**Abstract:**
The Settlement movement, which originated in late 19th Century England, was a pioneer in bettering the conditions of the working poor. It pursued the utopian project of locating 'settlements' within poverty-ridden neighborhoods where respectable students should meet slum dwellers on equal terms. This article explores the trajectory of the comparatively under-researched Danish offspring of the movement. It demonstrates the tempering and compromise that occurred when utopian ideals of 'Brotherly love', 'God's Kingdom', and 'radical social change' were realized in concrete social practices. Contradictions and ambiguities arose when utopian ideas were confronted with what could be done. The Settlement became a highly ambiguous space, a 'heterotopia'. The roots of the contradictions cannot simply be identified in the external pressure from legal requirements and funding criteria represented by public welfare agencies. The contradictions can also be excavated from The Settlement's own ideological doctrines and their historical development. From its inception, The Settlement articulated, and helped shaping, longstanding welfare paradoxes. The most fundamental one is the contradiction between formal universality and the specific needs of the irreducible human being.

KEY WORDS: The Settlement, Christian Philanthropy, utopia, heterotopia, social welfare.
The Settlement Utopia:

Brotherly love, discipline, and social critique

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The Settlement Utopia

Brotherly love, discipline, and social critique

The Settlement movement, which originated in late 19th Century England, was a pioneer in bettering the conditions of the working poor. It pursued the utopian project of locating ‘settlements’ within poverty-ridden neighborhoods where respectable students should meet slum dwellers on equal terms. This article explores the trajectory of the comparatively under-researched Danish offspring of the movement. It demonstrates the tempering and compromise that occurred when utopian ideals of ‘Brotherly love’, ‘God’s Kingdom’, and ‘radical social change’ were realized in concrete social arrangements. Contradictions and ambiguities arose when utopian ideas were confronted with what could be done. The Settlement became a highly ambiguous space, a ‘heterotopia’. The roots of the contradictions cannot simply be identified in the external pressure from legal requirements and funding criteria represented by public welfare agencies. The contradictions can also be excavated from The Settlement’s own ideological doctrines and their historical development. From its inception, The Settlement articulated, and helped shaping, longstanding welfare paradoxes. The most fundamental one is the contradiction between formal universality and the specific needs of the irreducible human being.

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The differences between voluntary sector rationality and welfare bureaucracy have been the subject of longstanding debate. Sometimes, these differences have been articulated as an opposition between ‘utopian’ values of unconditional care and radical social change versus the mundane, legal and bureaucratic stipulations of professionally organized welfare. The issue is highly pertinent to the relationship between Christian-inspired philanthropy and modern welfare arrangements.
In 2010, Johs Bertelsen, leader of the voluntary organization in Copenhagen, *The Settlement*, asked himself: ‘Am I a spokesman for the marginalized or an inspector who serves the administration? He was organizing employment projects for long term unemployed under the auspices of *The Settlement*, a voluntary organization which, during more than a Century, has carried out social projects in the old working-class neighborhood Vesterbro in Copenhagen. The dilemma that Bertelsen faced was one between acting as a social critic opposed to a rule-following administrator. In the first case, he would defend civil rights and more tolerance of different ways of living; in the second case, he would administer programs that discipline marginalized to fit labor market demands. In *The Settlement*, Bertelsen was carrying out radical social work in a context where the official welfare policy and public authorities had placed employment center stage. To be eligible for public funding voluntary social organizations needed to pursue this employment agenda by foregrounding preparatory training or ‘discipline’ of individuals at the borderline of society. Schematically, we may speak of a contradiction between utopians ideals of fundamental social change versus disciplinary normalization.

*The Settlement* has organized social projects at Vesterbro since the early 19th Century and received quite a lot of attention because of its innovative work in the former working-class neighborhood. The organization has Christian roots, reflected in the original name, *The Christian Student Settlement* (hereafter *The Settlement*), and it is perhaps surprising to see such an organization acting as the center of experimental social work. However, the initial ideal behind *The Settlement* movement, of which the Copenhagen based organization was an off-shot, was to ‘settle’ and interact directly with inhabitants in overcrowded working class neighborhoods. This idea was adopted from the first ‘student settlement’, *Toynbee Hall*, established in 1884, in London, to bridge the growing class divide. In 1889, the first American *Settlement*, the *Hull-
House, was founded in a poor immigrant neighborhood in Chicago. During the following years, the Settlements in London and Chicago extended their initial goal of establishing ‘hearty friendship’ between the classes by undertaking social research and policy advocacy. In this regard, the Hull-House project became particularly influential, and residents began to speak of themselves not as philanthropists, but as social scientists. Jane Addams, prominent leader of the Hull-House emphasized that philanthropic dogmatism was shifting towards knowledge-production and influencing social legislation (1910: 72). At the same time, the American and English Settlements maintained the initial goal of sharing the residents’ higher culture with the underprivileged slum dwellers.

The Danish Christian Student Settlement was established in 1911 by Christian academics with the objective of reconciling the enormous divide between the social classes of rapidly industrializing society. From the start, the project of locating Christian students inside the working class neighborhood seemed very difficult, one that Bertelsen described as ‘an impossible idea’ (2011: 4). Indeed, there was something impossible or utopian about the project. The Settlement was from its inception pervaded by a series of fundamental contradictions: The goal was to better the conditions of the working poor, but the means were not conceived as relief or charity but as a ‘friendly encounter’ between equals. There was the assumption that the culture of the students from the better background could ‘lift up’ the working poor, but it was emphasized that there was no hierarchical relationship between superior givers and subordinated receivers. The key notions were ‘meetings’ and ‘friendship’ as opposed to ‘teaching’ or ‘moralizing’. The founders were guided by a Christian values, including notions of salvation in the after world, but the activities were not oriented around conversion, since they foregrounded practical purposes of securing education, childcare and better housing. Hence, the value base
contained a reference to the transcendent, the divine spirit, but their activities tended to eschew transcendent references. Finally, there was a strong emphasis on ‘meeting’ and respecting the working poor ‘as they were’, and yet *The Settlement* discourse was replete with generalizing ideas about ‘how the poor were’, their depraved morality, their irrationality, and their lack of self-control, all which would be transformed within the confines of *Student Settlements*.

In brief, there was a contradiction between the ideal of meeting the poor as particular beings and the aspiration to foster certain inherently human capacities in each and every one. This was evident in the frequent assertions about human and social potential in the working poor. Pointing out these contradictions is not the same as saying that *The Settlement* project was self-defeating from the start. To the contrary, one might say that these inherent contradictions spurred lots of creativity throughout *The Settlement*’s historical development, including a broad range of social projects. As we shall see, contradictions and logical paradoxes need not necessarily stifle and paralyze an organization but may incite on-going discursive and practical inventiveness.

*The Settlement movement*, and the specific Danish variant, is an interesting case in regard to the issue of how Christian philanthropy was connected with state welfare. The experiment at Vesterbro indeed constitutes a space where social citizenship for the most marginalized groups can be practiced. *The Settlement* also acts as a center of critique of the social order and of official policies. During the 1970s and 1980s, *The Settlement* demonstrated the possibility of organizing ‘other spaces’ of youth work, community revitalization, alternative employment, local business activity, and, more recently, integration of immigrants. From the beginning of its establishment, *The Settlement* founders opposed themselves to conventional charity, since they wished to establish ‘respectful friendships’, not a giver-receiver relationship. Situating themselves inside the poor neighborhood, they wished to create ‘a different space’, opening up for social change. In
more recent years, *The Settlement* has established alternative forms of job training, employment, and integration, while negotiating the contradictory role of receiving public funding and criticizing welfare policies. As consequence, a ‘different space’ of social citizenship emerged, crisscrossed by different rationalities. Simultaneously a site of fundamental social critique and interlinked with the legal and ‘disciplinary’ requirements of public welfare.

In voluntary sector studies a central concern has been how collaboration and funding from public organizations put voluntary organizations’ autonomy under pressure. However, studies of the Danish *Settlement* have challenged this thesis on bureaucratic encroachment upon voluntary autonomy. They observe that historically, Christian charitable organizations never constituted an isolated sector. Instead, they developed and modernized in tandem with the emerging welfare state. Henriksen and Bundesen argue for approaching the dynamics between state and voluntary organizations from a ‘relational perspective’ (2004; Bundesen, Henriksen and Jørgensen, 2011). The adaptability to collaboration with public institutions demonstrated by Christian charitable organizations may result from a certain ‘theological elasticity’, making these organizations ‘adaptive rather than reactive and nostalgic’ (Borioni, 2014: 148). On this account, a key challenge for Christian voluntary organizations was to sustain their religious identity while they adapted themselves to the emerging, secular welfare state and professional services.

The contradictions of Christian-based charity are a key concern of this article too, but we will not identity public authorities as the principal or ultimate source of these contradictions. Expanding ‘the relational perspective’, we foreground how contradictions and ambiguities arise at *The Settlement* as a result of tensions between utopian ideals and ‘worldly’ practices and arrangements. Such contradictions may be rooted in *The Settlement* itself just as they may be generated or intensified from collaborating with public authorities. In order to take such an open-
ended approach, we draw upon Michel Foucault’s notion of ‘heterotopia’ which highlights ‘other spaces’ where contradictions and ambiguities are particularly intensely experienced.

_Heterotopic space_

Foucault’s brief comments on the heterotopia have given rise to a range of diverse interpretations, perhaps because he was experimenting with the concept rather than defining it stringently. In advancing the concept Foucault suggested that there are sites in our culture which are distinct in their capacity to incite reflection, contestation and transgression. They are ‘other places’ in relation to the existing order, not because they stand in opposition to it, but because they are places at which elements of existence otherwise unconnected co-exist. Foucault said heterotopias are ‘something like counter-sites…in which all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted’ (Foucault, 1986: 23).

The heterotopia has a fundamentally hybrid character in that it brings together a series of components that are conceived as foreign to each other: ‘The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible’ (Foucault, 1986: 25). In brief, heterotopias are reflective of the ambiguities of the society in which they exist by juxtaposing several incompatible spaces simultaneously.

Foucault further suggests that recognizable sites from our culture are not simply represented at the heterotopia but ‘contested’ and ‘inverted’. This means that heterotopias display in a particularly intense way contradictions, arbitrary divisions and paradoxes that are entrenched in our culture. Foucault explained that the spaces he was interested in ‘have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect. These spaces, as it were, which
are linked with all the others, which however contradict all the other sites’ (Foucault, 1986: 24). This means that the heterotopia is a purely relational concept, insofar as it articulates, via juxtapositions, the heterogeneous character of the external space.

Foucault mentions two kinds of spaces where juxtapositions and contradictions are extensively experienced. The first kind is ‘the utopia’ which is a space of pure imagination, a society in its most perfect and idealized version. One key function of utopias is to compensate for the present state of affair with all its messiness and imperfection. Utopias take the shape of fantasies, dreams, and critiques of existing conditions, and as such they have the capacity to provoke the desire for social transformation (Johnson, 2006: 82). Foucault contrasts utopia with heterotopia, emphasizing that they both relate to other sites by simultaneously representing and inverting them; but unlike utopias, heterotopias are real sites. They constitute ‘a kind of effectively enacted utopia’ (Foucault, 1986: 24). Heterotopias harbor a potential of contestation and undermining in regard to utopias, since this kind of analysis ‘reveals that heterotopia not only contrasts with utopia, but actually undermines or unsettles it’ (Johnson, 2006: 82). To take a concrete example, the Christian-philanthropic utopia of universal, Brotherly Love is unsettled or undermined when philanthropists begin to subject the poor to divisions and discipline.

Heterotopias press the limits of language, making it more difficult to use received concepts, and thus hold potentials for transgression of the given. Foucault emphasized this in The Order of Things: “Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter and tangle common names” (1971: xviii). Notably, it is not merely language but the heterotopia’s combination of the textual, aural and visual which disturbs our conceptions. It contests boundaries and received distinctions and may thus create moments of transgression. The opening of such transgression is
not a matter of invoking the transcendental or some post-revolutionary world. When we look at a heterotopia we see the culture in which we are placed, like one discovers oneself in a distorted mirror: ‘Although Foucault describes heterotopia as “actually existing utopia”, the conception is not tied to a space that promotes any promise, any hope or any primary form of resistance or liberation’ (Johnson, 2006: 84). By their unexpected constellation of incompatible elements, heterotopias display possibilities of minor transgressions or lines of flight from existing orders.

Finally, analyzing heterotopias is to adopt a particular lens or perspective, not a matter of pinning down places that are by themselves ‘inherently’ heterotopic. Foucault points towards this, when he says that ‘perhaps no one absolutely universal form of heterotopia would be found’ (1986: 24). If there is no pure heterotopia, the analysis is as much about applying a particular reading glass, as about revealing definite heterotopic places.

*The breeding ground for Settlements*

The decades around 1900 in Denmark were marked by growing class division, debates about how to handle ‘the social evils’, and concerns about the relationship between the Church and the growing socialist movement. There was also a questioning of traditional practices of almsgiving and charitable poor relief which had been voiced increasingly during the 19th century, and which towards the end of the Century opened up for new ideas about poor relief. Key in this discussion among representatives of the Church and Christian philanthropy was the theme of what a ‘Christian spirit’ towards the working poor should consist of in practice. These are the key component in the breeding ground, the particular historical context, from which *The Settlement* movement emerged.
During the 19th Century, rapid mass migration and industrialization created unprecedented, large working class neighborhoods, particularly in Copenhagen. The arresting urban poverty and the signs of ‘moral decay’ created fear among the privileged. They feared for the social cohesion of society, the spreading of moral and physical diseases and increasing violent unrest. Observers from the respectable classes cautioned that a new class of destitute, working poor had emerged in the large cities, people uprooted from the agrarian community, the family and the church, and they now ‘drifted loose’ without moralizing authorities that would give them an ethical compass. Some journals published reports from expeditions into ‘the dark continent of the poor’, that is, the dark and decayed neighborhoods where alien norms and language allegedly reigned. The readers from the better classes would shudder with fear and disgust when confronted with these travel reports (AUTHOR). This fear created an urgent need for mediation and representation with regard to the masses of urban poor.

The last decades of the 19th Century also witnessed debates on how to practice poor relief. Central to the debates was the critique of indiscriminate alms-giving and the notion of the giver-receiver relationship, which was raised in Denmark and across Western Europe (Donzelot, 1979: 66). The deed of simply giving alms was questioned since neither did it consider long-term consequences nor the motives behind the beneficiary’s demand. A key element in the push for rationalizing poor relief, then, was the requirement to distinguish more carefully between different kinds of poor. One needed to differentiate the able-bodied from the sick, children from adults, the morally decayed from the morally upright, and so on. Yet, apart from differentiation, there was little consensus on how to tackle the ‘social evils’.

Christian philanthropy sought a middle ground between the main adversaries across the political spectrum. One the one hand, the emerging socialist movement demanded a state
guaranteed right to work for the poor and collectivization of industries. Libertarians and conservatives, on the other hand, maintained that the poverty problem could only be solved through the benevolence of private charity, never through forced taxes. Christian philanthropists criticized the consequences of industrial-capitalist society, but they did not side with the socialists in demanding revolutionary changes of the social order. They gave more emphasis to the need for moral and material uplifting of the poor than on legal rights (AUTHOR). Charity should remain the key means for solving urgent problems of the time, i.e. bridging the growing class antagonism and securing social cohesion. It is this central aspect of charity which was given a particular variant by The Settlement and its notion of ‘friendship between the classes’.

Cultural spearhead or meeting forum?

The Settlement was one of several associational outcomes of the Danish Home Mission which defended a pietistic and puritan version of Lutheranism. In 1911, Richard Heinrich Thomsen, Graduate in theology, established The Settlement with inspiration from the English predecessor, Toyenbee Hall in London. Thomsen had his spiritual roots in the Home Mission movement, while politically he was a declared social democrat. He served as leader of The Settlement in Copenhagen during six years (Lindhardt, 1979). At its inception and in its early phase, the organization was tightly connected to the State Church and the theological circles in Denmark. The majority of its members and contributors were students of theology, parish priests or provosts (Bundesen et al., 2001: 226). Not surprising, then, the inspiration from Christian doctrines was evident during The Settlement’s first decades.

The anxiety caused by urban working class decay continued to be a key motive during the early phase of The Settlement. Richard Thomsen thus wrote in 1916: ‘When you walk along Vesterbrogade, the liveliest and most elegant street in our city, you have no idea about what is
hidden in the site-streets. But just walk down Saxogade, and at once you’re in another world’.
(Thomsen quoted in Laneth, 2011: 14). The descriptions of the decay of the poor neighborhoods often made references to explorers and missionaries’ reports from distant places in the world, ‘the fields of the heathens’, marked by the lower races’ ungodliness and need for salvation. Like Stanley Livingstone one must have both faith and will-power to dare entering into the wilderness of the urban poor: ‘The wilderness in Copenhagen is darker and more difficult to penetrate than the wilderness in African. But it is possible to overcome it, if one goes to the task in the right spirit, (Anne Vedde, 1916). Evident here is an unmistakably missionary tone characteristic of the Danish Home Mission movement which signaled aspirations of establishing ‘missionary stations’ which could bring Christian morality, culture or civilization to the continent of the poor.

However, The Settlement founders placed key emphasis on the idea of ‘respectful meetings’ with the poor workers, something which was, in fact, distinct for The Settlement in comparison with other charitable associations at that time.

The Settlement was based on the fundamental idea of students locating themselves in the heart of working class neighborhoods to enable a direct and close exchange with the inhabitants. The words used to describe this meeting was decidedly not ‘mission’ or ‘conversion’ but ‘meeting’ and ‘mutual exchange’. One might say that the missionary goal of individual spiritual rebirth was reconfigured into a notion of the spiritual rebirth of the community, or neighborhood, through the medium of Settlements. It must be noted, however, that this rebirth tended to rely upon a quite specific value base. The Settlement and its activities could be said to be pervaded by the values of the respectable classes: order, useful pursuits, literary studies, enlightened debate, exposure to culture, and learning the virtues of marriage. The role envisioned for the poor was not the traditional recipient of charity; instead they were conceived as ‘guests’ invited to share

Insofar as *The Settlement* strived to be as orderly, clean, and civilized as the surroundings were disorderly, dirty, and barbaric it was a ‘heterotopia of compensation’, to use Foucault’s term: ‘[T]heir role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation’ (Foucault, 1986: 27). The challenges of establishing something like a hybrid between a missionary outpost and a forum of cultural exchange is indicated by the recurrent complaints about the character of those working poor that the students met. Especially, the children were reported to have difficulties in adjusting to the norms of proper behavior promoted in *The Settlement’s* evening clubs. The working class children were reported to be unruly, noisy, and almost impervious to the educational efforts expended by the well-intended students (Laneth, 2011: 50). How to remain gentle, kind, unselfish and helpful in the contact with these children was a permanent challenge for the students. In summary, *The Settlement* founders’ meeting with their neighbors was based on the values of respect, instructive entertainment and the defense of spiritual virtue.

*Spirit in Action*

The decades before the establishment of *The Settlement* were marked by discussions of how the Christian spirit was best practiced. Disagreements revolved around whether individual conversion should remain the key strategy, or if more pragmatic approaches were called for in times of urban mass poverty and moral decay. This debate also resonated within the Danish *Home Mission*. Pastor Vilhelm Beck, the main leader of the movement during 1881-1901, stated that the emphasis should be on ‘the Word and salvation of sinners—the Word in order to make
people gather around Jesus. All the rest is minor things, although they may be important minor things’ (Beck quoted in Borioni, 2014: 135). Opposing this view, Harald Stein, leader of the Copenhagen Home Mission during 1879-1886, favored more active, charitable activity. The disagreement between the two positions was principally one between the priority granted to spiritual conversion or ‘rebirth’, and active care for the parish akin to social work.

The question whether the mere proclamation of the Word was sufficient in the poverty-ridden neighborhoods was a subject of heated debate. Some questioned if a spiritual awakening could take place under extreme material poverty, or if these needed to be addressed. This issue became more urgent with the rising socialist movement that proved more appealing to the working class than the Church. In fact, a growing number of the working class displayed despise for the Church, seeing priests as parasites on small people whom the priests allegedly charged for weddings and funerals to finance a comfortable living. The social democratic party largely portrayed priests as the capitalists’ footmen. This development spurred Stein to initiate a battle against atheism and socialism by organizing Christian based care-work among the poor at Vesterbro in an attempt to create a bulwark against the alluring ‘socialist devils’ (Laneth, 2011: 23). There was a widespread sensation that Christianity was pushed back by the tangible demands of concrete solidarity raised by the socialists.

In The Settlement’s newsletter one finds articles that asserted the necessity of realizing God’s Kingdom in this world by way of concrete actions amongst the poor. In 1928, one contributor made the distinction between an old Christianity centered on after-worldly salvation versus a new Christianity which carries the message of salvation in this world, the coming of Gods Kingdom:
“Your Kingdom shall come!” We have asked for it – we still ask – but it has not come. It has hesitated so long that many think that it’ll never come. This is a crucial point by which that we usually call Christianity distinguishes itself so strongly from the Christianity what conquered the old world… We have got accustomed to believe that the Kingdom of God is not meant for this world – that this in reality is the devil’s world, and that the Kingdom of God is placed in another sphere, in which God will admit good people when the die (Wille, 1928: 10).

The assertion was that behind this incomprehensible and cruel world there is an eternal, loving God. This God calls upon each and every one to work for the good and to combat the forces of evil. Despite our experience of misery, human cruelty and immorality, we must maintain the image, if not yet visible, of a world freed from the devil’s grip. This is the utopian ideal of realizing the Kingdom of God in this world through concrete interventions:

But for the one who realizes that it may come for that person who recognizes that he is also called upon to assist in its coming there is, even if he never sees it, enormous reward in the feeling that he…accomplishes something in alliance with the good Force noticeable in the universe, achieves something to wrest this world loose from the devil’s claws and turn it into a Kingdom of justice (Wille, 1928: 11).

The developments in Copenhagen seemed to prove that merely preaching the Word was simply not enough in poor neighborhoods where the working poor displayed an increasing indifference to preaching. Among Christian philanthropists the view gained support that to effectively compete with the socialist approach to social problems preaching needed to be combined with other measure to combat the social evils and establish a better rapport with the urban poor
(Borioni, 2014: 137). This new focus on activity in the face of urban poverty was paralleled by arguments that directed blame for misery away from the individual and towards non-personal, social conditions.

Such a displacement of emphasis had already been asserted by members of *The Settlement* movement in England and the USA (Deegan, 1990). The same analysis began to be voiced in Copenhagen, as for instance by Richard Thomsen: ‘In a poor neighborhood many evil forces are at play. Not because the poor are worse than others, but they simply cannot protect themselves against the powers of evil’ (Thomsen quoted in Laneth, 2011: 16). They asserted that Copenhagen was the unhealthiest place of all places to live, both physically and spiritually. The majority of the harmful mores and attitudes were said originate from the city that had become way too big. In light of this materialist-social analysis, the conventional Christian quest for individual, spiritual rebirth seemed illogical. In practical terms, an explicit emphasis on the holy Word had proved ineffective for establishing contact with the working poor. Accordingly, *The Settlement* refrained from direct preaching aimed at conversion and established, instead, an atmosphere imbued with Christian convictions and attitudes. This was to be the weapon against the two main threats – primitive class war and consumerist materialism.

**Social critique and individual transformation**

The *Settlement* movement combined an emphasis on fostering broadly defined Christian values with social critique. In the English and American settlements, there was an emphasis on generating factual knowledge of social problems to influence social legislation (Deegan, 1990). Parallel to advocating broad-scale social reforms, the *Settlements* emphasized the need for fostering what Jane Addams termed ‘social ethics’. Hence, there was a dual strategy of policy advocacy and awakening of individual responsibility. In the Danish *Settlement* there was much
less activity in terms of social research which only happened later in terms of surveys of housing conditions at Vesterbro. When the Danish Settlers voiced demands for social equality they occasionally did so with reference to Jesus’s teaching on the equality between all Christians.

This emphasis on securing material equality was an attempt to respond to the advancing socialist movement in Copenhagen. However, it was a response that found a basis in Lutheran reformed Christianity and the notion of ‘care for the created world’ (Borioni, 2014: 144). The Settlement’s commitment to Christian values did not so much emphasize tangible conversion, like the Home Mission, or the coming of God’s Kingdom, as they viewed this commitment as a source of social critique. This social critique targeted workers’ deplorable living conditions and hence converged in some fundamental ways with the socialist party and the labor movement. The latter had achieved an important victory with the 1899 compromise between the employers’ associations and the labor movement (Septemberforliget). However, Church officials and proponents of Christian philanthropy argued that an alternative was needed to the violent struggle for material equality which they felt lacked a spiritual substance. For their part, the socialists criticized philanthropy for acting as a ‘lightning arrestor’ for the poor’s justified outrage over the misery generated by industrial capitalism (Laneth, 2011: 34). It was in this heated ideological battlefield that The Settlement was established.

Like the American and English Settlements, the Copenhagen settlers stressed that their goal was not merely to fulfil material demand. In its emphasis on shaping the content of people’s demands, The Settlement’s ideology opposed a purely liberal position. Members of The Settlement expressed regrets that so many people displayed a completely materialist attitude instead of choosing spiritual development. In contrast to the materialist, they proclaimed, a true Christian believes in the spirit, not the body! The complaints about the encroachments of
materialism in defense of traditional morality made references to the sanctity of the family, spiritual nourishment, duty over pleasure and the need for moderating desire. In *The Settlement*’s newsletter this foregrounding of spiritual nourishment was condensed in the view that even if the external world were made perfect, nothing would be achieved without a change of faulty human hearts:

If one asks one self where misery has its cause, one always returns to the fact that the faults originate from the inside, from the spirit which reigns in people’s mind…For even if all the external things were changed, as if by magic, to become completely fair and good – if the human hearts not were changed as well, we would return to misery in a few years (Nielsen, 1928: 1-2).

Any betterment of the affairs of this world needed to be accompanied by efforts at bettering the human spirit. By choosing this pathway, *The Settlement* echoed the general strategy of philanthropists for navigating the political battlefield of late 19th century Denmark. Eschewing socialism and laissez-faire liberalism, philanthropy offered a doctrine of intervention into social problems which revolved around ‘the moral cohesion of society’. *The Settlement* displayed the same ideal in its attempt at nurturing a community where a set of collective moral standards and obligations would tie uprooted individuals together (AUTHOR). While demands were raised about material equality and the rights of working poor to decent living conditions – which would involve formal obligations of the state towards the poor – the emphasis leaned towards moral-spiritual nourishment through exposure to culture, instructive entertainment and meeting with the members from the privileged class. The rapport on the first 10 years’ of activity said:
The recent years’ of materialism and looseness in moral affairs have proven us right in our principle that it is education and spiritual development which is needed. The turmoil of the time thus only animates us to exert further efforts to develop an efficient religious, moral and cultural work (Christian Student Settlement, *Annual Report*, 1919: 4).

The idea that the space of *The Settlement* would exert an ‘uplifting’ influence upon both the students and the working class was fundamental. Hence, the project could be said to rest on the idea of establishing a civilizing-educating-stimulating space; a space of transformation. Later on, in 1936, *The Settlement* acquired a countryside house to where small excursions were made, and in 1955 a larger property was acquired with economic support from the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Copenhagen municipality suitable for longer stays during summer. It was reported how the removal from the big city, the fresh air, outdoor activities and generous food, completely changed the children who reluctantly returned to Copenhagen. *The Settlement* and its adjacent spaces represented a site of passage, real as well as imaginary, and hence resonate with one of Foucault’s definitions of the heterotopia, namely that it may take the ambiguous form of both ‘rigorous division and absolute Passage’ (Johnson, 2006: 80). Foucault defined heterotopia as a system of openings and closures that define who can enter and under which conditions (1986: 26).

The point about admission criteria is pertinent since it indicates that heterotopias can only be accessed by undergoing rituals of purification and transformation. Researchers have observed that *The Settlement* tended to attract the better part of the working class, that is, the people with most resources and cultural capital (Bundesen et al: 227). On the one hand, *The Settlement* rejected to target their efforts at with specific groups such as the homeless, the unemployed or
drug addicts. They argued that other organizations at Vesterbro were specializing in working with these groups. On the other hand, *The Settlement* has throughout its life span given more emphasis to creating activities for one particular group, namely children. The emphasis on the work with children can be explained both from this ideal of transformation and from practical circumstances. Children’s clubs reflected well the objective of transformation through exposure to healthy cultural and recreational activities, since they replaced the depravity of the street with homely protection and constructive entertainment. Another, more pragmatic, reason for *The Settlement*’s prioritizing of children was that it was the only group that would secure permanent economic funding from public authorities (Bundesen et al., 2001: 238).

*Utopian experiment or welfare institution?*

We have noted that *The Settlement* at its birth was a novel, hybrid structure which displayed utopian aspirations. Unlike preceding charitable institutions, *The Settlement* was an ‘outpost’ in the middle of the urban wilderness. It was not philanthropy but a meeting forum. It should not offer charitable assistance but bridge an essential class antagonism. It should be a home as well as a public space (Rousmaniere, 1979: 47). At first glance, it seems utopian to merge these divergent functions within the same space. Adding to this, another impossible duality was intensified during the historical development of *The Settlement*, that is, acting both as a radical critic and as a welfare institution.

In the period from the 1950s to the 1990s, *The Settlement* increasingly became an explicit socially critical organization. Their analysis targeted modern society with its chain gang production that was causing social misery: Lack of housing, loneliness, family problems, stress and unemployment. At the same time, the references to Christianity receded, and the arguments
became more secular. The key problem was said to be a deleterious economic system that could only be transformed through collective action:

Many of the social problems that we confront on a daily basis are created by a society which places economic interests higher than concerns for humans. We see it as a key pedagogical task to inform the youngsters about these societal failures that they are subjected to, and which cannot be solved at an individual level, but only if a sufficient amount of people decide to act upon the state of affairs (Christian Student Settlement, Annual Rapport, 1974/75: 9).

Harsh analyses of the harmful effects of market based society and its production of social problems became more prevalent and frequent. At times socialism was mentioned sympathetically as a ‘natural reaction’ to a harmful society, but The Settlement never chose a defined political position (Bundesen et al., 2001: 228). The balance act of combining utopian ideals with the pursuit of the possible, by way of minor improvements, continued in a new variant. One the one hand, The Settlement articulated social critique, demanding fundamental transformations of industrial-capitalist society. On the other hand, the organization established an increasing attachment to public authorities and its rationalities. Its activities for children, unemployed, and, more recently, immigrants became gradually interlinked with the law-based system of state regulated welfare and its criteria and divisions.

From 1921 onwards, support from the state and from the municipality began to appear in The Settlement’s budget. This public funding was granted to the support of ‘preventive child care’. During the period 1919-1931 the proportion of public funding of the organization’s expenses gradually increased to reach 38 percent in 1931 (Bundesen et al., 2001: 232). However, the collaboration with public authorities became more systematic after the social reform of 1933.
The Settlement established a child care facility in 1939 which received a significant proportion of children from the public child welfare service, and another group was paid for by the City Magistrate (Bundesen et al., 2001: 235). Close links were thus established between The Settlement and public authorities around the work with children. But initiatives aimed at other groups were sustained alongside. In 1950, The Settlement established a counselling office which offered counselling with a doctor or a social worker once a week. A key function of this service was to assist users in their contact with social authorities, have someone accompanying them in court or secure help with household matters. In these cases, The Settlement was taking up the role of ‘mediators’ between people on the verge to exclusion and social authorities with discretionary power over service provision. This role would become still more important in the 1990s and onwards.

In 2010, The Settlement was asked by the Ministry of Social Affairs if they could organize a preparatory employment project for young, long term unemployed. The leader, Johs Bertelsen, had aspirations to create a ‘third labor market’ where people not easily included in the labor market could develop qualifications and self-worth through alternatives activities. The idea was not simply to turn the participants into a labor force, since it was considered just as important to develop their ‘life-force’ (Bertelsen quoted in Laneth, 2011: 221). Bertelsen had previously, in the years around 1994, formulated a set of principles in connection with the ‘Side Street Project’ (Sidegaden) initiated in 1986 during times of recession and high unemployment. The project was unique in that it combined several efforts at the local level in streets marked by years of decay, closed shops and youth crime. Sidegaden can be described as a mixture of urban revitalization, outreach community work with marginalized, crime prevention, and attempts to create spaces of alternative forms of social existence and activity. A key idea behind the project was that full
employment is illusionary and that alternative forms of work should be established within social work, ecology, culture, and recycling. Training of the unemployed should not be disciplinary but should allow them to make meaningful contributions to the development of society such as community revitalization. Society should prioritize projects that function like ‘social laboratories’ at the local level where experimentation can unfold around integrating the needs of everyday life and work-life (Laneth, 2011: 223). Yet, in 2010, Bertelsen had to realize that if The Settlement organized training projects for unemployed sponsored by the municipality, they could not ignore the overwhelming employment focus. They would have to act like a public authority in relation to the users and could not adopt a position of solidarity with them. Insofar as The Settlement wished to carry out social work supported by public funding, it had to subscribe to the employment agenda and then focus on the positive aspects of it.

What we witness is how radical ideas, or utopias, become tempered by legal stipulations and funding criteria inherent to the welfare system. Or, putting it in Foucault’s terms, once a utopia is enacted it becomes a heterotopia. The Settlement projects become at the same time enclosures for experimentation and generation of critical, collective awareness and normalizing molding of deviant groups. Schematically speaking, in the early phases of The Settlement’s trajectory it was the message of universal, ‘Brotherly love’, found in Christianity that was tempered by ‘worldly’ encounters with the working poor. From around the middle of the 20th Century, voices within The Settlement increasingly criticized that the radical demands of fundamental social change were compromised by the concrete bureaucratic requirements of the modern welfare state. In both cases, we may speak of a heterotopic co-existence of divergent elements which are ‘simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted’ (Foucault, 1986: 23).
As a site of juxtaposition, the heterotopia puts language and received notions under pressure. Insofar as heterotopias are impossible or highly ambiguous spaces they reveal the limits of our language, making it tremble and splinter (Foucault, 1971). Perhaps the recurrent difficulties of agreeing on the right name for *The Settlement* can be understood in the light. First, in 1911, it was *The Christian Student Settlement*, then, in 1975, it was shortened to *The Student Settlement*, and later, the name was changed to *The Settlement at Vesterbro*. Throughout its lifespan, *The Settlement* has challenged and reconstructed entrenched divisions in our culture between the religious and the secular, between public and private space, between leisure and work, and between the normal and the deviant. This is certainly one of the reasons for why *The Settlement* has inspired, moved, or provoked its surroundings. Consider Foucault’s emphasis on the heterotopia’s violation of culturally entrenched oppositions, ‘for example between private space and public space, between family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure and that of work’ (1986: 22).

In situations where the language would seem to be pressed to its limits, *Settlement* members sometimes made creative discursive inventions. Terms like ‘spirit in action’, ‘the third labor market’, or ‘co-vision with the user’ offered ways of re-describing what could not be contained within the conventional distinctions. It must also be noted that from the early 1970s onwards, an increasing part of the workers at *The Settlement* and its projects consisted of professionals like social workers, nurses, and language teachers. Notions of Christian spirit or Brotherly love were clearly not suited as a way to construct collective identity in an organization populated by volunteers and various, secular professions. At a visit that I undertook with a group of researchers at *The Settlement’s* social counselling unit and language classes for immigrant women, one word was repeated to designate the unifying value of the work: ‘hope’. When
working with severely marginalized users who tend to be stuck with psychiatric disease, drug abuse, or a collapsed economy, the Settlement workers were united, they said, in ‘keeping up hope’.

This would seem like a very open or vaguely defined notion, but this vagueness might be its strength. According to the discourse theory advanced by Ernesto Laclau such ‘empty’ signifiers, like the ones above, play a unifying function by rallying agents around a particular project, for instance, The Settlement. ‘The empty signifier’ is as a signifier which assumes its unifying function by cancelling out its specific content hereby allowing diverse actors or groups to identify with it (Laclau, 2000: 70-71). Its function depends, then, on its capacity to simultaneously represent other signifiers. In our case, these could include ‘friendly meetings’, ‘community revitalization’, ‘working with not for the users’, and ‘doing the impossible’. We can hypothesize that loosely defined notions of ‘the Christian spirit’ served as means of uniting members from diverse congregations during The Settlement’s early decades. It is furthermore tempting to conclude that in the absence of any transcendental reference, other, more ‘worldly’ signifiers must increasingly do the job of unifying The Settlement of the present day.

Conclusion
So far, much research on voluntary and philanthropic associations has emphasized the question of how they can maintain their particular identity, while they adapt to the bureaucratic regulation of the welfare state. Applying the perspective of the heterotopia provides a slightly different emphasis. It is possible to agree with the above contributions on the limitations of a simplified model that contrasts Christian charity based on morality, patronage and compassion with the universal welfare based on objectivity, formal rights, and science-based services. The
development was certainly more complex. However, the present analysis did not reveal the contradictions of *The Settlement* as solely created by the growing collaboration with the public sector. It revealed certain contradictions that were inherent to *The Settlement* right from its inception rooted in the attempt to unite a serious of distinct elements: philanthropy and cultural integration, home and public space, religion and social analysis, radical critique and welfare projects. *The Settlement* became a place in which the Christian impulse, social critique, and social work converged.

We also noticed how radical and utopian ideas were continuously formulated in different guises throughout the whole period. At the same time, *The Settlement* workers maintained that it was important to achieve something on a small scale even if the overall social conditions were constraining. The increasing collaboration with public authorities around child care and projects for the unemployed meant that *The Settlement* needed to pay attention to the necessities, regulations, and professional codes of the authorized welfare system. One simple reason for this was that the people who sought help from *The Settlement* often needed to be referred to public welfare services and hence needed to be represented in appropriate and acceptable ways. They might be in need of social benefits, medical treatment, psychiatric counselling or representation in the legal system.

*The Settlement* displays the unavoidable tempering and compromise that occur when utopian ideals of ‘unconditional care’ or ‘radical change’ are institutionalized and become embodied in social practices and institutional arrangements. While acknowledging that such ideals are compromised or tempered through various political and structural controls of the welfare hegemony, it does not mean that they cannot have transformative effects. One the one hand, *The Settlement* glows and glitters in its incongruous variety, illuminating passages for the
imagination of alternatives. One the other hand, we witness the presence of defined needs, regulation and training to fit requirements of ‘normal society’ and the labor market. In fact, debates within *The Settlement* highlighted the paradox that they prepared marginalized users for inclusion in the very society which was the very target of fundamental critique.

The principles of Brotherly love, ‘co-vision’, and ‘working with the users’ stand in a tensional relationship with requirements of categorizing users for eligibility, abiding by regulations and normalizing whenever possible – in short, welfarist discipline. Clearly, the space of *The Settlement* did not constitute an enclosure but was pervaded by the heterogeneity of outer space. It reflected – and continues to reflect – longstanding welfare state paradoxes. The most fundamental one is the contradiction between formal universality and the specific needs of particular individuals. *The Settlement* does not escape mediating between the legal-political discourse and individualizing care, the two deep-seated poles of the modern welfare state. Despite of all radicalism, they had to face the problem of representing the particular person in objectifying and juridical categories.

*The Settlement* has promised simultaneously the possible and the impossible. It displayed the juxtapositions and contradictions that emerge when the Spirit was put into action. We have seen that these incongruences did not freeze up or paralyze *The Settlement* project but have spurred a continuous social innovation. Whether we emphasize the utopian dreams or the entangled and contradictory realities is an analytical choice, insofar as the heterotopic perspective encompasses both. *The Settlement* is a place where what can be dreamed up intersects with what can be done.
References:


AUTHOR


