

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Fresh news as meaningful? A multi-site ethnographic analysis of meaningful activities at four day centres in Denmark and Norway

Christine Øye PhD

Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Centre of Care Research, Bergen, Norway

**Correspondence**

Christine Øye, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Centre of Care Research, Bergen, Norway.  
Email: [christine.oye@hvl.no](mailto:christine.oye@hvl.no)

**Funding information**

Norwegian Research Council, Grant/Award Number: 273696

**Abstract**

Day centres are increasingly being established, as many older persons are isolated and in need of meaningful activities and social interaction with others. Previous research has shown that day centres are still an important arena for older attendees to socialise and engage in meaningful activities, although day centres are increasingly introducing activities as part of rehabilitation programmes to enhance physical and mental enablement. However, little is known about what attendees and staff regard as meaningful activities. Based on a multi-site ethnographic investigation at four day centres in Denmark and Norway in 2018 and 2019, this article examines *how* staff and attendees alike 'utilise' day care centres to pursue meaningful activities and *what* is considered meaningful for those attending and working there. Furthermore, this article discusses the potential for person-centred care in communities like day centres. Our study shows that activities are first and foremost perceived as meaningful if they enhance an enjoyable social dimension with 'a touch of fresh news'. Hence, day centres function as a social space where elderly attendees can share stories and news based on personal experiences from the past and present. Consequently, person-centred care in day care centres preferably facilitates communities to give attendees something new and refreshing to bring back home with them—and not only facilitate personal histories, preferences and wishes.

**KEYWORDS**

ageing, day centre, ethnography, meaningfulness, person-centred care, social activity

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Day centres are increasingly part of community-based aged care in response to an increasingly elderly people population worldwide (Doh et al., 2020; Miller, 2016) and typically target frail elderly home-dwelling persons (Ayalon, 2019; Burch & Borland, 2001; Miller, 2016; Pitkala et al., 2009; Svidén et al., 2004). Historically, day centres

have been associated with day care activities with a collectivistic and social orientation to compensate for social isolation and loneliness (Ayalon, 2019; Burch & Borland, 2001; Hagan & Manktelow, 2020; Miller, 2016; Pitkala et al., 2009; Svidén et al., 2004). This is still the case, as day centres are an important arena for elderly attendees to socialise and engage in meaningful activities (Hagan & Manktelow, 2020; Miller, 2016; Orellana et al., 2020a; Orellana et al., 2020c). However, lately, it has been claimed that day centres

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited and is not used for commercial purposes.

© 2022 The Author. *Health and Social Care in the Community* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

increasingly downplay socially meaningful leisure activities and are more preoccupied with defined programmes, such as rehabilitation and enablement activities that support independence (Carlsson et al., 2020; Hickerson et al., 2008; Iecovich & Biderman, 2013; Lassen, 2014), also being the case in Norway and Denmark (Øye et al., 2021). With the increase in introduced rehabilitation and enablement activity programmes, day centres have enlarged their activity repertoire. As such, these programmes in day care contexts are becoming part of policies on ageing in place and active ageing (WHO, 2016).

Previous studies report that frail older persons living at home lack engagement and purposeful activities (Ashida & Heaney, 2008; Hickerson et al., 2008; Miller, 2016). A lack of activities in general, and a lack of meaningful social activities in particular, has often been explained by the diminished quality and quantity of social networks and relationships in later life due to retirement, death and illness of family members, lack of a network and relocation (Eggebo et al., 2019; Pitkala et al., 2009; Ashida & Heaney, 2008; Hickerson et al., 2008). Therefore, it has been claimed that close friendships and social interaction with others outside the family and previous network are important for older persons' social needs and meaningfulness (Ashida & Heaney, 2008). In that respect, it has been reported that day care centres can fulfil social needs and offer a sense of social connectedness and belonging that counteracts loneliness (Carlsson et al., 2020; Hickerson et al., 2008; Miller, 2016; Orellana et al., 2020c; Walker et al., 2004) and that staff-facilitated activities can enhance meaningfulness and well-being of the elderly people (Seddigh et al., 2020; enhancing well-being and quality of life (Fields et al., 2014; García-Martín et al., 2004; Kwok et al., 2013; Miller, 2016; Orellana et al., 2020c; Pitkala et al., 2009; Svidén et al., 2004; Tollén et al., 2007). Nevertheless, it is still a mystery as to what attendees find meaningful in attending organised activities and especially what the staff experiences as meaningful and purposeful about the activities offered. Some previous studies based on attendee perspectives report that attendees find it meaningful to engage in social interaction with others whilst doing activities (Emami et al., 2000; Hagan & Manktelow, 2020; Hickerson et al., 2008; Miller, 2016; Orellana et al., 2020c). More concretely, this means being useful to others (Hagan & Manktelow, 2020; Lund & Engelsrud, 2008), being able to carry out activities despite frailty (Miller, 2016; Tollén et al., 2007), or simply participating in shared life stories with old and new friends (Lassen, 2014). However, activities can be experienced as less meaningful if they must be carried out by the elderly people who are unable to participate due to mental or physical decline (Lund & Engelsrud, 2008; Miller, 2016), if they are infantilising (Carlsson et al., 2020) or if people are unable to form friendships with peers without staff interference (Shulamith, 1999). In general, previous studies report that the activities offered in day centres still have a significant social profile, which is largely experienced as meaningful by attendees and staff alike, without specifying what aspects of the social activities are perceived as meaningful or how the participants utilise the activities based on the arranged and spontaneous activities of staff or attendees.

### What is known about this topic?

- Day centres are increasingly part of community-based age care with an emphasis on rehabilitation and enablement activities that support independence.
- Day centres compensate for isolation and loneliness amongst older home-dwelling persons and enhance social well-being.
- Person-centred care can enhance meaningfulness, needs and preferences by targeting older individuals in round-the-clock institutions.

### What this paper adds

- What meaningful activities mean seen from the perspectives of elderly attendees and staff in day centres.
- How staff and older attendees utilise arranged and spontaneous activities.
- What person-centred care can "look like" in communities like day centres.

As day centres are increasingly becoming part of community services, discussions focus on the congregate nature of these facilities (Orellana et al., 2020b). First of all, the discussions concern how day care activity programmes in collectivistic contexts can enhance physical and cognitive enablement amongst attendees (e.g. Fields et al., 2014; Hickerson et al., 2008; Stevens et al., 1998). In other words, the focus is on a form of restorative care to maintain the highest possible level of function amongst attendees (Resnick et al., 2006). Second, the discussions examine how the activities offered can enhance meaningfulness, needs, preferences and values, and as such align with perspectives on person-centred care (Britten et al., 2016; Edvardsson et al., 2010; McCormack et al., 2011; Santana et al., 2018; Wilberforce et al., 2017). However, since person-centred care is usually associated with individualism, whilst day centre activities are community-based (Manthorpe & Moriarty, 2014; Orellana et al., 2020a), the question is whether the collectivistic activity programmes at day centres are outdated in the personalisation era (Manthorpe & Moriarty, 2014; 352). In contrast, others claim that the personalisation of care can be provided in a more collectivistic 'impersonal' institutional day care setting (Barnes, 2011). However, how this can be done is still a puzzle and there have only been a few attempts to formulate what person-centred care may 'look like' in communities like day care institutions. However, these attempts are based on research from care homes and round-the-clock institutions and not day care institutions. Person-centred care in care home communities is formulated as a service initiative aimed at leisure activities for older persons in order to experience engagement and enjoyment in a cheerful atmosphere and promote a continuation of self in line with the older person's history, values and preferences (Ruggiano & Edvardsson, 2013). Alternatively, it provides meaningful activities in a person-centred environment by enriching

the environment with personal aspects 'that could promote a continuation of self and normality' (Edvardsson et al., 2010; 2617). All the same, these ideas are formulated as care work that targets the individual person defined by his or her historically defined preferences, values or needs and are not necessary as collectivistic communities relevant for day centres. Hence, person-centred care is yet to be highlighted in more detail and considered relevant for facilitating communities in day centres where attendees attend only a few hours a few days a week.

Against this background and drawing on ethnographic data from Danish and Norwegian day centres, this paper has a twofold aim: (1) To examine *how* attendees and staff actively shape and utilise activities and *what* it is about the activities that is perceived as meaningful and (2) based on the analysis of meaningful activities, the paper also discusses the potential for person-centred care in communities like day centres.

## 2 | METHODS

The study was carried out at two day centres in Denmark and two in Norway based on a project called 'Creating Integrated Person-centred Care in Different Settings' (CONTEXT). Day centres were one of several services explored in the Context study based on rapid site-switching ethnography (Armstrong & Lowndes, 2018).

### 2.1 | Setting

In both Denmark and Norway, the day care services are needs assessed, and most day centres are part of public municipality health and social care services and, therefore, free of charge. However, in some day centres, attendees will have to pay a small user fee for food, excursions, bingo gifts, etc. One of the day centres in this sample was run by a private non-profit organisation in close collaboration with the municipality's home care services. In both countries, day centres typically target frail older home-dwelling persons in need of social, mental and physical reablement services (Førland & Rostad, 2019; Øye et al., 2021). Nevertheless, in this sample, the assessment criteria slightly differed, as one day centre only assessed persons living with dementia whilst the three others assessed persons with both physical and mental decline in need of social activation. In all day centres, attendees were assessed to reduce the burden for spouses, despite this not being formal assessment criteria in the Danish municipalities. Most of the attendees also received home care services.

Typical planned activities were indoor activities like bingo, reading groups (newspapers), handicrafts, puzzles, different types of board games, etc. At some day centres, cultural activities such as writing groups with authors, film watching, singing sessions and carving or knitting groups were also organised. In addition, all day centres organised physical exercise sessions, either individually or in groups, including group outdoor walks, excursions to churches, parks, grocery stores, etc.

### 2.2 | Data collection

Data were collected in 2018/2019, utilising a range of data sources: (1) semi-structured interviews with leaders, staff and attendees in day centres (2) walk-and-talk interviews with staff and attendees (3) field notes from participant observations. The study includes participant observations over a total of 18 days. The field work was carried out for 5–9 hours on weekdays for 5 days in a row and repeated in the four different day care settings. Typically, the participant-observer observed different forms of social interaction between staff and attendees, staff interaction only and interaction between attendees without staff being present. The interaction observed took place during activities, e.g. planned staff-facilitated activities indoors or outdoors, spontaneous activities initiated by staff or attendees and, finally, meal preparation and eating as important social arenas.

### 2.3 | Participants

A total of 19 attendee participants between the ages of 75 and 95 (six men and 13 women) were formally interviewed about their experiences with day centres and recruited in collaboration with staff. Most of the attendees also received home care. Three interviews were held in groups of three participants ( $n = 9$ ) and one with two participants ( $n = 2$ ), and eight interviews ( $n = 8$ ) were held with one participant at a time, either at the day centre location or in the attendees' private home. Approximately half of those interviewed had some form of cognitive decline but were considered by staff to be sufficiently competent to provide informed consent. The youngest participant observed was in her late 50s with a dementia diagnosis and the oldest was in her late 90s. A total of 18 day centre staff with a permanent position were also interviewed, either individually or in pairs recruited by the author. The interviews with staff and attendees lasted between 20 and 65 min. The staff interviewees consisted mainly of practical nurses, but a few were assistant occupational therapists, occupational therapists, registered nurses, physiotherapists or sports educators. At one day centre, volunteers arranged activities, such as singing sessions for all attendees and crafting sessions with male attendees. However, volunteers were not interviewed being present only for approximately an hour per day.

### 2.4 | Analyses

The Context project was based on a layered case study (Patton, 2002) with a research design that opened up several layers and focal points for possible analysis. NVivo was used for a verbatim transcription analysis of the formal interviews with staff and attendees. All researchers read through the transcriptions, thereafter, formulating memos often as metaphors (e.g. 'fresh news', 'telegraph station') and suggestions for codes. Based on such an inductive procedure eight thematic, fine-grained codes were identified in analysing the attendees' interviews whilst 12

codes were identified by reading interviews with staff. The attendees' codes used for this article were: (1) Home life context of the older persons. (2) Experiences with health and social care services, with particular focus on day care centres. (3) Meaningful activities and social activities. (4) Person-centred care, including shared decision-making. For staff interviews, four thematic fine-grained codes were used for this article, paying particular attention to: (1) Activation, rehabilitation and enablement, (2) social activities, (3) loneliness and social care and (4) person-centred care. For the field notes and informal interviews, setting-specific coding was used (Lofland et al., 2006) based on the different settings in which the social activities took place: (1) physical activities, e.g. physical exercise, outdoor walks in gardens or nearby area, dance sessions, (2) cultural activities, e.g. singing sessions, writing groups, handicraft groups and (3) social activities, e.g. excursions, shopping, bingo, meals and coffee get-togethers. This setting-specific coding led to awareness of how the material settings, e.g. breakfast seating and garden shelter enabled meaning-making. Therefore, the analysis was informed by looking at how meaning is socially shaped by the attendees and staff alike in the circumstances of day care settings, i.e. examining how participants attach meaning to the activities in which they participate, constituted by existing social and material structures (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000).

## 2.5 | Research ethics

Ethical approval was obtained from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), ref. no. 128713, and informed consent forms were collected from all interviewed attendees and staff. Anonymity was secured by slightly redrafting the empirical material if episodes or quotes were recognisable.

## 3 | RESULTS

Most staff and attendees alike emphasised the joyful social dimension of the day centres as the most important reason for attendees to visit, as these quotes from staff show: 'We work against social isolation and fulfil a psycho-social need' or 'It is nice for the elderly to get out of their own homes and see other people and especially to have something other to do than stare at the walls at home'. Likewise, the attendees highlighted the social dimension of the activities as particularly important: 'We have physical exercise every day and sometimes bingo... It's hard to tell what I prefer, probably the social contact with others... so it is important to find a place to sit with others'. All in all, the reason for highlighting day centres' social dimensions was largely related to the attendees' home life in isolation, as one attendee said: 'The people at the day centre are the only people I see and talk to all week. I share the newspaper with two neighbours, but I hardly talk to them'. As such, the day centres were perceived as an important part of the elderly person's social life during the week: 'I need to see people because I sit alone day and night'

or 'The day centre is a very nice concept ... but I don't want to spend Christmas Eve here'.

If the attendees commented on activities, it was often for the sake of chatting with others or having fun, just as two ladies in interviews answered when asked if they enjoyed the activities: 'We are very fond of each other. We laugh and tease each other, just like school children'. Based on observations and interviews, most attendees seemed to enjoy the activities offered, despite some being less enthusiastic. Obviously, attending the day centre and the activities were not always the attendees' own choice. When asked the reason for attending a day centre, they could 'blame' their cognitive decline: 'The people at the hospital told me that I have dementia, so they took away my driving license ... and then I was sent here' or attendees might say that the day centres were not their preferred choice, as the episode below suggests:

A church visit was organised for all the attendees of the day centre. A lady sat down next to a staff member and said, 'I have not been to church since I got married. I would rather not be here, even though the church is very pretty'. The staff member replied, 'I didn't even get married in the church, but here I am', to which the woman replied, 'Well, I don't want to be at the day care centre, but my husband sent me.'

The staff members were very much aware that not all attendees were there by choice and this was very evident when the reluctant attendees arrived in the morning. But the staff members did their best to motivate them to stay:

A lady arrived at the day centre in the morning by bus. Two staff members walked over to the bus when they saw Agnes arrive and said, 'So nice to see you again, Agnes, we haven't seen you in a while'. She replied, 'I can't find anything any longer and I don't know where to go'. A staff member took her hand gently and said, 'You'll spend the day with us today'. The woman protested and tried to return to the bus, saying, 'Actually, I won't be staying here because I'm getting ready to leave for a holiday'. The staff member replied, 'Yes, you'll be going on holiday in two weeks' but the woman still protested and said, 'I want to sleep until noon and get up when I want to'. (Observation).

Despite some attendees protesting, generally speaking, the day centres were perceived by attendees and staff alike as a meaningful place for social stimulation and joy.

### 3.1 | Staff-facilitated activities

The staff facilitated most of the planned activities, except for those organised by volunteers in one of the day centres. The

activities were organised for various reasons. Most of the activities were organised for attendees to be socially, mentally and physically active and the activities were perceived by the staff as having a social dimension: *'The activities provide a sense of community and social companionship. They (attendees) are not only in a good mood when they return from, for instance, the physical exercise session, depending on their abilities of course, but also because it is an enjoyable social activity'*. In addition, the activities had a political purpose, i.e. to enable the attendees to be independent and continue to live in their own home longer: *'We should offer the elderly a meaningful and joyful experience when visiting the day centre. And if they experience this as meaningful, they will be able to stay at home longer before needing nursing home facilities'*. Accordingly, many of the activities organised had an enablement purpose. Therefore, all day centres organised physical exercise, various games or 'natural' social settings to improve physical and cognitive functioning. For instance, an excursion group was organised in which all attendees had a dementia diagnosis and the staff 'used' social settings to talk about memories from the past or present:

After the excursion to the park, the staff members wrote down the events of the day in a book for the attendees to take home: 'Peter, what do you want me to write? What did you do outside with your friends? I don't know because I wasn't in your group'. He responded: 'Write down all the stuff I have experienced during my lifetime'. The staff member replied: 'Yes, you have worked as a gardener, so tell me about the plants you saw today'. Peter talked about the kinds of plants he used to work with, but not the plants he saw today. (Observations).

Moreover, the staff members were eager to make attendees feel welcome and organise activities they were sure the attendees would appreciate. This is why the staff would always give attendees a warm welcome by name and ask about their home life, for instance by asking: *'How was your dentist appointment yesterday?' or 'How is your new neighbour? Have you had a chance to get to know her yet?'* If attendees were reluctant to enter the facility or participate in activities, the staff members would do their best to motivate them to actively participate. During an interview, one staff member explained how and why she kept the reluctant attendees busy: *'I try to get them to feel attached to this place and that's easier if I give them a purposeful activity to keep them busy. This helps them feel that they belong here'*. Staff would also 'use' knowledge about the person's history to help the attendee enjoy an activity. For instance, during a park excursion, one staff member asked Jens when he was reluctant to pick plants, *'Why don't you tell us, Jens, how to make liquor? I know you have a degree in Biology and know more than all of us about the nature of plants'* Jens 'woke up' for a short whilst, whispering his response, before heading back to the shelter. Engaging attendees in 'meaningful activities' is a complex matter that makes the staff constantly search for something that

can resonate with attendee interests and abilities. Accordingly, the staff downplayed such things as frailty and disengagement and 'used' activities to enable active participation.

### 3.2 | Attendee-initiated activities

The attendees could also initiate activities, which were often 'small' social activities such as conversation groups, knitting with peers, going for a short walk outside with others, having a smoke and a chat outdoors, etc. Furthermore, the attendees could ask staff to organise social activities such as reading the newspaper aloud, an extra cup of coffee, bingo etc. When attending the day centre, meaningful activities that were not previously experienced as meaningful could be perceived as meaningful, such as bingo, as one attendee explained: *'I would never have dreamed of participating in bingo before I started coming here, but it's actually quite fun'*. In addition, having the staff read aloud from newspapers, either local or national, was also perceived as meaningful. The elderly people would comment on the news, with local scandals and obituaries appreciated in particular. News from peers was also appreciated. Consequently, 'fighting' over certain seats was important in contexts where seating was not determined by the staff:

The buses arrived with the attendees in the morning. The first attendees to arrive were able to choose a seat at the breakfast tables first. The seats with a view to the main entrance filled up first. From these seats, the elderly people could see who was seated in the main living room and who was seated in the smaller living room (a living room for attendees with dementia). Whilst waiting for breakfast to be served and as the attendees were finding a seat, they began sharing news: 'Here comes Olav. I wonder if he's going to sit with us today or in the senile group'. Another replied, 'I've heard that he started annoying people at the supermarket the other day. He's not quite right (pointing at his head)'. (Observations).

The attendees would share news from the inside and the outside world. In itself, the news is important for attendees to communicate further to peers inside and outside the day centres. They might say, 'I have some news to tell my wife when I get home' or 'I have a daughter and since my wife died some years ago, coming here gives me something to tell my daughter when she visits, something to share about my day'. Therefore, activities are important arenas where the older persons get 'fresh news' to comment on or pass on in other social contexts. Typically, activities were used as an opportunity to whisper 'fresh news' to peers, as the case below shows:

During an organised activity in which a volunteer musician from the outside came to entertain with his guitar, he sang a song about a man named John. Two older

persons sat close to each other and during the song session, one older woman whispered to the man next to her, 'In this song about John, how is John doing? Is he still living with that lady, what's her name?', to which the man replied, 'Her name is Lise, I think they're still together, I haven't heard anything else'. After the song session, one of the attendees shared 'news' from this session during lunch: 'I don't know what's going on with him (the singer) these days, but he seems to forget the lyrics and tone,' to which another replied, 'Yes, and I noticed that he played the same song twice'. (Observations).

Activities, whether or not perceived as meaningful, serve as a 'centre' of events where the attendees can exchange stories and news. Consequently, attendees can 'utilise' the activities to pursue social meaningful goals.

## 4 | DISCUSSION

Demographic changes, policies on 'ageing at place' and fiscal pressure make older persons in their 'fourth age' homebound, consequently with fewer opportunities to engage in social and meaningful activities due to the lack of a social network, relocation and physical and mental frailty (Ashida & Heaney, 2008; Eggebø et al., 2019; Pitkala et al., 2009). Day centres have previously proven to be one of the few community services that fulfil social needs and offer meaningful activities in an enjoyable company for older persons in their fourth age (Ayalon, 2019; Hagan & Manktelow, 2020; Miller, 2016; Orellana et al., 2020b, 2020c). This is also the case in this study, showing that day centres fill a 'social gap' in everyday life, as such, an appreciated break for many older persons from a home life that is often characterised by isolation and loneliness. Nevertheless, for some attendees, day centre activities were a last resort since there were few other opportunities to be social on a daily basis. For others, it was a way to ease the burden on their relatives. As such, the activities offered and how they were 'utilised' by attendees varied, some attendees felt that the activities offered at the day centres were meaningful, whilst others actively avoided participation in activities. For the ones actively participating in activities, it was not always the activities as such that were perceived as meaningful, but rather the social dimension—as also highlighted elsewhere (Hagan & Manktelow, 2020; Miller, 2016). Nevertheless, many of the attendees build a strong community by actively utilising activities to pursue meaningful social goals, such as by 'fighting' over certain seats and social companions. Likewise for staff, activities were organised to fulfil a social need to compensate for home life in isolation and boredom, despite staff strived to make the activity offers meaningful for reluctant attendees. Nevertheless, activities were also utilised for rehabilitation and enablement purposes to delay costly institutionalisation care (e.g. Carlsson et al., 2020; Iecovich & Biderman, 2013; Lassen, 2014), as was evident in staff motivation and engagement efforts towards reluctant attendees.

Previous research has not been very specific regarding how attendees and staff utilise day centres to pursue meaningful goals. However, some previous research has highlighted what attendees find meaningful about visiting day centres, such as engaging in activities that they are able to master (Miller, 2016; Tollén et al., 2007) or engaging in social activities where they connect with others by sharing stories (Lassen, 2014). Likewise, in this study activities, whether or not organised by the staff, offered potential as a 'place' to pursue news as something to be conveyed further to others inside or outside the day centre. 'Fresh news', scandals and gossip were especially appreciated. Sharing 'news' connects the attendees to the outer world because the news travels, albeit sometimes with the help of the staff writing it down for those with memory loss. Consequently, day centres function as an old-fashioned 'telegraph station' where fresh news travels with attendees as they come and go. Accordingly, 'fresh news' is a vital part of being social and has a 'hidden' meaningful social significance because 'fresh news' can boost the social life of homebound older persons. Personhood is therefore not only a historically shaped trait stored in the individual in the form of memories from the past and values, preferences or needs (e.g. Britten et al., 2016; McCormack et al., 2011), but rather can also entail anticipation of something new and 'refreshing' despite old age. Accordingly, the day centres as 'telegraph stations' inscribes and prescribes spaces and places for connecting attendees and news in a meaningful way. As such, 'fresh news' is inscribed in the materialisation of the activities that the day centre offers prescribing possibilities of personalisation that are at odds with the marketisation of care based on choice and autonomy (Nettleton et al., 2018). Therefore, person-centred care in day centre contexts can focus on facilitating communities as 'materialities of care', e.g. for the elderly people to have something 'new' to tell others by arranging for activities such as 'telegraph stations'. Moreover, using a person-centred community care approach (e.g. Wilberforce et al., 2017), day centres can enhance meaningfulness and joy by facilitating socially stimulating activities with a touch of freshness and excitement beyond one-to-one relationships. Hence, person-centred care can be enhanced by facilitating communities to connect older persons with each other based on events from the past and present, thereby bridging the past with the present and an anticipated future.

Despite considerable awareness amongst day centre staff of the potential that lies in facilitating communities and trying to enhance social events to create meaningful and joyful experiences, staff members are also tied-up with the utilisation of activities that support or improve independence, e.g. by appealing to what the attendees master rather than what they do not. Accordingly, engaging attendees in meaningful activities can be used as a form of restorative care (e.g. Resnick et al., 2006) for rehabilitation purposes in order to maintain or strengthen capacities that help promote independence despite impairments and frailty. Consequently, facilitating and enhancing person-centred care communities may be at odds with individualised restorative care in which staff uses 'meaningful' activities to keep the elderly people out of costly institutional care homes.

## 5 | LIMITATIONS

Multi-site ethnographic research involving week-long visits to four different sites does not provide a sufficient understanding of what is perceived as a meaningful activity. Short-term ethnographic fieldwork does not provide us with the voices of the most vulnerable attendees, which would require a longer stay. Therefore, it is possible that there are other critical voices that are not included in this ethnographic material. Moreover, there are crucial contextual differences (e.g. staffing, entrance requirement, clientele) that affect how staff are able to organise meaningful activities. However, despite the differences, the similarities are more striking, especially in relation to the social and meaningful dimensions evident in the activities organised.

## 6 | CONCLUSION

Historically, day centres have served as a social community that promotes socialisation in later life with a distinctly social activity profile. This is still the case, as day centres fulfil a social gap due to diminished social connectivity in old age and policies on 'ageing in place'. However, little attention has previously been devoted to how attendees and staff alike utilise the activities organised in day centres in a meaningful way and, equally as important, *what* makes an activity meaningful. Staff and attendees utilised the facility and activities for slightly different reasons. Whilst staff organised activities for attendees to be socially active, they also utilised the activities for rehabilitation and enablement purposes to help keep the elderly people out of costly institutional care homes. On the contrary, the attendees did not necessarily utilise the activities for rehabilitation purposes, but rather to pursue social goals. The study shows that activities are first and foremost perceived as meaningful if they enhance an enjoyable social dimension with 'a touch of fresh news'. Hence, day centres function as a social space in which elderly attendees share stories and news filled with experiences from the past and present to be conveyed outside the day centres. The 'hidden' social significance of 'fresh news' that takes place during activities gives the activities an extra meaningful dimension. Therefore, it is not the activities in themselves that are perceived as meaningful, but rather the spin-off effects that boost the older persons' social life. As such, person-centred care at day centres should preferably facilitate communities for attendees to have something new and refreshing to bring back home with them—and not only to facilitate personal histories, preferences and wishes in an individualistic way. Moreover, staff should be reluctant to use activities as a restorative form of care for rehabilitation and enablement purposes in line with the political aim of 'active ageing'—if the perspective of the attendees matters!

### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

I, Christine Øye, planned, conducted (data collection and analyses of the data) described in this article and wrote the paper.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the project leader of the CONTEXT project Mia Vabø for useful comments on an earlier draft. I would also like to thank all the participants in this project; research staff, leaders, care staff and day centre attendees in the four municipalities for their hospitality and practical preparations and organisation.

### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

No conflict of interests.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [cø], upon reasonable request.

### REFERENCES

- Armstrong, P., & Lowndes, R. (2018). *Creative teamwork. Developing rapid, site-switching ethnography*. Oxford University Press.
- Ashida, S., & Heaney, C. A. (2008). Social networks and participation in social activities at a new senior center: Reaching out to older adults who could benefit the most. *Activities, Adaptation & Ageing*, 31(1), 40–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01924780802039261>
- Ayalon, L. (2019). Sense of belonging to the community in continuing care retirement communities and adult day care centres: The role of the social network. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 48(2), 437–447. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22268>
- Barnes, M. (2011). Abandoning care? A critical perspective on personalization from an ethic of care. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 5(2), 153–167. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496535.2010.484265>
- Britten, N., Moore, L., Lydahl, D., Naldemirci, O., Elam, M., & Wolf, A. (2016). Elaboration of the Gothenburg model of person-centred care. *Health Expectations*, 20, 407–418. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.12468>
- Burch, S., & Borland, C. (2001). Collaboration, facilities and communities in day care services for older people. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 9(1), 19–30.
- Carlsson, H., Pijpers, R., & Van Melik, R. (2020). Day-care centres for older migrants: Spaces to translate practices in the care landscape. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 23, 250–269. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2020.1723135>
- Doh, D., Smith, R., & Gevers, P. (2020). Reviewing the reablement approach to caring for older people. *Ageing & Society*, 40, 1371–1383. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X18001770>
- Edvardsson, D., Fetherstonhaugh, D., & Nay, R. (2010). Promoting a continuation of self and normality: Person-centred care as described by people with dementia, their family members and aged care staff. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 19, 2611–2618. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2702.2009.03143.x>
- Eggebo, H., Munkejord, M. C., & Schönfelder, W. (2019). Land, history and people: older people's stories about meaningful activities and social relations in later life. *Journal of Population Ageing*, 13(4), 465–483. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12062-019-09253-7>
- Emami, A., Torres, S., Lipson, J. G., & Ekman, S.-L. (2000). An Ethnographic Study of a day care centre for Iranian immigrant seniors. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 22(2), 169–188.
- Fields, N. L., Anderson, K. A., & Dabelko-Schoeny, H. (2014). The effectiveness of adult day services for older adults: A review of the literature from 2000 to 2011. *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, 33(2), 130–163. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0733464812443308>
- Førland, O. & Rostad, H.M. (2019). *Variasjon og uønsket variasjon i kvalitet i omsorgstjenestene [Quality variation and not unwanted quality variation in health and social care services]*, Report no. 4. Centre of Care Research, Norway.

- García-Martín, M. A., Gómez-Jacinto, L., & Martimortugués-Goyenechea, C. (2004). A structural model of the effects of organized Leisure Activities on the well-being of elder adults in Spain. *Activities, Adaption & Ageing*, 28(3), 19–34. [https://doi.org/10.1300/j016v28n03\\_02](https://doi.org/10.1300/j016v28n03_02)
- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (2000). Analyzing interpretive practice. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 487–508). Sage Publications.
- Hagan, R. J., & Manktelow, R. (2020). 'I shall miss the company: Participants' reflections on time-limited day centre programming. *Ageing & Society*, 41, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X2000689>
- Hickerson, B., Moore, A., Oakleaf, L., Edwards, J., Swanson, J., & Henderson, K. A. (2008). The role of a senior center in promoting physical activity for older adults. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 26(2), 22–39.
- Iecovich, E., & Biderman, A. (2013). Quality of life among disabled older adults without cognitive impairment and its relation to attendance in day care centres. *Ageing & Society*, 33, 627–643. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X12000104>
- Kwok, T., Ho, D., Chan, G., Isaac, I. P., Wong, B., & Ho, F. (2013). Evaluation of day care services for demented clients in Hong Kong. *Asian Journal of Gerontology & Geriatrics*, 8(2), 1–5.
- Lassen, A. L. (2014). Billiards, rhythms, collectives. Billiards at a Danish activity centre as a culturally specific form of active ageing. *Ethnologia Europea*, 44(1), 57–74.
- Lofland, J. D., Snow, D., Anderson, L., & Lofland, L. H. (2006). *Analyzing social settings—a guide to qualitative observation and analysis*. Thomson Wadsworth.
- Lund, A., & Engelsrud, G. (2008). 'I am not that old': Inter-personal experiences of thriving and threats at a senior centre. *Ageing & Society*, 28(5), 675–692. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X07006988>
- Manthorpe, J., & Moriarty, J. (2014). Examining day centre provision for older people in the UK using the Equality Act 2010: Findings of a scoping review. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 22(4), 352–360. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hcs.12065>
- McCormack, B., Dewing, J., & McCance, T. (2011). Developing person-centred care: Addressing contextual challenges through practice development. *The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*, 16(2), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.3912/OJIN.Vol16No02Man03>
- Miller, E. (2016). Beyond bingo. A phenomenological exploration of leisure in aged care. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 48(1), 35–49. <https://doi.org/10.18666/jlr-2016-v48-i1-6254>
- Nettleton, S., Buse, C., & Martin, D. (2018). Essentially it's just a lot of bedrooms: architectural design, prescribed personalisation and the construction of care homes in later life. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 40(7), 1156–1171. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.12747>
- Orellana, K., Manthorpe, J., & Tinker, A. (2020a). Day centres for older people: A systematically conducted scoping review of literature about their benefits, purposes and how they are perceived. *Ageing and Society*, 40, 73–104. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X18000843>
- Orellana, K., Manthorpe, J., & Tinker, A. (2020b). Choice, control and person-centredness in day centres for older people. *Journal of Social Work*, 21(6), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468017320952255>
- Orellana, K., Manthorpe, J., & Tinker, A. (2020c). Day centres for older people – attender characteristics, access routes and outcomes of regular attendance: findings of exploratory mixed methods case study research. *BMC Geriatrics*, 20, 158. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-020-01529-4>
- Øye, C., Norvoll, R., & Vabø, M. (2021). Keeping up appearances - negotiating identities of being fit in older age. A multi-site ethnographic study of daily life in contemporary day centres. *Ageing and Society*, 41, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X2100163X>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. SAGE.
- Pitkala, K. H., Routasalo, P., Kautianinen, H., & Tilvis, R. S. (2009). Effects of psychosocial group rehabilitation on health, use of health care services, and morality of older persons suffering from loneliness: A randomized controlled trail. *Journal of Gerontology*, 64(7), 792–800. <https://doi.org/10.1093/Gerona/glp011>
- Resnick, B., Simpson, M., Galik, E., Bercovitz, A., Gruber-baldini, A. L., Zimmerman, S., & Agaziner, J. (2006). Making a difference: Nursing perspectives of restorative care nursing. *Rehabilitation Nursing*, 31(2), 78–86.
- Ruggiano, N., & Edvardsson, D. (2013). Person-centredness in home- and community based long-term care: Current challenges and new directions. *Social Work in Health Care*, 52(9), 846–861. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00981389.2013.827145>
- Santana, M. J., Kimberly, M., Jolley, R. J., Zelinsky, S., Quan, H., & Lu, M. (2018). How to practice person-centred care: A conceptual framework. *Health Expectations*, 21, 429–440. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.12649>
- Seddigh, M., Hazrati, M., Jokar, M., Mansouri, A., Bazrafshan, M.-R., & Kavi, E. (2020). A comparative study of perceived social support and depression among elderly embers of senior day centers, elderly residents in nursing homes, and elderly living at home. *Iranian Journal of Nursing and Midwifery Research*, 25(2), 160–165. [https://doi.org/10.4103/ijnmr.IJNMR\\_109\\_8](https://doi.org/10.4103/ijnmr.IJNMR_109_8)
- Shulamith, L.-A. (1999). From ritual to drama and back in a rehabilitation day-care center. *Journal of Ageing Studies*, 13(3), 315–332.
- Stevens, A. B., Camp, C. J., King, C. A., Bailey, E. H., & Hsu, C. (1998). Effects of a staff implemented therapeutic group activity for adult day care clients. *Ageing & Mental Health*, 2(4), 333–342.
- Svidén, A. A., Tham, K., & Borell, L. (2004). Elderly participants of social and rehabilitative day centres. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Science*, 18, 402–409.
- Tollén, A., Fredriksson, C., & Kamwendo, K. (2007). Elderly persons' expectations of day-care rehabilitation. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 14, 173–182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11038120601042566>
- Walker, J., Bisbee, C., Porter, R., & Flanders, J. (2004). Increasing practitioners' knowledge of participation among elderly adults in senior center activities. *Educational Gerontology*, 30, 353–366. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03601270490433549>
- WHO. (2016). Ageing and health. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/ageing/GSAP-Summary-EN.pdf?ua=1>
- Wilberforce, M., Challis, D., Davies, L., Kelly, M. P., Roberts, C., & Clarkson, P. (2017). Person-centredness in the community care of older people: A literature-based concept synthesis. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 26, 86–98. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.12221>

**How to cite this article:** Øye, C. (2022). Fresh news as meaningful? A multi-site ethnographic analysis of meaningful activities at four day centres in Denmark and Norway. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 30, e4705–e4712. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.13877>