Article

Between governance and local knowledge: Social workers' engagement with employment support for young people in the Faroe Islands and Greenland

by

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Abstract

Unemployment among young people is a large and multifaceted theme in contemporary social work research in the Nordic countries, with investing in youth being a top political priority. Social work has a pivotal role in the provision of employment services, particularly for young people in disadvantageous situations. We argue that the political understanding of unemployment as a social problem, and work inclusion as the solution effectuated through universalised employment support for young people, do not always correspond to social workers' experiences and understandings of work and inclusion. This is particularly evident in postcolonial contexts, where identity politics interfere with policies of employment support, and power asymmetries between Nordic countries become visible. We suggest that culture as complex forms of local knowledge continuously negotiated and transformed by multiple actors, is a key factor for the constitution and resolution of unemployment as a social problem. Drawing on two ethnographic cases from Greenland and the Faroe Islands, we investigate how tensions between local knowledge and governance is played out in social work on young unemployment. We show how social workers insist on unemployment as social problems that need to be solved in tensions between belonging and uprooting, traditional and modern forms of life, and through postcolonial conflicts. Addressing challenges of employment support and work inclusion in areas in the Nordic region, which have been paid less attention to in research, is of crucial importance to make improvements.

Introduction

Unemployment among young people is a large and multifaceted theme in contemporary social work research in the Nordic countries and beyond. A growing number of young people are struggling with health issues, educational achievements, everyday social activities and other challenges, placing them in vulnerable and precarious situations (Assman & Broschinski, 2021). To be included in work might be a challenge because of incomplete schooling, a lack of work experience, poor qualifications or because of caring responsibilities for family members (Karlsdóttir et al., 2019). Welfare-to-work policies attempts to streamline employment support services towards labour market participation for all people of working age (van Berkel, Caswell, Kupka, & Larsen, 2017). The neo-managerial approach in the European welfare state has developed the governance of young unemployment towards more punitive employment support services, emphasising control and mandatory participation in activities for young benefit recipients. According to critical research, these rules for social services have enhanced the notion of othering between social service providers and their clients, thus generating a lack of recognition of people outside work and education (Timor-Shelvin, 2022).

Social work has a pivotal role in the provision of employment services, particularly for young people in disadvantageous situations, and within different social and cultural contexts (Pfeilstetter, 2017; Oltedal & Nygren, 2019). Much research has explored the tension between social work and work-inclusion initiatives from a comparative and national policy perspective (van Berkel & van der Aa, 2012; Timor-Shelvin, 2022; Gjersøe et al., 2023). Some scholars claim that social work is incompatible with the 'threat effect' of activation policies (van Berkel & van der Aa, 2012; Molander & Torsvik, 2022). Other research argues that social work needs to consider culture as a key factor for the constitution and resolution of social problems (Pfeilstetter, 2017, p. 169; Handulle & Oltedal, 2022).

Postcolonial social work research has made strong contributions to help understand cultural complexities in social work in general. This field of research is concerned with bringing the voice of unprivileged groups to the forefront of analysis, for example, with the point of departure in indigenous communities or marginalised people (e.g.

Nygård & Saus, 2018). Other researchers further discuss how to decolonise ethical principles of social work (Sewpaul & Henrickson, 2019) to include indigenous knowledge in social work (Brydon, 2012), and to criticise social work theory as dominated by Western 'shadows of hegemonic and universalist thinking' (Ranta-Tyrkkö, 2011, p. 37). Jensen and Arnfjord (2024) show how social work education in Greenland has been deeply interwoven with the colonial past, where Danish models of professionalism of social work was superior to local Greenland forms of thinking about social problems. Including indigenous knowledge in social work education is assumed to make Greenlandic students better equipped to address the specific needs of their communities (Jensen & Arnfjord, 2024, p. 212).

Although postcolonial social work research addresses crucial issues in order to include local knowledge in social work, there is less research that challenges the tendency to make a static oppopsition between the local/indigneous versus universal knowledge. In this study, we aim to add to social work research a more nuanced understanding of culture and local knowledge in understanding young unemployment, and to make improvements in employment support for young people. Drawing on two ethnographic cases from Greenland and the Faroe Islands, we identify contested forms of knowledge that are played out in employment support contexts. Throughout the article, culture is interchangeably understood with the concept of local knowledge, or 'what a person employs in order to interpret and act on the world' (Barth, 2002, p. 1). Applying an anthropological approach to local knowledge as heterogeneous, contested and hybrid, we aim to show how local knowledge of work and inclusion is not opposed to, but may inform universal principles, governance and understandings of work and inclusion of young people. We ask: *In what ways are tensions between governance and local knowledge on work and inclusion played out in social work on young unemployment?*

In the next section, we situate the research problem and study within the contexts of Greenland and the Faroe Islands. We then present our analytical framework and the method and data, before we develop the two empirical cases. Lastly, we summarise tensions in our findings that highlight challenges with the work inclusion of young people in the Nordic region.

Postcolonial context in the Faroe Islands and Greenland

The Faroe Islands and Greenland are two subnational island jurisdictions within the Kingdom of Denmark. The Faroe Islands was granted Home Rule in 1948, while Greenland obtained a similar system in 1979. In 2008, the Self-Government Act of Greenland was implemented. In both North Atlantic countries, the Danish government retains control of citizenship, monetary policy and foreign affairs, including defence. The population density in the Faroe Islands is much higher than in Greenland; the total area of Greenland constitutes 2,166,086 km2 compared with to the Faroe Islands at 1,399 km2 (Andersen, 2020, p. 7).

Greenland has 56,421 inhabitants (Statistics Greenland, 2021), which is divided into five municipalities, with a total of 17 towns. Approximately 90% of the citizens of Greenland belong to the indigenous Inuit population group. There are no roads connecting towns and settlements in Greenland, so therefore all transport between the towns and settlements is dependent on planes, helicopters, ships and dog sleds. Extreme weather conditions can restrict mobility and travel. For many young people, it is necessary to travel away from their homes to acquire an education. To attend school grades 8-10, children from the smaller settlements are forced to move from home to the nearest town. Approximately half go to continuation school either in Greenland or Denmark after 10th grade, while only one in seven young people continue directly to an upper secondary education after primary school.

In recent years, there has been an increased political focus on children and young people in Greenland, including young people outside education and work. Of the total population, 5,476 persons are in the age group between 18-24 years. According to Statistics Greenland, 2,649 young people between the ages of 16-24 are not in employment or education (NEET) (Statistics Greenland, 2021). The unemployment rate among people aged 18–29 is 5–7% in towns, whereas smaller settlements have a young unemployment rate of 10–15% (Statistics Greenland, 2019). There are also considerable differences between municipalities in terms of the proportion of young people who have started an upper secondary education four years after completing lower secondary school. The primary challenge is to retain pupils and students in education. At present, only about half of those who start an upper secondary

education programme will complete it (Ministry for Education, Culture, Sports, and Church, 2020). Greenland has the highest placement rate in the Greenlandic, Faroese and Danish commonwealth, with 4.5% of teenagers placed outside the family in residential institutions or foster care (Jensen, 2023). Many young Greenlanders do not participate in education, and are not actively looking for a job (Ravn, 2022, p. 148). The Greenlandic labour market is complex, and other means of sustaining a living beside paid work are well-known in Greenland, for example, hunting, fishing and social economy. As emphasised by Ravn and Høgedahl (2023): '(...) *being unemployed in the Greenlandic context is not the same as not working; one may still be providing for oneself by hunting, fishing or by being engaged in social economy, even if not partaking in formal paid work'* (Ravn & Høgedahl, 2023, p. 642).

The Faroe Islands has a population of 55,200 scattered over 17 of the 18 islands, although 40% live in the capital area of Tórshavn. The unemployment rate in the Faroe Islands is 1%, with just over 300 persons registered as full-time unemployed (Statistics Faroe Islands, 2023). Among persons aged 16-24, the unemployment rate is 1.1%. Only 31 persons are long-term unemployed (more than 12 months) in the Faroes today. The population in the working age group (15-74 years old) accounts for roughly 33,000 persons, of whom 16% are outside the labour market. Two hundred and sixty persons receive unemployment benefits from Arbeiðsloysisskipanin today (Statistics, Faroe Islands, 2023), of whom 157 are men and 103 are women (Statistics, Faroe Islands, 2023). Just below 1,000 persons receive 'fish processing plant' benefits, which is a support system tailored for people temporarily unemployed (because of the seasonality of work) in the fishing industry. Nevertheless, there are other groups of young people at risk of social marginalisation and work exclusion. Many young people from the villages move to Tórshavn, or even out of the country, first and foremost to Denmark, because of various challenges in their everyday life in the Faroe Islands (Gaini, 2024).

A common way to earn some extra money beside one's main occupation is through services and activities in social networks and local communities, which includes selling handmade knitwear, fish, birds, cakes, artwork and so on. Many families own sheep, a plot of land and a small boat for fishing, while others fix cars and repair

house roofs on weekends and holidays. A lot of working activities within family networks are not registered and taxed. These practices make it easier to make a living without necessarily having a permanent full-time job. Many fishermen take up other small jobs when they are on land – as taxi drivers, truck drivers, bus drivers, craftsman and so on (Hayfield, 2018). The Faroe Islands is a maritime society with strong bonds to the ocean, as more than 3,000 Faroese have places of work away from the Faroe Islands (Hayfield, 2018). As Hayfield points out, living in an island society considered to be remote in relation to continental urban regions, yet at the same time also being part of the globalised world, has an impact on cultural identities:

> For remote island or rural places, where high mobility (work mobility and cyclical migration) is part of sustaining such communities, remoteness must be understood in the context of connections elsewhere – to the sea and other places, as well as labour markets and locals living elsewhere. (Hayfield, 2018: 1150)

Mobilities associated with the maritime traditions of the Faroese society have shaped the working culture of the islands. This also applies to the context of Greenland, which has an extremely segregated and mobile labour market (Ravn & Høgedahl, 2023). Greenland and the Faroe Islands differ in size, climate, demography, culture and history, but have some similarities; fisheries constitute the basis of the economy, in addition to tourism (Andersen, 2020), with the communities mostly being rural and coastal, and the people having strong place-based identities and a complex and multilayered relationship with Denmark (Hayfield, 2018; Gaini, 2022). In both the Faroe Islands and Greenland, the tension between governance in terms of welfare models from Denmark and local identity politics is continuously debated as part of the countries' colonial heritage. It is within this context that social work's engagement with local knowledge is investigated in this study.

Theoretical approach: Local knowledge in social work

Social work and anthropology share several similarities, with common roots in the history of social theory, an engagement in human relations and an interest in understanding and improving conditions for unprivileged people (Pfeilstetter, 2017). However, while the main subject of anthropology is the study of culture, the main subject in social work is social problems (ibid. p. 168). As emphasised by Pfeilstetter (2017): *'Every social problem can be understood from a cultural point of view, but not*

every aspect of culture can be explained through social problem semantics'
(Pfeilstetter, 2017, p. 169).

Much social work research problematises different ways that culture and ethnicity matter in social work, for example, as the point of departure in indigenous communities (e.g. Nygård & Saus, 2018) or marginalised people (Lee, 2022). The concept of local knowledge is often used as an alternative to the culture concept. The term 'local knowledge' has many synonyms, such as indigenous knowledge, practical knowledge, cultural knowledge, community knowledge and traditional knowledge (Antweiler, 1998, p. 471). Antweiler (1998) suggests that local knowledge derives from specific localities and consists of factual knowledge, as well as skills and capabilities (Antweiler, 1998). In knowledge debates in social work, the tension between local knowledge, often labelled 'practical knowledge' and evidence-based knowledge, has been heavily debated along with an increased academisation and professionalisation of the profession. What shoud be the valid knowledge in the profession, and how should it be ranked? (Vindegg, 2009). According to Fossestøl (2019), the evidence model in social work tends to marginalise practical knowledge as valid knowledge in social work (Fossestøl, 2013). According to Fossestøl, practical knowledge relates to the particular and the local, and the evidence-based paradigm is insufficient for understanding social work research and practice, while much scholarship has argued for a broader knowledge base (Forrestøl, 2019, p. 1970). Smith (2012) and Gray and Coates (2010) highlight how indigneous knowledge held by minority groups as part of their cultural identity is crucial for social workers in order to solve problems for this group. An opposition between universalist forms of governance and indigenous (traditional) knowledge is a common tension in postcolonial social work research (Ranta-Tyrkkö, 2011).

A question debated by Rud (2014) is whether dichotomies between the universal and the local, traditional and modern life, and between local and global forms of work and education, are themselves products of the colonial politics. The picture of a traditional and pre-industrialised culture, emphasising practical or indigenous knowledge (Bertelsen et al., 2016), still shapes the understanding of Greenland (Rud, 2014). This limits 'Greenland's potential for economic growth and independence', he argues (Rud ibid.). For instance, the hunter is an ideal for young men in Greenland, and a

powerful cultural representation of Greenlandic culture (to tourists). Yet to be a hunter is not a paid job, and hunters are somehow 'unemployed". According to Rud (2014), ideals of 'tradition' provided colonial officials in Greenland with a strategy that enabled them to make fundamental changes in society appear as a restoration of Greenlandic culture en route to its own destruction' (Rud, 2014, p. 569). Nygren (1999) makes a similar argument on a general level in her discussion about knowledge debates in the development discourse. She suggests that local knowledge should not be understood in the conventional way as opposed to universal knowledge, or as part of a romantic past and a major obstacle to development (Nygren, 1999, p. 267). Instead, local knowledges could fruitfully be analysed as 'heterogeneous ways of knowing, that emerge out of a multidimensional reality in which diverse cultural, environmental, economic and socio-political factors intersect' (Nygren, 1999, p. 282). This establishes a more diversified model to analyse social workers' engagement with unemployed young and the structural, political and cultural challenges this might entail. We suggest that the anthropological perspective contributes to a broader understanding of the dynamic relational and processual link between power, knowledge and governance in postcolonial contexts.

Method and data

To demonstrate how tensions between governance and local knowledge are played out in the social work context in our study, we have constructed two cases from two work inclusion initiatives, one in Greenland and one in the Faroe Islands (Table 1). The cases draw on our previous ethnographic fieldwork and qualitative interviews in these contexts, supported by statistical overviews, reports and articles. As researchers, we share a common background in social anthropology, experiences with research on social work, unemployment and young people, and collaboration on research review on work inclusion of young people in the Nordic region (Gaini, 2023; Gjersøe, Leseth, & Vilhena, 2020). However, we have different positions when it comes to the proximity and distance to the empirical sites of the Faroe Islands and Greenland. While the second author (Gaini) is an 'insider' in the Faroe Islands, as well as having in depth-experience with Greenlandic culture, the first author (Leseth) is an 'outsider' in both Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Gaini has research experience from research on young people in the Faroe Islands, while Leseth has

research experience from research on activation work in Norway. These prior experiences and positions provided us with a framework for interpretation, as we aimed to approach the research field with an open mind, against a backdrop of theory (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). An ideal in qualitative research is to balance one's proximity to the subject or field of study with an analytical distance and ability to detach from the field (Powdermaker, 1966). As suggested by Strathern (1987), the analytical challenges of being an insider or outsider are not primarily about proximity or distance to the empirical field, but rather whether the researchers' models of explanation and interpretation overlap with those of the informants (Strathern, 1987). Drawing on a critical approach to categories and models of explanation we possibly 'share' with the informants, such as social work, local knowledge and work inclusion, we aim to contribute to a broader contextualised understanding of work inclusion and social work:

Table 1: This study's data set

Case	1.Arbeidsloysisskipan	2.Marioaq
Year	2018	2023
Location	The Faroe Islands	Greenland
Sites of investigation	Urban	Urban
Method	Fieldwork (participant observations, in-depth interviews)	Fieldwork (participant observations, in-depth interviews,)
Sample size	Five interviews with key staff, participant in meetings	Three interviews with key staff, observation in fisheries

The data from the Greenland case consists of interview transcripts from qualitative interviews, with staff engaged with the employment support services in Majoriaq, a town in Greenland with approximately 4,500 inhabitants. The data was collected by the first author in April 2023, who conducted three in-depth interviews with staff engaged in social work in a Majoriaq centre, as well as short-term fieldwork in the town by, for example, visiting local fisheries and construction services. The purpose of the interviews was to gain an understanding of the work-inclusion initiative in Majoriaq, and how the interviewees described challenges with unemployment among young people. An active interview approach (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003) guided the discussion towards specific topics, such as everyday work, culture, forms of social

inclusion, unemployment and employment policies. The interviews were carried out in Norwegian, with some translation done between Norwegian/Danish and Greenlandic by one of the staff. All the interviewees were native Greenlanders, born and raised in Greenland, but with some education in social work from Denmark. In addition, the researcher attended and observed different job placement sites in the city, such as fisheries, restaurants and kindergartens. She took field notes afterwards, and the interviews were taped and transcribed.

The data from the Faroe Islands consists of long-term fieldwork and in-depth interviews carried out in autumn 2018, from the employment support service Arbeiðsloysisskipanin. The fieldwork consisted of participant observation in meetings and seminars, and five in-depth interviews with key staff members at Arbeiðsloysisskipanin in two cities. The fieldwork was part of a research project on the vulnerable young and work, which was commissioned by- and contributed to a larger Nordic project on NEETs in rural communities (Karlsdóttir et al., 2019). This Faroese case draws on data from one of the employment support offices studied, particularly interviews with key persons in the service. All interviews and conversations were carried out in Faroese, and the data was later translated to English by the second author, Gaini.

The group of informants in both the Greenland and Faroese cases shared some similarities. Not all of them had completed higher education in social work, as they described their work as social work, emphasising holistic and relational understandings of people within work- inclusion initiatives. All of the informants had some of their formal education in social work from Denmark, yet they were all native speakers and shared a long-term experience with the community in which they worked. The study complies with the ethical principles for good research practice, including ALLEA´s European Code of conduct for Research Integrity (ALLEA, 2023). All names are anonymised. 'Work inclusion' is a political field that put high expectations on researchers as problem-solvers, showing "what works" (Carthwright & Hardie, 2012; Tellmann, 2024). An ethical challenge in our projects has been how to keep a critical distance to political definitions of youth unemployment as a social problem, by taking peoples meanings and opinions seriously (e.g. Vogt, Lorentzen, & Hansen, 2020). Some people we interviewed did not understand the meaning of the

word 'work inclusion' as a specific form of inclusion, nor did they agree that participation in school and higher education would solve challenges in society for young people.

The process of analysis involved the following three phases. First, we constructed a case-description for each of the work inclusion centres with a particular emphasis of how social workers engaged in local knowledge in their work. We then carried out a thematic analysis of the cases by moving back and forth between induction and abduction, looking for repetitions, similarities and differences between- and within each case. We read through our material to identify repeating themes related to how the informants engage with local knowledge in their work with young people. Regular discussions between the authors helped to overcome taken-for-granted aspects in each context, thus preventing misinterpretations. Finally, we critically discussed our findings by drawing on our theoretical approach to local knowledge and additional references.

Social workers engagement with employment support for young people between governance and local knowledge

Faroe case: Searching for 'Faroese solutions' to unemployment in the city of Torshavn

In a modern building with large windows in a quiet street in the centre of Torshavn, the capital of the Faroe Islands is where the office of the Unemployment Support Service (Arbeiðsloysisskipanin) of the Faroe Islands is located. Arbeiðsloysisskipanin, (ALS), which is financed by employers and employees in the country and provides benefits through a variety of systems stipulated in law and regulations, has three main objectives: 1) providing financial support to unemployed people, 2) helping to improve unemployed people's chances of finding work, and 3) administering employment services on behalf of the Faroese labour market.

Arbeiðsloysisskipanin (ALS) was established in 1992, during the worst economic crisis in the country since World War II. Besides the law on unemployed fishermen from 1922, it represents the first unemployment insurance system in the country. ALS came at a time when there was a desperate need for unemployment support, and the

government felt obliged to take actions to turn the large wave of out-migration among young families with children. It was no longer possible to put one's trust in the family network and local community as support and protection mechanisms for all citizens facing economic and social problems.

The social workers at Arbeiðsloysisskipanin are not all trained as social workers. Similar to the case from Ranta-Tyrkkö (2011), people employed at ALS described their work as social work. They share a strong connection to-, and knowledge about, the Faroese society and a motivation to provide support for vulnerable young people. Many young people did not want to be accused by their neighbours and friends of being unable to take care of themselves by working. They felt that it was shameful to ask for economic help from a state institution. Despite the opportunities for support services through the public labour market programme, ALS, there are young people who are not in education, employment or training, but who are neither registered as unemployed in ALS. These young people typically live with their parents or other relatives who support them emotionally, socially and economically. Mental health problems and social isolation are some of the reasons for these individuals to stay at home without any contact with ALS or other social, pedagogical or psychological support services.

Since its beginning, Arbeiðsloysisskipanin has had to convince the islanders of its anchorage in-, and commitment to, their local communities. In a magazine article published on the 20th anniversary of Arbeiðsloysisskipanin, the birth of the institution is recalled:

> At that time, Faroe Islanders were not used to walking into Unemployment Services to ask for help. Especially elderly men were so proud that they simply refused to show up at the ALS office. But women, who were suffering and had to prepare dinner with fresh fish that people brought to them, in some cases dragged their husband to ALS, so that the household could receive a stable money transfer. (ALS, 2012)

The people interviewed, who were working with young people and unemployment at ALS, all described a general resistance among young people to be identified with ALS. At Arbeiðsloysisskipanin, social workers discussed the complex problems that people in rural and small communities face when they have lost their job. The reasons for not being offered a new job could be problems related to something the person has done (reputation damaged), a lack of networks (isolation), being a

foreigner (discrimination), being a previous unpopular leader of a company (stigmatised) or being 'over-qualified' (too expensive and/or unfit for the job). These are indeed situations that people in larger urban settings in the Nordic region might experience as well, but the social interconnectedness and interdependency of small local communities can, according to our material from the interviews, influence the way people navigate the landscape of processes of inclusion/exclusion, and relate to local values on work and inclusion.

The social workers interviewed emphasised that they wanted to avoid defining the young people to whom they given services as 'clients' without a name and relationships with other people in the community Faroese society, continually adapting its programmes and priorities to shifting cultural, economic, and political trends. In the following, this is illustrated through the experiences of the head of the employment services, Mr H. He drew an image of the Faroese landscape of young and work in relation to employment strategies.

> It was in 2010, when young unemployment rates were rising, that Arbeiðsloysisskipanin became interested in the situation of vulnerable young people. How to meet the unemployed young and to understand their social and emotional situation? This was a question that Arbeiðsloysisskipanin needed to address, to succeed in its holistic and regenerative mission. Our team put energy into the task of developing a model that was more open, more motivating and more localised and person-based for the young in the Arbeiðsloysisskipanin system. The social workers at Arbeiðsloysisskipanin wanted to make the transition from unemployment to employment a good and formative experience, but also to support the young people. Our aim is to empower and motivate young people, not only with the aim of securing a job contract, but also of reengaging with the local– through education, training, cultural activities and work. We need Faroese solutions that fit the Faroese context.

What emerged from the interviews that Gaini had with consultants and leaders at Arbeiðsloysisskipanin was that they seem to strategically capitalise on their strong connection to the local community. They have extensive knowledge on the relations between individuals, families, groups and organisations in the local community, and they know who knows whom. This can be an advantage for the social worker who is trying to understand the situation of a young person sitting at the other side of the table, but it could also be a disadvantage for the young person who might feel that his life is 'transparent' to the social worker. Moreover, the local knowledges that people at ALS have of the society and the young peoples' situation is a complex set of values (e.g. inspired by decolonising literature) and not a romantic view of Faroese culture as something that everyone shares images of.

For the social workers, the aim of his work was to help young people to get rid of the 'unemployed' stigma in a society where being 'inactive' and unable to engage in valued (paid or unpaid) working activities was repudiated. Arbeiðsloysisskipanin should not just be a 'payment office', but also a 'powerhouse', referring to the slogan of the previous head of Arbeiðsloysisskipanin (Jacobsen, 2006-2014). ALS as an institution was described by the employees as contesting the universal one-size-fits-all initiatives based on standardised and de-contextual arrangements. Activities have been based on the premise that every person has different skills and competences, experiences and potential.

The Faroese case reveals the complex relationship of governance and local knowledge in a small-scale island society. The youth in need of support, and the support services at Arbeiðsloysisskipanin belong to the same society and need to work closely together to find a good solution to the labour market inclusion of the young person. The staff at Arbeiðsloysisskipanin and the young unemployed persons have intertwining knowledge and social and cultural capital, and this connection has had an impact on communication and negotiation in relation to work-inclusion programmes.

Greenland case: 'The word "unemployment" has an unclear meaning to people'

The sign Majoriaq was painted in blue on one of the grey walls of the cement building. The building was situated along a dusty road in the city, close to the supermarket and to a residence for young people. The residence housed approximately 30 young people from the small villages, and who lived in the city to continue their secondary education. The young pupils who stayed there were from 15-17 years of age, and some of them visited Majoriaq. The word *majoriaq* means 'upwards' in Greenlandic.

In Greenland, every town has a Majoriaq qualification centre. From 2016, a new law on work, supervision, and qualification implied the establishment of Majoriaq centres as a link between education, the labour market, and business (Holt, Thuesen, &

Casier, 2019). The purpose of the Majoriaq centres is to raise the level of education in the population, reduce unemployment, and generally strengthen the skills of the labour force. Young people are a particular target group. Greenland does not have unemployment insurance funds, but one may be entitled to receive unemployment benefit from the municipality while one is unemployed. When people become without paid work, they are encouraged to contact their local Majoriaq centre (Naalakkersuisut, 2021).

Karen, Eva and Tom work at Majoriaq. All of them have some education in social work and social economy, but they are not fully trained social workers. The first time Leseth entered the building, she was met by Karen, a woman in her 40 wearing a colourful Greenlandic dress. Eva was working in the same office when they talked about their work;

Karen laughed and explained that Greenland has an unusual transport system compared to other Nordic countries. There are no roads between the towns and settlements, and transport is restricted by the extreme weather conditions. When she was younger, the major means of transportation was usually by boat around the coast in summer, and by dog sled in winter. Nowadays, air travel by helicopter or other aircraft, and travel by ship are the main ways of travel. When there is less snow, transport with dog sled is not possible. Karen and her colleague, Eva, explained that they travel a lot by helicopter when, for example, visiting family or for job purposes. When reaching out to young people living in the small villages, social workers might spend quite some time getting there.

However, as Karen said, it is difficult to keep young boys and girls in education. When digging further into the purpose of Majoriaq, a characteristic in the interviews was a tension between local skills and practices, and the requirement for formal education and inclusion in paid work, often outside Greenland. Eva described this tension as follows: 'Education requirements for participation in work life challenge the whole system for hiring. When you live in Greenland, you need a willingness to move. The young people need to move to get education.'

To be included in society *outside* Greenland was a matter of getting a paid job that required a formal education, as well as moving away from your family for some time. This was also a gendered pattern of more women moving than men. Both Eva and Karen experienced their youth in terms of mobility to and from Greenland. Eva had been living many years in another area of Greenland, but now she had moved back to her place of birth as she said. Eva studied social work in Copenhagen, but came back to the small city 10 years ago. Karen described work life in Greenland to be quite 'scattered' all over Greenland and in Denmark. Her description is supported by literature that argues that the Greenlandic labour market is multiple and isolated. Seasons and weather affect the labour market, especially for jobs such as fishing and construction work (Høgedahl, 2022).

Karen and Eva in Majoriaq expressed frustration with working in a work-inclusion initiative, where the emphasis was on fulfilling secondary education, and the word 'unemployed' had an unclear meaning to people. If one was fishing every day without earning any money and without formal education, was that unemployment? Another interesting point made by the interviewees was that being included in Greenlandic society was about having a competence or skill developed from family values. Tom said: 'It is difficult to enter the Greenlandic society. The family structure should not be disturbed. If you are coming from the outside you need a competence to offer – I am a good hunter, I have good dogs, and my mind is clever. You need to be met with respect.'

An example of a challenge, Tom explained, was with the skill of fishing, which was highly valued in Greenland. Tom continued: 'Young boys might say that I only want to become a fisherman like my father and grandfather, so I need no education. However, to become a fisherman is no longer a sustainable job. You need a formal education.'

The tension between inclusion in the local community versus inclusion through work and education often outside your community was a tension in the local knowledge of work that social workers engaged with. Eva and Karen also described lively local forms of social gatherings, the importance of celebrating rituals, family gatherings and rituals when small children started school (before they needed to move to

secondary education). Nevertheless, the importance of the family was problematised by Karen, who explained that many young people going to school in the cities lived in residential institutions, and lacked a sense of belonging to family and place (see also Jensen, 2023).

The Greenlandic case show how social workers contest and negotiate the discursive, environmental and social aspects of governance models of young unemployment. They question whether the concept of unemployment make sense in their local context and reveal a range of inclusion processes in society beyond contexts of paid work. In addition they show how the environment in Greenland, with difficult weather conditions and transport challenges influence the ability to attend school and work.

Discussion

In what ways are tensions between governance and local knowledge of work and incluson played out in social work on young unemployment? Work inclusion of young people is a prime target of employment policies across the Nordic countries. Unemployment and marginalisation of young people, and efforts to include vulnerable people in work, is of global concern. However, as shown in this article, the political understanding of unemployment as a social problem, and work inclusion as the solution effectuated through universalised employment support for young people, do not always correspond to social workers' experiences and understandings of work and inclusion. This is particularly evident in postcolonial contexts, where identity politics interfere with policies of employment support, and power asymmetries between Nordic countries become visible. In the following, we summarise these tensions as forms of contested knowledge on work and inclusion that social workers employ in different ways in dealing with unemployment.

Work and inclusion as belonging and uprooting

Inclusion in society and inclusion in work are not necessarily similar processes. On the one hand, social workers in both cases emphasise the importance for young people of building a local identity through participation in society, while on the other hand they describe, with reference to their own history, the importance of moving outside the country to get an education. Work inclusion for young people is therefore

both a matter of uprooting from the family, in Greenland particularly at an early age, or alternatively to stay in the local environment, purposing informal unpaid work, contributing to 'cultural activities' (fishing, dog sledding, sheep), yet being excluded from the formal labour market. To participate in the local environment is a deep-rooted value in Greenland and the Faroe Islands. In order to be well integrated into the society, you should be able to contribute to tasks in the community, such as fishing, hunting, dog sledding and farming.

A report on informal competence in Greenland highlights this dilemma; people possess a broad spectrum of skills that are not acknowledged by the formal labour market. A large group of people in Greenland are in danger of marginalisation because of a limited formal education, which reduces their chances for employment (Bertelsen et al., 2016). Standardised paths toward work inclusion for young people are experienced by many social workers as not building on what people can already do, yet while requiring young people to take an education and work outside the country.

Employment policy as postcolonial conflicts

The social work performance in ALS and Majoriaq is based on a more-or-less explicit negotiation of the national unemployment policy on the one hand, and the needs and expectations of local people of the Faroe Islands or Greenland on the other. In the Faroe Islands, the state-introduced initiatives and policies regarding young people's work inclusion have been characterised by the implementation of Danish organisational models and 'solutions', which in many cases do not fit the Faroese society (Gaini, 2019). By contrast, critical voices contesting the implemented Danish model will often suggest alternative solutions based on an essentialist view of Faroese cultural norms and values. This situation generates dilemmas where the person in need of support services, as in the case of an unemployed young person, feels stuck between two models that fail to address social realities characterising 21st century Faroese society (Gaini, 2019). Especially in Greenland, the colonial history is the root of tensions between the Greenlandic people and institutions associated with Denmark and Danish societal organisation. As Ravn (2022) argues, social workers are set to solve social problems caused by the colonial history. Unemployment

among young people is one case. Danish academic language is used to organise and define the political discussion about work and education. This makes the Greenlander not fluent in Danish – and not familiar with the analytic/technical expressions in Danish – feel excluded and misunderstood. In an evaluation of the Majoriaq employment support system, one finds that those Greenlanders fluent in Danish were more successful in finding a job than those who did not speak Danish (Holt et al., 2019).

In our study, people working in employment initiatives in the Faroe Islands and Greenland expressed problems of unemployment not as an isolated problem 'belonging to young people, but as conditions and concern for local communities, their sustainability and their right to their own identity. These concerns include understandings of peoples' lives and the meaning of work in contexts characterised by cultural transformation and friction.

Traditional and modern forms of life

As discussed by the social worker in Majoriaq, the hunter is an outsider in the big cities in Greenland, as he lives without a fixed job and salary (see also Gaini, 2017). Tourists want images of Greenlandic and Faroese hunters and fishermen, while on the other hand it is difficult for young men to be recognised as hunters and fishermen, as they fail to get an education and a stable job, with the environmental conditions for fishing and hunting changing dramatically, and the use of drug and alcohol abuse increasing among young men (Gaini, 2017). This tension between tradition and modern forms of life could be understood in Rud's terms, as previously introduced (Rud, 2014), as products of the colonial politics. The picture of a traditional culture with traditional forms of working still shapes an understanding of Greenland and the Faroe Islands, which has implications for how people think about paid work and inclusion, though often in contradictory terms. However, as shown by Vogt, Lorentzen and Hansen (2020), low-skilled young people in general, and men in particular, are not necessarily losers in the labour market in the long run, but rather the contrary.

Conclusion

The social workers' engagement with unemployment is expressed as a tension between their understanding of what it is to live in the society in question, and governmental solutions to unemployment. Work inclusion of young people is not only a matter of engaging young people in different forms of paid work or formal education. It is also a constant matter of balancing local forms of inclusion and cultural practices, whether Greenlandic or Faroese, with formal requirements for participation in society beyond the national context. These contested forms of knowledge played out in social work on unemployment and work inclusion in this study includes heterogeneity into the concept of local knowledge, in which environmental economic and sociopolitical dimensions intersect (Nygren, 1999). Local knowledge on work inclusion is not opposed to models of governance, yet continuously develop in a friction between structural, political and cultural challenges of work and inclusion. More research is needed to develop holistic and context sensitive approaches to the question about youth and unemployment in the Nordic region and beyond.

We suggest that to better understand and attempt to solve problems with young unemployment, it is of importance to include knowledge about the local context, traditions and political and structural characteristics in employment initiatives, not as oppositions, but as complex webs of knowledge. This implies insisting on unemployment as a social, and not only an individual, problem, continuously searching for solutions by acknowledging its political, transnational and local dimensions.

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