototori in the community. The recognition of visitors' language skills provided an opportunity for visitors or volunteers to take up a new position as *Community Advisors*. Community Advisors provide service to visitors in their own language alongside social work practitioners, who offer professional support and oversee the quality of the service given. Some community advisers have later got a paid job in immigrant social services or started a BA education in social services.

Kototori's informal environment helps build trust at both the individual and the community, which can turn into fluency of guidance and counselling. The drop-in centre breaks problems into more manageable portions, making them lighter to deal

with, compared with how issues are commonly handled within statutory office-based settings. Visitors often seek help before problems have reached an uncontrollable level and retaining control and ownership of the problem assists in finding solutions. Visitors are given as much time as they need to complete the paperwork, so they learn to communicate with bureaucracies.

The interaction between a visitor and a practitioner at Kototori is not controlled or framed by any top-down management model. This enhanced the sense of open dialogue and less the sense of interrogation (Roivainen et al., 2019). Feedback from visitors has been collected twice a year and clearly reveals that Kototori has become a meaningful place that has had a positive and encouraging effect on their everyday lives. This combination of shared environment and humane approach was experienced as empowering by both visitors and social work practitioners alike. The visitors reported gaining valuable knowledge and skills to cope with everyday problems, while social work practitioners reported that Kototori had enhanced their well-being and helped update their professional skills. A working day at Kototori was often described as being refreshing, interesting with variation in work, and a culture and environment that made resident's issues lighter to handle.

6.5 A Compilation of Competencies

The social work practitioners felt that a vital transformation had occurred within their professional role and identity while working simultaneously in the statutory field and in the community social work field at Kototori. The dual role was something that neither of Kototori's practitioners had experienced before. Working in a shared community space required rethinking and reassessing their position as social work practitioners and stepping outside the familiar office-based role and stepping into uncertainty. It was like starting work at a construction site with an empty toolbox or someone else's toolbox. This status transformation (Goffman, 1974) afforded a new perspective on professionalism and can be classified into four elements: forming relationship-based social work, sense of community and community-based social work, experimentation and shared action for social change and finally creativity and analytical thinking.

6.5.1 Forming Relationship-Based Social Work

Social work at Kototori is based on building and maintaining constructive relations, advancing social inclusion and promoting justice and equality. Forming a bond with visitors, other local actors and organisations required sensitivity and giving more of one's self. Goffman (1974) writes about the relationship between the actor and interactive system, the frame, in which the role is performed, and how the

performer's self is seen. How the role is performed will allow for some 'expression' of personal identity, that is characteristic not only of the role but of the person (Banks, 2012; Payne, 2014).

The *individual*, *organisational* and *community* levels can be seen as three dimensions of relationship-based social work. Each of these levels requires a specified know-how (procedural knowledge), and in Kototori's case the know-how was learned through action. Within the individual level the basis of the relationship between the visitor and social practitioner is created through interactions at the drop-in centre. It was made clear to every practitioner that they should 'embrace the moment' when a visitor enters the centre. The way the visitor is greeted and welcomed formed the basis for effective interaction. It also helped to create Kototori's open, relaxed and unique environment. From that first encounter, the process of creating relations and trust begins (Seikkula & Arnkil, 2006; Thompson, 2015, 2016).

Kototori, being part of a project with statutory social work support, gave the practitioners unstated permission to show courage and put ideas immediately into practice. Trying out new solutions did not require prior approval. The role of Kototori within the organisational level could be described as a friendly infiltrator of community social work. This made it possible for workers to create change in the city's social service organisation from within. To achieve this, it was essential that the drop-in centre was not operated by a third sector organisation. Kototori's importance for statutory social work could be seen in multiple ways. The drop-in centre clearly helps ease the long queues at the social services information desk in the city centre. Further, social workers found that, during appointments, they have more time for psychosocial assessments as service users have already completed paperwork at the drop-in centre.

Courage is also needed in the everyday life at Kototori since the content of a day is truly unpredictable. Some might even describe the atmosphere on a busy Friday afternoon as chaotic, but perhaps less chaos and more the management of uncertainty. A community social work service like this calls for flexibility and reassessment of one's comfort zone by becoming accustomed to the uncomfortable. Certainly, there are structures and rules for the drop-in centre´s service and social work practitioners are responsible for maintaining a welcoming and peaceful atmosphere. Any inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated, and there are predetermined measures that operate if something unacceptable would happen. Courage and flexibility turned out to be the vital elements of relation-based social work (Thompson, 2015). Balancing and adapting these elements within the professional social frame were often challenging yet rewarding.

Kototori as an organisation challenges the existing managerialist structures of statutory social work by demonstrating how municipalities and their practitioners can meet the needs of residents by going out on foot into the community. By developing new community practices, social workers meet the requirements of structural

social work regulated by Finnish legislation. Kototori is an example of a resilient structure built on alliances and mutual understanding. This type of structure calls for social work practitioners to show courage and challenge existing structures to promote change. The development process epitomised by Kototori requires patience, self-efficacy and developing indigenous skills and resources within the community rather than import them.

6.5.2 Sense of Community and Community-Based Social Work

> And this is where we are now, with these people. We understand better the environment, the situation and those people, so we start to change our position towards that direction. We start to use the law and the means that exist, to make that change. And that's structural social work, if anything. And it combines community social work with structural social work. This changes, community social work changes those perceptions of reality, and structural social work is that change. (M1)

Understanding and 'sensing the community' are essential in such a community social work process as seen at Kototori. It is important to understand that social work is not the only source responsible for social activity. Seeing the ability of the community creates new measures and resources for social work, and it opens our eyes to seeing that many needs are shared needs. Shared needs require shared effort to find shared solutions. In order to fully work with the community, it is important to invest in getting to know the community (Stepney, 2018). That is why the process at Kototori began by the social work practitioners having an 'open door' policy and spending time in the suburb of Hervanta.

Kototori continues to reach more visitors every year. In the beginning of 2020, the number of visitors ranges from 30 to 55 per day. The drop-in centre is open to everyone, and the services provided are unrestricted. It is impossible to outline the services given at Kototori, since the intention is that a visitor can drop in with any issue. The visitor together with the social work professionals and community advisors will tackle any problem. If the issue is insolvable at Kototori, the visitor is guided to the appropriate service provider. Kototori's visitors come from various backgrounds and diverse life situations. Some visitors have only recently arrived in Tampere, while others might have been employed for several years and have settled routines. Some people visit Kototori just to socialise and have a cup of coffee.

Throughout the development of the drop-in centre, it has been understood that involving the community is the key to success. Many visitors experience Kototori as their home base and have developed feelings of ownership over the centre. This creates both challenges and evidence of success. Shared ownership can be seen, for example, in frequent visits to Kototori and in the way visitors want to 'give something back' by volunteering or offering help as community advisors. A few visitors

have seen the centre as a place where they can express their feelings, beliefs and opinions. These have been situations that required sensitivity and instant reaction to uphold Kototori's values of equity and openness. Early intervention and open discussion have turned out to be the vital elements in creating durable structures and keeping Kototori under the supervision of social work professionals. It is important to share ownership, but it is as important to set limits to maintain Kototori's purpose as a welcoming drop-in centre for all.

There is growing recognition that work at the drop-in centre remains unfinished. It is essential that Kototori remains a reactive structure that evolves according to the community's needs. For example, at the beginning of 2019, the centre changed its opening hours in order to better suit the daily rhythm of visitors. Community social work depends on goodwill and a vision. It has to operate within the community and not from the headquarters faraway. Working with the community requires visible, active and concrete participation. It is essential that community social workers are visible, empathetic and approachable people. These are skills that are easiest to learn and develop through action. Kototori's workers have a slogan '*Try it, ditch it, develop it.'* This encourages them to bravely find new solutions to tackle dysfunctional systems, even better when the solution comes from the visitors or the community advisors.

In the early stages of Kototori's development, local organisations were invited in to discuss and share ideas about working together. Local organisations had ideas and the willingness to organise different activities in Hervanta, but they did not have appropriate venues. Kototori was able to offer space and help find funding. In exchange the members of organisations came to the drop-in centre to work as community advisors and provide activities for groups of local people. This was an important way to create forums for dialogue and increase the 'sense of community' in the area.

6.5.3 Experimentation and Shared Action for Social Change

Community advisors provide an important link with the community as they interact and offer counselling to the visitors at Kototori. Community advisors have a significant role in finding ways to interact with local organisations and people in the various apartment buildings. They gain knowledge and information during the work they do with social work practitioners. This information does not only stay within the frame of Kototori, because community advisors are also active members of their own ethnic communities. Current knowledge and information was spread to the appropriate communities involved.

Community advisors along with the practitioners of Kototori had an innovatory idea to bring counselling services closer to the people by offering them in the community rooms of apartment buildings. Community advisors themselves lived in these same buildings or in the local area, so they were known to many residents. This created trust and, importantly, lowered the threshold to ask for help.

It was found that shared actions created shared thinking, both on a community level and on an organisational level. The needs of the visitors to the drop-in centre were not confined to the field of social services. Therefore, it was necessary to make Kototori a shared environment so that other organisations could find their place. A large number of visitors' issues were related to the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (SII), and soon SII set up their own stand at Kototori twice a month. Also, a nurse from the local health centre became a regular visitor every Friday afternoon helping visitors to book health-care appointments and making health service needs assessments. Working together in a shared environment at the drop-in centre had a positive impact on the workers from visiting organisations. At Kototori it was possible to try out a more inclusive community-based and needs-based way of working and, importantly, take the lessons learned back to their parent organisations.

Social networks and teamwork with local organisations helped to develop Kototori into a service with a vision of providing holistic care and support. It became a shared goal to learn how to work together with a shared needs-based and community-based approach. Many projects have seen Kototori as a place to reach people, and this shows an understanding of the need for services to actively reach out into the community. This all supported Kototori's aim to transform faceless street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980) into approachable and responsive workers.

6.5.4 Creativity and Analytical Thinking

Throughout this chapter, it has been said that Kototori required something new and giving a little more of one's self, including stepping out of one's comfort zone. This describes Kototori as an action-orientated agency working with creativity and analytical thinking.

> Somehow, I, of course, I always think in the chaos situation. (M1)

Creativity and creative analysis were both characteristic features of the new roles of practitioners. The model used when creating this drop-in centre was that a social instructor and a social worker worked as a team. This helped manage doubts and prevented anyone collapsing under the stress and feelings of uncertainty. Active collaboration with the university involving supervision, research and student practitioners helped promote critical reflection and analytical thinking. Working intensively made rapid and direct communication possible, and this created enough

safety to openly discuss doubts and uncertainties. Reflective dialogue created conditions for creative teamwork in the new frame of community social work.

Before Kototori there had been a rise in concerns reflecting a new way of thinking within immigrant social services. Social work practitioners had become worried that service users seemed to become more and more dependent on social services, so something had to be done. Even if Kototori had been built from scratch, the need for it was already recognised. This need then became visible through Kototori.

It is said that creativity cannot be artificially forced, and this was the case at Kototori. The freedom and space given to the team to develop helped create a physical arena where attempts are encouraged, mistakes are accepted and immediate success isn't required. However, working at the drop-in centre did not mean that it was only creative actions, attempts and errors. All of the above would have been pointless if the team had not been open for analytical processing and critical reflection on their actions and choices. The social work practitioners working at the drop-in centre constantly observed and monitored their own work through an exploratory and reflective lens, both among themselves and with others (Schön, 1983).

For its social work practitioners, experiencing a work environment such as Kototori has been a transformative learning process (Mezirow, 1991). It has given them a creative and analytical way of working within the frame of community social work. Instead of being restricted by managers, they were encouraged to just *give it go*.

6.6 Working Close and Together

> A transformation has happened, I don't change even though I go from one place to another. But of course, the way people see me, that changes. The same people who greet me as visitors at Kototori, they experience the situation a little" icy" when I see them at the lobby at Sarvis (the social services centre). … But at the lobby at Sarvis, there's something, something happens. I notice that the same people don't make contact with me either. But then again, I feel that during a meeting with my service user I can use the exact same genuine immediacy and something, some sort of, sort of working really close – I feel that the competencies when they change, you see they are brought also here to Sarvis, that's at its best. (M1)

The best way to describe the way of working at Kototori is working close to people and close to the statutory social work institution. The social work practitioners working in both worlds (statutory and community social work) act as mediators keeping all parties up to date and aware of each other. Kototori can be seen as a place that offers space for person to person interaction and dialogue. This dialogue

creates the required sensitivity to understand that there is a need for physical places that offer space for face-to-face interactions (Seikkula & Arnkil, 2006).

The professional transformation created a *'travelling competence'* that followed these social work practitioners and can now be seen in their office-based statutory work in immigrant social services. The transformation includes a broadened understanding of how to support the integration process by providing different tools and community resources to support individual's self-efficacy and ownership of their own lives.

The use of informality as a tool of community social work created discussion about the limits and boundaries of informality when helping someone. This discussion would arise especially when these limits were pushed. It was noticed that the new roles as community social workers at Kototori changed how the visitors saw these practitioners. The visitors saw the workers as more approachable and equal to them as human beings. There were situations where visitors were referring to workers more like good friends than practitioners.

During the first year of Kototori, the two social work professionals were the only employees to represent the public social work institution. Since the second year, the days spent at the drop-in centre were divided among all the social instructors working at the immigrant social services. This solution connected the drop-in centre more closely to the statutory social work institution, and soon a shared responsibility developed. Nowadays when new employees start their work at the immigration services, they are immediately offered a shift at Kototori. Today social instructors and social workers get the opportunity to experience Kototori and its community social work environment as part of their professional development.

6.7 Discussion and Conclusion

The development of the drop-in centre has demanded some rethinking about the nature of social services in the city of Tampere. Since the managerial turn, the main trend has been to concentrate public services and governance into the city centre. In this sense Kototori has been a notable exception to general city planning. Kototori developed into a multi-agency, low-threshold centre to serve residents in one local multicultural suburb. The new social frame found at Kototori was 'informality within formality'. Adopting a broader perspective, this meant that the drop-in centre turned out to be an environment that helped deconstruct power relations between practitioners and visitors. The ability to be informal, to be a person, within a formal profession became a vital element in supporting equality and building trust. Informality was related to sharing power and responsibilities by working collectively together.

Flexible and delicate structures at Kototori were created by emphasizing the use of various shared elements:

- Physical and social space with a foyer and round tables
- Lively common social area, social café
- Minimised hierarchy
- Working together with shared knowledge
- Experimental culture as a way of working
- Practitioners as community members
- New terminology – speaking of visitors instead of clients or service users
- Relaxed atmosphere

Social work competencies were transformed in the process of collaborative learning and dialogical social development. As Goffman (1974) suggested, the actor status arises in a social context, and this makes it possible for the actor to grow and transform. Gradually, the reflective community approach led to the practice of mutually shared competences, changing the way professional expertise was used. The social work practitioners recognised four specific competencies which are needed at such a centre and discussed in detail above.

According to Fook et al. (2000), it is procedural knowledge which is needed in new, uncertain and unpredictable situations. The competences mentioned above show that they are underpinned by know-how, i.e. procedural knowledge. The development of competencies demanded personal courage and self-efficacy and above all trusting that skills and resources will be found within the community. It demanded that the practitioners cope with challenging situations without knowing the final answer. Reflective collaboration with co-workers and visitors at the drop-in centre helped to find solutions.

The empowerment of visitors occurred through working together and allowing them to adopt meaningful roles. The inspiring slogan was '*Try it, ditch it, develop it'*, which meant ideas could immediately be put into practice. The role of Kototori within the organisational structure could be described as being a friendly infiltrator of community social work. This makes it possible for workers to create change, from the inside, in the city's social service organisation. That's why it is essential that the drop-in centre is not operated by a third sector organisation, which is often the case with community projects in other European countries (Stepney, 2018).

Kototori's importance for statutory social work can be seen in multiple ways and should not be underestimated. The drop-in centre helped to ease the long queues at the social services information desk in the city centre. Social workers soon noticed that they had more time for psychosocial assessments and general discussion during

their appointments, because clients have already completed the paperwork at the drop-in centre.

Kototori reflects the area of Hervanta and its residents, as it is based on the local needs of the area and its people. Kototori as it is currently could not easily be duplicated in other areas. According to the theory of diffusion of innovations, we have to compare the context and properties of Kototori with the other community context where the model might be replicated (Rogers 1962, 2003). Within the city of Tampere, a drop-in centre set up in another area might have turned out different. Throughout this process it was understood that a drop-in centre like Kototori had to be created jointly with the local community. Developing such a structure meant learning through experiences and interaction. The model underpinning Kototori is understanding the need to critically observe and creatively experiment through trial and error. Community social work requires committing to active and responsive relation-based practice.

One of Kototori's aims is to make social services more approachable, accessible and humane. Kototori offered a new arena within the city of Tampere's social services. The laws regulating these services such as the *Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration* and the *Social Welfare Act* were redefined in interactions between visitors and social work professionals. Re-designing the given institutional reality into this new arena made it possible to create an alternative and more positive way of seeing service users. This meant giving individuals or more accurately *seeing* them in new roles, as *visitors, residents and actors.* Not only did Kototori offer new identities for service users, it offered possibilities for social work professionals to challenge and redefine their roles as supporters with more control over agency policy.

By doing experimental work, the practitioners gained substantive knowledge about individual visitors, the community and its social activity. Recognizing the inherent ability and potential of the community created new resources and opportunities for social work. Further, it confirmed that many needs are shared needs, and shared needs require shared effort and collective solutions. In order to fully work with the community, it is important to invest time in getting to know the community. Community social work also calls for social work practitioners to develop courage to challenge existing structures, especially when seeing the need for change. Also, in collaboration with language-skilled community advisors, practitioners acquired special contextual knowledge about the needs of visitors and their own communities.

This developmental study outlines new knowledge about the competencies needed for implementing community social work and experimental work more generally. The professional transformation was reinforced by creating a 'travelling competence' that follows the social work practitioners wherever they work. It can readily be seen in their office-based statutory work in the immigrant social services.

The transformation includes a broadened and deeper understanding concerning how to support an individual's integration. The process is enriched and enhanced by providing tools and community resources, such as Kototori, to support the individual's self-efficacy and ownership of their own life.

The project has demonstrated the importance of relationships in social work and the inter-connectedness of people in the community irrespective of their status, class, age, ethnic origins and culture. Relationships are at the basis of empowerment, and as the project has revealed, they were central to what was achieved at Kototori, through the development of trust, mutuality and meaningful collaboration. Community social work, and the vibrant experimental culture it promotes, brings clear benefits not only to the community but for professional practitioners too. It is an evidence-based, interesting and rewarding form of practice that contributes to ongoing professional development.

The 3-year project demanded resilience from both professionals and residents alike to demonstrate the positive outcomes of the community social work model. The extensive knowledge produced has demonstrated evidence of effectiveness that will hopefully influence managers and political decision-makers concerning the great need for the drop-in centre and value of community-based work. Practice research is important because the knowledge produced by academics, social workers and student researchers can help make the evidence visible and contribute to more effective and empowering services.

6.8 References

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