

# PENSION SKEJBY

Fællesskab

+ -

Balance i  
hverdagen

frihed

Spændende  
oplevelse

God støtte

FÆLLESSKAB

Bagage  
For  
Livet

ÅRENT.

At være social.  
Skal lære at lave mad.

Kolegie / fællesskab

TORSKELLIGHED

## Meeting halfway

Experiences of convicts and non-convicts living together in a  
Danish halfway house

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Utrecht University 2014

Mangfoldighed

HJEM

SØD-  
HVALER-  
OMSTRÆNG-  
PÆDAGOGIK

UD-  
LÆNGSEL

fængsel

Imødekom-  
hed.  
Frihed.

Lovet  
tilbage

PARADISE HOTEL  
(POSTINT MENT JEFF)

Rummelighed

Sjov og  
vdfordrende  
forshellighed.

MEDIND-  
FLYDELSSE

© Photo: Nienke de Haan

The artwork photographed hangs in the living room in Pension Skejby, and is made by the inhabitants during a house meeting in 2013. A translation of the words the inhabitants use to describe their house is as following (from left to right):

Fellowship, + -, balance in everyday life, freedom, exciting experiences, good support, to be social, should learn how to cook, baggage for life, openness, college/fellowship, difference, positivity, home, sweet- cosy- circumstances- pedagogy, diversity, good, people, out of prison, life back, prison, Paradise Hotel (positively meant), prison, courtesy, freedom, participation, messiness, fun and challenging diversity.

## **Meeting halfway**

Experiences of convicts and non-convicts living together in a Danish halfway house



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“And at the moment in this political debate, where there is talk about more punishment and harder punishment, maybe we need to look at why we are actually doing what we are doing. A lot of times they speak with emotions without rationalising why we actually have these punishments, and without talking about alternatives. Maybe this house could be an alternative.”<sup>1</sup>

“If you want to lose weight, the best circumstances to do so are not during Christmas time. If you want to start cycling, it's pretty much uphill to start on a cold, windy, rainy day in November. It is hard to break habits for all people. Surroundings and various forms of support and advice can make a big difference, also for criminals.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lucas, informal conversation 08-04-2014

<sup>2</sup> Translated quote from a newspaper article written by one of the inhabitants. Jørgensen, J. 2012 Til bords met banditter. Jyllands-Posten, June 10. Online available at: <http://pensionskejby.dk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Artikel-Til-bords-med-banditter.pdf>



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## Introduction

Imagine leaving prison after ten years, not knowing how internet banking or online government ID's work, having no job, but having a huge debt to pay the government for your court cases, and seeing family members again who you have been estranged from. It is no surprise then, that many ex-convicts reoffend. The difficulties of reintegration are part of a wider social debate. How do we craft a just society, and which role should punishment play? What is successful reintegration, and is it possible to work towards this within the current criminal justice system? Different initiatives try to bridge the gap between imprisonment and life outside prison. An example is the concept of normalisation in Denmark; the ideal that life in prison should resemble the outside world as much as possible. Another initiative is the existence of halfway houses, in which prisoners can spend the last part of their sentence to get used to 'normal life'.

However, to what extent can living in an institution prepare inmates for life outside prison? Bondeson concludes, after doing comparative research in thirteen correctional institutions, that no matter how the institutions are designed, criminalisation rather than rehabilitation is the outcome of imprisonment (Bondeson 1989). Furthermore, Goffman argues that with imprisonment a process of institutionalisation takes place, in which people get accustomed to life on the inside which makes it difficult to readjust to society again (Goffman 1982). He calls this 'deculturation', the loss of habits required in the bigger society, or the difficulty to relearn these again (Goffman 1982:61). Cressey theorised the ideal circumstances to change behaviour within the institutional context. According to him, prisoners should be in an environment where criminal behaviour does not give a high status, but non-criminal values do. They should preferably be surrounded by people who encourage them to follow the law, there should be a 'we-feeling' among them, and resocialisation should be the common goal. It works best if this 'peer pressure' is carried out by placing criminals and non-criminals in one group (Cressey 1955). These circumstances however, are not often present in institutions. One exception is Pension Skejby, a Danish halfway house where convicts, convicted for different kinds of (serious) crimes, can spend the last part of their sentence living with non-convicts.

This ethnographic study describes the encounter of convicts and non-convicts in Pension Skejby. The central question of the research is: How does daily life in Pension Skejby influence both the convicts and non-convicts and how does this play a role in the process of rehabilitation of the convicts? Following a broad definition of rehabilitation, I will look at different aspects: social interaction, stigmatisation and prejudices, the experience of living in the house as a transitional phase, and resocialisation.

This thesis provides a case study of the process of reintegration and the contact between prisoners and non-prisoners. Reintegration and resocialisation have become topics of debate in

Denmark, related to the worldwide trend towards tougher punishment. How does life in prison relate to life outside of prison, and how can we make it easier to make this transition? Both from an economical as well as a humanitarian perspective it is necessary to bridge the gap between prison and society, to reduce re-offending and give people the opportunity to settle in again. It is known that reintegration is a difficult process, but qualitative knowledge about this is lacking. Because of Pension Skejby's position in between prison and total release, and its unique combination of prisoners and non-prisoners within an institution, this study can provide new insights in the process of reintegration.

This thesis is organised as follows: In the first chapter I describe the research methods. The research results are based on twelve weeks of ethnographic fieldwork in Pension Skejby. I will explain methodological and ethical considerations and reflect on my position in the field.

The second chapter provides the theoretical background to the research. Relevant literature concerning the reintegration of convicts will be reviewed; starting with the question how successful rehabilitation should be defined, and showing developments in the perception of rehabilitation. It is shown how institutionalisation and the development of a prison culture problematise the transition to life outside the institution. I will conclude the first chapter by reviewing the role of stigmatisation and prejudices in the process of reintegration.

The third chapter describes the context of the study; it elaborates on the Danish criminal justice system and describes the history, structure and aims of Pension Skejby. Next to that, I will review earlier research on Pension Skejby.

The fourth and the fifth chapters present and analyse the research data. The fourth chapter focusses on group processes within the house. Taking into account different authors who have stated that confinement leads to criminalisation rather than rehabilitation, I will show why this process does not take place within the house. I will explain this by looking at the relationship between the staff and the inhabitants and at how contact between convicts and non-convicts reduces stigmatisation, and gives people the possibility to take on new roles.

The fifth chapter focuses on resocialisation. I start with looking at how living in the halfway house is experienced as 'in between' the prison and release. Following that I will look at how the process of deculturation is counteracted upon in the house, and how living in the house changes behaviour.

In the conclusion, I will argue that though Pension Skejby is not a panacea for success, it can offer a friendly environment for those wanting to participate and get used to life outside of prison. The pension differs significantly from other prisons and correctional facilities, which are often characterized by a subculture of negative views and behaviour towards the staff.

## Methods

The research results are based on twelve weeks of ethnographic fieldwork in Pension Skejby, by living in the house and participating in daily life. Observations of daily activities and informal conversations form a big part of the research data and create a deeper understanding of everyday social life in the house. DeWalt and DeWalt emphasise the importance of using different methods during research, to make cross validation of conclusions possible. Next to conducting in depth interviews, I cross validated my research participants' statements with observations. Each method has its own strengths and limitations, and can reveal a slightly different viewpoint (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011:128). I conducted fourteen semi-structured interviews; seven with convicts, six with non-convicts and one with a staff member. The interviews lasted for about an hour and were loosely based on pre-determined questions, which gave participants the possibility to lead the interview and emphasise topics they found important. During the period of fieldwork, I changed my question list several times, due to new insights and feedback from participants. To get a better overview of the different perspectives on each topic, all interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded using NVIVO.

The interviews were carried out in English, which is not the mother tongue of the participants. Some participants said after the interview that they found it difficult to explain everything in English. However, when unsure about a certain word or way to explain something, the participants had the possibility to clarify it in Danish. I learned some Danish before the research started, but mostly in the field by speaking with participants and following a language course six hours a week. My level of Danish grew from having a basic idea of the topic people spoke about, to being able to understand nearly everything. This enabled me to do more accurate observations, and to participate more easily in everyday life in the house. Learning Danish also turned out to be a way of building rapport, as it was very much appreciated in the house that I took the effort to speak their language and learned it quickly.

The choice to interview both the convicts and non-convicts was made to gain insight in perspectives from both groups. In order to get a better insight into the views of the inhabitants while working within a limited time span, I decided to focus mostly on them, rather than on the staff. I did not participate in any of the staff meetings. Although this would have been interesting, it would have been problematic since private information about clients is discussed during those meetings. Hearing this information would not have been appropriate and have problematised my relationship with the inhabitants. All employees have signed a code of silence regarding the information about clients, and to maintain my neutrality it was better if I did not participate in those meetings. While selecting participants for interviews I took into account their age, gender, type of

crime and length of sentence, to be able to cover different perspectives and get a representative view of the research population. Another aspect of the selection of participants was the extent to which people wanted to be interviewed. This decision was made out of ethical concerns; people living in an institution under the Prison and Probation Service have had to tell their story to many people, social workers as well as government officials. Considering that, the wish not to be interviewed is understandable. Based on observations and informal conversations, I considered whether an interview would be appropriate or if sticking to informal conversations would be preferable.

Gaining trust is important while doing ethnographic fieldwork, especially within the context of a prison, since prisons can be characterised as low-trust environments (Nielsen 2010). Trust and rapport with the research population also make it possible to do deeper qualitative interviews. For that reason I started doing interviews after getting to know the informants in the first two weeks. To guarantee informed consent I gave a presentation during the second house meeting I attended, in which I explained more about my background and the research I was conducting. I explained that I was doing research by just living in the house and participating in daily life, but I would also like to do interviews with those of them who were interested. Because the inhabitants of the house changed quite regularly I also had to keep explaining to new inhabitants why I was living in the house and what I was researching. Since it was clear that I was a foreigner, it was easy to introduce myself to new inhabitants and tell them that I am from Holland and I stayed there to do research. I changed the names of the participants in this thesis, for privacy reasons. However, within the small context of the house people might still recognise each other when they read it. Participants are aware of this and did not see that as a problem.

## **Reflection**

Keesing and Strathern emphasise the value of anthropological fieldwork. They state that ethnography does not only rely on field notes, but also on an unspoken understanding and background knowledge gained by the anthropologist in the field. This gives ethnography a richness that could not have been reached in any other way than immersing in such an intensive way in the field (Robben and Sluka 2012:8). This also means that the researcher has a great influence on how the data are gathered, interpreted and presented. I interviewed the non-convicts about what it was like to live in the house and how it affected their view of prisoners, but I also experienced how my own feelings changed. Before I arrived at pension Skejby, I noticed how my feelings conflicted: I thought the idea of the house was very good and interesting, but feeling wise I was a bit nervous about doing research among prisoners. However, after the first weeks I noticed that – just like my

informants told me – in daily interaction it does not matter who is convict or non-convict. In the beginning I was quite aware of who was plus and who was minus, but after getting to know the people better I noticed that this distinction started to fade. My own experience of living in the house contributed to a greater understanding of the mixing principle and how that takes place in daily life. I got more insight in what it is like to live in the house as a non-convict, but to what extent can I say something about the process of resocialisation from the convicts' side? Although we lived in the house together, our history was very different. I have never been imprisoned, and I think it is hardly imaginable what life in prison is like for an outsider. Hearing the stories of the convicts, conducting interviews and making observations, made me understand better what it was like for them to live in the house, although I guess it is impossible for me to grasp the full experience.

As a researcher you always enter the field with predetermined ideas and concepts. Observation is never neutral, but always shaped by one's personal history and background knowledge. I found Pension Skejby in a search for a research location in Scandinavia, with the idea to research something of what John Pratt called 'Scandinavian exceptionalism' (Pratt 2008). Although maintaining a critical view, to me the house represented the Scandinavian system, which I suspected to be better than prison systems elsewhere. However, I was also critical and wondering to what extent there would be contact between the different groups in the house, and how that would function. By reading literature while being in the field and following the societal debate in the newspapers I aimed to synthesise data and theory, in a process in which new data led me to read new theories, and the other way around. Back home I started to read more critical literature on the idea of 'Scandinavian exceptionalism', also because my informants expressed themselves negatively about the Danish penal system. This led me to question my findings: Had I only found what I was looking for, while doing my research in Pension Skejby? I entered the house with an open view, being curious and questioning everything. Both in my data collection and data analysis I have been open for criticisms on the house and the system. Nevertheless, I think I have been able to show the exceptional nature of Pension Skejby in this thesis. While doing research I found out that it is hard to link broad societal trends to specific contexts. I give some theoretical background of the Scandinavian and Danish context in this thesis, but in the empirical chapters I focus on life as lived in the house.

"Culture is interpretation. The 'facts' of anthropology, the material which the anthropologist has gone to the field to find, are already themselves interpretations. The baseline data is already culturally mediated by the people whose culture we, as anthropologists have come to explore. Facts are made" (Rabinow 1977:523). Rabinow points us to the fact that facts are interpretations, made both by the anthropologist and by the informants. I experienced this in the field while having an

informal conversation with Anna and Laura, two non-convicts who lived in the house. Every time I was typing out an interview I noticed that I regarded the material I typed out as 'facts'. Having something on record, literally said by my informants made the information sound more true than if I would have had only observed something. However, Laura made me aware of the constructiveness of facts, when she said that often she told me something, which she might have seen different if I would have had asked her the next day, after having had another experience. Anna added that it was good that I could also observe what they were doing, since what they would tell me was also the way they liked to see things. That might be different from the way they actually acted. For example, I noticed that while people said there were not really different groups in the house, some people would logically join when planning a trip and others would not.

Different than other researchers who had conducted research in the house, I was part of one of the living groups. I had the same responsibilities as the others and took weekly cooking shifts and cleaning jobs. Living in the house and participating in the group gave me the advantage to experience the whole day of living in the house and getting a close relationship with the research participants. On the other hand, living in the house also meant that I always had to manage my position within the house. The results presented in this thesis are the outcome of my interaction with the inhabitants of the house. I try to give a broad range of perspectives, to cover different views on life in the house. However, my impression was also managed by my own social relations within the house. With some people I established a better relationship than with others, which gave me the possibility to do more in depth interviews and spend more time with them; their view is in some cases better represented in my writing than others. Having no separation between research time and private time, I sometimes felt like being lost in participation, rather than observation. All interaction is a part of 'being there', but there is a difference between 'being there' and 'participant observation', as the latter requires a more analytical and reflective view. After a while I got so accustomed to life within the house, that I found it hard to remember what to look at. Beforehand it is hard to know which will be the most interesting aspects of your fieldwork as this has to grow within the field with the acquisition of 'emic' knowledge. Because I was spending all my time within the research setting, I found it hard to maintain an analytical view. Things that seemed normal to the inhabitants of the house, also started to feel normal for me. While studying social interaction 'topics people speak about during dinner', might be interesting data, it is also not possible to always reflect on everything that is said. As all anthropologists, I tried to find a balance between participation and observation. Looking back I am happy with all the detailed notes I made of things that did not seem important back then, but I am also glad I took the possibility to engage in as many activities as possible, to have the full experience of participation.

## Theoretical framework

How to define the half-way house? Being partly a prison<sup>3</sup>, and partly a 'bridge' between the prison and society, the halfway house falls in between two bodies of literature. In this chapter I will discuss literature on prisonisation, as well as literature on rehabilitation. I will show how social identity is created by categorisation and how this plays a role both in the institutional context as in the post-release experience. The choice for this focus is made with regard to the research setting, in which the group processes are exceptional. To start I will give an overview of developments in the way rehabilitation is perceived. Then I will look at how processes of prisonisation work, and the influence of prisonisation after release. Following that I consider the role of stigmatisation and prejudices in the post release experience.

### Rehabilitation

What is rehabilitation, and should successful rehabilitation be defined? Visher and Travis note that one of the analytical flaws in most research on the transition between prison and community, is the emphasis on recidivism as a measurement for effectiveness, rather than the extent to which one is reintegrated or resocialised (Visher and Travis, 2003: 105). Also Liebling and Crewe argue that rehabilitation outcomes are often defined narrowly, with a mere focus on the prevention of reconviction (Liebling, Crewe 2013: 297). In this study I will use a broad definition of rehabilitation, defining rehabilitation as possibility to participate in society in a legal and meaningful way after imprisonment, containing a sufficient level of resocialisation and reintegration. The perceptions of and reasonings for rehabilitation have changed over time. According to Robinson et al. the justification of rehabilitation has changed from a welfarist, humanitarian convict-centred perspective to a more instrumental and utilitarian perspective. Community safety and monetary costs of imprisonment and recidivism are the rationale behind rehabilitation programmes (Robinson et al. 2013: 330). Different authors have argued that rehabilitation has become more focussed on risk prediction and classification, and putting more responsibility on the convict (Lynch 2000, Robinson et al. 2013). This has consequences for the convict in the sense that rehabilitation is seen as an individual project, rather than a social project and little help can be claimed from the state in the creation of opportunities for reform or reintegration (Robinson et al. 2013: 331). Rehabilitation becomes to resemble 'self-help', which blames the individual when it goes wrong rather than situational obstacles (Lynch 2000: 55). Lynch notes a shift at the end of the seventies from an approach that aims at normalisation, and looks at individual cases by providing convicts work and

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<sup>3</sup> There are different kinds of half way houses. Sometimes people live voluntary in a halfway house, after they are released. In Pension Skejby most people living in the house were there as part of their sentence and the house is part of the Danish Prison and Probation service.

psychological help, to a more managing approach, aimed at controlling and containing the risk in a cost effective way. This approach consists more standardised procedures, paperwork and documentation and aims at uniformity across case management (Lynch 2000:43). Although Lynch writes about the California, this trend can also be seen in Europe.

The shift in approach towards rehabilitation is also linked to an idea to what extent individuals can be transformed by rehabilitation. Martinson's study (1974), in which he compares the effectiveness of rehabilitative aims in institutional and non-institutional settings, concluded that with few exceptions rehabilitative efforts had had no effects on recidivism rates. This study has had great effects, both in the academic world and in practice, on the belief in possibilities for rehabilitation. Martinson however, posed two possible explanations regarding his results: We might conclude that our attempts are not yet good enough, and we should make treatment programs better. We can also conclude that crime is a social phenomenon, and even the best treatment cannot help the individual to desist from crime. These answers depend on what crime is understood to be. The rehabilitative effort is linked to the idea of crime as an individual 'disease' that can be cured. If we, on the other hand, look at crime as a social phenomenon, the decarceration of low risk-offenders and keeping high-risk offenders in simple prisons would be a more fruitful approach. However, crime and punishment also have a moral dimension. Even though the chance that someone who has committed a murder would re-offend may be small, only giving him a parole sentence might harm the feelings of justice in society, due to the absence of retribution (Martinson 1974). Punishment and rehabilitation thus also clearly have political dimensions.

### **Prisonisation**

Both the emphasis on the individual in the new rehabilitation discourse, as well as the growing disbelief in rehabilitation within institutional settings can be brought back to the relationship between structure and agency. What is the role of the individual in committing crime? To what extent can his or her surroundings be held responsible? Criminological theories differ in the level of responsibility they allocate to the individual or society. Rather than looking at the opposition between structure and agency, I will look at the interrelatedness between structure and agency within correctional institutions. How can we explain that criminalisation rather than rehabilitation is often the outcome of imprisonment? According to Bondeson, the possibility of prisoner reform is counteracted by socialisation within prison cultures with accessory prison morals and habits. Bondeson uses a definition of the handbook of socialisation and defines socialisation as follows: "[...] the process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, skills and dispositions that enable them to participate as more or less effective members of groups and the society" (Goslin 1969 in Bondeson

1989). The process in which someone is socialised into the “folkways, mores, customs and general culture” of the prison, is called prisonisation (Clemmer 1958:299).

Sykes explains the existence of a criminal culture as a reaction to the ‘pains of imprisonment’. Engaging in a common culture is seen as a mode of defence against the deprivations of imprisonment and their attacks on the prisoners’ self-image (Sykes 1958:82). Goffman describes how in institutions, where people live under supervision, a process of role dispossession takes place. People are no longer capable to maintain the social role they used to fulfil outside the institution, but get accustomed to their different position within the institution (Goffman 1982:21). Both Goffman and Sykes describe processes where the focus on the individual is taken away. Sykes’ pains of imprisonment – the deprivation of liberty, goods and services, autonomy, and heterosexual relationships – are painful in themselves, and more severe because they imply the rejection of the prisoner as a functional member of society. Whereas imprisonment reduces the individual to ‘a prisoner’, within the group of prisoners there is space for distinction, as prisoners take on different roles within the social hierarchy of the prison community.

Bondeson did comparative research in thirteen Swedish correctional facilities and concluded that no matter the official objective, structure or clientele, a process of prisonisation can be seen. This would mean that even more liberal initiatives, such as open prisons still would have a negative effect. Minkes research (2014) confirms this and shows that prisonisation takes place at the same levels in open and closed prisons. Several factors did influence the level of prisonisation: young prisoners, male prisoners, prisoners convicted more than five times, prisoners imprisoned longer than six months, and prisoners convicted for drug offences were more likely to be highly prisonised (Minke 2014: 42).

However, not all researchers have found this process of prisonisation. Mathieson did research in a Norwegian institution for preventive detention and states that a prison culture with distinct norms and values seemed absent. There was, nevertheless, a deep conflict between the staff and prisoners, expressed in constant criticism of the prisoners against the institution and the general prison system, as a defence towards the stigma they experienced and the power of the staff. He concludes that whether a process of prisonisation in the sense of the establishment of a ‘prison culture’ can be seen or not, the goal of rehabilitation is not met (Mathieson 2000:50).

How do these processes of socialisation and prisonisation work? Socialisation should not be seen as an one way process in which the individual is influenced; staff members can only exercise a limited influence on the prisoner, and the prisoners have different possibilities to exercise influence on each other and sometimes also on the staff (Bondeson 1989:21). Norms are not just followed, but people have agency which gives them the possibility to enact and subvert norms. However, not

everyone has the same capacity and skills to undertake action. Bourdieu's theory of the habitus can reveal insight in the processes of socialisation and prisonisation. The habitus consists of "systems of durable, transposable dispositions [ways of being, tendencies], structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (Bourdieu 1977:72). The habitus gives people a feeling of how to act and respond in daily life. It shapes their feeling of what is appropriate behaviour in a situation (Thompson 1991). The habitus is in the mind as well as embedded in the body, reflected in different postures, different ways of walking and speaking. The norms and values of a person, but also of a group, are thus shaped in daily practices and ways of living, which themselves are the product of habitus and social context. Also much of the 'sense of the self' is shaped by one's unreflexive habits and routines (Jenkins 2000:11). The environment of the prison, with accompanying power relations may lead to context specific norms and values, for example "Don't talk to prison guards". This norm is internalised and expressed in daily behaviour and bodily postures. Even though many prisoners might wish to have more contact with the staff than they do, this is hard to change because the interaction norm lies within the context which shapes and is shaped by a certain way of acting. Resocialisation (out of a prison culture), as aimed for by the administration of an institution, could take place during the encounter with other people, but this presupposes that the prisoner is offered other relations than those with the prison community. Within prison the only possibility for this would be with the staff, but this is problematic because of the role of the staff and the social distance between them and the prisoners (Galtung 1958).

The process of prisonisation, in which someone is socialised into a prisoner's role, can lead to the internalisation of a 'prisoner identity', shaped in the process of social identification. All identification is based on categorisation, our identity is created in the interplay of how we identify ourselves and how others identify us. As described by Jenkins, the labelling theory focuses on the internalisation of an ascribed identity. This may occur if one is authoritatively categorised within an institutional setting. However, the shaping of identity is not a unilateral process, individuals have some control over how they are perceived, and they can resist labelling. Nevertheless, within an institutional setting there is the power of the authority to make categorisation matter, even without internalisation (Jenkins 2000:8). So even when one does not see himself as a prisoner, or does not have a strong identification with the internal criminal norms and values, one can still be treated as such. Not only personal identification but also group identification depends on the categorisation of the self and others. If external categorisation 'a group prisoners' is the same as the existing group identification, they might reinforce each other (Jenkins 2000:21).

Following Bourdieu's idea of the habitus, I focus on the interrelatedness of objective structures and subjective experience. In other words: I look at how the structures of the prison, the

pension and society are linked to the practice of everyday life and experienced by the individual. Personal motivation and capability (agency) to desist from crime is important, but people also face structural difficulties, embedded in the system.

### **The influence of prisonisation after release**

In order to survive in prison, prisoners have to learn new norms specific to the institutions of imprisonment. This makes adaption to the general society after release difficult, because these norms are often not compatible with the norms of the rest of society (Goffman 1982). Minke (2014) confirms this in her research on prisonisation in Danish prisons, and concludes that: “The distinctive norms of Danish prisoner culture contribute to an individual and group identity that is in conflict with the institution and wider social values. This is likely to inhibit re-integration on release and the process of desistance” (Minke 2014:42). Prison norms include for example: do not steal from other prisoners, do not tell information about someone’s criminal activities or plans and do not interact with the guards. There is not only a difference in norms within prison and outside of prison, there is also a significant divide between the kind of skills and knowledge needed in the prison, such as codes of silence, distrust of authority, and the routine use of physical force, and those skills required outside of the prison, such as the ability to engage in an open dialogue, the resolution of conflicts in a non-violent way, and the development of trust (Halsey 2007: 1258). Goffman speaks of ‘deculturation’: the loss of habits required in the bigger society or the difficulty to relearn these again (Goffman 1982:61).<sup>4</sup>

Goffman’s concept of deculturation is based on the idea that prisons are a form of ‘total institutions’, separated from the rest of society. This distinction is challenged by Baer and Ravneberg, who argue that the boundaries between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ are more fluid. They see prisons as heterotopias (Foucault 1967), separated from other spaces, but still within the general social order (Baer, Ravneberg 2008:214). Prisons differ in the extent to which they are closed off from the outside world, in open prisons and half-way houses this distinction is less rigid. The prison climate still requires different skills and knowledge from those needed outside of the prison, but the distinction between prison and society might not always be as clear as portrayed in the concept of ‘total institutions’. It is hard to generalise about the transition from prison to society, as there is a wide array of imprisonment situations. Think about the difference between someone who serves

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<sup>4</sup> Goffman uses the term ‘deculturation’, because the term ‘desocialisation’ sometimes used by others in the same context, implies too much the loss of fundamental abilities to communicate or cooperate. Deculturation, however, has the connotation of ‘losing someone’s culture’. Both terms should be read in a moderate way, as in losing certain abilities, but not losing one’s whole culture or all skills to communicate. The term ‘resocialisation’ is often used in criminological literature, as being the opposite of what Goffman calls ‘deculturation’. I agree with Goffman’s critique of the term ‘desocialisation’, but do use the term resocialisation.

time in an open prison while following education outside of the prison every day, and someone who spends time in a high security prison, where contact with the outside world is minimised.

In order to be able to reintegrate successfully into society after release, prisoners should be resocialised, that is to say: have at least a minimum amount of social skills to act in daily life. Johns researched the post-release experience of ex-convicts and her research shows some examples of problems ex-convicts face in the contact with other people when they get out; the difficulty to relate to non-prisoners, to find a shared language and shared experience. It is hard to stay away from old contacts, but also hard to engage in new contact with people on the outside (Johns 2010). Galtung comments that the ideal prison should resemble a small scale model of society, where some sort of role-playing would take place that serves as training for social life (Galtung 1958). However the other functions of the prison like deterrence and retribution make resocialisation difficult. The way someone behaves and interacts with others is also of influence of how one is categorised or perceived. In routine public interaction we use verbal and non-verbal cues to allocate 'categorical identity' (Jenkins 2000: 15).

### **Categorisation: stigmatisation and prejudices**

Categorisation contributes to the process of prisonisation in prison, but also plays a role after release. The label one is given after committing a crime, "offender" or "criminal", implies to refer not only to what one has done in the past but also to what one is likely to do in the future. Such conceptions of the self are created in the processes of role taking and social interaction (Uggen et al. 2004). Also, Maruna and Lebel emphasise that the process of reintegration is constructed in the interaction with others and highlight the importance of others' belief that someone can successfully desist from crime (Maruna and Lebel 2010:76).

Moran speaks of two kinds of stigmas related to imprisonment: conspicuous and concealable stigma; the latter referring to the embodied experience of imprisonment which a prisoner experiences himself. The transition from imprisonment to the domestic setting is difficult because the body is used to schedules, flow control, communal living and the deprivation of privacy, very different than the silence one is likely to encounter at home. Conspicuous stigma is seen by others, whether real or imagined (Moran 2012:570). Many ex-convicts say to have the feeling that strangers can see they have been to prison. Although this might not be the case when walking on the street, there are several moments in which someone's criminal history becomes visible for others. Access to the internet makes information about other people easily accessible, and even when a sentence is done, information on the internet about the conviction can stay available for a long time. Furthermore employers regularly ask for a clean criminal record, which underlines that even when a

sentence is served the stigma associated with imprisonment is still there. Maruna highlights the fact that reintegration is a 'two-way street', which does not only involve changes on the part of the person coming from prison, but also on the part of the community and society. The current 'risk society', in which little trust is put upon the criminal, does not promote rehabilitation but discourages it (Maruna 2014:128).

How can stigmatisation and prejudices be reduced? According to the contact hypothesis (Allport 1954) the best way to reduce prejudice and promote social integration is to bring two groups together. Besides that, longstanding contact between groups may also produce mutual shifts in identification. How others appear to define us and how they treat us, may cause us to define ourselves somewhat differently (Jenkins 2000:21). Furthermore, Christie (2000) argues that social distance is also of importance for the interpretation of an act as crime. Distance increases the tendency to interpret something as crime. In other situations, for example within the family sphere, an act wouldn't be seen as a crime or the person as criminal (Christie 2000:22). Getting in contact with ex-convicts might thus reduce prejudices and make people more tolerant towards ex-convicts. Geographer Valentine, however, points to the difference between proximity and integration and notes that living together doesn't necessarily mean that a meaningful relation is established (Valentine 2008:323). Valentine's work mainly focuses on the integration of different ethnic groups, and contact between minorities and majorities, but in her analysis she also mentions examples of other minorities like deaf people or homosexuals. Valentine's analysis could be useful when looking at the integration of prisoners. Previous conviction often leads to stigmatisation. Does subsequent contact between ex-prisoners and a community really reduce prejudice?

Although Valentine's critique of the contact theory is mostly based on the urban context, where people might live together and meet each other at some point, but do not establish a meaningful relationship, she makes another point which is also of importance in Pension Skejby. According to her research, having a positive experience with someone of a minority does not necessarily change the opinion towards the whole group. When looking at the reintegration of convicts, it is fruitful to look at what kind of contact takes place and how bonds are established as well. Valentine states that when looking at contact we need to look more precisely at what kind of contact is sought, by whom, and see that the same contact might be perceived differently by different groups or individuals. She also points to the intersectionality of multiple identities, and the fact that encounters are embedded within grids of power (Valentine 2008:332). In the case of ex-convicts' reintegration this means that the division between ex-convict and 'other citizens' is maybe too simple, because of the different roles someone has in different situations. Besides that, someone's personal identity does not have to coincide with the way one is perceived. Even though one might

not see himself as an 'ex-convict', but rather as a student, worker or father, when a clean criminal record is asked when applying for a job, different identities might conflict. The idea of stigmatisation and the importance of categorisation in the construction of identity might be criticised by the notion of self-identification and fluid identities. However, I follow Jenkins in this, others still set the boundaries that construct the limits of identity. I focus on how these boundaries are constructed and the roles of social relations in the stretching of these boundaries.

Strong social bonds with people from the conventional society are important in the process of reintegration, and also decrease the feeling of the former prisoner to be socially stigmatised by mainstream society. Group identification and strong social bonds with other ex-convicts on the other hand, increase the feeling of stigmatisation (Lebel 2012). Uggen et al. emphasize the idea that role commitments, for example work, family or citizen roles are important for the desistance from crime. According to them, skill training and role commitments must begin before release from prison, to help inmates with anticipatory socialisation (Uggen et al. 2004). However, as shown earlier, it is hard to work on this within an institutional setting. Increasing family contact may be a way to provide people with a more positive role while being imprisoned.

## Research context

“Don’t throw away the key”<sup>5</sup> reads the headline of an opinion article in the Danish newspaper *Information*. It states that over the last 15-20 years there has been growing attention for security and control in Danish prisons and resocialisation has become seen as an offer, instead of a right. Another headline states: “Those who are punished hardest, are released without supervision”.<sup>6</sup> According to John Hatting, headman of the Danish Prisons Association, 55 percent of the people in closed prison are denied parole. However, a direct transition from prison to freedom is asking for trouble, he says, since prisoners lose healthy ways of responding in prison. Eva Smith, from the Danish Crime Prevention Council sees a transition in which we used to look inclusively at prisoners as citizens, to a new belief in which we exclude them. She says this is a ‘pricey attitude’, when you look at social accounts. In another article<sup>7</sup> Kim Østerbye, from the Danish Prison Association opposes suggestions to privatise the prison system and divide the tasks of rehabilitation and control between different parties: “The rehabilitation of offenders in Denmark would be much worse. There will be a ‘them and us’ culture. The focus will be profit”, he says.

In Denmark, discussions about the prison system are part of a public debate. In this chapter, I will place Pension Skejby in the context of the Danish penal system. To do so, I first describe the Danish penal system, and show how it has changed over time. Then I will give background information on my research location: Pension Skejby, a Danish halfway house, part of the Danish Prison and Probation Service, Kriminalforsorgen. I will review the history and structure of the house, as well as earlier research on the place.

### **The Danish penal system**

Scandinavian countries are often portrayed as progressive and free, this also seems to be reflected in their criminal justice system. John Pratt introduced the idea of ‘Scandinavian exceptionalism’, and sought for an explanation for diverging trends in punishment worldwide. This exceptionalism is, according to Pratt, based on two properties of the Scandinavian context: the lower rates of incarceration in Scandinavia, and the humane prison conditions. He traces the system back to the specific historical roots of the region (Pratt 2008:119). Equality is often seen as one of the most important values in the region. According to Christie (2000) a feeling of ‘sameness’ can act as a barrier against excessive and stigmatizing punishment. Whereas in hierarchical societies capital punishment often was a display of power of the ruling classes, in societies with less rigid class

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<sup>5</sup> Abrahamsen, S. 2014. Smid ikke nøglen væk. *Information*, April 25. Online available at: <http://www.information.dk/495235>

<sup>6</sup> Richter, L. 2010 Hårdest straffede løslades uden tilsyn. *Information*, July 13. Online available at: <http://www.information.dk/238946>

<sup>7</sup> Thieman, P. 2013 Danske fængsler er dyre i drift. *Politiken*, June 12. Online available at: <http://politiken.dk/indland/ECE1995576/danske-faengsler-er-dyre-i-drift/>

divisions punishment would not play that role (Pratt 2007:129). Although Pratt did his research in Sweden and Norway, the Danish penal regime seems similar to the systems he described (Nielsen 2012:136). The Danish penal regime is based on egalitarian values and ideals, and ideally punishment should only be the deprivation of liberty. Rehabilitation was introduced in the Danish Penal Code in 1930. In 1967 Lars Nordskove Nielsen became head of the Danish Prison and Probation service and introduced the idea of 'normalisation'. The idea is that life in prison should, as far as possible, resemble life outside (Engbo 2005 in Nielsen 2012:136). A decade later, in 1977, a report on the 'Alternatives to incarceration' was released and different initiatives for community sentencing as alternatives to incarceration were launched. However, the global trend towards tougher punishment can also be seen in Denmark. Whereas rehabilitation and normalisation were important values in the seventies, around the turn of the century more retributive values became prominent. During the election campaign in 2001, justice policy played an important role. The political right won the elections and emphasised the need to reinforce people's sense of justice and security. The sentence time for crimes was increased, and more people were sentenced. Balvig notes that we should place the changes in the Danish penal system within the general trend of increased sentencing. What is exceptional about Denmark is that the shift came late and is evolving slowly. Balvig explains this with three factors. First of all ideas about the welfare state are deeply rooted in the Danish political system, and find support under both left- and right-wing parties. On top of that, the people of the administrative power in the Danish criminal justice system are socialised in the modern paradigm, and were part of creating and implementing it. Also, relations between politicians specialised in criminal justice, and criminal justice experts in the university, where the modern paradigm is still dominant, are closer and more frequent than in other countries.

The changing perception of rehabilitation, in which the offender's responsibility 'will to change' are important, can also be seen in Denmark. Nielsen notes the difference between penal ideas and practices. Her research in a Danish open prison shows that although the material conditions might be good and the levels of imprisonment low, the system poses new challenges to its inmates, revealed by a lack of clarity. Not all prisoners are equally strategic or competent to make use of the possibilities of the system, for example the possibility for earlier release by showing good intentions (Nielsen 2012:139). Scandinavian exceptionalism thus should not be idealised. Both utilitarianism and retributivism play a role in the Danish prison system. Whereas there has been a demand from the population and political parties to make the system more retributive, this has only happened in a moderate way.

Despite the fact that crime policies have become stricter, some of the ideals of normalisation are still reflected in the Danish prison system. This is visible in the existence of open prisons, and the

possibility for Danish convicts to spend part of their sentence in an institution other than a prison. In that case they are mostly assigned to one of Denmark's six halfway houses (a seventh house is going to be built in North Jutland between 2013 and 2016). Halfway houses are residential places where convicts can spend the last part of their sentence. The goal usually is reintegrating the convict back into the community (Minke 2011:81).

### **Pension Skejby**

Pension Skejby is one of Denmark's six halfway houses, located six kilometres north of the city centre of Aarhus, Denmark's second largest city. The house was built just outside of the city, but as urban growth took place, the house became located in between a residential area and an industrial area with companies and big warehouses, such as Ikea. The halfway house differs fundamentally in its approach from other halfway houses because convicts live with non-convicts. There are twenty-five places in the house, of which forty percent is obtained by non-convicts, mostly students. The motivation behind this is the idea that social environment is an important factor in the desistance from crime, and that non-convicts will influence the convicts in a positive way and teach them conventional norms. The house was built in 1969, as a conventional correctional facility for youth, four years later a social experiment started in which half of the residents were replaced by youth without a criminal sentence. Later the pension changed into a pension for all ages.

The mixing principle is inspired by a study of the Danish Army in which the influence of environment interaction was studied. In this study the conscripts were divided into different social categories: the socially fit, the socially less fit, and the socially unfit. The result of the study showed that when socially unfit people were placed into a group with socially fit people this influenced them positively and there were less behavioural problems. The effect of different pedagogical environments was also tested and it was found that there were more behavioural infractions in a restrictive environment. For the Danish prison system the outcomes of this research meant two things, the recommendations were made that: where possible prisons should be exchanged by social institutions, and it could be beneficial to house socially unfit people with socially fit people (Rieneck et al. 1970 in Minke 2011:83).

The convicts usually move into the house in the last part of their sentence. Ideally they stay at least a year, but in practice many only get to stay the last few months of their sentence in the house. The selection of the convicts is made on several criteria; the type of crime committed, the prison they are in, their age, and the length of their sentence. To prevent group forming, the ideal is to mix different types of crimes, ages, and take people from different prisons. Among the inhabitants are people sentenced for drug related cases, economic crimes, (attempt to) manslaughter, murder

and sex related crimes. The convicts apply to live in the house mostly because of geographical proximity to family, work or education. The non-convicts have often heard from the house through friends or in school, and move in for different reasons; an interest to meet different people, the location of the house, looking for shared housing, cheap rent, or a combination of those factors.<sup>8</sup> With the selection it is taken into account that there are not too many inhabitants that are friends beforehand, that there is a spread in the type of education, and that they are willing to engage in the social requirements of the house, for example to participate in the weekly group meetings.<sup>9</sup> Although there are no age requirements, in reality most of the non-convicts are students. To live in the house one has to have an occupation, either studying or working. Those who do not have an occupation, work in the house and perform a daily routine of cleaning the floors, maintaining the terrain and buying fruit for the house.

The people who are living in the house because they are serving their sentence are called 'plusbeboere' [plus inhabitants] and the people without a criminal record living in the house are called 'minusbeboere' [minus inhabitants]. It could be said that when working towards social integration, making a distinction between the two groups could work counterproductive. The reasoning behind this distinction is that there is a difference between the two groups. The terms under which the plus and the minusbeboere are living in the house are different, because the plusbeboere are clients and have different rules and different contact with the staff and other institutions. Knudsen (1984) argues in her research that by recognizing difference it is possible to work with it. Next to the client/non-client distinction there is also a difference in the label society puts on the plusbeboere, and the possibility that the plusbeboere have a criminal identity when they move in (Knudsen 1984:43).

There are twenty five places in the house, divided over rooms of eight square meters, as well as three fourteen square meter rooms that have their own bathrooms, and an apartment. The apartment can be used for plusbeboere moving in with a family, during the time of my research a family with two young girls lived in the apartment. The house is divided into four groups containing convicts and non-convicts, and linked to two or three staff members. Within the groups there is joint responsibility for taking care of grocery shopping, cooking and cleaning. The members of the group hold a meeting once a week, in which they talk about their week, get possible information from the office, discuss problems, deal with the group budget and divide the tasks for the next week. Every other week the whole house comes together in a meeting to discuss general issues of the house and new applicants.

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<sup>8</sup> Semi-structured with minusbeboere, informal conversations

<sup>9</sup> Semi-structured interview with staff member Ella, 30-03-2014

### *Earlier research*

Sociologist Minke did a qualitative and quantitative study of the house and concluded several things: Firstly, there is less of a negative attitude among the inhabitants towards the staff because the non-convicts live voluntarily in the house, and they do not share the same negative experiences with the prison system. This prevents an 'us versus them' culture. Secondly, the convicts learn new ways of behaving by living with the non-convicts, this happens through informal social control in daily interaction. Non-criminal norms are strengthened by this, and criminal-norms disappear. The daily interaction also means that the convicts are seen as something more than just what they are convicted for. Thirdly the non-convicts are not influenced in a negative way by living with convicts, and their opinion towards convicts gets more nuanced and less prejudiced (Minke 2006:101). In the quantitative part of the study transgression analysis was used to compare the recidivism rates of inhabitants of Pension Skejby with other halfway houses with comparable situations. She concludes that the probability of recidivism is 21.1% lower for convicts who have stayed at Pension Skejby (Minke 2011:92). What causes this difference? Minke concludes in her research that different factors are interrelated and it is difficult to know whether the mixing of convicts and non-convicts is the cause of the positive effects, the pedagogical environment of the house, or the engaged staff and director (Minke 2011:97). Given the literature about prisonisation, group forming and the difficulties of rehabilitation within an institutional setting, it is interesting to look at Pension Skejby and see how these processes work within the house. Is there a possibility for 'deprisonisation'? How are the positive results Minke found to be explained? What is happening exactly between the convicts and non-convicts? Does mere living together result in positive effects, or is social integration needed? How do people give meaning to their relationship with the other residents of Pension Skejby, and to which extent do they get socially integrated? Valentine probes that knowing someone of a minority group and having a positive experience does not necessarily mean a positive attitude towards the whole group (Valentine 2008:332). Does the contact between non-convicts and convicts help against stigmatisation? And how does the contact influence both groups?

## More than a prisoner

I remember the first day I visited the house, before I moved in. Klaus, the vice-director gave me a tour through the house, passing the long and dark hallways where the bedrooms are, the big and spacious living room with long wooden tables, connected to four large kitchen blocks, ending in a light room with glass walls, where sofas, high tables with bar chairs, and a grand piano were placed. We walked outside and he showed me the little houses on the terrain; a music room, a room with paintings, a glass workplace, a computer space, and a metal workplace. Then I was left by myself. I walked through the house for a bit, it was around four o'clock and the house slowly started filling up with people. I chatted with some people in the living room, about their day and their school, and I remember having no idea who was convict and who wasn't. Some people prepared dinner, some were studying or hanging around in the kitchen and there was not a single feeling of fear or aggression. I couldn't help thinking: why does it feel so normal here?

If prisonisation is inherent to all institutions of confinement (Bondeson 1989), then why does a culture of criminalisation seem absent in Pension Skejby? This chapter focuses on group processes within the house. Taking into account different authors who have stated that confinement leads to criminalisation rather than rehabilitation (Bondeson 1989, 1994, Mathieson 2000), I will show why this process does not take place within the house. I will explain this by looking at the relationship between the staff and the inhabitants, and looking at how contact between plus and minusbeboere<sup>10</sup> reduces stigmatisation and gives the plusbeboere the possibility to take on new roles.

### **Staff-inhabitant relationships**

Prisonisation often happens in a process in which the prisoners oppose themselves to the staff, and create their own group as a way to deal with the difficulties of imprisonment. According to Bondeson, even when the material conditions of imprisonment are not that bad, the social atmosphere in correctional institutions fosters a negative attitude towards the staff. Although some might experience the institution and the staff as positive, the social atmosphere prevents them from showing this, because it is perceived to be the group norm to be against the staff (Bondeson 1994:174). These general norms among the prisoners counteract possibilities for rehabilitation. In Pension Skejby the general attitude towards the staff is not negative. One of the reasons for this is the presence of the minusbeboere, who do not have a reason for a negative attitude towards the

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<sup>10</sup> I will use the terms 'plusbeboere' and 'minusbeboere', for the convicts and non-convicts, as they are used in the house. Although these categories are not always relevant; there is not 'one group of prisoners', just as there is no 'one group of non-prisoners', and, I will show sometimes other categories are more important. I will, however, distinct between the two groups in this thesis to clarify the position of the participants to the reader.

staff. This prevents a general negative attitude towards the staff within the house (Minke 2006). According to Laura, a minusbeboer, she has a different relationship with the staff, than many of the plusbeboere: *“I don’t see them as much as an authority as the plusbeboere. I think that maybe as a minusbeboer, I have a more relaxed relationship with them than many plusbeboere have, because they are the system to the plusbeboere”*.<sup>11</sup> However, also between the plusbeboere and the staff the contact in daily life is friendly and informal. Sometimes people come back to the house after they are released to visit friends. One evening Jonas, who used to live in the house as a plusbeboer, is visiting. He is picking up Kasper, Anna and Sebastian, an old minusbeboer, to drive them to his housewarming. They hug each other and greet each other enthusiastically. *“How are you?” “So good to see you again” “It has been so long”*. Sofie from the staff walks in and asks how Jonas and Sebastian are doing and they make a little friendly and informal chat. Two days later Jonas is visiting again, together with some other old housemates to play poker. When he is leaving he ticks Sofie on her shoulder to say he is leaving, and they hug each other.

The friendly and informal contact between the staff and the inhabitants is exceptional. I talk about it with Ella, a staff member, she tells that she sees the relationship with the residents as quite personal, it is always nice to see old inhabitants again and good that they come back to visit friends in the house. When she started out working in the house she did not think she would hug someone who has killed someone. But she found the relationship with the residents more personal than she expected. *“You have to be willing to use yourself”*, she says, so people believe the staff does not do their work just for the money. This can have the form of exposing yourself to other people by telling something personal, or engaging in activities with the residents.<sup>12</sup> William, a plusbeboer confirms this: *“You have to give something from yourself, to get something back”*.<sup>13</sup> The staff also tells him about their personal problems, by doing that they get a better relationship. But there also has to be a balance, as Ella says: *“Sometimes you get very close to some residents and it is this balance about using yourself but not too much. Not being too private. And not to say stuff about yourself that our residents can use if they get mad at you or stuff like that”*.

#### *Power and possibilities to influence*

According to Mathieson negative attitudes towards the staff are fostered by a feeling of perceived stigmatisation and powerlessness (Mathieson 2000:50). The feeling of being able to influence your own situation is important in this case. The power structure within the Pension Skejby is relatively egalitarian, there is a framework of rules, but within that framework there is space for negotiation.

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<sup>11</sup> Semi-structured interview Laura 20-02-2014

<sup>12</sup> Semi-structured interview Ella 30-03-2014

<sup>13</sup> Fieldnotes, informal conversation with William 26-04-2014

On one hand this gives the staff power, since something can be allowed one day for one person, but denied the other day. On the other hand it gives the inhabitants the possibility to influence their situation. During the house meetings the inhabitants decide themselves about new purchases for the house, protest against a new inhabitant if they have a good reason to refuse someone, and talk about exceptions to the rules. For example, normally drinking alcohol in the public spaces is prohibited, but at some celebrations an exception is made. In this case the residents have to decide themselves during a house meeting what kind of alcohol will be allowed. Also in interviews, situations are recalled in which an exception to the rule was made because someone could give a good argument. Sykes describes how in prisons the refusal to provide an explanation for the regulations and commands from the staff involve a threat to the prisoners' self-image, because it provokes a feeling of helplessness and dependency (Sykes 1958:75). By making negotiation about rules possible, the staff at Pension Skejby has to reflect constantly on why a decision is made, rather than saying "The rule is the rule". Besides that, the policy of differentiation differs from a de-individualizing approach that can be seen in prisons. Goffman describes how role dispossessions take place in institutions, by which the individual gets stripped from his individual identity (Goffman 1982:21). Being seen as an individual for whom sometimes different rules apply than for others gives people the possibility to focus more on their own identity, rather than taking on an 'inmate identity'.

### *We are not that different*

Besides that, the difference between the staff and inhabitants is marked less clearly. Not only is it difficult to see who is plus or minus, informants also tell stories of confusing the staff with plusbeboere. Andreas, a minusbeboer tells about his experience of things he learned when he just moved in: *"Like cleaning and where stuff is, and who is employed and who is just living here, because a lot of the plus and the staff are the same age so it is kind of hard to tell"*.<sup>14</sup> Goffman gives the example of the shifting of roles in a totalitarian institution, when clients are taken for staff members and manage to keep up that role for a while. He explains these kinds of anecdotes as a way to show how thin the line is between client and staff member, and that in the world outside the institution the roles might have been different. According to Goffman one of the most important achievements of the totalitarian institution is making a difference between two constructed categories of persons, a social difference on a moral basis, of one's own personality and the other's, for example the difference between prisoners and guards (Goffman 1982:88). In Pension Skejby the difference between the staff, the plus and the minusbeboere is played out less, the staff – without uniforms – does not play a leading role in the house- and group meetings.

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<sup>14</sup> Semi-structured interview Andreas 06-03-2014

One day a group of prison guards gets a tour through the house. I am standing in the kitchen with Erik and we are looking at them from a distance. He shows his disgust of the prison guards, who according to him are ‘trained not to be human’. In the house he has a good relation with the staff, because of their different education as social worker or pedagogue, rather than guard, he says. He speaks with them, whereas in prison he would never speak with the guards. Talking with the staff is unusual in the setting of a prison, where contact with the staff is often kept to a minimum. Minke (2014) describes how half of the prisoners in her research had rarely (once a month or less) talked with a prison guard for at least ten minutes, although a third expressed the wish to have more social contact with the guards (Minke 2014:40).

### **Plus and minus**

#### *A friendly atmosphere*

It is Sunday and we are having dinner with everyone who is home. I’m sitting at the end of the dinner table with a few minusbeboere, and Lars, a plusbeboer who moved in a few days ago. “Are you all happy to live here?”, Lars asks. They all say there are really happy to live in the house. “That is what everyone has told me so far,” Lars says. He continues: “There is such a good atmosphere in the house, everyone is so quiet and happy. Every time I come down to the kitchen I can have a chat with someone or a coffee”. Emil, a minusbeboer notes that there is a difference between the culture in prison and the culture in the house, which resembles more a student culture. On the other hand it is also not a student culture with parties every night, not because of any rules, but just the way it goes. “Maybe also because in prison the doors close at nine?” he wonders. In the house most people go to their rooms around ten, although there are often still some people in the living room. Lars comments: “It is special to see how good everything is functioning, and arranged in the house, and that everything works so well.”<sup>15</sup>

All informants say that the atmosphere in the house would be different if there were no minusbeboere: ‘then it would be just like prison here’, Erik, a plusbeboer says. There would be prison talk and a prison culture, seen for example in the way people speak to each other, and status would be important.<sup>16</sup> I am surprised that I do hear people talking about crime or life in prison quite regularly. I discuss this with Erik and he says there is a big difference between talking about ‘doing crime’ and talking about ‘having done crime’.<sup>17</sup> People’s sentence is a big part of their recent history, so it makes sense that imprisonment is a conversation topic. However, people do not brag about it in the pension and most conversations are about something else.

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<sup>15</sup> Fieldnotes, conversation translated from Danish 30-03-2014

<sup>16</sup> Informal conversation with Erik 05-03-2014

<sup>17</sup> Semi-structured interview Erik 10-03-2014

During the day it is often quiet in the house as most people get up early to go to work or school. Around four o'clock the house starts to fill up with people again, and preparations are made for dinner. In each group people take turns in cooking, but often more people hang around in the kitchen to talk or help with cooking. After dinner some go to their room, others watch TV, see a movie or play a game. The extent to which plus- and minusbeboere mix in activities differs, also because of differences in interest. Relationships in the house are mostly based on common interest, for example doing the same sports or study, rather than the distinction between plus or minus. This corresponds to the thesis that other dimensions of categorisation can overlay the distinction between two groups (Brown 2000:345). A lot of the inhabitants say that they could not see who was plus and who was minus when they moved in. In daily life all participants say that it does not matter if someone is plus or minus. As Laura, a minusbeboer explains: *"I always know who is plus and minus, but I can't always remember what their crime was. It's nothing I think about"*.<sup>18</sup> During interviews several informants confused the terms plus and minus, this might indicate that there is no negative connotation attached to the term 'plusbeboere', but the terms are interchangeable, they just mark a distinction between the different groups in the house.

Both plusbeboere as minusbeboere express the fear that the minusbeboere might have to leave, with the reorganisation of the Danish Prison and Probation Service [Kriminalforsorgen]. Although it is cheaper to have a plusbeboer in the pension than in prison, the minusbeboere take up half of the space that could be used by prisoners. This fear is not new, the house has always had an 'experiment status'. When Pia Knudsen evaluated the house in 1984 the house existed for ten years and it was not sure if the pension would be maintained in the future (Knudsen 1984:194). The fear for reorganisation creates a form of group bonding within the house, since also the plusbeboere express that it would be bad if the minusbeboere had to leave.

### *Being more than 'a criminal'*

Different than in situations outside of the house, having committed a crime is relatively normal within the house. On the other hand it also does not give status, like in prison. The process of prisonisation in prison influences people's identity and self-perception, since identity is shaped by the way one defines himself and is defined by others. Lucas, a plusbeboer, explains the feeling of being disintegrated while being in prison.

I think I didn't see myself as a part of society, yes, not really. Because it is like being on an island. You are the leftovers and you are the disintegrated. You are the marked ones, left. And you know, society takes a stand and says we don't want you and that is why

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<sup>18</sup> Semi-structured interview Laura 20-02-2014

you get to be where you are, you get to be in prison. And when you get a label like that a lot of people would have a reaction going: well, okay I don't want [to have] anything to do with you as well.<sup>19</sup>

The process of prisonisation enlarges the (perceived) differences between prisoners and the general population. According to Lucas, many people in prison expressed negative sentiments towards the system. McCorkle and Korn state that imprisonment implies the rejection of the prisoners as members of society, which is consequently met by a reaction from the prisoners to 'reject their rejectors', to avoid the devastating psychological effect of social rejection (McCorkle and Korn 1954:95). Having the label of 'criminal' and feeling like a criminal reduces the chances for rehabilitation. Identity is fluent and subjected to changes, but others are part of defining what is possible to imagine yourself as and what is not. Longstanding contact between groups can produce mutual shifts in identification (Jenkins 2000:21). Living in a place where previous conviction does not seem to matter, like the pension, creates the possibility to take on other roles, and thereby the boundaries of identity can be stretched. Frederik explains how outside of the house his own identity sometimes conflicts with prejudices. He expresses frustration about getting rejected at job applications because of his criminal record. *"I'm registered that I have killed a man, it is ok", he says. But he thinks employers should not look at it when he applies for a job, "because that is not the man you are anyway. It is not the man I am. I am never going to kill a man again".*<sup>20</sup> Within the house he experiences acceptance, he has the possibility to take on the role of a good friend, an organiser, a caretaker of the children in the house, and being someone who takes initiative.

William has a long history of imprisonment, starting when he was a teenager. In prison he got recognition because he 'could hit hard'. Within the house he turns out to bring a lot of positive new energy. He has been a cook all his life, and takes the initiative to make dinner for the house in the weekends. Also when others are cooking they ask him for help to make a sauce, or use a certain herb, and he is happy to help. Being in a very non-aggressive environment gives him the possibility to play another role, and show his soft side; being a cook and giving advice to the younger people in the house. He is in his fifties and does not need to learn much anymore, he says. But indirectly, by teaching other people something he is changing his own behaviour.

Being convicted does not attract attention in the house, whereas outside a criminal record still forms a barrier to a normal life. Frederik explains how he experiences that, when looking for work or housing.

When you get out of prison in Denmark even though people are saying: oh a prisoner should have a second chance, a prisoner should have work, an apartment. Yeah that is

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<sup>19</sup> Semi-structured interview Lucas 14-04-2014

<sup>20</sup> Semi-structured interview Frederik 06-03-2014

right but just not the work where I work, not an apartment next to me. So it's so, excuse my words, fucked up. Because they are still judging us.<sup>21</sup>

This highlights the fact that reintegration has to come from two sides, both from the person coming from prison as from the society. Contact between the plus- and the minusbeboere leads to changes in perspective. Victor, a plusbeboer experienced that within the house he does not get judged for his conviction.

Maybe I learned that some people that haven't done any crime in their life, are not always judging you on what you have done. And that tells a lot about who they are. And not judging you, saying you are a bad person because you have done crime. But they look at you the way you are and not what you have done.<sup>22</sup>

### *Challenging prejudices and stereotypes*

If intergroup contact should lead to less prejudices, both groups should have equal status within the situation (Allport 1954)<sup>23</sup>. Although it could be said that the minusbeboere have an advantage over the plusbeboere because of their social position in society, in house meetings or discussions plus- and minusbeboere have an equal vote, and they take on equal responsibilities. Minusbeboere say that they learned that you often cannot see who is convicted or not. Convicted people are also 'normal people'. Andreas, a minusbeboer, tells how he developed by living in the house:

I think it is a way to be more tolerant around other people because you have to deal with that some people have killed another man or robbed a bank. And you don't have to do that in a normal everyday life, if you don't live here. [...]I think it is both exciting and also a bit difficult. Because it is something I'm not used to.<sup>24</sup>

Andreas describes how by living in the house he experiences the direct encounter with convicts, something he would not have experienced when living somewhere else. Later on in the interview he tells that living in the house did not challenge his ideas about convicts, since that was already quite moderate, but by living in the house he could confirm the ideas he had beforehand. Minusbeboere also describe how they got a greater understanding of different people they would not have met otherwise. Besides that, they learn to look more critically at the picture painted in the media. 'I

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<sup>21</sup> Semi-structured interview Frederik 06-03-2014

<sup>22</sup> Semi-structured interview Victor 03-03-2014

<sup>23</sup> Some researchers also stress the importance of having an equal status from the beginning (see for example Brewer and Kramer 1985). However, this is not a very workable definition, because if the status between two groups has to be more or less equal from the beginning, the contact theory would not apply to most cases of contact with disadvantaged groups, since being stigmatized already assumes a lower status.

<sup>24</sup> Semi-structured interview Andreas 06-03-2014

learned that every story has two sides', Johan tells.<sup>25</sup> He thinks the truth often lies in the middle, of what he hears from people themselves and what he reads on the internet. Also their friends and family change their perspectives of what prisoners are like, as Anna said:

I've had friends who were a little bit nervous to come here. Mostly the husbands were afraid for the wives to come visit here. 'Is it dangerous?' 'They should lock the door.' 'What have they done?' 'Is there a lot of violence?' They don't know what it is. It is so funny, because just on the other side of the road there is a firm where there is a big fence, and everybody thinks that's the prison. So when they come here [they see] ooh okay, this is normal, this could be anything.<sup>26</sup>

Living together in Pension Skejby changes the perception of the prisoners in the house and challenges stereotypes. But to what extent can experiences within the house be generalised to prisoners in general? To get a more positive view of the whole prison population they have to believe that the prisoners they meet are representative for the general prison population. Often it was said that *'Not everybody gets to be here, it is only the best prisoners that get here. Those who want to change'*. This indicates that although people have positive experiences with the prisoners they get to know in the house, it does not change their overall perspective of prisoners. However, living together at least gives them a more nuanced view and a more open approach to prisoners as a whole, with a deeper understanding of the problems prisoners face. In that way the encounter of the plus- and the minusbeboere in Pension Skejby is likely to be influential beyond the direct contacts in the house as well.

### **Summing up**

Prisonisation often takes place in a process in which the convicts clash with the staff or the institution. It is used as a mode of adapting to prison life to make it easier to serve time, to prevent a feeling of dependency. In Pension Skejby this process does not occur. The plusbeboere and the minusbeboere create the atmosphere in the house together, within the settings of a soft pedagogical climate. Different informants say that the atmosphere in the house is different because non-convicted people also live there, so there is no hierarchy, and people do not discuss crime all day. The contact between the two groups leads to mutual understanding and the reduction of stereotypes. People integrate with each other towards different extents, not everybody gets close contacts. The possibility however of being seen for something else than a 'prisoner', opens up space to take on new roles. The possibility to be valued for your skills, knowledge or personality influences the way people act and think about themselves. The situation in the house is radically different from

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<sup>25</sup> Semi-structured interview Johan 27-02-2014

<sup>26</sup> Semi-structured interview Anna 18-02-2014

the circumstances in prison, where there is a clear distinction between the staff and the inmates. Besides that, it differs from the post-release situation outside of the house, where most people have a less open approach towards (ex)convicts. I have explained why a process of prisonisation is towards a high degree absent in the house. In the next chapter I will look at the process of reintegration and show how the process of deculturation is counteracted in the house, as new skills are acquired.

## From prison to society

There is an extensive body of literature on imprisonment and post-release experiences. There are, however, few qualitative studies about the experience of living in a half-way house. This chapter focuses on the process of resocialisation within the context of Pension Skejby. First I will look at the position of the Pension, and show how the house is experienced as 'in between' the prison and society. By telling the stories from different plusbeboere I aim at showing the diverse experiences of living in the house. Then I will focus on the learning of skills to counteract the process of deculturation – the loss of habits required in the larger society – from former imprisonment.

### **Prison but non-prison**

Being in the house is characterised by an ambiguity between freedom and confinement. For Sarah, being in the house is different from the prison where she spent the last four years. There she could only go outside one hour a day, and the staff decided when. Here she feels like she can go everywhere. She has to get used to the new environment. It feels strange to be able to walk to the supermarket, and have so much freedom. But it still feels like prison.

For me it is a prison, you know because I don't choose to be there. If I could choose I would be at home with my husband and just relax, see my parents and his parents and family. [...] Yeah and for some people who choose to be here it looks very nice and they enjoy it a lot to be here. But for me in this moment this is not the place for me, maybe eight years ago I would have enjoyed it.<sup>27</sup>

Next to wanting to be with her family she also faces physical problems such as back pains, and she worries about her sentence. It is difficult to engage in the social life of the house, while she has little energy. Being in prison made her lose trust in people. Before imprisonment she believed that others would always help her, but in prison she experienced many difficulties with the system. For Lucas the balance between being free and being in prison is difficult. He likes being in the house because he has more freedom. But he also finds it difficult to be so close to his family, but still having to be back at the Pension every night. The staff wants him to spend time in the house, but all he wants to do is leave. The ambiguity between freedom and confinement is one of the 'new pains of imprisonment' in open prisons (Shammas 2014:113). The closer you are to freedom, the more frustrating the boundaries to that freedom can be. Lucas has acquired responsibility, but he feels like he has to make the decisions that the staff wants him to make.

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<sup>27</sup> Fieldnotes, informal conversation Sara 10-03-2014

There is a different kind of power here, they use soft power. But you can still feel it is there, it always underlies, they could take away privileges. For example the privilege of being in this place.<sup>28</sup>

As much as the house looks like a very free and liberal place, it is always possible to get sent back to prison. All inhabitants can name people who have been sent back. When someone breaks the rules, for example by using drugs, the staff has to make a judgement whether someone is allowed to stay in the house. Usually people get a second chance. When someone is sent back there is no moment of goodbye; the person is picked up or brought back straight away.<sup>29</sup> Although the Pension resides in a normal neighbourhood, at the outskirts of the city, in that way it can feel close to prison as well. According to Erik, living in the house is harder than in prison, because you have a lot to lose.

You lose your face if you go crazy here. You cannot go back. So it is pretty much harder to be here than in an open prison and definitely than to be in a closed prison because in a closed prison in the special security section there is no way back, you can't go further back. Here you can go way back, a lot of steps back. [...] So that is why it can be very hard to be here.<sup>30</sup>

However, he does see living in the house as valuable, because he is likely to encounter the same situation upon release.

You have to think about what you do all the time. But this is a kind of learning. It is the same in the community when you get out.<sup>31</sup>

Johns describes the process of post-release as a *liminal phase*, the prisoner has moved away from his old habits, but is still not fully integrated into society yet (Johns 2010). Pension Skejby can be placed within this process of release; although the inhabitants stay in the house as part of their sentence, it is part of a re-integration trajectory. In the pension this feeling of liminality can be observed, as well. For example in Lucas' negotiation with the staff about the time he can spend at home, and the time he has to spend in the house. He says: "*I have to remind myself that I'm still serving time*".

Leaving the prison might provoke a feeling of estrangement; the prisoner has to adapt to a new

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<sup>28</sup> Fieldnotes, informal conversation Lucas 14-04-2014

<sup>29</sup> During the three months I did research in the house, one person got sent back to prison because of drugs use, and another person who living in the house voluntarily after his release, left the house and could not come back because of intolerable behaviour.

<sup>30</sup> Semi-structured interview Erik 10-03-2014

<sup>31</sup> Semi-structured interview Erik 10-03-2014

environment. Frederik, a former plusbeboer<sup>32</sup> tells how he feels like society has changed while he was in prison, internet became widespread and the use of phones grew explosively.

There is so much else going on in society. So the society changes and you are just ... when you are in prison you are just standing still from how you were in the society when you were coming in. So something is really new. Some situations have been a little difficult for me because it didn't used to be like that.<sup>33</sup>

The feeling of estrangement, because things in society have changed Frederik describes, forms an extra barrier to reintegration, together with different skills and behaviour needed in prison and in society. Pension Skejby provides in that case an 'in between solution', to get used to a new environment. Although they live in the house as a part of their sentence, participants also describe the house as a form of bofaelleskab [flat-sharing community] or a kollektiv [commune]. Frederik decided to stay living in the house after his release because he thinks the house helps him in the transition from prison to society, because he is not used to being alone anymore.

It is not a prison [...],but it's a sort of a 'kollektiv' and in a better way because [...] when you go out of your room, you can still talk to people, and there are always one in the kitchen or in the living room, always someone you can talk to, so you are not alone. And that is very important for me right now, in the state I'm in. Because there have been people around me for so many years, so that is one of the reasons why I'm staying here.<sup>34</sup>

Also others decided to stay after they got released, because they want to find a good job first, finish their education, or a find place to live.

### **New habits**

Being in the house requires a new daily routine. For some of the inhabitants life in the house is very different from the life they were used to. Daily practices and habits influence one's 'sense of the self' (Jenkins 2000:11). A different way of living also influences someone's sense of how to act and respond in daily life. Erik used to live in a criminal circuit, but in prison he started to attend an art school in Aarhus, and he continued to make art at the pension. *"And also I think the art and the art school... I changed my way of living totally. Totally. From one extreme to another extreme. That is me"*. Astrid never lived a criminal life, but came from a difficult environment. One of the guards at the jail helped her to apply for a place at the pension.

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<sup>32</sup> Frederik decided to stay living in the house after his sentence was officially finished. Sometimes both the inhabitant as the personal regard it better to stay a bit longer after a sentence is done. This means the inhabit is no longer a plusbeboer, but not a minusbeboer either.

<sup>33</sup> Semi-structured interview Frederik 06-03-2014

<sup>34</sup> Semi-structured interview Frederik 06-03-2014

She said it was the best place for me, because here are people here who have not been in prison before and haven't been a bad person in that way. And that could maybe help me to change the circle that I always have been in. And it did. *How does that work you think?* Because you are with people who are living normal life. And you just come from a 'milieu' [...] [where] you just hear every single time all the violence and you are so tired of it.<sup>35</sup>

For others, being at the pension is also a place to learn how to live with little money. Everyone pays 1200 kroner [approx. 160 Euro] to the group cash every month, from which breakfast, lunch and dinner are paid. Marcus often complains about the budget, he is used to having more money and buying luxury products.

These days where I have to cook I'm fucked stressed up the whole day, because I don't have the time for it, and I can't prepare a decent meal for 8 people for 200 kroner, come on, in my life that is not possible.<sup>36</sup>

Daily life at the pension is also different from life in prison, there is no strict schedule, except from responsibilities at work or school, or appointments with the group for dinner. The embodied experience of imprisonment leaves its marks: some plusbeboere appear tired, also because of physical problems such as back pains. To some, sounds like the clinging of keys trigger negative associations to imprisonment. Norms of imprisonment are internalised and expressed in daily behaviour and bodily postures. The social context of the house creates new habits and shapes new ways of behaviour.

### **Relearning skills and social behaviour**

Moving from a prison to the outside world requires a different set of skills and knowledge. For example the ability to engage in an open dialogue, the resolution of conflicts in a non-violent way and the development of trust (Halsey 2007:1258). Leavens speaks of a process of de-learning of old habits such as distrust, aggression and prison identification, and to relearn respect, trust, kindness, a citizen identification and seeing good intentions (Leavens 2007). Plusbeboere experience that in the house other skills are needed than in prison. They describe the prison as 'another world', 'a world in the world', with different behavioural manners. Lucas describes how prison differs from the life outside.

Well, in many ways it is a lot like life outside, just very intense, or with a lot of circumstances cut off, but that is more like in a philosophical way of thinking I think, because when you think more realistically about it, there is no resemblance to real life actually. Because the circumstances you are in, and the sociality of it and the environment is not at all like the rest

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<sup>35</sup> Semi-structured interview Astrid 23-02-2014

<sup>36</sup> Semi-structured interview Marcus 26-03-2014

of the world. It has a lot of rules, [...] You can't walk across the street, you have to, you are being very, yeah subjected, you are being a subject of other people, and in a much bigger way than you are in real life or the other life.<sup>37</sup>

Lucas describes how social life in prison is different, and also the feeling of having little responsibility and agency, by being subjected to other people. One of the things prisoners have to learn is to take responsibility again and organise a wide array of things themselves, which were arranged for them in prison. One of the ideas of the house is to give people responsibility, for example to make people responsible for cooking in the group, but also to give people the possibility to make decisions regarding the house in the house meetings. According to William, a plusbeboer, it is good that people first come to live in the house, rather than being released straight away. If you have been locked up for a long time and you could not decide anything about your food, your daily rhythm and could not talk with anyone normal it is difficult to make that transition. These different ways of behaving are mostly learned in the contact with other people. Frederik describes that the way of communicating is different in the house as in the prison.

When I was younger and when I just came here I got very angry and I was shouting all the time [...] Because if you said to one in the prison: "If you do that I'm really gonna pay you for this and it will not be fun". You can't do that here. [...] Here you have to talk about it. So it is a whole new world.<sup>38</sup>

Being in the house means having to negotiate over the standards of behaviour, since the plusbeboere and the minusboere, and also different individuals, have different reference frames. Erik describes how behaviour might be perceived different by the different groups.

So when people like us come from the prison to here, our standard in getting angry is much higher than you guys, who haven't been in prison. So when you feel threatened by a man who is yelling, maybe the man is not fucking 100 percent angry yet, but maybe you experience that, because your level is much lower.<sup>39</sup>

The plusbeboere describe how in the prison 'the one who hits the hardest' has the most power, whereas in the house everything has to be settled by talking. Both Erik and Frederik describe how they have always had the tendency to get angry easily, which means their angry behaviour might only be partly be attributed to the process of prisonisation, enlarged by the social settings in prison where aggression is valued.

Feeling like a prisoner influences the way (ex-)prisoners interact with others. One has to master explicit and implicit rules of behaviour, for example the duration of having eye contact with

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<sup>37</sup> Semi-structured interview Lucas 14-04-2014

<sup>38</sup> Semi-structured interview Frederik 06-03-2014

<sup>39</sup> Semi-structured interview Erik 10-03-2014

someone or that if someone walks into you this is not necessarily on purpose. Conspicuous stigma, stigma that is perceived as visible by others influences the behaviour of the (ex-)convict (Moran 2012). Having the feeling to be treated differently might then provoke negative reactions (Levens 2007:9). Frederik describes the perception that people could see that he came from prison made him wanting to avoid places with a lot of people, such as big supermarkets.

In the beginning, I came here and I did not like to go out to buy groceries because I didn't like to come in a big place like [...] Ikea because there are a lot of people and I had the feeling that everyone could see: oh my god he has killed a man. But they can't.<sup>40</sup>

Normal everyday interaction, for example while waiting in the cue at the supermarket was challenging, because he took everything personal. This view, combined with the behavioural responses he was used to from prison, could be problematic.

If I meet a person in the line in Footex or something and I think he is irritating me. I'll just aarh... like in prison, aaahrrrr, fuck off. Now I've learned if there is one irritating you like in the line, then you just aaah of course, there is nothing to be upset about because it is not personal. Before you took everything very personal.<sup>41</sup>

It has to be repeated that people experience imprisonment in a different way. For some people it is important to relearn social skills, for others the step from prison to society is not that big. As Victor explains:

I came [here] five weeks ago and I just started school in open prison seven months ago, so I went to school every day and saw ... and I was social with all my school students. I didn't talk about crime with them but talked about homework and school. So for me it is not so special, to go here.<sup>42</sup>

However, as shown in the previous chapter, he did say he learned that people do not always judge him for what he has done. In that way people get different things out of living in the house, practical skills, social skills, different perspectives, or closer contact with family members. In the process of rehabilitation all these factors are of importance.

Some minusbeboere express that they are glad to play a role in the process of resocialisation of the prisoners, also by just being in the house. Besides that, also the minusbeboere learn from living in the house. Because the composition of the house changes regularly, minusbeboere tell how they learn to deal with new people easily. Some minusbeboere also use their experiences of living in the house when applying for jobs, to show how they have learned to be flexible, take responsibility and know how to engage with people of different backgrounds.

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<sup>40</sup> Semi-structured interview Frederik 06-03-2014

<sup>41</sup> Semi-structured interview Frederik 06-03-2014

<sup>42</sup> Semi-structured interview Victor 06-03-2014

### *Explaining change*

I have shown how plusbeboere say their behaviour changes by living in the house. How to explain this change? As the plusbeboere say, the atmosphere in the house serves as a barrier for aggressive behaviour or rough talk, because there is 'no need to get angry'. The environment is of great influence on the way people behave. The minusbeboere do not see themselves as role models, they see it as their task to just live a normal life. They can provide an example by being in the house, but that does not necessarily have to be a good example, as Anna explains:

I think it's a lot of small things because they see that I also have problems. I'm not perfect, I can lose my job, I can flunk. Then they see, oh it isn't just them who have difficulties. It's normal to have difficulties.

Laura adds to that that she does not necessarily function as a role model, but she does see it as her task to show people a different perspective.

That is one of the reasons why I'm here, that, to tell them how I think about things, that I don't yell and scream about people who haven't emptied the dishwasher.

Most of the change in behaviour happens without verbal corrections, people adapt to the environment of the house. When people correct each other it usually regards cleaning tasks, but sometimes also behaviour. Karla comments on how she felt unpleasant by the way a plusbeboer was talking and using swearwords during the group meetings. *"I asked if he would like to say it nice and gently, and he said [...] [that] he says it gently and I said: no I don't feel that really".*<sup>43</sup> That led to an unpleasant situation, as her comment on his behaviour was not taken on and appreciated. This shows that not only plusbeboere have to adapt to minusbeboere, but common ground has to be sought on what is considered as the right way of behaving. Besides that, it is often the plusbeboere who express that something should be done differently, as Andreas explains:

So I think it is very good that we say things out loud when we are not happy about things. And I think that, especially many of the plus people are very good at saying if there is something they are mad about. *Especially the plus people?* Yeah I think so, but yeah maybe they are just used to say things more directly.<sup>44</sup>

Whereas some plusbeboere are more likely to make direct comments, for example on keeping the kitchen or the toilets clean, for others it is something they have to learn. Imprisonment has different effects on people, also seen in the different strategies people take on to survive in prison. One of the

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<sup>43</sup> Semi-structured interview Karla 19-03-2014

<sup>44</sup> Semi-structured interview Andreas 06-03-2014

strategies in prison is to retreat and engage in prison life as little as possible (Goffman 1982:53).

Laura tells about how she has seen a plusbeboer change after being in the house for a while:

He didn't dare to say anything in the beginning, at the meetings, also in the big meetings. Because he said that from prison he is used to that if you don't say anything and don't do anything they leave you alone and you don't get into trouble. But here you don't get into trouble, [...] and it took a while for him to learn that. But when he learned that he was always saying something at the meetings. That that was really nice to see. That they get out of these habits from prison as well.<sup>45</sup>

Not only the plusbeboere, but also the minusbeboere say that they get more confident to speak in the house meetings, and for example be a chairman of the meeting. Laura says: "*I learned how to say things at the meetings, and I noticed that I suddenly didn't think it was scary anymore*".<sup>46</sup> Saying something about someone's behaviour, like Karla did, also takes courage. One has to learn how to do this the right way. Karla comments on that:

I have been very open since I moved in here, and spoke to many people. But because I don't know them, and they don't know me it is also important to give it time. [...] I think more about how I say things and what I say.

She went on to say that she can be very direct, while sometimes it is better to say things more gently. This is something the minusbeboere, but also the plusbeboere learn after living in the house for a while.

### *Building trust*

Trust is named by the inhabitants as one of the most important values of the house. This is remarkable, since prisons can be characterised as low trust environments (Nielsen 2010) trust is one of the things prisoners have to relearn. Most minusbeboere say that being able to trust people is a prerequisite for them to live in the house. They do not want to feel unsafe, have to lock the door of their room, or watch their belongings the whole time. For the plusbeboere it takes time sometimes to get a feeling of trust. During the house meetings the policy regarding trust can be negotiated. Oscar, a plusbeboer suggested during one of the meetings<sup>47</sup> to let people sign a paper when borrowing the beamer to watch movies, since the last beamer got missing. This was met with resistance by other inhabitants and the staff, because trust is seen as important in the house, and letting people sign a paper would give a feeling of distrust. In a small house one person can have a great influence on the atmosphere and also on the feeling of trust. Both plus and minusbeboere

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<sup>45</sup> Semi-structured interview Laura 20-02-2014

<sup>46</sup> Informal conversation Laura 23-04-2014

<sup>47</sup> Fieldnotes, house meeting 12-03-2014

recall episodes in which someone lived in the house who provoked a feeling of distrust in many people. This had a negative influence on the atmosphere in the house.

### **Summing up**

Pension Skejby forms an 'in between' situation between prison and society. Both feeling wise as for relearning skills to bridge the gap between prison and society. Life in the pension is perceived as quite different from life in prison, mostly because of the freedom in the house and the different ways of interaction. Being in the house requires a new routine. Different plusbeboere describe how they have changed their way of living. Not only are new habits created, the environment of the house also requires different skills and ways of behaving than in prison. Since the experience of imprisonment, and personal history differs from person to person, different people learn different things in the house. Most of the change in behaviour happens in daily interaction whereby people adapt to the atmosphere of the house.

## Conclusions

In this thesis I have attempted to bring together the different perspectives of the inhabitants of Pension Skejby to show what living in the house means to them. This final chapter will summarise my main findings in the light of my research question: How does daily life in Pension Skejby influence both the prisoners and non-prisoners and how does this play a role in the process of rehabilitation of the prisoners?

The encounter of prisoners and non-prisoners while living together in the same house is exceptional, therefore I have attempted to show throughout this thesis how it affects both groups. Living together changes the atmosphere of the house. The process of prisonisation that often occurs – to greater or lesser extent – in correctional facilities, is absent in the house. The egalitarian structure of the house, in which differences between staff and residents are levelled, reduces the wish for resistance. In addition, the presence of the minusbeboere prevents a general ‘negative attitude’ towards the staff. Living together creates a unique opportunity in which there is no criminal subculture, but having a sentence also does not make people stand out. This gives the plusbeboere the possibility to take on other roles within the house than being stigmatised as a prisoner, or feel like ‘a prisoner’. Stereotypes are challenged, amongst others because it becomes clear that it is possible for the convicts and non-convicts to live together and participate in normal daily life together. Living in Pension Skejby gives the minusbeboere more insight in the problems prisoners face, as well as a greater understanding of different people.

How soft the mild pedagogical climate and the mix between plus and minus inhabitants may appear, there are limits to the freedom. The halfway house is an in between situation between prison and society. Living in the house can be characterised by the dual nature as well. Notwithstanding the liberal conditions of confinement, living in the house is still a part of serving a sentence. Therefore, not being free to go wherever you want, or be with family, still makes it feel like a prison to some. Living in the house is not always easy, since it requires sentiments of sociability and social skills. The skills and behaviour that are lost during imprisonment, such as trust, normal everyday contact with non-prisoners, conversational skills and responsibility are reconstructed within the house by living the daily routine. Negotiations over what is correct behaviour take place in the encounter between plusbeboere and minusbeboere, from both sides. This is usually not expressed in a patronising way, but communicated in discussions about daily topics such as cleaning the kitchen or house.

Pension Skejby is not a promise for success. It is not always easy to live in the house and the good effects of the house do not seem to work on everybody. When behavioural infractions occur the consequences are strict, and sometimes people get sent back to prison. However, in the

transition between imprisonment and freedom the house can provide an opportunity, for those who can handle the responsibility, to re-learn social skills and behaviour.

Rehabilitation is more than desisting from criminal activities, measured in recidivism numbers. It also consists of constructing a meaningful life and being able to participate in society. To do this different skills and dispositions are needed, and it is important to have the possibility to relearn those again. Whereas rehabilitation originally meant 'restore to former privileges', in the case of the rehabilitation of prisoners the focus seems to lay solely on the prisoners' responsibility and wish to change. However, rehabilitation also requires the possibility to regain privileges such as work, housing and relationships. I want to stress the importance of qualitative research into the process of rehabilitation with an emphasis on the experiences of the convicts. Besides that, a broader definition of rehabilitation that includes a focus on the two directional process of reintegration by looking at the interaction between convicts and non-convicts is desirable.

During my fieldwork I felt as if there was never a saturation of data, since all inhabitants had different backgrounds and took something different out of living in the house. By interviewing the people of which I thought they wanted to be interviewed, I may have missed different insights. I hope to have shown a wide array of perspectives on life in the house, as well as making some generalising conclusions. Nevertheless, the composition of the house changed regularly and I have only been able to sketch a snapshot life at Pension Skejby during the three months I was there. I do believe, however, that an anthropological approach gave an insight in the way life actually and normally takes place in the house.

There are still issues left to be explored. More research into the lived experience in halfway houses can provide a better understanding of the difficulties and possibilities of resocialisation within the institutional context. Before we can answer Martinson's question: "What works?" with a steady: "This works", it is desirable to look at for how many of the prisoners currently in closed and open prisons the Skejby model could be workable. The house requires a great amount of responsibility from the inhabitants, and as a great part of the prison population faces mental or drug problems, houses with more support might be desirable for those groups.

Cross cultural comparison is one of the strengths of the anthropological discipline. Further research could be focussed on the possibilities of applying the Skejby model in other places. I have shown how Pension Skejby came to existence within the framework of the Danish criminal justice system during the sixties. To what extent are the conditions in the house specific to the Danish or Nordic context? Could an egalitarian based structure also be workable in other countries?

Besides that, more attention could be drawn to the dual nature of 'Scandinavian exceptionalism'. Shammass (2014) proposed the 'pains of freedom', building upon Sykes famous

'pains of imprisonment', showing the difficulties prisoners in an open prison with good material conditions experience. Barker (2013) poses that the Nordic welfare state is both universal and exclusive, which poses challenges for the treatment of foreign prisoners. Since a quarter of the Danish prison population consists of non-Danish citizens, more attention could be focussed on aspects of racism in the Nordic context. In this thesis I have focussed on the relationship between the plusbeboere and the minusbeboere without touching upon cultural issues. It could be interesting to look at the house from a multiculturalist perspective to see whether the house is experienced differently by non-Danish convicts.

Pension Skejby is exceptional. With this thesis I hope to have contributed to the debate on rehabilitation, by providing a case study of an extraordinary encounter between convicts and non-convicts.

A police car drives up the driveway of the pension. Several people look curiously outside the windows. Two policemen step out of the car and enter the house. I want to see what is happening and walk towards the entrance. There the policemen are having a chat with one of the new inhabitants, to inform him that he has to testify against someone at the police station the next day. They seem a bit 'out of place', standing in the entrance of the pension with their uniforms and their stark posture. It is in that moment, seeing the contrast between the formally dressed policemen and the relaxed atmosphere of the house, that I realise how little the house resembles a prison.

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## Danish summary

Undersøgelsen handler om livet i Pension Skejby, i Aarhus, hvor kriminelt belastede udsledes til et frit liv, mens de bor sammen med ikke kriminelt belastede. Research spørgsmålet er: Hvilken indflydelse spiller dagligdagen i Pension Skejby på både straffefange og ikke-straffefange. Og hvordan påvirker det straffefangernes rehabiliteringsproces? Resultaterne er baseret på tolv uges etnografisk feltarbejde, ved at bo i huset og deltage i dagliglivet. Ved siden af har jeg også foretaget tretten kvalitative interviews, seks med kriminelt belastede, seks med ikke kriminelt belastede og et med en medarbejder.

Mødet mellem fanger og ikke-fanger der bor i samme hus er unik, derfor har jeg forsøgt at vise med denne afhandling hvordan det påvirker begge grupper. At bo sammen ændrer atmosfæren i huset. I fængsler ofte sker en 'prisonisationproces', socialisering i en kriminel subkultur med specifikke normer og værdier, ofte med en høj grad af modstand mod fængslet og personalet. I Pension Skejby er den proces fraværende. Den egalitære struktur af huset, hvor forskelle mellem personale og beboere bliver udlignet, reducerer ønsket om modstand. Hertil kommer, at tilstedeværelsen af minusbeboere forhindrer en generel "negativ holdning" over for personalet. At leve sammen skaber en unik mulighed, hvor der ikke er nogen kriminel subkultur, men at have en dom gør at folk ikke skiller sig ud som i samfundet. I huset bliver folk er ikke bedømt af medbeboere for hvad de har gjort. Dette giver plusbeboere mulighed for at påtage sig andre roller i huset end at blive stigmatiseret som en fange, eller føle sig som 'en fange'. Stereotyper er udfordret, fordi det bliver klart, at det er muligt for fanger og ikke-indsatte at leve sammen og opbygge en fælles normal hverdag. At bo i Pension Skejby giver minusbeboere større indsigt i den problemer fanger står overfor, samt en større forståelse for forskellige mennesker og deres baggrund.

Selvom det milde pædagogiske klima og mix mellem plus og minus beboere kan synes blød, er der grænser for friheden. Pension Skejby er en mellemstation mellem fængselet og samfundet. Livet i huset kan karakteriseres ved den dobbelte natur. På trods af liberale betingelser for indespærring, er det stadig en del af afsoningen at bo i huset. Man er ikke fri til at gå hvorhen man vil eller være sammen med familien, hvilket gør at nogle stadig føler det som et fængsel. At bo i huset er ikke altid let, da det kræver en masse socialt kontakt og sociale færdigheder. Mange adfærdskompetencer tabes i fængslet, såsom tillid, normal dagligdagskontakt med ikke-indsatte, samtalefærdigheder og det at tage ansvar. Disse rekonstrueres i huset ved at leve i den daglige rutine. De fleste af adfærdsændringerne sker i den daglige interaktion, hvor alle er med at tilpasse til atmosfæren i huset. Plusbeboere og minusbeboere bestemmer sammen kulturen i huset og hvad de synes er

korrekt adfærd. Dette kommer normalt ikke til udtryk på en nedladende måde, men gennem små diskussioner om daglige emner, såsom rengøring af køkkenet eller i huset generelt.

Pension Skejby er ikke garanti for succes, det er ikke altid nemt at bo i huset, og de gode virkninger af huset synes ikke at gavne alle. Men i overgangen mellem fængsel og frihed, kan huset give en mulighed for dem der kan håndtere ansvaret med at genskabe sociale færdigheder og adfærd.

Rehabilitation er mere end afstå fra kriminelle aktiviteter, målt i recidiv numre. Den består også af at konstruere et meningsfuldt liv og være i stand til at deltage i samfundet. Forskellige færdigheder og vaner er nødvendige for at leve i samfundet, og det er vigtigt at have mulighed for at genlære dem igen. Rehabilitation betød oprindeligt "gendanne til tidligere privilegier", men i tilfældet af rehabilitering af fanger, synes fokus at lægge sig på fangerens ansvar og ønsker om at ændre sig. Men rehabilitering kræver også mulighed for at genvinde privilegier såsom arbejde, bolig og relationer. Jeg ønsker at understrege betydningen af kvalitativ forskning i rehabiliteringsprocessen med vægt på erfaringer fra fangerne. For at skabe en bredere definition af rehabilitering, der omfatter fokus på to retningsbestemte reintegrationsprocesser, er det nødvendigt at se på samspillet mellem fanger og ikke fanger.