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Bjørn Hallstein Holte

# Religion and social cohesion

Youth exclusion and religious organisations  
in a super-diverse city district of Oslo, Norway



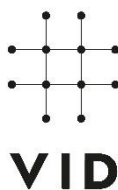
**Religion and social cohesion:  
Youth exclusion and religious organisations  
in a super-diverse city district of Oslo, Norway**

**Bjørn Hallstein Holte**

Dissertation Submitted  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
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## Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>List of papers</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Increase and spatial concentration of diversity in Norway (c. 1970–2015) .....	6
Research on religious organisations and religious diversity in Norway.....	10
Research on youth exclusion in Norway .....	17
This thesis .....	18
<b>1. Research design and research process</b> .....	<b>21</b>
Youth at the Margins and ethnographic fieldwork .....	22
Finding and meeting NEET young people .....	25
Interviews in religious organisations .....	29
An extended case .....	33
Qualitative research quality criteria .....	35
<b>2. Social cohesion as communicational permeability</b> .....	<b>39</b>
Academic and policy discourse on social cohesion.....	40
Qualitative differences and different scales.....	42
Luhmann’s theory of society .....	46
Social integration and system integration.....	50
<b>3. Summary of papers</b> .....	<b>55</b>
<b>4. Religious organisations, youth exclusion, and the public sphere</b> .....	<b>63</b>
Religious organisations in functionally differentiated society .....	64
Religious organisations and youth exclusion .....	71
Religious organisations as public space .....	79
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>85</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>89</b>
<b>Papers</b> .....	<b>105</b>



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Bjørn Hallstein Holte

Oslo, February 2018

## Abstract

This thesis is a contribution to the research on youth exclusion, religious organisations, and religious diversity in Norway. It asks how religious organisations' activities and engagements for youth in Søndre Nordstrand, a super-diverse city district of Oslo, contribute to social cohesion. The thesis approaches the research question on two levels: a theoretical discussion of social cohesion and qualitative research on youth exclusion and on religious organisations' activities and engagements for youth in Søndre Nordstrand.

The theoretical discussion of social cohesion draws on Niklas Luhmann's theory of society and argues that social cohesion should be understood in terms of people's access to participate in social systems (social integration) and the extent to which communication flows across different social systems (system integration) rather than in terms of consensus among people or whether people share values (socio-cultural integration). I conceive of the synthesis of social integration and system integration as *communicational permeability*. This represents a new and different way of conceptualising social cohesion, which is nevertheless grounded in established sociological theory.

The qualitative research for this thesis followed two different, but interrelated, tracks. The first track aimed to address the relevance of religious organisations among other networks, engagements, and attachments in the lives of excluded youth in Søndre Nordstrand through interviews and ethnographic research. While I was trying to find and meet young people who were not in education, employment, or training (NEET young people), a category of excluded youth, I became aware of how the concept meant different things to different people and in different contexts. Rather than taken as an objective and unproblematic category of excluded youth in qualitative research, I suggest in Paper 1 that it has different meanings to different people and in different contexts. It should therefore be understood contextually.



The second track of my research focussed on religious organisations' activities and engagements for youth in Søndre Nordstrand. This was based on a mapping of and interviews in the religious organisations in the city district. Through the mapping, I found 14 religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand in addition to four parishes of the former state church, the Church of Norway. Twelve of the religious organisations and Church of Norway parishes became part of my research. Paper 2 analyses inclusion in and exclusion from the religious organisations' activities and engagements for youth. Representatives and youth groups from most of the religious organisations that were part of my research described excluded youth in similar terms, and most of them had little to do with these youths. The main motivation for the religious organisations' youth work was to pass on their religion. The youth were segmented in the religious organisations by roughly overlapping categories of ethnicity, race, and religion.

Paper 3 analyses the religious organisations' communication with each other and with other organisations. The communication among the religious organisations in the city district was not primarily differentiated into different religions but segmented corresponding to communities in the suburbs. The religious organisations also had contact with public authorities and welfare services. Moreover, all of them were part of citywide, national, or transnational networks of organisations that espoused similar faith, although the relative importance of different geographical scales varied between the different organisations.

In terms of communicational permeability, the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand did not contribute to social integration by including large shares of the population or otherwise excluded youth, but their communication with other organisations may have contributed to system integration. The analysis and discussion in this thesis focus particularly on their communication with secular organisations in the city district. Based on this and as a contribution to the research on religious diversity and religious organisations, I suggest that the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand can be understood as public space, which is a contribution to recent discussions on religion in the public sphere. For youth research, this thesis contributes a critical analysis of the exclusion concept and a discussion of how religious organisations can contribute to alleviating youth exclusion. Of relevance to the ongoing debates on integration and social cohesion in Norway and elsewhere, the thesis shows how applying Luhmann's theory and focussing on the interrelations between social systems and on the inclusion and exclusion of people in them can provide a viable framework for future research.

## **List of papers**

### *Paper 1*

Holte, Bjørn Hallstein. 2017. "Counting and meeting NEET young people: Methodology, perspective, and meaning in research on marginalized youth." *Young – Nordic Journal of Youth Research* 26(1): 1-16. Published online 16 March 2017.

### *Paper 2*

Holte, Bjørn Hallstein, Annette Leis-Peters, Olav Helge Angell, and Kari Karsrud Korslien. 2018. "Us and them: Faith-based organisations and street youths in Søndre Nordstrand, Oslo, Norway." In *Stuck in the Margins? Young People and FBOs in South African and Nordic Localities*. Edited by Ignatius Swart, Auli Vähäkangas, Marlize Rabe, and Annette Leis-Peters. Book manuscript in preparation.

### *Paper 3*

Holte, Bjørn Hallstein. 2017. "Religion and integration: Religious organisations' communication in a diverse city district of Oslo, Norway." Article manuscript under review.



Map 1: Map of Oslo showing the places mentioned in this thesis. Map source: Google.

## ***Arriving in Søndre Nordstrand***

Field notes, Tuesday 3 March 2015

*I came to Søndre Nordstrand with the spring. My first trip this year and my second time ever setting foot in the city district happened to be on the first day of spring. The weather was warm, above zero degrees, and the grass was turning green. Having taken the subway for about a quarter of an hour from my home at Røa in Vestre Aker, I transferred to a train at Oslo Central Station and took notes on the way:*

*Leaving Oslo Central Station by train, you soon pass by villas overlooking the Oslo Fjord by Nordstrand and Ljan. Everything may not be well in these places – and a heavily trafficked road separates the neighbourhoods from the sea – but the houses you see have large gardens and a view. This is one of the most attractive, and one of the most expensive, places to live in Oslo. When you reach Søndre Nordstrand city district a few minutes later, as the train crosses the Ljan River on a small bridge just before it arrives at Hauketo, you can no longer see the fjord. The houses are more densely clustered, and most of them are newer than the venerable villas at Nordstrand – but not so new as to make them attractive for that reason, either. By the time you get to Holmlia, 11 minutes after leaving Oslo Central Station, you are surrounded by buildings from the 1980s. The landscape has been more heavily engineered, and there are tall cement walls on both sides of the station.*

*Three quarters of an hour after leaving home, I got off the train at Holmlia and climbed the stairway from the platform to the bridge that passes above the station. The station exit leads onto a sidewalk. There are also two car lanes and a bus stop in each direction on the bridge. I had come to discuss possibilities for recruiting youth for interviews through a public office near Holmlia, so I turned left and walked towards the centre, which has some shops, a café, and a pub. There is also a public library, a health station, and a small police station. In the early afternoon, the area is crowded with people – some waiting for the bus or for somebody to pick them up in a car, others walking past, going home or perhaps to the train station. There are parents with young children, people carrying grocery bags, and youth hanging out with friends. Some are white; others are not. Some of the women wear hijabs; most do not. Anybody would hear languages they do not understand and may not even be able to identify. In Søndre Nordstrand, the minorities are the majority.*



## Introduction

In this thesis, I present qualitative research on youth exclusion and religious organisations' activities and engagements for youth in Søndre Nordstrand city district.<sup>1</sup> Søndre Nordstrand is the southernmost city district of Oslo, located east of the Oslo Fjord. It is constituted by suburbs built since the 1970s (Bjørndal, Hauketo, Holmlia, and Mortensrud), a few older neighbourhoods (Brenna, Dal, Klemetsrud, Prinsdal), and tracts of forest that separate the suburbs and neighbourhoods from each other. In Norwegian media, the names of the suburbs in Søndre Nordstrand and other parts of eastern Oslo often appear alongside terms such as 'criminal gangs' and 'parallel societies'.<sup>2</sup> A longstanding concern with youth delinquency in the suburbs of eastern Oslo has intertwined with concern for the failed integration of immigrant families that have moved into them over the last few decades.<sup>3</sup> In Norwegian

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term 'religious organisation' to refer to any organisation formed for religious purposes. All the religious organisations that feature in my empirical research were places of worship and could have been called 'faith communities' or even churches, mosques, and temples. (Paper 2 uses the term 'faith-based organisation' about the same organisations in line with the terminology used in the international research project through which my scholarship position was funded; see Chapter 1.) My preference for the term 'religious organisation' has theoretical reasons, which I return to in Chapter 2 and discuss in Chapter 4.

<sup>2</sup> In March 2017, a Saturday night news special on Grorud, Stovner, and Søndre Nordstrand on the national broadcaster NRK began with the following words from the studio: 'Children as young as twelve who sell and use hash. Fifteen year olds with guns. This is the reality in parts of Oslo where criminal gangs have gained a strong foothold. Violence among youth is on the rise, featuring mass fights and shooting' (NRK TV 11 March 2017; see also *Nordstrands Blad* 16 March 2017; Slettholm 14 March 2017). In March 2016, Mazyar Keshvari, a politician for the right-wing Progress Party, stated that 'Norway has parallel societies' and pointed to Grønland, Furuset, and Holmlia as his examples (e.g. *Aftenposten* 2 April 2016; *Dagsavisen* 1 April 2016; *Klassekampen* 30 March 2016; 18 March 2017; see also Qureshi 6 April 2016). As I am doing the final edits on this thesis, reports about a young man being shot and wounded at Holmlia has revived media attention and public discourse on youth gangs in the city district (e.g. *Aftenposten* 9 February 2018; NRK 8 February 2018). Residents of the city district call for better recreational facilities for youth (*Aftenposten* 10 February 2018).

<sup>3</sup> See Eriksen and Vestel (2012) for an account of how this has unfolded for Furuset and Danielsen and Engebriksen (2014) on Stovner, other suburbs in eastern Oslo.

public discourse today, the suburbs in eastern Oslo are often associated with ‘marginalised youth’, which, in turn, is often equated with ‘immigrant youth’ and even with ‘Muslim youth’ (Andersen and Biseth 2013; Jacobsen and Andersson 2012). As in other European countries, the term ‘immigrant’ has racial and religious connotations in Norway (Eriksen 2015, 5; Gullestad 2002a; Vestel 2009, 482-483; Wikan 1995, 85; cf. Moosavi 2015). Concern for the exclusion and marginalisation of ‘immigrant youth’ – and especially ‘immigrant boys’ – is backed by public statistics showing how they perform worse than other Norwegian youth on a number of key indicators.<sup>4</sup>

In Oslo, both the immigrant population and various social problems are disproportionately concentrated in the eastern city districts, including Søndre Nordstrand (for different takes on this, see Andersen 2013; Wiggen et al. 2015). The suburbs in eastern Oslo are thus associated with immigration, failed integration, and youth delinquency in national media and public discourse, but they are also sites of local communities and places to which people feel attached. In some official material and at annual community festivals, the diversity in eastern Oslo is celebrated as adding richness and texture, often focussing on food, music, and art (e.g. Eriksen 2016a, 396-397). To be sure, far from everyone in eastern Oslo are affected by social problems, and among those who are, this may only be a part of their lived experience (Danielsen and Engebriksen 2014). In British social research, the term ‘reputational geographies’ has been used to refer to this tension. Reputational geographies refer to how some places are associated with immigration and failed integration and have been defined as bad at or failures of multiculturalism, although this is not necessarily how their residents perceive them (Parker and Karner 2010; cf. Jones 2014). Reputational geographies emerge from outside the places they concern and may or may not be contested from within them. As generalities that overlook particularities and details, reputations can be stigmatising and have negative implications for senses of belonging and even, potentially, for social integration. Thus, when they coined the term, David Parker and Christian Karner (2010, 1467) concluded that ‘[u]rban social cohesion requires struggles by [...] local [civil society- and religious]

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<sup>4</sup> Young immigrants are less likely to complete upper-secondary school than other young people, although young people born in Norway to immigrant parents do so at rates similar to Norwegian majority youth (Statistics Norway 2016a; but see Rogstad 2016). This indicator has been much discussed in Norwegian media the last few years (Vogt 2017). Young immigrants and young people born to immigrant parents in Norway are overrepresented among young people who are not in education, employment, or training (Bø and Vigran 2014, 13-14; Olsen 2017), and recent statistics show that immigrants and Norwegian-born persons with two immigrant parents are also overrepresented as registered offenders (Andersen, Holtmark, and Mohn 2017).

organizations to secure social justice and contest reputational geographies that overlook the particularities of place’.

In this thesis, I ask how the religious organisations’ activities and engagements for youth in Søndre Nordstrand contribute to social cohesion. The thesis presents a theoretical discussion of social cohesion and qualitative research on youth exclusion and the religious organisations’ activities and engagements for youth. The theoretical discussion draws on the work of the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann. As I return to in Chapter 1, the qualitative research followed two different, but interrelated, tracks. Reflecting public concern and statistics indicating that youth exclusion presents a problem in Søndre Nordstrand, the first track of my research focussed on youth exclusion. It aimed to address the relevance of religious organisations – among other networks, engagements, and attachments – in the lives of excluded youth in the city district. As I was trying to find and meet young people who were not in education, employment, or training (NEET young people) to conduct interviews, I gradually became aware of how the NEET concept, as well as the exclusion concept, had different meanings to different people and in different contexts (Paper 1). The concept therefore had to be understood contextually. The second track of my research focussed on inclusion in and exclusion from religious organisations’ activities and engagements for youth in the city district as well as the religious organisations’ communication with each other and with other organisations. My research did not specifically concern ‘immigrant youth’ – or, for that matter, ‘immigrant religion’ or ‘minority religious organisations’ – but conducting research in Søndre Nordstrand brought both to the fore. The field note excerpt on the page before this chapter describes the diverse population in Søndre Nordstrand. As I return to in the next section, the majority of people in the city district had ‘immigrant backgrounds’<sup>5</sup> at the time of my research. Around half of the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand at the time of my research were led and mainly attended by people with an immigrant background. I call these minority religious organisations (see papers 2 and 3). Søndre Nordstrand was selected for the Norwegian case study of the international research project to which my scholarship position was linked because it was highly diverse and lowly ranked in socio-economic terms (see Chapter 1). In the next section, I situate my research by outlining how the Norwegian population has become more diverse since the early 1970s and how this

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<sup>5</sup> I use the term ‘immigrant background’ to denote immigrants and people born in Norway to immigrant parents in this thesis. This is in line with the terminology of Statistics Norway, although separate figures are often presented for the two groups (see Dzamarija 2008).



diversity has come to be concentrated in certain parts of big cities, such as Søndre Nordstrand. This shows how Søndre Nordstrand represents a case of super-diversity in Norway.

#### *Increase and spatial concentration of diversity in Norway (c. 1970–2015)*

For a long time, Norway was seen as a homogeneous and egalitarian country.<sup>6</sup> The late 1960s marked the end of an era of low migration rates into and out of Norway when nearly the whole population spoke Norwegian as its mother tongue, and the share of religious minorities – or of ‘Catholics and Muslims’<sup>7</sup> – in the population was low (Galtung 1968, 453). In this section, I use versions of these parameters (the share of immigrants in the population, the share of the population with mother tongues other than Norwegian, and the share of religious minorities in the population) to illustrate the increase and spatial concentration of diversity in Norway from about 1970 to the start of my research in 2015.<sup>8</sup> The indicators do not constitute a perfect measure of diversity, but they capture dimensions that are much discussed. The purpose of this section is to give some context to the research presented in this thesis and to situate it relative to other research and thinking on the social role of religious organisations in Norway, and to some extent also the Nordic countries more broadly.

The year 1970 is not an arbitrary choice. Norway became a net immigration country for the first time in 1968, around the time when immigrants from the global South began to arrive in the country (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2008, 179, 192–198).<sup>9</sup> ‘[I]n the year 1970, the share

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<sup>6</sup> Although arguments can be, and often have been, constructed to show how the Norwegian population was highly homogeneous when immigration from the global South began in the late 1960s, the histories of the Sami indigenous people and the national minorities show how there has always been an element of diversity in the Norwegian population. There are also regional and class differences in the Norwegian majority population that are often ignored (cf. Eriksen and Neumann 2011, 426). While Norway still appears to be more homogeneous and egalitarian when compared with most other countries (e.g. Holte and Rabe 2017), this is also, to some extent, an ideologically loaded self-description.

<sup>7</sup> The Jewish minority in Norway, although never large, was decimated by deportation and murder, imprisonment, and flight to other countries during the German occupation in the Second World War. It remained small in the post-war era.

<sup>8</sup> A table with comparable figures from 1970 and 2015 would be ideal, but I have not been able to find comparable figures for these parameters. Statistical definitions and categories change over time, reflecting how the concerns and interest they are intended to address change. In this regard, 45 years is a long time.

<sup>9</sup> Apart from refugees from countries such as Hungary in 1956–1958, immigration to Norway on a significant scale started later than immigration to most other Western European countries. Labour migration from the global South picked up from the late 1960s and remained relatively high for a few years. More selective regulation of the opportunity to enter Norway was introduced with the ‘immigration stop’ in 1975, partly in response to the introduction of restrictions on labour migration in other European countries. The immigration stop was made permanent in 1981. Labour that was in

of foreign citizens in the total Norwegian population was only 1,3 percent, of which 46,7 percent originated in the Nordic region. The rest came predominantly from the north-western parts of Europe or North America' (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2008, 179). According to the 1970 census, 94,0 percent of Norwegians were members of the Church of Norway, while 3,5 percent were members of other faith communities, and 2,5 percent were not members of any faith community or did not answer the question (Statistics Norway 1974, 73). A few years later, the criminologist Nils Christie described the Norwegian population in the following way:

We have shared ancestry, shared history, a shared lifestyle [...] We are said to be part of a pluralist culture, but it is rather its monolithic character that is dominant. The one centrally governed school system, the one TV channel, the completely dominant church, the one labour organisation, the one employers' organisation. We resemble one another ad nauseam (Christie 1975, 63, my translation).

A number of important changes took place in Norway in the last decades of the twentieth century, including large-scale immigration and the emergence of an oil economy (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2008; Eriksen and Neumann 2011). Grete Brochmann and Knut Kjeldstadli (2008, 239) wrote that Christie's description, 'which in fact was no exaggeration in 1975, was thoroughly outdated in 2000'. By the time I began my research for this thesis in 2015, 15,6 percent of the Norwegian population were immigrants or born in Norway to immigrant parents, over half of whom had backgrounds from 'Asia, Africa, Latin America, Oceania except Australia and New Zealand, or Europe except the EU28/EEA' (Statistics Norway 2015a).<sup>10</sup> Religious affiliation was no longer asked in the Norwegian census, but register data

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demand (for example in the rapidly expanding and hugely profitable oil industry) and people who came for humanitarian reasons (including family reunification) could still enter Norway. From 1975 to 2004, when the European single market was extended to include several Eastern European countries, immigrants came to Norway primarily for humanitarian reasons and mostly from the global South. Since the expansion of the European single market in 2004, labour migration from Eastern Europe has become the numerically dominant form of immigration (see Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2008; NOU 2017:2, 39-59).

<sup>10</sup> This group of countries replaced the category 'non-Western countries' in Norwegian public statistics following the end of the Cold War and the accession of former eastern European countries to the European Union in 2004. The categories 'the EU28/EEA, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand' and 'Asia, Africa, Latin America, Oceania except Australia and New Zealand, or Europe except the EU28/EEA' respectively correspond to countries from where the majority of immigrants are labour migrants and countries from where the majority of immigrants come to Norway as refugees (Høydahl 2008).

suggested that 72,9 percent of the population were members of the Church of Norway (Statistics Norway 2016b). Roughly 15 percent of the population was not affiliated with any religious organisation (Urstad 2017), while 749 ‘religious and life stance communities outside the Church of Norway’ claimed public subsidies for approximately 11 percent of the population (Ministry of Culture 2015; Statistics Norway 2015b).<sup>11</sup> Among them, the Catholic Church in Norway grew particularly rapidly after Poland’s accession to the European single market in 2004. According to its own numbers, it counted 150 000 members in 2015, which corresponded to nearly 3 percent of the Norwegian population (Erdal 2016; Mæland 2016).<sup>12</sup> A total of 2,7 percent of the Norwegian population were registered as members of Muslim organisations in 2015 (Statistics Norway 2015b).

The change in the parameters of diversity used by Galtung (1968, 453) and cited at the beginning of this section shows how Norway has become more diverse between 1970 and 2015. While there were hardly any immigrants from the global South in Norway in 1970, they constituted over eight percent of the population in 2015; whereas only one Norwegian in 20 was not a member of the Church of Norway in 1970, this was true of one Norwegian in four in 2015. Furthermore, the same parameters can also reflect how the emerging diversity has been concentrated in major cities, such as in Oslo, and in certain city districts, such as Søndre Nordstrand.<sup>13</sup> Table 1 compares national figures, figures from Oslo, and figures from Søndre Nordstrand from 2015 to illustrate the spatial concentration of diversity. People who did not have an immigrant background, whose mother tongue was Norwegian, and who were members of the Church of Norway were majorities in Norway as a whole and Oslo but minorities in Søndre Nordstrand. A demographic survey of the population of Søndre Nordstrand would reveal a wide range of background countries, ethnicities, religions, socio-economic statuses, and lengths of residence in Norway, in Oslo, and, indeed, in Søndre Nordstrand. At the beginning of 2014, for example, immigrants and those born in Norway to

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<sup>11</sup> Public statistics on religious affiliation in Norway are based on membership registers that religious and life stance communities outside the Church of Norway submit with applications for subsidies (as well as the registers of the Church of Norway). The membership concept, which I also allude to in this thesis, is thus defined in administrative terms that may or may not correspond with different theological membership concepts in different religious organisations.

<sup>12</sup> The Catholic Church in Norway has been accused of overstating the number of its members to receive more public subsidies. The legal case is still pending as I submit this thesis, so any number should be taken with some caution. However, it is clear that the Catholic Church in Norway has seen a large increase in membership and attendance since 2004 (Erdal 2016; Mæland 2016).

<sup>13</sup> There are also significant demographic differences between different sub-districts of Søndre Nordstrand, which I will not discuss here.

immigrant parents who lived in Søndre Nordstrand had ‘country backgrounds’<sup>14</sup> from 147 foreign countries and were more or less equally divided between people who had migrated to Norway since 2000, people who had migrated to Norway before 2000, and (mostly young) people who were born in Norway to immigrant parents (Wiggen et al. 2015, 113, 115). Among those without an immigrant background, some came from Oslo-based families, while others had moved to Oslo and Søndre Nordstrand from other parts of Norway. In terms of an entirely different parameter, official statistics show that the adult population of Søndre Nordstrand in 2015 was also almost equally divided between those who had not completed more than compulsory education, those who had completed secondary education, and those who had a university-level education (Oslo kommune 2016). In other words, Søndre Nordstrand was diverse in many different ways.

**Table 1: Spatial concentration of diversity, 2015**

	<i>Norway</i>	<i>Oslo</i>	<i>Søndre Nordstrand</i>
Population, 1 January	5 165 802	642 603	37 956
Share of population with immigrant background	15,6 %	31,6 %	52,2 %
Share of pupils in grades 1–10 with a mother tongue other than Norwegian and Sami	-	40,2 %	67,9 % <sup>15</sup>
Share of population who are members of the Church of Norway	72,9 %	49,0 %	31,7 %

Source: Oslo kommune 2017a; 2017b; 2017c; 2017d; Statistics Norway 2015a; 2016b<sup>16</sup>

Using a fairly recent concept from British social research, Søndre Nordstrand and a few other parts of eastern Oslo can rightly be described as ‘super-diverse’ (Vertovec 2007; see also Eriksen 2015; 2016a). Super-diversity differs from ‘multi-culture’, which describes the coexistence of several distinct and recognised communities in the same place. Super-diversity is characterised by a greater variation in backgrounds and greater fluidity of identities and has

<sup>14</sup> Country background is a variable used by Statistics Norway to refer to a person’s own country of birth or that of a parent or one of the grandparents.

<sup>15</sup> This number refers to the student population in 14 public schools in the city district in the academic year 2014/15. However, school district boundaries do not follow city district boundaries, and the numbers apply only loosely to the population of Søndre Nordstrand.

<sup>16</sup> Some of the percentages in this table are based on my own calculations using figures from the indicated sources.

implications for communities and forms of belonging. Writing about a suburb in another super-diverse city district in eastern Oslo, Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2015, 7) suggested that '[u]nlike in classic nationalism and traditional *Gemeinschaften*, a collective identity in Furuset and in super-diverse places more generally, cannot rely on an ideology and social practices based on shared origins, history and culture'. The implications of diversity for communities and social cohesion is an important field of research today, as I return to in Chapter 2. Super-diversity also challenges multiculturalist policies such as public support for ethnic minority organisations to represent communities and adaptations of public services based on needs related to presumably fixed identities (Vertovec 2007, 1047-1049). My focus in this thesis is on the social cohesion contribution of religious organisations' activities and engagements for youth in super-diverse Søndre Nordstrand and how this can be researched.

### *Research on religious organisations and religious diversity in Norway*

As I noted in the previous section, post-war Norway was imagined as a highly homogeneous and egalitarian country, although this is now changing. Perhaps owing to the high rates of membership in the Church of Norway, perhaps to the ideological orientation of often leftist Norwegian social scientists, and perhaps also to the hegemony of secularisation theory in the social sciences, religion and religious organisations have not been high on the agenda of Norwegian social research. However, immigration and in particular the presence of increasing numbers of Muslims has brought religion to the fore of public concern over the last few decades (see Furseth 2018a). This has also been reflected in research. In an article on Norwegian identities, Thoams Hylland Eriksen and Iver B. Neumann (2011) suggest that the 'other' against whom Norwegian ethnic identities are defined has shifted twice in the last century. From the struggle for national independence and into the post-war era, Norwegian identities were defined in relation to Denmark and Sweden, who dominated Norway politically until 1905. Europe and the European Community/Union came to serve a similar role in the 1970s, which was transferred to 'immigrants' and Islam starting in the late 1990s. Thus, for example, Marianne Gullestad (2002a, 49) remarked on how Norwegian discourses pitted 'Lutheran Christianity in opposition to Islam'. More recently, Sindre Bangstad (2014a) has analysed Norwegian mediated and public discourse on Islam and Muslims, showing how elements of Islamophobic discourses, including the idea of Islam as an 'other' to Europe, have become mainstream. His conclusion was that '[t]o think that extreme and populist right-wing rhetoric on Islam and Muslims may be neatly delineated and compartmentalized is to blind oneself to the discursive realities of the past ten years in Norway, as well as in a number

of other western European countries' (Bangstad 2014a, 218). The recently published results of the research project *The Role of Religion in the Public Sphere* (NOREL) suggest that Islam is often discussed in negative terms in Nordic parliamentary debates and major newspapers (Lundby et al. 2018; Lövheim et al. 2018).

As the number of Muslims in Norway has increased, a body of literature has emerged on Islam and Muslims in Norway since the 1990s. Most of it is written by anthropologists (Bangstad 2014a; 2014b; Jacobsen 2002; 2011; Wikan 1995, 85-136) and religious historians (Vogt 2000; Østberg 2003a; 2003b). Much of this literature focusses on the everyday lives of (often young) people rather than on religious organisations, although religious organisations figure in most of the work. Kari Vogt's (2000) book is an exception, focussing on Muslim organisations in Norway. In the mainly descriptive volume, Vogt (2000) emphasised the diversity among Norwegian Muslims and the fragmentation of Norwegian mosques along ideological, ethnic, and linguistic lines. She also described the more socially and politically engaged Muslim civil society organisations that emerged in the 1990s,<sup>17</sup> such as the Islamic Council Norway (IRN), the Muslim Student Association (MSS), and the Muslim Youth of Norway (NMU). These organisations brought Norwegian Muslims together across the differences by which the mosques were fragmented. They were concerned with questions related to the recognition of Muslims in Norwegian society and contributed to the formation of Muslim identities that transcended other divisions (Jacobsen 2002; 2011). These identities and the related 'social imaginaries' led some Muslim youth to social action and activism, for example the protests against the Israeli invasion of Gaza in 2008–9 and the demonstrations following the 2010 reprinting of the caricatures that sparked the Muhammed cartoon crisis in 2005 (Andersson et al. 2012, 88-136; Jacobsen and Andersson 2012). However, and importantly in the context of the present thesis, participation in Muslim youth organisations did not replace engagement in mosques (Jacobsen 2011, 70).

Christine Jacobsen (2011, 234-238) listed mosques alongside the extended family and the Norwegian public school system as the most important sites for the transmission of Islamic traditions to new generations of Muslims in Norway. Sissel Østberg (2003a, esp. 174-175) similarly described how Norwegian-Pakistani youth negotiated religion, gender, ethnicity,

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<sup>17</sup> Vogt (2000, 58, 165) uses 'mosque' for 'public prayer rooms' and the term 'Muslim organisation' for civil society organisations that draw members from a variety of mosques and work to promote cooperation among Muslims and promote integration in mainstream society. This differs from the terminology I otherwise use in this thesis, where I also call mosques Muslim organisations (see page 3, note 1, above).

and social boundaries by drawing on different authorities, including public schools, mosques, and their parents. Thus, the literature on Muslim youth in Norway discusses how their identities and life courses emerge through choice, reflexivity, and agency, placing various kinds of religious organisations alongside other arenas and influences in the lives of young Muslims. In short, it describes a situation broadly in line with theories on the individualisation of religion in modern society, where religious organisations represent one set of influences and choices among others.<sup>18</sup> Pointing to a possible blind spot in the literature, however, Bangstad (2013, 71) suggested that the MSS recruits ‘a socially mobile educational elite among “descendants [of immigrants]”’ (my translation), which may also be true of the other Muslim youth organisations mentioned above. The less pragmatic and more conservative youth organisation IslamNet, on which there has been less academic research, is larger and has been more successful in mobilising youth from the social margins (Bangstad and Linge 2013). Overall, the volume of research on Muslim organisations in Norway is limited, although some Muslim organisations figure in work on Norwegian Muslims’ lived religion.

A stream of literature on Christian immigrants to Norway has also emerged in the last few years (Aschim, Hovdelien, and Sødal 2016; Drønen and Eriksen 2015; Erdal 2016; Mæland 2016). This research has focussed more closely on religious organisations than the research on Muslim immigrants in Norway has. In particular, there are a number of recent studies on the Catholic Church in Norway discussing its rapid increase in membership and attendance after Poland’s accession to the European Single Market in 2004 (Erdal 2016; Mæland 2016; see also Aschim, Hovdelien, and Sødal 2016; Loga 2011). This research shows how the Catholic Church, which has had a transnational orientation and been attended by a fairly large share of immigrants since its return to Norway in 1843,<sup>19</sup> has adapted to increasing diversity by offering the most numerous migrant groups services in their home language and pastoral care by priests from their home countries, a principle that has led to a relatively high level of segregation within the church (although this is different outside the major cities; Mæland 2016). In addition to providing religious services, the Catholic Church in Norway also publishes the quarterly magazine *Informator Katolicki* in Polish, which contains information on the Church and faith-related texts alongside texts on Norwegian society, such as

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<sup>18</sup> Although, it should be noted, Jacobsen (2011, 375-387) also problematizes this by drawing on Foucauldian theory and a view of Islam as a discursive tradition (influenced, especially, by works such as Asad 2003; Mahmood 2005; see Bangstad 2013).

<sup>19</sup> The Catholic Church was banned in Norway after the Reformation.

information about the police, taxes, the Child Welfare Services (*Barnevernet*), the education system, and political parties (Erdal 2016). Tomas Sundnes Drønen and Stian Eriksen (2015) describe the growth of ‘migrant churches’ in Stavanger in Western Norway, focussing on the transnational influence they bring to the region.

The research reviewed thus far has focused on individuals or individual religious organisations, but a number of sociologists and political scientists have discussed religious organisations as part of communities and society more broadly, also in Norway. Much of this research has drawn on Robert Putnam’s (esp. 2000; 2007) social capital concept, which refers to levels of social participation and trust in social units. Putnam (2000) emphasised the role of voluntary associations – famously, bowling clubs – in building social capital. He showed how levels of social capital correlated with a variety of desirable outcomes. Unlike Pierre Bourdieu (1985), who developed the capital concept as way of analysing the reproduction privileges, Putnam saw social capital as a public good and applied it to larger social units, changing the empirical focus ‘from the immediate circle of relationships surrounding individuals and families to aggregate characteristics of the population’ (Portes and Vickstrom 2011, 462; see also Portes 1998). Putnam (2000, 22-23) distinguished between ‘bridging’ and ‘bonding’ social capital, where the former is ‘outward looking and encompass[es] people across diverse social cleavages’, while the latter is ‘inward looking and tend[s] to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups’. He emphasised that both could be vitally important, but in different ways: while bonding social capital built networks that individuals could draw on for support in times of need, he saw bridging capital as important for generating broader identities and reciprocity in communities and societies (Putnam 2000, 23).<sup>20</sup>

In one of the first texts to draw on social capital theory in Nordic research on immigrant religion and religious diversity, Inger Furseth (2008, 149) remarked on the lack of social theory in Nordic research on immigrant religion. She argued that ‘the benefit of using the [social capital] concept in research on immigrant religious communities lies in its versatility’ (Furseth 2008, 160). Social capital theory has since been applied by sociologists of religion (Furseth et al. 2018; Furseth et al. 2015; Synnes 2012; see also Aschim, Hovdelien, and Sødal

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<sup>20</sup> The rather rosy view of social capital implied here is somewhat more nuanced in Putnam’s work – he acknowledges that social capital ‘can be directed toward malevolent, antisocial purposes, just like any other form of capital’ (Putnam 2000, 22) – and discussed in critical terms by others (see e.g. Furseth 2008, 159-160; Portes 1998; Portes and Vickstrom 2011, 473-474). However, social capital research does tend to consider social capital to be desirable, at least in most forms.



2016) and civil society researchers whose research has included minority religious organisations in Norway (Eimhjellen 2016; Hagelund and Loga 2009; Loga 2011; 2012; Ødegård et al. 2014, 119-147). Norwegian research on immigration and integration that has included minority religious organisations has tended to focus on whether the religious organisations contribute to bridging between immigrants and minorities on one hand and the majority population on the other (Loga 2012, 26-27). This research suggests that minority religious organisations tend to be more strongly bonding than bridging, although religious organisations that have members and users with different backgrounds facilitate bridging between the different groups within the organisations (Synnes 2012, 86-87). Research on the Catholic Church in Norway shows the same: although Catholics in Norway tend to bond in ethnically and linguistically segregated groups, there is nevertheless mediation of knowledge about and contact with public authorities and welfare services across the groups (Halvorsen and Aschim 2016; Loga 2011; 2012, 62-64; Mæland 2016, 240-243).

The social capital concept has also been problematised in Norwegian research. Jill Loga (2012, 71) wrote that researching whether specific organisations or practices promote integration presupposes the clarification of which social units should be integrated. What constitutes social capital varies depending on whether one is researching integration in local communities, integration in the welfare state, or integration in transnational movements. Øivind Fuglerud and Ada Engebrigtsen (2006) pointed out that, when applied in research on minorities with immigrant backgrounds, the social capital concept tends to be understood in terms of social mobility in the country of settlement, thus ignoring different 'cultural grammars' and life-worlds left behind or brought from one place to the other. This, however, is to let majority conceptions and interests govern research rather than explore the purposes for which the minorities themselves put their social capital to use.<sup>21</sup>

Taking a slightly different position, Kristin Walseth (2016) argued in a recent article about sport in Muslim organisations in Oslo that 'integration' needs to be conceptualised in ways that recognise the value of minority religious organisations' work, even when it does not lead to bridging social capital through face-to-face encounters across differences. While sports in religious organisations have been criticised for leading to segregation, Walseth suggested that

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<sup>21</sup> The national focus in much Norwegian research on immigration and integration, which in many cases has to do with funding requirements, has been remarked upon in different publications (e.g. Lithman 2004; Hagelund and Loga 2009, 84). Relatedly, I discuss the influence of administrative and policy concepts on social research in Chapter 2.

closely bonded groups can be important to forming identities – for example as ‘Norwegian Muslims’ – and that religious organisations’ youth groups can provide valuable spaces for negotiating identities and problems peculiar to them. Walseth (2016, 96) argued for ‘a shift away from an integration perspective that almost exclusively focusses on building social networks across ethnic differences towards recognition of the integration work being carried out by minority organisations, even though this work, in terms of social networks, has more of a bonding character’. In line with this critique and that of Fuglerud and Engebretsen (2006), I seek to move beyond the social capital concept in this thesis.

Suggesting an entirely different framing of the research on immigration and religion, Peter Kivisto (2014) suggested that Nordic research could draw on developments in the American sociology of religion starting in the early 1990s. Kivisto highlighted the ‘de facto congregationalism’ thesis and the ‘returning to theological foundations’ thesis as good alternatives, both of which concern how immigrant religion adapts to receiving societies while maintaining traditions from the immigrants’ countries of origin (see also Warner 1993; Yang and Ebaugh 2001). The de facto congregationalism thesis suggests that even religions and theological traditions that are organisationally incorporated differently – if at all – in immigrants’ countries of origin take on congregational characteristics in the United States. This means that they are incorporated as privately funded religious organisations characterised by voluntary membership, lay leadership, and a tendency towards the expansion of services to feature educational, cultural, social, and political activities as well as social and welfare services (Warner 2000; Yang and Ebaugh 2001). American research on immigrant religion has noted how immigrant religious organisations provide welfare services themselves and help newcomers navigate public welfare services (e.g. Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000a, 145-150; 2000b, 55-59; Foley and Hoge 2007, 117-130, 159). The adoption of the English language, especially in youth activities and separate youth services, has also been noted as a form of adaption (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000b, 115-117; Yang and Ebaugh 2001, 277-278). The returning to theological foundations thesis, on the other hand, suggests that the transplantation of people and religions to new contexts leads to new reflections on the relationship between religion, culture, and ethnicity and often eventually to greater inclusivity (Yang and Ebaugh 2001; see also Kivisto 2014, esp. 11).

Reviewing American research on immigration and religion, including much of the literature cited in the paragraph above, Wendy Cadge and Elaine Howard Ecklund (2007) pointed out that it mainly consisted of case studies of single religious organisations, which were also the

units of analysis. They suggested that it was more descriptive than analytical and that it did not address how the religious organisations interacted with broader social institutions, which is important in this thesis. I draw on the American research on immigration and religion for some comparisons in Chapter 4, but my research was primarily inspired by two other bodies of research. One is the studies of religious organisations' role in urban communities, both in the United States (Day 2014; Livezey 2000; Numrich and Wedam 2015) and in Europe (Knott 1998; 2009; Martikainen 2004; 2009; see also Strausberg 2009). The American research has shown how 'congregations and their surroundings are in constant dynamic interaction, shaping and being shaped by each other' (Day 2014, 9; cf. Numrich and Wedam 2015, 274). Here, religious organisations are studied as part of, and in the context of, the city, and the city as shaped by the religious organisations, among other influences. In Europe, for various reasons, immigrant religion has tended to be seen as more foreign and more problematic than it has in the United States (Foner and Alba 2008; cf. Martikainen 2014a). In this context, Tuomas Martikainen (2004, 22) suggested that his research focussing on 'the whole immigrant religious field in Turku', a city in Finland, could provide a corrective to a research field dominated by ethnographic studies of single religious organisations. He wrote that research had favoured 'exotic and unusual groups' and largely ignored the mainstream churches that had the largest number of immigrant members in the city, thereby contributing to 'the sense of exoticism associated with immigrant religions' (Martikainen 2004, 15-16, 207). Among other valuable contributions, the research on religious organisations' role in urban communities shows how some people travel, sometimes far, to get to the religious organisation of their choice, problematizing any assumption about religious organisations' local attachments (Martikainen 2004, 185; Numrich and Wedam 2015, 48-49; cf. Ebaugh, O'Brien, and Chafetz 2000; Paper 3).

The other body of research that has thematised the social role of religious organisations in urban areas that my research is inspired by is the research on welfare and religion in Europe spearheaded at the Uppsala Religion and Society Research Centre (see Bäckström 2014; Davie 2015). This research has studied the social role of religious organisations in relation to the different welfare arrangements of different European countries (see Davie 2015). From a Norwegian perspective, it addresses what the primarily public provision of welfare services characteristic of social-democratic welfare states (Esping-Andersen 1990) means for the social role of religious organisations. A proponent of this approach, Olav Helge Angell (2016) has suggested in a recent article that religious organisations – often diaconal

organisations – have a tradition of identifying new needs and constructing new services for which the welfare states have taken responsibility when they have proven their value. Other roles have also been discussed, often based on a view of religious organisations as part of civil society, as I return to in Chapter 4. In light of this research, the question in this thesis can be framed as whether the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand fulfil any role with regard to excluded youth, a target group that has received much media and policy attention over the last few years.

### *Research on youth exclusion in Norway*<sup>22</sup>

In a recent research commentary article, Kristoffer Chelsom Vogt (2017) wrote that young people leaving upper-secondary school without a completed qualification are generally considered to be one of the main challenges for Norwegian youth policy. He shows how the proportion of young people leaving school without a qualification has remained fairly stable over the last 20 years, while the media attention paid to this group has increased dramatically. This may partly reflect concern for the labour market prospects of young people in the European Union, following the dramatic increase in the number and proportion of NEET young people in some countries after the financial crisis of 2007–2008 and the ensuing economic recession (e.g. Eurofound 2012; 2016; European Commission 2010; see Paper 1). Although the Norwegian situation is nothing like the situation in countries such as Greece, Italy, or Spain, analyses of labour market statistics and register data indicate that there is a significant number of young people in NEET situations in Norway, at least some of whom are in vulnerable situations. For example, Tor Petter Bø and Åsne Vigran (2014) described a population of 70 000–105 000 NEET young people aged 15–29 years in Norway, corresponding to 7–11 percent of the population in that age bracket (see also Bø and Vigran 2015; Grødem, Nielsen, and Strand 2014; Olsen 2017; Paper 1).<sup>23, 24</sup>

The identification of youth exclusion as an important social problem has led to several policy interventions over the last decades, but the interventions have generally not been found to

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<sup>22</sup> This section is shorter than the review of research on religious organisations and religious diversity in the previous section in part to avoid overlaps with Paper 1, which also reviews literature on youth exclusion in Norway and its international sources of inspiration.

<sup>23</sup> The numbers are based on the labour force surveys and register data, respectively. The number of NEET young people in the labour force survey-based estimate is lower than the number of NEET young people in the register data-based estimate because the labour force survey picks up certain activities that public registers do not.

<sup>24</sup> A new analysis of the Norwegian situation by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2018) is expected but was not yet available when I submitted this thesis.

have strong effects, especially not for the most vulnerable groups (see Hyggen 2015, 37-45; Sletten, Bakken, and Andersen 2015). However, as Christer Hyggen (2015, 46-47) has pointed out, qualitative research on individual projects and smaller-scale local interventions have described positive results. While this may seem contradictory, part of the reason may lie in the complex needs some young people have. Public welfare services are organised in specialised organisations, limiting their ability to attend to the complex problems facing young people in NEET situations who also struggle with other problems, such as mental health issues. In this context, Cecilie Høj Anvik and Ragnhild Holmen Waldahl (2017) found that individual ‘enthusiasts’ who worked closely with the young people and collaborated with different service providers gave the most successful help. Based on semi-structured interviews with young people in NEET situations who participated in projects aimed to help them complete their education and find work, Kjetil Frøyland (2017) drew attention to the importance of good relations and humour, empathy, positive orientation, flexibility, and praise in addition to practical assistance and the tailoring of services when working with this group. He suggested that welfare workers need to draw on resources in their young clients’ personal networks and local communities that can provide personalised help (Frøyland 2017, 23). In his report on youth exclusion from education and work, Hyggen (2015, 47, my translation) concluded that ‘[y]outh meet people, not systems’ (see also Halås, Follesø, and Anvik 2016, 152-153).

Importantly in the context of the present thesis, neither Anvik and Waldahl (2017), Frøyland (2017), Hyggen (2015), nor other researchers I am aware of mention the contributions religious organisations or religious professionals can or do make with regard to youth exclusion. In light of how religious organisations and religious professionals can be in a position to contribute precisely the kind of personal help and relational orientation in local areas that qualitative research seems to suggest works well, this is somewhat surprising. An important contribution of this thesis is therefore to provide a discussion of how religious organisations can contribute to alleviating youth exclusion as well as a description of youth exclusion and religious organisations’ activities and engagements for youth in Søndre Nordstrand.

### *This thesis*

This thesis is a contribution to the research on youth exclusion, religious organisations, and religious diversity in Norway. It asks how religious organisations’ activities and engagements for youth in super-diverse Søndre Nordstrand contribute to social cohesion and approaches

the research question on two levels: a theoretical discussion of social cohesion and qualitative research on youth exclusion and on religious organisations' activities and engagements for youth in Søndre Nordstrand. The thesis is composed of a synopsis and three autonomous papers. In the synopsis, this introduction has situated my research in relation to the increase and spatial concentration of diversity in Norway since the year 1970 and in relation to the research on youth exclusion, religious organisations, and religious diversity in Norway. Chapter 1 outlines my initial research design and the process of my qualitative research. The chapter describes how my research unfolded and was redesigned underway, resulting in two different, but interrelated, tracks that followed each other chronologically. The first track of my research was inspired by ethnographic research on youth exclusion and unemployment in modern societies, while the second track was inspired by the methods used in research on welfare and religion and the role of religious organisations in communities. Chapter 2 discusses social cohesion and Luhmann's theory of society, providing the definition of social cohesion as communicational permeability that I draw on in the summary of my three papers in Chapter 3 and the discussion that follows in Chapter 4. In the discussion in Chapter 4, I describe in theoretical terms how religious organisations can contribute to social cohesion and discuss whether the religious organisations' activities and engagements for youth in Søndre Nordstrand have done so. In the conclusion, I describe this thesis as the end point of three journeys: a physical journey across Oslo to conduct qualitative research, a methodological journey that took me from trying to adapt ethnographic research methods and conduct research with NEET young people to conducting interview-based research in religious organisations over the course of 2015, and a journey through the literature on social cohesion and Luhmann's theory of society. The conclusion answers my research question and reflects on the most important contributions of this thesis.

This thesis is an interdisciplinary work. It is written by a social anthropologist, engages with sociological theory rarely read by anthropologists, and is submitted to a PhD programme called Diakonia, Values, and Professional Practice. I furthermore conducted research for and wrote this thesis in a scholarship position linked to the Norwegian case study of *Youth at the Margins* (YOMA), a Nordic-South African research project in the field of diaconal research and the tradition of research on welfare and religion (Swart 2013; see also Chapter 1). As mentioned, my qualitative research was inspired by ethnographic research and methods characteristic of social anthropology as well as methods used in the sociology of religion. The topic under investigation – the interrelation, if any, between youth exclusion and religious

organisations' activities and engagements for youth in super-diverse Søndre Nordstrand – can fall under a broad definition of diakonia as religious social practice (cf. Dietrich et al. 2015). This thesis is therefore an empirical study of diakonia in a broad sense, although I do not systematically relate my results to the field of diaconal research.

## **1. Research design and research process**

This thesis is based on qualitative research from a city district of Oslo. The research consisted of two different, but interrelated, tracks that followed each other chronologically. The first track of the research was inspired by ethnographic research on youth exclusion and unemployment in modern societies. The second track of the research was more closely in line with methods used in research on welfare and religion and the role of religious organisations in communities in the sociology of religion. This chapter describes how the results that emerged from the first track of my research informed a revision of my research design and led to the second track of my research. As is often the case with qualitative research, my research for this thesis was shaped by unexpected events and how I responded to them, perhaps more than the initial research design itself. This chapter is meant to make the choices transparent to the reader. Along the way, the chapter describes my methods and data, and it discusses how I was perceived in the field and how this may have impacted the research process. In line with the anthropological tradition of writing research accounts, this chapter is written as a chronological account of my research from late 2014 to early 2016.

In *The Ethnographer's Method*, Alex Stewart (1998) suggested that ethnographic research should be evaluated for its veracity, objectivity, and perspicacity rather than for criteria derived from quantitative research, such as validity, reliability, and generalisability. Stewart (1998, 17) highlighted seven 'coping tactics' that he considered to be 'very helpful': prolonged fieldwork, search for disconfirming observations, good participative role relationships, and attentiveness to speech and interactional context to achieve veracity, writing a trail of the ethnographers' path to attain objectivity, and what he called 'intense consideration of the data' and 'exploration' to ensure perspicacity. As this chapter shows, my



research made use of the standard ethnographic methods only to a limited extent. However, the quality criteria and research coping tactics outlined by Stewart can apply to more generic qualitative research as well. I return to Stewart's criteria and coping tactics, and how they apply to my research, at the end of this chapter.

### *Youth at the Margins and ethnographic fieldwork*

My research was financed by a scholarship position linked to the Norwegian case study of the research project *Youth at the Margins* (YOMA). YOMA was a Nordic-South African research project on marginalised youth and faith-based organisations that ran from 2013 to 2016 (Swart 2013). My scholarship position and involvement in the project started in September 2014, when important foundations for the project were already in place. The project aimed to study faith-based organisations' contribution to social cohesion through their activities and engagements for marginalised youth aged 16 to 24 years. The project consisted of policy reviews and methodically standardised case studies in Finland, Norway, and South Africa as well as a comparison of the case study results. The Norwegian case study, to which my scholarship position was linked, represented a city district in a large Nordic city. Søndre Nordstrand had been selected because it was highly diverse and lowly ranked in socio-economic terms (see the introduction). South African researchers correspondingly conducted case studies in central Pretoria in the City of Tshwane and in Riverlea Township in Johannesburg, and there were also case studies in smaller towns and rural areas in Finland and South Africa (see Swart 2013).

The YOMA project ran in very different contexts and aimed to compare the wealthy, social-democratic Nordic welfare states with the much poorer and more market-oriented South Africa (see Holte and Rabe 2017), which meant that identifying comparable definitions and units of analysis presented a challenge. The terminology used in the YOMA project and the delimitation of the Norwegian YOMA case study gave important direction to the methodical, conceptual, and terminological choices in my own research. For example, the concern with NEET young people in papers 1 and 2, and this thesis as a whole, stems from the YOMA project, where the concept was used as an operationalisation of 'youth at the margins' or excluded youth that could be compared across the different countries and case studies. The NEET concept was subject to increasing interest in the Nordic countries and South Africa when the project started (Holte, Swart, and Hilamo 2017). It also felt specific and descriptive, and it became central in the project when the case study methods were decided at a working conference in late 2014. It was agreed that each case study should start with

interviews with a sample of approximately 20 NEET young people, using a standardised interview guide that covered their background and life histories, current life situations, and any experiences they had had with faith-based organisations. The case studies would then proceed with interviews with local religious professionals, welfare workers, and other (mainly adult) ‘experts’ concerning their perception of the issues raised by the NEET young people.

I designed my research to encompass and build on the interviews with NEET young people in the Norwegian YOMA case study, which were my responsibility as part of my scholarship position. As a social anthropologist, my intuition was to conduct ethnographic fieldwork by performing participant observation with some of the NEET young people interviewed for the Norwegian YOMA case study. I write participant observation *with* NEET young people because ‘NEET young people’ is a category of individuals who share – or, rather, lack (see Paper 1) – some specific relations (or inclusions, in Luhmannian terminology; Chapter 2). It is a structural position in modern society, where being in education or employment is a norm, but not a community of people who interact and share certain identities, as the subjects of classical ethnographies usually are. It is not possible to conduct fieldwork *among* NEET young people without identifying an arena where they interact, which may or may not exist.

However, conducting ethnographic research in a modern, complex, and global society, where communities, cultures, and places cannot be assumed to share concomitant boundaries (Chapter 2), requires certain adaptations of more classical ethnographic methods. The ethnographer’s participation is limited to certain domains in the research participants’ lives to a larger extent than when conducting fieldwork in the small-scale societies for which ethnographic methods were developed (Frøystad 2003; Howell 2001). Largely in response to this, various forms of ‘multi-sited fieldwork’ emerged in the 1990s that traced the movement and circulation of people, things, metaphors, plots, biographies, and conflicts rather than focussing on single communities or single sites (Marcus 1995). However, although the range of ethnographic subjects and genres have broadened in recent decades, ethnographic research remains distinguishable from more generic qualitative research. According to Stewart (1998, 5-8) ethnography has five characteristics: (1) participant observation; (2) holistic analysis; (3) contextualised explanation (cf. Strathern 1987); (4) detailed description and analysis of culture and social relations, including a concern for ‘the native point of view’; and (5) the use or development of anthropological or sociological theory. In a new epilogue written for the second edition of *Tales from the Field*, John van Maanen (2011, 143-175) suggested that

ethnography remains committed to participant observation, longer-term immersion in the field, and detailed and situated empirical accounts. It has also remained cautious about generalisations, abstractions, and theory as points of departure for or the purpose of analysis. More normatively, Paul Atkinson (2015, 191) wrote in *For Ethnography*, his recent manifesto, that ethnography should be ‘directed at the production of sustained, disciplined knowledge about social worlds and social processes’ through ‘intimate engagement with their subject-matter [and] recurrent dialogue between the local and the generic’. For all three, then, ethnography remains based on the intimate knowledge of a subject matter acquired through longer-term and in-depth immersion based on participant observation, which would be a fairly uncontroversial understanding of ethnography today.

The adaption of ethnographic methods in my research design was inspired by Lisa Russell,<sup>25</sup> who conducted ethnographic research with NEET young people in Northern England, and Cato Wadel’s (1973) classic work on unemployment in Newfoundland in Canada. Both researchers had to overcome the problem of participation across multiple domains as well as how NEET young people and the unemployed are often isolated and stigmatised to some extent, making participant observation difficult. Both researchers chose to base their work on close relationships with small samples of people whom they followed closely. The research I planned would be based on exploring NEET young people’s biographical narratives through the YOMA case study interviews and later follow-up interviews, following a few individuals across several domains of their lives and conducting participant observation in certain strategic sites. The research would combine what George Marcus (1995) described as following lives or biographies, following people, and conducting strategically situated single-site ethnography. I took responsibility for the interviews for the Norwegian YOMA case study because interviews can provide a way for researchers and research participants to get acquainted. Although being interviewed can be an intimidating prospect, it may be easier to agree to be interviewed than to agree to have a researcher you have never met tag along in your everyday life. Insight from the interviews could make it possible to make more specific requests regarding participant observation. I planned to ask the interview subjects to show me particular sites and places that came up in our interviews, to explore some sites and places myself, and to build my fieldwork from that. The aim was to explore the different social

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<sup>25</sup> Russell’s ethnographic research with NEET young people is presented across a number of publications, some of which are co-authored with Simmons and Thompson (Russell 2013; 2016a; 2016b; Russell, Simmons, and Thompson 2011a; 2011b; Simmons, Russell, and Thompson 2014; Thompson, Russell, and Simmons 2013). I discuss this research in Paper 1.

networks, engagements and attachments that were relevant in the NEET young people's lives. The premise was that NEET young people would have networks and engagements – including, possibly, online ones – outside education and work.

### *Finding and meeting NEET young people*

The YOMA case study and my research both required a way of finding and meeting NEET young people for interviews. This was the first step in the YOMA case study design as well as in my research. The Norwegian YOMA team<sup>26</sup> planned to draw on the network and connections of social workers at a public office in Søndre Nordstrand who had been positive about the project when we met them in late 2014. Following some delays, I met the social workers twice, and we exchanged a few e-mails and talked on the phone a few times in March 2015 before our cooperation broke down at the end of the month.<sup>27</sup> I consequently had to try other strategies to find and meet NEET young people in the city district. I describe this process as it unfolded from March to October 2015 in some detail here because it is central to how I now understand the NEET concept. It became the empirical basis for Paper 1 as well as the grounds for the revision of my research design.

The first strategy I tried to find and meet NEET young people was to seek potential gatekeepers in other public offices. The Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV), the Child Welfare Services, the police, the local health station, and the local upper-secondary school all had contact with young people in the relevant age group in the city district and responsibilities towards vulnerable youth. I was in contact with all of them in the course of this research. Except for one representative who referred me to a young man he knew from a former job, however, none of the representatives I talked to could introduce me to potential research participants.<sup>28</sup> Some public welfare workers referred to their professional and legal responsibilities to protect the privacy of their clients.<sup>29</sup> Others avoided the question by

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<sup>26</sup> The Norwegian YOMA team consisted of Olav Helge Angell, Annette Leis-Peters, Kari Karsrud Korslien, and myself.

<sup>27</sup> Out of concern for the anonymity of our contacts, and because the details of the breakdown are not relevant to the way the research subsequently unfolded, I will not discuss the details of how this transpired.

<sup>28</sup> I was also referred to another young man in the target group through a colleague's personal network, hence the two NEET young men mentioned in Paper 2.

<sup>29</sup> Although the welfare workers are right to protect the privacy of their clients, too strong protection of vulnerable groups can have the problematic consequence that they become under-researched or are only researched using methods that do not facilitate their participation in knowledge production (such as through population statistics; see Paper 1). In the long run, this can contribute to making the groups even more vulnerable (NESH 2016, 25). Qualitative research with vulnerable and marginalised groups can therefore have an intrinsic value (cf. Atkinson 2015, 183), and it is important for

referring me to superiors, who, in most cases, either refused to talk to me or neglected to answer phone calls or reply to e-mails when I tried to follow up on appointments. As a second strategy, I also contacted potential gatekeepers in civil society organisations and religious organisations in the city district that I knew had activities for young people. In most of these organisations, the representatives told me that the individuals I was looking for did not participate in their activities. A few of the representatives I talked to in these organisations told me that they did not know whether the young people who participated in their activities were in education or employment and that they consequently could not make introductions to potential research participants (see Paper 1). One representative emphasised that they did not ask the youth who came to their activities 'what they do'.

Overall, I met representatives from nine public offices, civil society organisations, and religious organisations between March and October 2015. I also exchanged e-mails and spoke on the phone with representatives from some other public offices and organisations. When I gave up on the prospect of recruiting NEET young people for interviews through gatekeepers in public offices or civil society organisations in October, I had recorded 70 e-mails, phone calls, and meetings in my contact log, which included only the contacts that had responded.<sup>30</sup> My requests had been rejected or I had been sent in loops within organisations, eventually being forwarded to people I had talked to before, which, in my view, made it seem unlikely that any of the public offices or civil society organisations would help me find and meet NEET young people for interviews. By this time, I was also becoming more aware of how my research and I were perceived by the representatives I met and talked to and increasingly concerned with how they understood the NEET concept.

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researchers and public welfare workers to find ways of collaborating to include vulnerable groups in research, without violating their right to privacy. Ways of doing so could be for welfare workers to give their clients information about research projects and researchers' contact details, asking clients for permission to share their contact details with researchers, or having researchers sign non-disclosure agreements so some details can be shared with them and they can contact potential research participants themselves. Fairly recently, Tanum and Krogstad (2014, 255) left leaflets with information about their research on unemployment at NAV offices, which resulted in four interviews. Ultimately, however, whether any of this is possible may hinge on whether public welfare workers and the organisations they work for have the time and resources necessary to support research, trust researchers in general and the researchers who contact them in particular, and feel that the research they are asked to contribute to is important. In my research, some combination of these and other factors did not work out to my benefit.

<sup>30</sup> I took some comfort in Russell's (2013, 50) note that she conducted 18 meetings with adults and over 40 telephone conversations and e-mail correspondences before she met with a single young person during our research.

How my research and I were perceived by the representatives I met and talked to, may have contributed to a reluctance to help me. My focus on NEET young people may have made some representatives concerned that I intended to write an account of youth marginalisation and failed integration that would make the city district and the people who live there look bad, in line with how the city district is often portrayed (see the introduction). Why was I not asking for their success stories? Furthermore, Oslo is often portrayed as a ‘divided city’, with the difference between western Oslo and eastern Oslo as the most fundamental division (Andersen 2013). I travelled across the city from my home in Vestre Aker to get to Søndre Nordstrand, as described in the field note excerpt on the first page of this thesis. My appearance as a young white man speaking in a western Oslo dialect made me identifiable as an ‘other’ to the ‘immigrant youth’ in Søndre Nordstrand. My being in higher education and asking about NEET young people contributed to emphasising the differences, essentially turning me and my request into a caricature of the divided city. In a context of contested reputational geographies, where local authorities, public offices, and civil society organisations in Søndre Nordstrand were working hard to promote a positive picture while the city district and its ‘immigrant youth’ were more often framed as problems in national public discourse (see the introduction; cf. Jones 2014; Parker and Karner 2010), this may have contributed to a reluctance to help me find and meet NEET young people.

I also began to question how the representatives I talked to understood the NEET concept. In parallel with my efforts to find gatekeepers who could help me set up interviews with NEET young people, I explored the possibility of recruiting NEET young people for interviews directly or through other youth through exploratory participant observation in one civil society organisation and one religious organisation in the city district. I call this part of my research ‘exploratory participant observation’ (cf. Paper 1) because I took on participatory roles but did not keep as strict of records as I would have had I intended to analyse the data it generated. Still, for ethical reasons and as a way of starting conversations, I told as many people as possible about my research while ‘in the field’. Rather than producing ethnographic data, I was interested in finding ways to find and meet NEET young people. I was therefore surprised when the exploratory participant observation turned out to be analytically fruitful. From the numerous informal conversations it facilitated in the field, I began to realise that the NEET concept meant different things to different people and in different contexts. Despite two publications on NEET young people in Norway that received some media attention at the time (Bø and Vigran 2014; Grødem, Nielsen, and Strand 2014), the abbreviation ‘NEET’ was

not well known. Its literal translation and various Norwegian equivalents<sup>31</sup> tended to elicit only a few specific subgroups in people's mind, notably teenage boys engaged in youth gangs, petty crime, or drugs or who were considered at risk of becoming religiously or politically extreme. Few, if any, people mentioned girls or other possible subcategories, such as unemployed graduates or the long-term ill, who were also included in the statistical category. I came to see this as an issue of meaning related to the concept's fuzzy denotation in a labour market characterised by temporary and part-time employment, its multiple connotations, and its exclusionary function as a way of speaking about 'others' (Paper 1).

This analysis implied how I could build a sample of NEET young people without depending on gatekeepers from public offices who had access to administrative registers defined in categories similar to those of the labour market statistics in terms of which the NEET concept was defined. I could translate the NEET concept into subcategories that resonated better with concepts used in everyday language to facilitate recruitment. The categories mentioned in the previous paragraph – unemployed graduates and the long-term ill – could be examples of such categories, as could youth from vocational tracks in upper-secondary school who did not get apprenticeships and young parents, in particular young mothers (see page 77, note 59, below). However, uncritically calling such a sample 'NEET young people' would run the risk of constructing research participants as NEET even when they did not themselves agree with the label. Rather than using the NEET concept as an operationalisation of excluded youth, as we had set out to do, Paper 1 concluded that qualitative research should engage critically with the concept and how the young people it denotes identify themselves, allowing them to comment on the concept in relation to their life situations.

This implied a need to redesign the Norwegian YOMA case study. However, the Norwegian YOMA team decided against the research design outlined in the conclusion of Paper 1 – which would have required a great amount of time and effort to identify subcategories, to find and meet youth, and to gain access and build trust,<sup>32</sup> especially given my position as an

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<sup>31</sup> I mainly used the phrase 'youth who are not in school and not working' (see also Paper 1, note 1). Other concepts frequently used in research and public discourse concerning many of the same people include 'school dropouts', 'early leavers', and 'unemployed youth' (Vogt 2017).

<sup>32</sup> One of the two NEET young men I interviewed introduced me to a friend who was also in a NEET situation. The three of us met in a coffee bar once. After about an hour of discussing the research, its use and utility, who I was, and why I was interested in talking with him, the friend agreed to be interviewed. We agreed on a time and place to meet a few days later and exchanged phone numbers, as he did not have time to do the interview that afternoon. He never showed up for the interview appointment and never responded to my calls or text messages. While this kind of experience is to be

outsider to the city district, as discussed above – because the YOMA project concerned the relationship between excluded youth and religious organisations, not the NEET concept itself. Continuing to focus on finding and meeting NEET young people would have distracted our attention from the relationship between excluded youth and religious organisations that our research concerned. Instead, the Norwegian YOMA team decided that we would approach the relationship between excluded youth and religious organisations through interviews in the religious organisations in the case study city district.

### *Interviews in religious organisations*

The decision to study religious organisations' activities and engagements for youth through interviews in religious organisations rather than interviews with NEET young people implied a reversal of the original case study design. Rather than NEET young people's relations to religion and religious organisations, the new design meant that we would explore prevailing ideas of and relations to excluded youth in the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand. Rather than a structural position and a means of building our sample, we would investigate the NEET concept and excluded youth as discursive constructions in religious organisations, and particularly in their youth groups. What did the adult representatives and youth group members think about NEET young people? Whom did they see as excluded in their communities, and how did they relate to them?

Before we could build a sample of religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand district, we needed an overview of the field. I drew up a list of religious organisations in the city district based on what I knew from my research thus far, data from public registrations, personal contact with representatives, and online searches. I began by writing a list of the religious organisations I already knew about and supplemented this list by going through public registrations. The city districts of Oslo are administrative units, but their administrations do not have any particular responsibilities toward religious organisations and do not keep publicly available overviews.<sup>33</sup> However, the Ministry of Culture and the county governors pay subsidies to religious organisations other than the Church of Norway. I went through the

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expected when doing ethnography with youth, it reflects the importance of mutual trust, the identification of mutual benefits, how research designs must be flexible, and how the research requires a large input of time (cf. Russell 2013, 50-51). Gaining the trust required for youth to agree to be interviewed and for interviews to be effective may require the researcher to spend time and build relations in the field.

<sup>33</sup> A local police officer kept a list of the religious organisations in the city district, but it was a working document and not a publicly available overview. It was related to his work with the Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation (on which, see Paper 3).



list of religious organisations that had applied for subsidies from the county governor of Oslo and Akershus, highlighting those with addresses in Søndre Nordstrand. A few of these addresses turned out to be the homes of board leaders of religious organisations located elsewhere when I contacted the representatives. The opposite also occurred: two of the religious organisations that I found renting a church in the city district were registered with addresses in other city districts. I finally conducted online searches using keywords like ‘church’, ‘mosque’, and ‘temple’ and the names of the different parts of Søndre Nordstrand and made phone calls to religious organisations about details I was not otherwise able to confirm. In the end, I had a list of 14 religious organisations that operated in Søndre Nordstrand. In addition, there were four Church of Norway parishes in various stages of merging with each other. The Norwegian YOMA team eventually agreed to count them as three separate organisations, yielding a total of 17 organisations.<sup>34</sup> The thorough mapping of the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand as well as how I asked the different representatives we interviewed about religious organisations in their vicinity without being told about religious organisations that were not on my list, made me confident that I had an overview of all the religious organisations in the city district.

The members of the Norwegian YOMA team contacted and talked to representatives from all but one of the religious organisations on the phone.<sup>35</sup> In this initial round of contact, we asked whether the religious organisations had activities for or contact with youth aged 16 to 24 years. We made appointments to interview those representatives who said their religious organisations had some activities or engagement for youth. This criterion excluded four religious organisations from our research. We interviewed 17 representatives from 12 of the religious organisations, including two Church of Norway parishes. We conducted all but two of the interviews on the religious organisations’ premises. The exceptions were a mosque where it would not be permissible for the female YOMA team members to enter and a

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<sup>34</sup> See Paper 2, Table 2, for an overview of the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand.

<sup>35</sup> I tried different methods for getting in touch with the last religious organisation, including calling the contact persons in the county governor’s list, asking representatives from nearby organisations whether they had any contact, and waiting outside their venues for extended periods of time. Although I did get in touch with some individuals, none of them agreed to answering questions or to meet me as representatives of the organisations. Compared with a recent report whose authors were only able to conduct interviews in five out of 12 mosques they contacted (Utrop 2016, 14), our response rate of 16 out of 17 religious organisations, and four out of five mosques, is high. One reason may be that we asked questions about their youth work, which it seemed they wanted to talk about, while the authors of the report had a more critical agenda focussed on financing and theological and political influence. The report also sampled religious organisations other than those we did.

Muslim organisation that did not have a meeting place of their own at the time of our research. We interviewed the representatives from one of these Muslim organisations in one of the representatives' homes and the representatives from the other in a nearby church, which the representatives suggested and preferred. All the interviews were semi-structured with two or more YOMA team members present. We started each interview by explaining what our research was about and gaining written consent to participate from each participant. In the interviews, we first asked open questions about the organisations' history and the representatives' personal and professional experiences from the city district. We proceeded to ask what they knew about the situation of the youth in their local communities, what meeting places for youth they knew about, what their religious organisation's activities and engagement for youth were, who the youth active in their religious organisation were, and whether they cooperated with other organisations in their youth work. We recorded and transcribed the interviews with all but one of the adult representatives. We took notes during the last interview, and I transcribed the interview from our notes later that day.

In the religious organisations where the representatives told us there was a youth group, we asked them to help us set up focus group interviews with youth group members over 16 years of age. Representatives from seven religious organisations said they had youth groups, but only five of them actually managed to gather their youth groups (Paper 2). We thus conducted six focus group interviews with 34 youth group members from five religious organisations. The focus group interviews were conducted on the religious organisations' premises during or after a regular meeting, when the youth were already present. The focus group interviews were semi-structured, and there were two or three YOMA team members present in each of them. We first explained the methods and purpose of our research and obtained written consent to participate from each participant.<sup>36</sup> After brief rounds of presentations, we started each focus group interview by asking the youth what they saw as good and bad about their suburbs. We then asked them to describe their neighbours and the

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<sup>36</sup> According to Norwegian guidelines for research ethics, youth 15 years and older can consent to researchers collecting and using their personal data, but researchers can only acquire sensitive data about youth under 18 years with the consent of their parents (NESH 2016, 21). We recorded sensitive data regarding religion and to some extent also ethnicity about youth aged 16 and above, in line with our notification to and clearance from the Data Protection Official (NSD). Some youth under 16 years of age were present during the focus group interviews in two of the religious organisations but did not speak when our recorder was on. We thus did not record or use any of their personal information. We opted for this solution as asking some youth group members to leave the premises while allowing other youth group members to stay would have been questionable behaviour and may have left the youth with a bad impression of research and researchers.

members of their religious organisation, what their youth groups and other religious organisations in the city district did for youth, and what they thought religious organisations should do for youth. All the focus group interviews with youth were recorded and transcribed. Together with our interviews with adult representatives, this produced an empirical body of material of approximately 200 pages of dense text, which was the main data for papers 2 and 3 in this thesis.

In addition to the interviews in the religious organisations, we also participated in services in some of the religious organisations before and after the focus group interviews; I also attended some further activities and services in some of the religious organisations on my own and read the websites and social media pages of the religious organisations.

Furthermore, the Norwegian YOMA team conducted interviews with representatives from local public authorities and civil society organisations as well as with the local youth council. None of the papers in this thesis refer explicitly to this as data, but it provided additional depth to what the representatives and youth we interviewed in the religious organisations told us and a clearer understanding of the field. It also allowed us to verify information from our interviews using other, independent sources.

In Paper 2, which was written for publication as part of the main YOMA results, the Norwegian YOMA team analysed structures of meaning and identity as they emerged in the interviews and affected inclusion and exclusion in the youth groups. The paper must be read against how we conducted the interviews in religious organisations with adult representatives and youth recruited through the religious organisations. We did not follow the youth over several domains of their life as the ethnographic fieldwork of my initial research design would have. The interviews focussed on activities in the religious organisations and did not provide detailed information on the focus group participants' participation in and experiences of other activities and arenas, such as school, work, sport, or, for that matter, on 'the streets'. While the 'street youth' emerged as a category of 'others' in the religious organisations and their youth groups, they may not have been so in other contexts, such as in public schools. Youth who did not participate in any religious organisations were not represented in the data although they may have represented a majority of youth in Søndre Nordstrand.

This part of my research was based on a thorough mapping of the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand, which presented opportunities. It implied a shallower treatment of each religious organisation but allowed me to analyse the relations between them in ways that

would not otherwise have been possible. Mapping religious organisations on the ‘meso-level’ of a city district meant that I could engage with the city district and the local communities as units of analysis (cf. Strausberg 2009). Thus, the analysis in Paper 3 was based on an overview of other organisations the representatives we interviewed mentioned as partners in their activities and engagements for youth. Relating this to Luhmann’s theory of society, I suggested that representatives mentioning each other indicated that some form of communication had taken place between their respective religious organisations. I used it as a proxy for communication. The paper was not based on observations of the communication as it occurred but on a mapping of the communication that had taken place. It was not as much an analysis of communication as it was an analysis of the structures of communication. Paper 3 drew on Luhmann’s theory of society to analyse the structures of communication revealed in my data, asking how the religious organisations were integrated in local communities, the city, and other social structures.

#### *An extended case*

So far, this chapter has outlined my initial research design and the research process, including the methods I have used, the data I have produced, and the mode of analysis in the three papers. In this final section of the chapter, I will draw on Michael Burawoy’s (1998; 2009) elaboration of the extended case method to outline how I have used this research to make an argument in this synopsis. While the extended case method is far from the only way of constructing theoretical arguments in qualitative research (cf. Atkinson 2015, 64-72), it is a clearly formulated and influential one. It is more closely linked to the anthropological tradition than the sociological tradition, but some of its key texts are published in sociology journals (Burawoy 1998; Mitchell 1983) and also referred to by sociologists (e.g. Angell and Molokotos-Liederman 2017). At the beginning of the chapter, I referred to Stewart’s (1998) alternative research quality criteria for ethnographic research and the research coping tactics he discussed and recommended, which I also return to in this and the next section.

The extended case method emerged in the Copperbelt in present-day Zambia as researchers at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in what was then Northern Rhodesia began to record ‘real events, struggles, and dramas that took place over space and time’ and used these to ‘[bring] out discrepancies between normative prescriptions and everyday practices – discrepancies they traced to internal contradictions but also to the intrusion of colonialism’ (Burawoy 1998, 5; cf. Kempny 2005, 155-160). Classic studies include Max Gluckman’s (1940) ‘Analysis of a social situation in modern Zululand’ (or ‘the bridge’) and Clyde Mitchell’s (1956) *The*

*Kalela Dance*. Emerging from research in colonial Africa, the extended case method represented an adaptation of ethnographic research methods to a more complex society than anthropologists normally studied. Even – or perhaps particularly – in the margins of the complex, globally interconnected society, social scientists could not ‘[treat] their field sites as Malinowski had treated the Trobriand Islanders, cut off from the world and from history’ (Burawoy 2009, 4). Social research had to be explicitly situated in and related to the macroprocesses that shaped the field of inquiry.

In this thesis, I draw on Burawoy’s elaboration of the extended case method, which is more theoretically oriented than other versions of the extended case method (Abbott 2009, 87-88; 2016, 107-108). Summarising his version of the extended case method, Burawoy (2009, 17; cf. 1998, 16-22) wrote that it was a process of ‘extending’, first of ‘the observer into the community being studied’ and second of ‘observations over time and space’. These two criteria are in line with generally accepted principles of ethnography, as outlined earlier in this chapter, but apply to my research only to a limited extent. I did not conduct longer-term participant observation in the way it would normally be expected of an ethnographer. Where the extended case method as elaborated by Burawoy differs from other ethnographic research and illuminates my research, is rather in how it relates to theory:

The third principle is the extension from microprocesses to macroforces, looking at the way the latter shape and indeed are shaped by the former. We have to be careful not to reify those forces that are themselves the product of social processes – even if those social processes are invisible to the participant observer. The fourth principle is the extension of theory that is the ultimate goal and foundation of the extended case method. We start with theory that guides our interaction with others and permits us to identify forces beyond our suite. In the process its inadequacies become apparent in the anomalies and contradictions we seek to rectify. (Burawoy 2009, 17; cf. 1998, 16-22)

In other words, Burawoy’s extended case method does not start with data but with theory (Burawoy 2009, 13). By using theory to situate cases and cases to challenge theory, it is possible to arrive at conclusions of general validity based on researching a single case. This would come close to the research tactic Stewart (1998, 53-54) called ‘intense consideration of the data’ and described as a process of ‘decontextualizing’ data segments from their source and ‘recontextualizing’ them to inform ‘empirical inquiry and theorizing’. Mario Luis

Small's verdict was that Burawoy's elaboration of the extended case method 'provides a potentially effective way of improving theories, by proposing (as many others have) the use of unique or deviant cases to improve on existing theories. It does not quite propose a model for distinguishing a good from a bad hypothesis [...] and it does not provide an explicit criterion to make empirical assessments relevant to other cases' (Small 2009, 21). Drawing on J. Clyde Mitchell's (1983, 199-200) elaboration of the distinction between 'statistical inference' and '[s]cientific or causal – or perhaps more appropriately, logical interference', Small (2009, 23-24) suggested that case study research could indicate causal relations of the kind 'When X occurs, whether Y will follow depends on W' and ground 'ontological statements, those regarding the discovery of something previously unknown to exist'. The latter may have a theoretical interest if it challenges theory. Thus, for Mitchell (1983, 203-204), as for Burawoy (cf. Small 2009, 20), cases should be selected for their theoretical relevance, for how they can challenge existing theory. This would come close to the research tactic Stewart (1998, 59) called 'exploration' and described as 'specifying the contingencies that apply for their cases and comparing these with other cases, insights, and theorized contingencies'.

This thesis is based on research in Søndre Nordstrand. As I showed in the introduction, there is no clear majority group in Søndre Nordstrand, and the wide range of differences in the population can mean that some people will not fit into determinate minority communities. In this way, I suggested that Søndre Nordstrand is super-diverse rather than multicultural. Søndre Nordstrand is also so firmly embedded in the city of Oslo that it is hardly meaningful to analyse it as a separate social field (see Paper 3). As an extended case, then, research in Søndre Nordstrand can test various presumptions about religious organisations' relations in local communities, the city, the country, and even abroad as well as how they relate to ethnicities and cultures. Focussing on youth exclusion, as I do in this thesis, will contribute to making the interconnections with other local organisations and public welfare services visible.

#### *Qualitative research quality criteria*

At the beginning of this chapter, I referred to Stewart's (1998) suggestion that ethnographic research should be considered for its veracity, objectivity, and perspicacity rather than for criteria such as validity, reliability, and generalisability, which that are derived from quantitative research. In terms of Stewart's research coping tactics, also outlined at the beginning of the chapter, I did not conduct prolonged fieldwork at any single site or have

participative roles except for during the shorter period when I was conducting exploratory participant observation. However, I turned the process of (not) finding and meeting NEET young people into data, supplementing information obtained from the exploratory participant observation with information obtained while I was seeking to work with public offices, civil society organisations, and religious organisations. This became the basis of my discussion of different ways of understanding the NEET concept (Paper 1), which in turn led to the focus on religious organisations in the second track of my research, the analysis of inclusion in and exclusion from religious organisations' youth groups (Paper 2), and the analysis of how the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand were integrated in local communities, the city, and other social structures (Paper 3). In terms of Stewart's research coping tactics, this was based on concern for the frictions between what people say and what they do – in this case in relation to excluded youth (Stewart 1998, 26-28). That I mapped all the religious organisations in the city district meant that, for some observations, I exhausted the possibility of disconfirming observations. Furthermore, participation in services and activities in some of the religious organisations; interviews with representatives from local public authorities, with civil society organisations, and with the local youth council; and reading websites and social media pages allowed me to verify details in the interview data that I analysed in papers 2 and 3 (Angell and Molokotos-Liederman 2017). The account of the research process in this chapter was written as a trail of my path in the field, describing my different contacts and relations to allow the reader insights into how I – through my persona and conscious choices – shaped the research. Drawing on Burawoy's elaboration of the extended case method, this chapter has also outlined how the choice of a super-diverse research site contributes to the perspicacity, the more general interest, of my results by challenging existing theory through intense consideration of the data and exploration. In summary, this chapter has described the repeated journeys to Søndre Nordstrand on which my qualitative research was based as well as a second, methodological journey that took me from trying to adapt ethnographic research methods and conduct research with NEET young people to conducting interview-based research in religious organisations.

## *A Friday Night Drive*

Field notes, Friday 6 March 2015

*We have already visited the three youth clubs and a few other places in Søndre Nordstrand when my guide stops the car to turn around outside a pub in the basement of a large, red brick building at around eleven o'clock. The lights shining through the windows suggest that something is going on inside. There is nobody at the outdoor tables, but maybe just because it is cold and windy. As my guide turns the car, men in white cotton tunics and prayer caps suddenly appear around us on the street. The night prayer has just ended in a mosque a little further up the road, in another part of the red brick building.*

*We drive on. My guide points out Holmlia centre and another pub before she drops me off at the train station. I hear the train approaching as I open the car door, so I quickly say 'thank you' and run down the stairs to the platform. I do not make it in time and look at the train pulling off as I catch my breath. The next train is in half an hour, and it is cold and windy, so I go to the pub while I wait. Other than the bartender and myself, there are about ten people in the room. They are all white Norwegians in their sixties, drinking beer and listening to Elvis. Most of them have had enough to drink. A couple is trying to dance but having a hard time not falling over. Reflecting on the evening's drive around Søndre Nordstrand over a beer, I jot down some notes:*

*There are different people in different places. At the youth club in Mortensrud, were the cool kids. The girls wore tight jeans and tight tops. The boys, too, were dressed to impress. Their hair was immaculate. None of them were white. Maybe one or two, but none that I remember from the short visit tonight. At Låven, things were different. There were more white youth. Were they younger? They wore different clothes. A boy wore a tie and a blazer two sizes too large. There were games of chess upstairs and a science fiction film showing in the basement.*

*At the pub, a woman gets up from a table and reveals a leopard-print miniskirt as she slips off her coat. She asks all the men around the table to dance with her. They ignore her. She asks the bartender, who does not speak Norwegian. Then me. 'Do you dance?' 'Not tonight. I have to catch a train'. She leaves and comes back about a minute later and hugs me. 'This is what we do at Holmlia', she says. Before I finish my beer and leave for the train, I note down:*

*What do the people at the pub know about the city district's diverse ~~future~~ present?*





## 2. Social cohesion as communicational permeability

The woman in the leopard print miniskirt's last remark in the field note excerpt on the previous page – 'This is what we do at Holmlia' – suggested that she belonged to a community (*we*) who did something specific (*this*) in a certain place (*Holmlia*). Her remark articulated a worldview in which communities, cultures, and places were more or less the same thing and shared the same boundaries. Although this worldview remains prevalent (cf. Werbner 2005, 747), I argue in this chapter that it is not precise. The youth at the different youth clubs and the men walking home from the night prayer in the nearby mosque would not recognise the woman in the leopard-print miniskirt's Friday night as being similar to their own. They lived in more or less the same place but were doing entirely different things with entirely different people on a Friday night. Although this is not a new issue – as beautifully captured, for example, in Gullestad's (2002b, 219) remarks about growing up in a Catholic family in post-war Norway – it is an issue that becomes decisively important when conducting social research in super-diverse contexts, such as in Søndre Nordstrand. Researching communities and social cohesion in such places requires theoretical concepts that do not imply or depend upon the assumption that communities, cultures, and places are concomitantly bounded.

In this chapter, I first outline broad lines in the sociological and anthropological literature on social cohesion and the community concept. I focus on how the literature has dealt with the possibility of qualitatively different forms of social cohesion; differences in scale; and various intersections of local, national, and transnational cultural spaces and lived-in worlds. These sections of the chapter suggest that the dominant conceptualisations of social cohesion have been overly focussed on 'socio-cultural integration', or on matters such as consensus,

shared values, and trust, and influenced by an assumption that communities, cultures, and places share concomitant boundaries. I then conclude the chapter by outlining Luhmann's theory of society and suggesting an alternative definition of social cohesion based on it that focusses on social- and system integration. This definition will not share the same presuppositions as the other conceptualisations of social cohesion discussed in the first sections of the chapter.

#### *Academic and policy discourse on social cohesion*

Many authors distinguish between an academic discourse on social cohesion, which is often seen as rooted in sociology and social psychology, and a policy discourse on social cohesion (e.g. Chan, To, and Chan 2006; Hulse and Stone 2007; Novy, Swiatek, and Moulaert 2012; Schiefer and van der Noll 2016). While the origin of the academic discourse on social cohesion is often traced back over a hundred years, to the founding fathers of sociology, the policy debate is rather seen as emerging in response to increasing diversity due to immigration and rising inequalities due to neoliberal policies in Western countries over the last few decades (e.g. Cheong et al. 2007; Jenson 1998; 2002; 2010; Levitas 1996). Although this distinction can be helpful when analysing individual texts, I suggest in this section that the discourses have also been closely intertwined, especially as researchers have engaged with the policy discourse to bolster the relevance of their work.

Sociology emerged as a discipline in a context of rapid transformation, as Europe and North America were becoming industrial societies at the end of the nineteenth century.

Industrialisation, urbanisation and rapidly growing cities, and increasing individualism produced new social forms that demanded new social analyses. Much of the early sociological theory focussed on the binary modern/traditional in attempts to understand the characteristics of the modern society that was emerging. In Germany, Ferdinand Tönnies (2001 [1887]) distinguished between groups of individuals who were socially connected and acted for the sake of their community (*Gemeinschaft*) and groups of individuals who lived in the same places but were only connected instrumentally (*Gesellschaft*). From France, Emile Durkheim (1984 [1893]) distinguished between 'mechanical solidarity' as the force that united small-scale, traditional societies and 'organic solidarity' as the integrative force in larger, modern societies. Mechanical solidarity is based on homogeneity and integrates people into society as equals, while organic solidarity is based on interdependence and arises when the members of a society differ from, but depend on, one another.

Early social anthropologists explored how non-Western societies, which were also often non-statal societies, were held together. Reflecting the academic division of labour between sociology and anthropology, they were less concerned with the modern societies in Europe and North America. Thus, Durkheim's nephew, Marcel Mauss (2002 [1925]), described how obligations to give, receive, and reciprocate gifts produced lasting relationships between exchange partners.<sup>37</sup> Other social anthropologists focussed on conflict management. E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1940) showed how the lineage system and tribal structure of the Nuer in contemporary South Sudan determined who would be allies and opponents in feuds.<sup>38</sup> The basis of Evans-Pritchard's model was that alliances were formed with those lineage segments that were closer than the opponents in any specific feud, producing groups based on relative social proximity. As Max Gluckman (1955, 2) explained, '...these societies are organized into a series of groups and relationships, so that people who are friends on one basis are enemies on another. Herein lies social cohesion, rooted in the conflicts between men's different allegiances'. In another model, derived from fieldwork among the Pathans of the Swat Valley in Pakistan, Fredrik Barth (1959) showed how, in a similar lineage system, conflict of interest between the closest segments led to the formation of alliances with more distant segments. This aggregated into a system of two blocs, each bound together by strategic choices rather than similarity or relative proximity, as in Durkheim's notion of mechanical solidarity and Evans-Pritchard's model of the Nuer lineage system.

These examples suffice to illustrate how what is now discussed as social cohesion has been a main concern from the beginning of both sociology and anthropology, if often discussed in terms of 'integration' or 'the problem of order' (Jenson 2002, 145). Since the classic studies mentioned here, a vast corpus of literature has amassed, with various definitions and conceptualisations. A large portion of this literature has focused on the cohesion of smaller groups (Friedkin 2004) and will not be discussed in this thesis. However, a shift has taken place over the last few decades, roughly in parallel with the emergence of the policy discourse on social cohesion mentioned above. In a recent literature review, David Schiefer and Jolanda van der Noll (2016, 6) wrote that 'contemporary approaches to social cohesion are more strongly circled around its operationalization and usability for policy makers' than

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<sup>37</sup> More than an academic endeavour, David Graeber (2004, 17) places *The Gift* in the context of Mauss' well-known political commitments as a 'revolutionary socialist'.

<sup>38</sup> Also this work can be read in a more applied, or policy-oriented, light: '*African Political Systems* addresses precisely the issues that arose within the context of indirect rule [in the colonies]. Who were the leaders? What were the structures of administration?' (Kuper 2010, 144).

the earlier approaches were. Several recent publications have proposed definitions, operationalisations, and even measures of social cohesion (e.g. Bottoni 2016; Chan, To, and Chan 2006; Dimeglio, Janmaat, and Mehaut 2013; Dragolov et al. 2013). Contrary to the common claim that this literature features many and often incompatible definitions and operationalisations, Schiefer and van der Noll (2016) argue that the operationalisations tend to focus on a few similar core dimensions. Their review is organised around six core dimensions derived from the literature: (1) quantities and qualities of social relations, (2) attachment to or identification with the social entity, (3) orientation towards a common good, (4) shared values, (5) levels of equality or inequality within the social entity, and (6) individuals' quality of life. They argue that close social relations (including trust, tolerance, and social participation), orientation towards a common good, and shared identification or sense of belonging are essential components of social cohesion, but they reject that shared values, equality, and quality of life are essential components. They argue that the latter three dimensions may rather be causally related with social cohesion as factors that can make or break social cohesion (Schiefer and van der Noll 2016, 16).

This reflects how minimalist definitions of social cohesion such as Joseph Chan, Ho-Pong To, and Elaine Chan's (2006) and Schiefer and van der Noll's (2016) may describe the conditions necessary for a society to be cohesive but may not outline conditions sufficient for social cohesion to prevail, let alone for a society to be a 'good' society. In this way, their position is at odds with the position of other writers who have criticised the social cohesion concept for glossing over inequality and injustice, thereby becoming a euphemism for social order and social control (e.g. Fitzpatrick and Jones 2005; Levitas 1996; Stead 2017). David Herbert (2013, 240) wrote that 'answering the question of what is needed to hold a society together will always, in part, involve an element of judgement based on values: our answer, in part, depends on what kind of society we want and chose'. Andreas Novy, Daniela Coimbra Swiatek, and Frank Moulaert (2012, 1877) suggested approaching social cohesion as 'a *problématique*' by recognising that defining it is not a simple, value-free decision, especially in contexts where academic and policy discourses are intertwined, as they have been in the UK (Alexander 2004; Jones 2013; 2014; Worley 2005).

#### *Qualitative differences and different scales*

Compared with the literature reviewed in the previous section, Jan Germen Janmaat (2011) approached the social cohesion concept differently. Rather than defining and operationalising the concept on a theoretical or normative basis, Janmaat (2011) refined the four influential

definitions into eight ‘components’ (similar to Schiefer and van der Noll’s dimensions) and found measurable indicators for each of them. Analysing data from 41 countries on different continents, he extracted two main ‘dimensions’ of co-varying indicators, which he labelled ‘solidarity’ and ‘participation’. He found that the two dimensions did not co-vary across the countries, which implied that the countries were cohesive in different ways. In this way, his results were in line with the classical work referred to above, which suggested that different social structures were cohesive in different ways. Janmaat noted that striving for a single composite multidimensional index of social cohesion ‘... miss[es] the point ... that the social cohesion rankings thus obtained represent qualitatively different forms of social cohesion’ (Janmaat 2011, 63). Gianmaria Bottoni’s (2016, 21) more recent conclusion that his multilevel social cohesion model ‘has shown its validity across [...] 29 countries revealing how the mechanisms of social cohesion work in the same way across those cultures’ may at first seem to contradict this, but his research included only European countries, and his claim to ‘cross-cultural validation’ is consequently weak. In line with both Bottoni’s (2016) and Janmaat’s (2011) results, Schiefer and van der Noll (2016, 17) suggested that comparative research on social cohesion can be valuable, but that ‘[c]learly defined sets of comparison countries need to be agreed upon. A possible comparison can be OECD, or EU countries, or countries within continents. Comparing Germany to, for example, India or a central African country is difficult’.

While important, this insight disguises another important distinction. Bottoni (2016), Janmaat (2011), and most other quantitatively oriented sociologists compare social cohesion across countries. Countries allow a scale where datasets are easily available, but it is not the only meaningful scale of social cohesion. The classical anthropological studies outlined above concerned social cohesion of other social structures, such as ethnic groups. In sociology, Ade Kearns and Ray Forrest (2000) have suggested that social cohesion is a multilevel concept. They outlined the national, the city, and the neighbourhood levels and suggested that cohesion at the different levels may even be mutually incompatible. On an even more minute scale, Geoffrey Hunt and Sandra Satterlee (1986) showed how different pubs were part of the process by which two socially contrasting groups were established and maintained in an English village. Rather than helping to dissolve social barriers, the pubs consolidated them. In this way, the diversification of institutions – whether pubs, religious organisations, other institutions, or an observed tendency towards less public engagement (Putnam 2000) – can facilitate the coexistence of different communities and cultures in the same places. Yet, as

Pnina Werbner (2005, 747) wrote – and the woman in the leopard print miniskirt in the field note excerpt so aptly illustrated – ‘while sociologists may cast doubt on the notion of community as *gemeinschaft*, the face-to-face traditional, homogeneous and closed territorially-based group, it seems that the ideal of community cannot be banished from the popular imagination’.

The discussion in this chapter so far implies that a definition of social cohesion should address whether it means the same thing across different countries and communities and on different scales. Recognising how recent interest in the concept has emerged in response to increasing diversity and rising inequalities – and how it will be applied to a super-diverse city district in this thesis – the definition should also inform research on diverse localities and geographically dispersed social networks. This will require an analytic disentanglement of communities, cultures, and places – which is hardly radical. Even 25 years ago, Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992) suggested that anthropologists and other social scientists could no longer – if they ever could – take it for granted that cultures and communities are spatially bounded. Communities and cultures, they argued, were not necessarily local or even localised. Ten years later, they suggested a need for research on the spatialisation of states in an increasingly transnational neoliberal political economy (Ferguson and Gupta 2002). The latter article provided an illustration of how moving beyond methodological nationalism as ‘the naturalization of the nation-state’ (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003, 576) did not necessarily mean abandoning the state as a frame of reference but rather meant investigating it critically. Together, Gupta and Ferguson’s articles suggest that communities, cultures, places, spaces, societies, and states may share concomitant boundaries but cannot be assumed to do so and that when they do so, it should be an empirical observation, not an epistemological prerequisite for social analysis.

Referring to the rupture between such accounts of the present and social theory that has long tended to remain rooted in methodical nationalism, Eriksen (2011, 21) wrote that:

... it is time to start afresh. One cannot a priori take for granted which centrifugal and centripetal institutions and processes are at work in contemporary complex societies. Individuals and groups are likely to be socially integrated in some respects and disintegrated in others. Different parts of society and culture change at different speeds. The task at hand consists in nothing less than identifying which social and cultural processes contribute to that sense of cohesion required for a territory and/or

an aggregate of persons to constitute a collectivity that may meaningfully be spoken of as a society. (Eriksen 2011, 21)

For Eriksen (2011, 21-22), ‘the study of ethnicity, including inter- and intragroup dynamics as well as everything that takes place in the shifting frontier zones, should claim its privileged place’ in this project. He suggested that society as a concept needs to be understood in terms of tensions between continuous variations in culture and the relatively greater fixation of social identities. I share Eriksen’s sentiment of a need to reconceptualise the society concept, but, unlike Eriksen, I draw inspiration from the focus on communicational flows and boundaries in Luhmann’s theory of society. In his much-used textbook *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Eriksen (2010) emphasised the conventional anthropological view that ethnicity is the outcome of boundary-making processes constructing contrasting social groups. ‘However’, he wrote, ‘the social world can rarely be neatly divided into fixed groups with clear boundaries, unambiguous criteria for membership and an all-encompassing social relevance. Therefore, a one-sided focus on ethnicity may prevent a researcher from seeing social systems in other ways which may also be relevant’ (Eriksen 2010, 213). In other words, while identities and ethnicities can be important determinants of social structures, this is also true of many other factors.

With regard to the topic of this thesis, ethnicity can influence youth exclusion and religious organisations’ activities and engagements for youth in diverse contexts but so can factors such as local social networks, national welfare policies, and global religious networks. Luhmann’s theory will not restrict my analysis to any particular scale or presupposition but allows me to take the complexity of my empirical material seriously. Perhaps an unexpected choice for a social anthropologist, Luhmann’s theory consists of a carefully elaborated vocabulary for describing social structures as structures of communication. Focussing on communication, a further benefit of Luhmann’s theory is that individual identities become insignificant, and therefore also unproblematic, unless they lead to or structure communication. This is in line with David Herbert’s (2013, 241) call for ‘an understanding of social cohesion which focuses less on individual attitudes and more on co-ordinating systems’, among other things. I introduce Luhmann’s theory in some more detail in the next section, showing how it departs from some of the same conceptual problems discussed in the introduction and this chapter so far, before I discuss Luhmann’s take on social integration and system integration and show in the last section of the chapter how his theory can imply the idea of social cohesion as communicational permeability.



### *Luhmann's theory of society*

Luhmann's work is highly regarded in German sociology, but it is not as widely read in English-speaking countries and rarely referred to by anthropologists (but see Gershon 2005; Jöhncke 2007; Müller 2006; see also Strathern 2004). This may relate to Luhmann's radical and sometimes provocative reconceptualisations of well-established sociological assumptions as well as his impenetrable style of writing (Moeller 2011, 10-15). Another challenge has been the long delays between the publication of the German originals of his texts and their English translations. However, the recent publication of his last works in English translations as *Theory of Society* (in two volumes; Luhmann 2012; 2013a [1997]) and *A Systems Theory of Religion* (Luhmann 2013b [2000]) has made his work more available to Anglophone readers in the last few years. This chapter, and this thesis as a whole, draws closely on these translations.

For anthropologists, what Ilana Gershon (2005, 99) described as Luhmann's 'initial theoretical stance to remove the person as a conscious (or even unconscious) social actor from his systems theory' has been seen as at odds with the anthropological project of theorising based on participation and observation among people, to the extent that he has been read at all (Lee 2007). In this section, however, I suggest that there are important parallels between Luhmann's retheorisation of society and the project of social anthropology, which entail that anthropologists can benefit from reading Luhmann.

Introducing Luhmann for anthropologists, Gershon (2005, 100) wrote that 'he begins at the intersection of Talcott Parsons and Gregory Bateson'. Luhmann studied under Parsons at Harvard University in the early 1960s, and Gershon wrote that both Luhmann and Parsons were concerned with how social interaction aggregated into systems and saw systems themselves as meaningful units of analysis. 'Thus the first question to ask of any interaction is: to what system does this interaction belong? From there, the analyst can explore how this particular system structures itself, and how the system relates to other systems' (Gershon 2005, 100). Beyond their shared focus on systems, however, Luhmann diverged from Parsons on important points (see also Segre 2016). First, Parsons' systems were composed of 'action', while Luhmann's systems were composed of 'communication' (cf. Luhmann 2012, 45).<sup>39</sup> Second, Parsons saw systems as a heuristic device, while they had ontological status for

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<sup>39</sup> Jöhncke (2007, 59 note 3) suggests in a footnote that 'exchange' would be a better anthropological term than 'communication'.

Luhmann; unlike Parsons, Luhmann thought that social systems *existed* (Segre 2016, 116). Third, while Parsons' systems were characterised by their function for society, Luhmann suggested that systems distinguished themselves from their environment and were defined only by the difference that separates them from their environment (Luhmann 2006). As I return to below, what Luhmann called 'function systems' operate autonomously, and there is no predictable or definite number of function systems (cf. Müller 2006, 176-177). On this basis, it is an over-simplification to classify Luhmann as a functionalist; his functions are not theoretically given but historically produced. For this reason, Gershon (2005, 100) suggested that Luhmann and Bateson shared a concern 'with understanding systems in terms of communication and its binds' rather than 'interpreting systems in terms of functions and their failures'.

Introducing his theory of society himself, Luhmann (2012, 28) wrote that it drew on 'recent developments in systems theory and developments in fields such as cybernetics, the cognitive sciences, communication theory, and evolution theory'. Luhmann thought the sociological classics and other social theory inadequate, sharing Eriksen's (2011, 21) sentiment of a need to 'start afresh' (see page 44-45, above). More precisely, he identified four 'epistemological obstacles' in the sociological tradition that he aimed for his theory to overcome:

- (1) that society consists of actual people and relations between people
- (2) that society is constituted or at least integrated by consensus among human beings, by concordant opinion and complementary purpose
- (3) that societies are regional, territorially defined entities, so that Brazil as a society differs from Thailand, and the United States from Russia, as does Uruguay from Paraguay
- (4) that societies, like groups of people and like territories, can be observed from the outside (Luhmann 2012, 6).<sup>40</sup>

With reference to this list, Anne Friederike Müller (2006, 166) wrote that '[a]t least two of these faulty premises seem to be mainstays of anthropological thinking: the assumption that society is composed of human beings and their relations among each other; and the idea that societies exist in the plural, "cross cultural comparison" being the backbone of social

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<sup>40</sup> The fourth point on this list is beyond the scope of the present discussion and was included only in the interest of a full reference. Luhmann's extensive discussions of observation will not be discussed in this thesis.

anthropology'. However, Müller suggested that the differences were not as fundamental as they may at first seem. With regard to the idea of society as composed of human beings and their interrelations, she suggested that Luhmann and many anthropologists shared the project of deconstructing 'Old European ideas of society and the individual' (Müller 2006, 184). She referred to Marilyn Strathern (1988) and Roy Wagner (1991) as examples of anthropologists who had challenged the idea of society as composed of individuals (Müller 2006, 171-173). In *The Gender of the Gift*, Strathern (1988) argued that ideas about the 'individual' and 'society' did not make sense in Melanesian thinking, where personhood was seen as the outcome of other people's actions; Wagner (1991), in 'The Fractal Person', identified a Melanesian form of thought that enabled people to dispense with the dichotomy between individual and society altogether. I outline Luhmann's take on the relationship between people and society in the next section below.

With regard to whether societies exist in the plural, I would argue that the difference between Luhmann and the anthropological convention is one of terminology rather than substance. For Luhmann (2012, 83), society is 'the comprehensive social system' composed of 'all connective communication'. However, he continued, 'a number of societal systems may well exist, just as one used to speak of a plurality of worlds; but only in the absence of communicative links between these societies or, from the point of view of the individual society, where communication with others is impossible or without consequence' (Luhmann 2012, 83). His use of 'society' in the singular, in other words, reflected his theoretical definition of the concept rather than an ontological claim. Luhmann did not reject the possibility of 'uncontacted people' but claimed that their existence would be inconsequential to theories of 'our' global society. Luhmann's conceptualisation implied that any such people would become part of 'our' society if and when contact was made. European exploration, trade, missionary activities, ethnographic research, and colonisation merged the 'remote areas' (Ardener 2012) of the world with 'our' society, incorporating or often replacing extensive trading networks already operated in many parts of the world (Wolf 1982).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Global communicational interconnectedness has increased dramatically with the rapid development and spread of communication technologies in the last few decades (e.g. Eriksen 2016b, 117-130). To the best of my knowledge, Luhmann, who died in 1998, did not analyse this. A quick search in electronic versions of the two volumes of *Theory of Society* (Luhmann 2012; 2013a) indicates that the word 'Internet' is not used in his last work. However, the global extension of the Internet, its accessibility through smartphones, and the constant online connectiveness perhaps especially found in Western countries provides an interesting case for Luhmann's theory of a single, global society composed of 'all connective communication' (Luhmann 2012, 83).

Luhmann's rejection of the territorial concept of society was based on his definition of society and his theoretical description of modern society. For Luhmann (2013a, 87; cf. 1997), modern society is characterised by the primacy of functional differentiation, which meant that communication is differentiated into systems with distinct functions – such as the economic system, the political system, and the legal system – that each have global reach. The most important boundaries in functionally differentiated society are not territorial or spatial boundaries, such as those between countries, but boundaries between different types of communication and the 'function systems' they make up. He did not suggest that countries do not exist but that they are of secondary importance in structuring communication in functionally differentiated society. The type of communication, rather than where the communication takes place or who is responsible for it, defines what system any specific instance of communication belongs to. Because these systems operate globally, Luhmann (1997; 2012, 83-99) described modern, functionally differentiated society as a 'world society'.

Although the main purpose of Luhmann's theory was to describe modern, functionally differentiated society, he did not claim that this was the only possible society or even the only possible modernity. His theory was not teleological. He saw function differentiation as 'a specific historical arrangement that has developed since the late Middle Ages and was recognised as disruptive only in the second half of the 18th century' (Luhmann 1997, 70). He was open to the possibility of regional differences within it, mentioning the Soviet Union (Luhmann 2013a, 130-131) and Iran after the 1979 revolution (Luhmann 2013b, 160-161; cf. Beyer 1998, 165) as examples. Thus, although modern society is characterised by global function systems, it could also contain segmented social systems that did not adapt to the structures of functional differentiation, which would be close to the anthropological idea of distinct and different, but not isolated, tribal communities (e.g. Wolf 1982; see also Gonçalves 2017). A long succession of anthropological studies have shown how macroforces such as black-white relations in colonial Africa (e.g. Gluckman 1940; Mitchell 1956), colonialism more broadly (see Cooper and Stoler 1989), and neoliberalism (see Ferguson 2010) have conditioned lives in various localities in recent years using terminology such as 'structural violence' (Farmer 2004), 'global flows' (Tsing 2000; 2005; Ferguson 2006), 'supply chains' (Tsing 2009), and 'overheating' (Eriksen 2016b). My purpose here is to introduce Luhmann's theory of society as an alternative to these concepts that is grounded in sociological theory and to show how it can be used to give a nuanced account of social

cohesion in super-diverse Søndre Nordstrand and elsewhere. The next section departs from Luhmann's reworking of the concepts of social integration and system integration, the synthesis of which I see as social cohesion.

### *Social integration and system integration*

It is perhaps the suggestion that society is not constituted or integrated by consensus among human beings, the second point in Luhmann's four-point list cited in the previous section, that implies the most direct critique of the work on social cohesion discussed at the beginning of this chapter. This is related to the concept already introduced as socio-cultural integration above. If society does not consist of people or their relations, and is not integrated by value consensus or shared symbols, measuring levels of trust or distributions of certain values among people does not engage with the substance of society. While it may be indicative of social cohesion, it is not a direct measure. Moving towards a direct measure, I outline Luhmann's use of the integration concept in this section. Referring to David Lockwood (1964), Luhmann (2013a, 16-17) distinguished between social integration and system integration, which he analysed in different terms. Concluding this section, I outline how Luhmann's theory can imply the idea of social cohesion as communicational permeability.

I have already outlined how society, for Luhmann, was composed of communication, by which he referred to processes of uttering, transmitting, and understanding information.<sup>42</sup> He described communication as 'a genuinely social operation (and the only genuinely social one)' because it requires more than one party (Luhmann 2012, 42). He also described individual instances of communication as 'improbable' because of all the 'requirements that have to be fulfilled for it to come about' (Luhmann 2012, 113). Communication was recursive and autopoietic, which meant that it always referred to other communication and continuously fed into the production of new communication by prompting responses in the form of further communication. The contours of human beings' role in Luhmann's theory can be seen here: human beings enact communication as speakers, authors of texts (that live their own lives when they are written down), listeners, readers, and in many other ways. Yet, they are not *part* of the communication and hence not part of society.

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<sup>42</sup> Luhmann's understanding of communication is highly nuanced and more complex than this formulation implies (for a brief summary, see Pace 2011, 48-49). Yet, even the Luhmann expert Beyer (2013, 96) described communication as 'the expression, transmission, and understanding of information'. In this thesis, which analyses structures of communication rather than communication as it occurs, such a simplification is sufficient.

While communication always refers to other communication, any single specific instance of communication can only build on and refer to a very small selection of all prior communication, and these selections are not random. Selections in what was once called ‘primitive societies’, societies without writing, may primarily have been based on co-presence in time and space. While this mode of selection remains important in modern society as well, Luhmann’s functional differentiation concept implies that the primacy of topical selections was the defining characteristic of modern society. This thesis is a good example, referring to scholarly books and journals, some of which are decades old and written in far-away places, but not to my payslips, which were issued much closer in time and space, because the books and journals are topical and the payslips are not. When any such selection is applied systematically, disjunctive communication systems emerge that are based on different references, a process Luhmann called ‘differentiation’. This concept can also refer to how the relative prevalence of different selections structured society as the whole of all connective communication.

Luhmann (2013a, 12-13) mentioned four forms of differentiation that have shown the ability to survive in long-term systems: segmentation, differentiation in terms of centre and periphery, stratification, and functional differentiation.<sup>43</sup> In this thesis, I primarily refer to two of them: segmentation and functional differentiation. Segmentation results in any number of similar societal subsystems. Systematically applying selection based on co-presence or proximity results in segmentary differentiation when it entails the creation and sustenance of more or less separate communities. Systematically applying topical selections, as in the example of academic literature and payslips above, would lead to functional differentiation if it implies that communication is divided into subsystems that deal with different topics – for example science and the economy.

Luhmann’s (1997; 2013a, 87) suggestion that the primacy of functional differentiation was a defining characteristic of modern society can be analytically useful. It shifts analytic focus away from communities and countries, and towards global function systems, and thus provides a way of analysing global and transnational influence on any given field site. Furthermore, it treats this as a normal state of affairs. However, while a large proportion of Luhmann’s authorship was devoted to the consequences of the shift towards functional

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<sup>43</sup> In earlier work, Luhmann outlined only three of these four forms of differentiation (e.g. Luhmann 1977). This is one of many examples of how he developed and refined his theory through his career (see also Müller 2006, 176).

differentiation, my concern here is limited to the implications for social- and system integration.

Regarding social integration, functional differentiation entails that people no longer belong to single systems but communicate in multiple systems (Luhmann 2013a, 20-21). Under segmentary differentiation, a person belonged to one family, clan, or village, as in Evans-Pritchard's (1940) Nuer ethnography and Barth's (1959) Pathan ethnography referred to above. In functionally differentiated society, on the other hand, people have complementary roles in multiple function systems – they can be believers in the religious systems, consumers in the economic systems, voters in the political system, and maybe even patients in the medical system at the same time. In Gershon's words:

The systems that people on the ground face are increasingly structured as systems that erase selves, and, especially if the systems are global, that erase the messy contours of cultural difference. Economic flows, governmental networks, legal structures – all can be examined as colliding systems that create subject positions, but do not necessarily engage with subjects. (Gershon 2005, 99-100)

While the roles – or subject positions, as Gershon called them – are determined by function systems, function systems themselves cannot mediate access for individuals. Function systems cannot include people in communication or exclude them from communicating but depend on organisations to do so (Luhmann 2013b, 167-168; cf. Braeckman 2006, 77-80). Conversely, individuals' ability to communicate in function systems and in modern society more generally depends on organisations. This relates to how communication in most function systems depends on access to a tightly controlled communication medium, such as money in the economic system or voting rights in the political system. Most individuals depend on inclusion in organisations to gain access to the means of communication in the various function systems (Braeckman 2006): money, for example, is usually obtained as an employee (role) of a company (organisation) and voting rights as a citizen (role) of a state (organisation). In Chapter 4, I return to how this was different for the religious system because religious communication does not depend on any tightly controlled form of communication. Indeed, anybody can believe, pray, and even preach.

Luhmann's redescription of social integration becomes analytically powerful when it is coupled with his redescription of system integration. In principle, according to Luhmann's theory, function systems in modern society operate autonomously and independently of one

another when they have been differentiated. He emphasised that function systems have high levels of ‘operational closure’, which means that they determine their own identities and relate to society – that is, all other communication – as part of their environment rather than as a superordinate domain (Luhmann 2013a, 88). In practice, however, the function systems have to make adjustments to one another. ‘The outdifferentiation of operationally closed functional systems requires their intrasocietal environmental relations to be appropriately established’ (Luhmann 2013a, 110). Luhmann (2013a, 6) defined system integration in terms of ‘reduction in the degrees of freedom of subsystems [...]. It lies, not in the relation of “parts” to the “whole,” but in the shifting, also historically variable adjustment of subsystems to one another’.

At the same time, Luhmann (2013a, 6) emphasised that integration ‘is neither a value-laden concept nor “better” than disintegration’. Unlike some of the social cohesion literature reviewed earlier in this chapter, Luhmann did not lament a loss of integration. In fact, Luhmann suggested that contemporary society was at risk because it is ‘overintegrated’ (Lee 2000, 328). The close integration of function systems means that problems emerging in one function system can spread to other function systems, endangering society as a whole. For social integration, it also means that exclusions ‘integrate’ or accumulate across function systems (Luhmann 2008, 45; 2013a, 24; see also 2013b, 174):

Whoever doesn’t have an identity card cannot get a job. And whoever has to live on the street cannot register his children for school (as I was once told in Bombay). Without schooling, one barely has a chance of practicing a reputable career, or obtaining a better job. Without income, one barely has access to healthy nourishment, and no energy for regular work. Illiterates, for instance, barely have the opportunity to exercise their right to vote. (Luhmann 2013b, 218-219; see also 2008, 45; 2013a, 25; Braeckman 2006, 76)

Luhmann (2013a, 26) described the accumulation of exclusions and its social consequence, the existence of people who are excluded from most social domains, as ‘a side effect of functionally differentiated society’. Mass exclusion was a consequence of functional differentiation, and therefore of modern society, not residue from an earlier social order (Luhmann 2008; see also Balke 2002; Gonçalves 2017). In the discussion in Chapter 4, I return to how Luhmann suggested that this held opportunities for religious organisations but may also have to be understood in light of the emergence of the welfare system.



This chapter began with the observation that a large part of social cohesion research has focussed on forms of socio-cultural integration. However, a tradition going back to the founding fathers of sociology suggests that modern society may not depend on socio-cultural integration but on contractual relations and social structures that make mutual dependence possible. Luhmann, whose work I have drawn on in this chapter, fits in this tradition. The discussion of social cohesion in terms of social integration and system integration rather than socio-cultural integration, which characterises much recent work on social cohesion, in this chapter represents a major innovation in this thesis but one firmly grounded in sociological tradition. I have shown how social integration and system integration refers to the interlinkages between social systems and people and interlinkages among social systems. For the individual person or organisation, close integration means that their various inclusions facilitate a wide range of communicational possibilities. From a system perspective, close integration means that subsystems are closely interlinked, that couplings and communications among them are frequent. However, close system integration can also lead to volatility and mass exclusions of people. Social cohesion as the sum of social integration and system integration can be conceptualised in terms of how communication flows within society, among its subsystems, and to people. In other words, then, social cohesion is the communicational permeability of a social system, the extent to which the communication reaches the organisations and people associated with it. It is not necessarily good or bad – it is a descriptive, not a normative, concept – although the accumulation of exclusions that Luhmann discussed would generally be recognised as problematic when it occurs.

### 3. Summary of papers

The three papers in this thesis are based on qualitative research on youth exclusion and religious organisations' activities and engagements for youth in Søndre Nordstrand. As outlined in Chapter 1, my research followed two different, but interrelated, tracks. Paper 1 is based on the first track of the research, the process of finding and meeting NEET young people, while papers 2 and 3 are based on the second track of the research, which consisted of interviews in the religious organisations in the city district. Of the three papers, only Paper 3 engages with Luhmann's theory, which I used to define social cohesion in Chapter 2 and which I also use to structure the discussion of my results in Chapter 4. In this chapter, I summarise and draw together the results of the three papers, and I indicate how each of them can relate to Luhmann's theory.

Based on the first track of my research, the process of finding and meeting NEET young people, Paper 1 discusses how to conduct qualitative research on the NEET concept. The paper reviews how NEET has emerged as an important, if contested, statistical indicator for youth exclusion in British research, international European research, and other contexts over the last decades. Rather than focussing on the individuals the concept describes, Paper 1 focusses on the emergence and multiple meanings of the NEET concept. The paper relates how the concept emerged in British discourse and research on youth exclusion and marginalisation. In this context, the 'problem' it was meant to capture was not the exclusion of youth from education, employment, and training in and of itself but how these and other exclusions could accumulate over time. Paper 1 refers to how one of the earliest and most influential publications using the concept, the *Bridging the Gap* report (Social Exclusion Unit 1999), drew on research indicating correlations between having been outside of education, employment, and training immediately after compulsory education and other problems in

later life, such as unemployment and poor health (see also Bynner and Parsons 2002). The NEET indicator, in Luhmannian terms, measures the prevalence of exclusions that integrate strongly (cf. page 53, above). Paper 1 refers to how the NEET concept became a means of targeting social services in England around the same time it emerged as a statistical indicator. As a measure of exclusions that accumulate, it also became a means of inclusion in parts of the welfare system. In international European research and in Norwegian research, where the concept has been adopted by statistics agencies and applied on the macrolevel, its history is somewhat different. In Norwegian research and discourse on youth exclusion and marginalisation, other concepts that are also measured and compared internationally are more prevalent, such as ‘school dropouts’ or ‘early school leavers’ (see Vogt 2017). However, the NEET concept has been applied in this context as well (Paper 1; e.g. Bø and Vigran 2014; 2015; Grødem, Nielsen, and Strand 2014).

Paper 1 discusses how the NEET concept and statistics featuring it are produced for specific purposes and through specific practices, mostly by public statistics agencies. Drawing on standpoint theory (Haraway 1988), the paper argues that statistics using the concept embody the perspective of the agencies that produce them. However, the literal translation to Norwegian of the NEET concept that I used while trying to find and meet NEET young people took on other meanings when I talked to people ‘in the field’ (see also Chapter 1). Paper 1 relates this to the concept’s denotative, connotative, and performative meanings. It discusses the challenges of communicating about a youth labour market with high levels of temporary and part-time employment in terms of binaries such as inclusion/exclusion. A large number of young people are in in-between positions. The paper also shows how the people I talked to in the field understood the NEET concept as referring to teenage boys engaged in youth gangs, petty crime, or drug usage or who were considered at risk of becoming religiously or politically extreme, in line with media and policy discourse on marginalised youth in eastern Oslo (cf. the introduction). Finally, the paper mentions how concepts such as NEET can contribute to exclusions as well as refer to them. This refers to how the people I talked to in the field often understood the concept as referring to ‘others’, or how the NEET young people I was told about always seemed to be found somewhere else. In conclusion, Paper 1 outlines a way of conducting qualitative research with NEET young people that would be sensitive to power and representation by turning the concept itself into an object of analysis rather than a theoretical concept and letting the people it describes comment on it, at least as part of the research.

Rather than conducting interviews with young people in NEET situations and analysing the NEET concept from the perspective of the young people it concerns, as Paper 1 suggested one might, the second track of my research consisted of interviews in religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand. Based on these interviews, Paper 2 analyses the categories of inclusion in and exclusion from the religious organisations and their activities and engagements for youth, including their youth groups. ‘Street youth’ emerged as the main category of exclusion in this analysis. This category corresponded well with the connotations of the NEET concept as boys engaged in youth gangs, petty crime, and drug usage or who were considered at risk of becoming religiously or politically extreme described in Paper 1. It did not, however, correspond with the statistical NEET category. For example, the gendered connotations of the street youth concept are at odds with how statistics indicate that NEET rates for young men and young women in Norway are roughly similar and, indeed, higher for women in their late twenties than for men in their late twenties (Bø and Vigran 2014; 2015; Grødem, Nielsen, and Strand 2014). I return to these discrepancies in the discussion in Chapter 4.

The analysis of the interviews in religious organisations in Paper 2 focusses on how representatives and youth groups from the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand related to the street youth. Paper 2 suggests that the religious organisations did not have much to do with these youths. Exceptions included one of the Muslim organisations that reached out to include them in their activities and encourage them to revise their lifestyles, individual youth group members in the religious organisations who knew some of the street youth from school, and occasional, arbitrary encounters that came up in our interviews. In the majority of the religious organisations that did not reach out to the street youth, the street youth were described as irrevocably different from the youth group members or as a position in which all young people were vulnerable to end up if they were not provided with better alternatives, for example by the religious organisations. In Luhmannian terminology, the street youth concept may be understood as a category of exclusion, at least from the religious organisations and their activities and engagements for youth in Søndre Nordstrand.

The categories of inclusion in the different religious organisations’ activities and engagements for youth were not as unitary. The adult representatives and youth I interviewed said that their religious organisations and youth groups were open to all young people who wanted to join them. The only exception was a Muslim organisation whose representatives told us that they that did not have facilities to include girls in their activities at the time of our interview. Yet, Paper 2 notes how none of the five youth groups with which I conducted

focus group interviews reflected the diversity of the city district's population. Although especially the youth groups in the Muslim organisations included youth with backgrounds from different countries, the tendency was that the members of the different religious organisations had backgrounds from the same regions. This may to a large extent be explained by how one of the main sources of recruitment for the religious organisations' youth groups were parents who were members of the religious organisations. Paper 2 suggests that the main purpose of the religious organisations' activities and engagements for youth was to pass on their religious traditions and values to the new generation. Thus, Paper 2 describes how the youth were segmented in the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand by roughly overlapping categories of ethnicity, race, and religion.

The analysis of categories of inclusion and exclusion in the religious organisations and their youth groups in Søndre Nordstrand in Paper 2 begs the question of what it is the youth are included in or excluded from. This is the main concern in Paper 3, which analyses how the religious organisations integrated youth into and were themselves integrated in different structures of communication. The paper operationalises this as two lines of inquiry, drawing on Luhmann's development of the distinction between social integration and system integration (see also Chapter 2). It revisits the discussion of inclusion in and exclusion from the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand to analyse social integration and then turns to the religious organisations' external communication to analyse differentiation and system integration. Regarding social integration, the paper draws on public data and the analysis of categories of inclusion and exclusion in the religious organisations and their youth groups in Paper 2 to suggest that only a minority of the population in Søndre Nordstrand could have been registered as members of the local religious organisations in the city district and that the religious organisations did little to include the street youth, whom they identified as excluded. Based on this, the paper suggests that the religious organisations and their activities and engagements for youth, overall, did not contribute strongly to social integration by including large shares of the population or otherwise excluded youth.

With regard to system integration, Paper 3 analyses the religious organisations' communication with each other and with other organisations. The analysis indicates that the communicational density among the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand was higher within the four suburbs in the city district – or the centres, in the terminology in Paper 3 – than across them, lending support to the idea that the suburbs rather than the city district as a whole were community areas or the sites of local communities. The communication among

the religious organisations in the city district was not primarily differentiated into ‘religions’ but segmented corresponding to communities in the suburbs. The paper also distinguished between minority religious organisations that were led and mainly attended by people with an immigrant background and the ‘majority religious organisations’, the religious organisations of the national majority population, where most of the members did not have an immigrant background, were white, and spoke Norwegian with dialects rather than a foreign accent. The majority religious organisations were more frequently mentioned in our interviews than the minority religious organisations were, which can mean that they were preferred as partners for different forms of cooperation, perhaps because they commanded and could thus contribute greater material resources.

Most of the contact between the religious organisations was between leaders rather than lay people or youth. Facilitating face-to-face encounters across differences in the local communities was not a priority of the religious organisations. For example, only two of the five youth groups in the city district had met each other, while the adult representatives and youth I interviewed often mentioned meeting youth from religious organisations elsewhere, in other parts of the city, the country, and even abroad. This must be understood against how the youth who participated in our focus group interviews for the Norwegian YOMA case study emphasised that they knew youth with other religious backgrounds from public schools, sport, and other activities (papers 2 and 3). There may, in other words, have been little use for religious organisations to facilitate interreligious meeting places for youth across religious differences, even from a community perspective.

Perhaps most importantly, Paper 3 also analyses the religious organisations’ communication with secular civil society organisations and public authorities in the city district.

Representatives from minority religious organisations told us about seminars with public welfare services, and representatives from both minority and majority religious organisations told us that they had received visits from the police. Several religious organisations were represented in the ‘Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation’. The forum was started by the police and other public authorities to coordinate emergency preparedness and brought together representatives from religious organisations, secular civil society organisations, and public authorities (Korslien 2017). Paper 3 suggests that the forum instigated communication among representatives from different religious and secular organisations in Søndre Nordstrand. In doing so, it contributed towards the formation of a sphere of communication among religious organisations in the city district, akin to a local religious system. Initiated by

the police and other public authorities, the forum shared the administrative boundaries of the city district, not the community boundaries of the suburbs. Paper 3 also remarks on how some religious organisations did not take part in this, which, for some, had to do with how their members did not primarily live in the city district, while it had doctrinal reasons for others. All the religious organisations were also part of citywide, national, and transnational networks of organisations that espoused similar faiths – which we could call denominational structures – although the relative importance of different geographical scales varied between the different organisations.

Overall, the three papers in this thesis describe youth exclusion and religious organisations' activities and engagements for youth in Søndre Nordstrand. Based on the process of trying to find and meet NEET young people in the first track of my research, Paper 1 argues that the NEET category should not be taken as an objective and unproblematic category of excluded youth in qualitative research but has to be understood against the context in which it is used. This argument opened for a discussion of inclusion and exclusion categories in the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand in the Norwegian YOMA case study and my own research. Based on the interviews in religious organisations in the second track of my research, Paper 2 analyses categories of inclusion in and exclusion from the different religious organisations' activities and engagements for youth. It describes how 'street youth' was a category of exclusion from the religious organisations, while the inclusion categories differed between the different religious organisations. The youth were segmented in the different religious organisations by roughly overlapping categories of ethnicity, race, and religion. Drawing on Luhmann and introducing a second line of inquiry concerning differentiation and system integration, Paper 3 describes how the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand operated as something akin to a local religious system in which they communicated with each other and with secular organisations, including civil society organisations and public authorities. The communication among the religious organisations in the city district was not primarily differentiated into 'religions' but segmented corresponding to communities in the suburbs. At the same time, the religious organisations' communication with secular organisations coupled the religious system with other systems on the local level and made the city district a scale more relevant to them. The citywide, national, and transnational scales were also important, but to different extents and in different ways in the different religious organisations.

The three papers in this thesis point towards a situation in which the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand, overall, did not contribute strongly to social integration by including large shares of the population or otherwise excluded youth but where they contributed to system integration through various forms of communication with secular organisations in the city district. The religious organisations were also important in keeping national and transnational denominational networks together. This indicates an answer to the question of how the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand contributed to communicational permeability.





#### **4. Religious organisations, youth exclusion, and the public sphere**

The papers in this thesis suggest that the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand did not contribute to social integration by including large shares of the population or otherwise excluded youth but that they communicated with other organisations and that this may have contributed to system integration. In this chapter, I draw on theoretical work on religion in functionally differentiated society as well as other recent research on youth exclusion, religious organisations, and religious diversity in the Nordic countries to discuss the social role of the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand. The purpose of this chapter is to describe in theoretical terms how religious organisations can contribute to social cohesion and to discuss whether the religious organisations' activities and engagements for youth in Søndre Nordstrand did so.

I depart from work on religion in functionally differentiated society because of the influence of Luhmann's (esp. 1985a; 2013b)<sup>44</sup> work on this in the sociology of religion, especially as it has been appropriated and reworked by Peter Beyer (1990; 1994) and José Casanova (1994).<sup>45</sup> As I return to below, a key question in this work is whether religion will come to constitute a separate function system, complementing other function systems such the economy, politics, and law and, if so, how this system relates to the other systems. Beyer and Casanova both refer to Luhmann, but their verdicts on religion under functional differentiation differ from Luhmann's. In my reading, these three authors' work suggests two

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<sup>44</sup> His *Funktion der Religion* [The Function of Religion] has been more widely cited than the two works cited here, but it has not been translated into English, except for one chapter (Luhmann 1984).

<sup>45</sup> For an anthropologist's reading of this and related work, see Fenella Cannell (2010).

broad ways in which religious organisations can contribute to communicational permeability in functionally differentiated society. The first, derived from Luhmann, is to include people who are subject to exclusions. The second, which I derive from Beyer and Casanova, is through engaging in the public sphere. Their work also implies ways in which religious organisations can reduce communicational permeability, but I do not grant this as much attention because it is not as clearly visible in my research on Søndre Nordstrand or the papers in this thesis.

### *Religious organisations in functionally differentiated society*

Functional differentiation was Luhmann's theoretical description of modern society. It means that communication is differentiated into independent and autonomous systems with distinct functions, such as the economic system, the political system, and the legal system (Chapter 2). For Luhmann (1997, 70) functional differentiation was 'a specific historical arrangement that has developed since the late Middle Ages and was recognized as disruptive only in the second half of the 18th century'. He discussed the impact of functional differentiation on religion in several publications and at different stages of his career (e.g. Luhmann 1984; 1985a; 2013b). In broad terms, he argued that religion was a particular kind of communication that had to operate as a function system among other function systems under functional differentiation (see also Pace 2011, 115). For Luhmann (1982, 3-19), functionally differentiated societies did not need the kind of 'collective consciousness' that Durkheim (1984) postulated in *The Division of Labour in Society*.<sup>46</sup> Thus, Luhmann (2013b, 88) wrote that '*religion is no longer a necessary mediating instance producing a relationship of all societal activities to a total meaning*. The old thesis that religion serves societal integration can thus hardly be seen as valid' (his emphasis; see also Beyer 2013, 44; Pace 2011, 115, 135-137). In functionally differentiated society, religion was rather the residue that remained when the other function systems had been differentiated, when they had been established as autonomous function systems. Luhmann suggested that this residue had to adapt and become a functional system of its own if it were not to disappear: 'At least it will be treated as such whether it finds this situation comfortable or not and whether or not it prefers to remain maladaptive to some extent' (Luhmann 1985b, 35). Luhmann (2013b, 51-53) thus saw the differentiation of religion as a historical process linked to the transition to functional

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<sup>46</sup> 'Collective consciousness' was Durkheim's (1984) term for the shared beliefs and sentiments that bound people together in mechanical solidarity (see also Luhmann 1982, 7; page 40, above). There is a close, but often implicit, affinity between Durkheim's ideas and social cohesion research focussing on socio-cultural integration (see also Levitas 1996).

differentiation in Europe as well as to the elaboration of a code specific to religion. Luhmann (2013b, 61-63, 88-90) suggested that the code of religion was the immanent/transcendent binary (see also Pace 2011, 52).<sup>47</sup>

Luhmann was sceptical of how successful religion would be as a function system. With the emergence of functional differentiation, religious affiliation became independent of other inclusions with the result that 'individuals [could] forego participating in religion without being excluded from other social systems' (Vanderstraeten 2015, 180). In Norway, for example, holders of certain public offices had to be members of the Church of Norway until the late 1800s; judges had to be church members until 1892 (NOU 2013:1, 39). Revoking these requirements, like several other changes, removed external incentives to affiliate with the church. Analogously, I suggested in Paper 3 that the membership in the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand was somewhere between a third and half of the city district's population. While some members in the religious organisations in the city district commuted from other parts of the city and some of those people who lived in Søndre Nordstrand most likely commuted to religious organisations elsewhere, the religious organisations are only loosely embedded in local communities. There are few external incentives for people to seek to become members of religious organisations.

Luhmann furthermore suggested that the differentiation of religion could lead to the privatisation of faith and individualisation of religious experience, which would imply an uncertain future for religious communication, religious organisations, and religion as a function system (Luhmann 1985a; 2013b, esp. 209-215). He based this on how access to religious communication was not tightly controlled, unlike access to some other forms of communication (Luhmann 2013b, 145-147). Paying a given amount of money to acquire scarce goods or voting in an election was restricted to those who had access to money and those who were citizens (or residents) of the relevant political unit, but anybody could believe, pray, and preach. Individuals could engage in religious communication irrespective of whether they were members of religious organisations: 'even official excommunication in

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<sup>47</sup> Some critique has been directed at Luhmann's suggested immanent/transcendent binary (e.g. Beyer 2006, 85, 301; Laermans and Verschraegen 2001). However, the nuances of the code are not important to the argument I develop here. My research in Søndre Nordstrand focussed on religious organisations, which were included in my research on the basis that they were registered as religious organisations and/or recognised as religious organisations by the other religious organisations in the city district (see Chapter 1). In terms of Luhmann's definition of religion as communication coded by the immanent/transcendent binary, the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand communicated religiously and non-religiously (Köhren 2012).

this day and age would not immediately silence one's religiosity' (Luhmann 2013b, 168). I noted in the introduction that roughly 15 percent of the Norwegian population was not affiliated with any religious organisation in 2015.<sup>48</sup> Data presented in a recent paper indicate that more than one in four among the religiously unaffiliated in Norway reported belief in God or a higher power of some sort (Urstad 2017, 71).<sup>49</sup> Amounting to roughly four percent of the population, the religiously unaffiliated who reported belief in God or a higher power represent a larger share of the Norwegian population than members of the Catholic Church in Norway or members of all the Muslim organisations in Norway together, which are often discussed as the major religious minorities in Norway (see page 6-8, above). This might represent the emergence of non-institutional religion as posited by Luhmann. At least it illustrates how belief and religious communication also takes place outside religious organisations and how there is no equality of religious organisations and religious communication (Köhrsen 2012). 'These days, religion, too, practices system-specific inclusion/exclusion, doing so independently of membership registered by organizations' (Luhmann 2013b, 220). Combined with the absence of external incentives to affiliate with religious organisations, this meant that religious organisations risked becoming obsolete. Raf Vanderstraeten (2015, 178-181) summarised Luhmann's account of religion in functionally differentiated society as 'Inclusion problems'.

It is against this backdrop that Luhmann's work on religion and that of Beyer (1990; 1994) and Casanova (1994) suggest two different lines of opportunity for religious organisations to attain social relevance in functionally differentiated society, which I read as two ways in which religious organisations can contribute to social cohesion. The first, which was put forward by Luhmann, is based on the suggestion that inclusion in and exclusion from religious communication cannot be controlled, which also means that it will not accumulate with exclusions from other systems. As I noted in Chapter 2, Luhmann saw the accumulation of exclusions as a side effect of functional differentiation, but he also suggested that inclusion in and exclusion from the religious system was not tightly 'integrated' with inclusions in and

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<sup>48</sup> The number and proportion of religiously unaffiliated people in Norway has grown rapidly since 1970, when 2,5 percent of the population stated that they were not members of a faith community or did not answer the question about religious affiliation in the census questionnaire (see page 7, above). This, however, may not only reflect a tendency to renounce religious affiliation; it must also, for example, be understood against the number of immigrants who have not, or not yet, registered as members of a religious organisation in Norway (NOU 2013:1, 49). This does not change the point I make above.

<sup>49</sup> It is also interesting to note that about one in three among the religiously affiliated reported that they did not believe in God or a higher power of any sort (Urstad 2017, 71).

exclusions from other function systems (Luhmann 2013a, 114; 2013b, 174, 220). Thus, religious organisations could include people regardless of exclusions from other function systems (see also Paper 3). Luhmann (2013b, 220) suggested that this could provide ‘opportunities’ for religious organisations to ‘fill in the gaps’ that resulted from functional differentiation. In Vanderstraeten’s (2015, 180-181) words, ‘religious collectivities might nowadays be well advised to make use of their relatively isolated position, of the lack of interdependencies with other function systems at the level of the rules for inclusion and exclusion’. However, Luhmann (2008, 45; 2013b, 174-175) was sceptical of whether this would help reproduce the specific form of religion favoured by each religious organisation and suggested that it might, instead, lead to a proliferation of new religions and religious organisations (see also Vanderstraeten 2015, 180). There is, in theory, nothing tying believers to specific religious organisations. The representative who spoke about the boys he thought visited his church for the food they served rather than for their religious services in my research (Paper 2) presents a parallel: some people may be willing to receive hospitality and even charity from religious organisations while being disinterested in the religion they espouse.<sup>50</sup> As Luhmann suggested, including people who are otherwise excluded may not be the best way of recruiting new members for each individual religious organisation – or of solving the religious organisations’ inclusion problems (Vanderstraeten 2015).

With only one exception, the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand did not engage with excluded youth but recruited youth members through members’ families and personal networks instead. However, as I return to below, engaging with excluded youth can be a way for religious organisations to attain social relevance and, in my reading, to impact communicational permeability by giving people who are excluded from other systems access to at least some form of communication. As I also return to below, the two NEET young men I interviewed as part of the second track of my research said they wanted somewhere to meet other young people in life situations similar to their own (Paper 2). I also met young volunteers who were in NEET situations in a civil society organisation and one of the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand during the exploratory participant observation in the first track of my research (Paper 1). Facilitating more of these kinds of inclusions would

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<sup>50</sup> This, incidentally, was also true about myself as a visiting researcher. The religious organisations were hospitable and generous to me. They not only answered my questions during interviews and invited me to participate in and observe services but also shared their food and beverages with me. This did not contribute to reproducing the specific form of religion espoused by any of them by making me a member.

contribute to social integration. I discuss why working with excluded youth was not a priority of the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand in some detail in the next section below.

The second line of opportunity for religious organisations to attain social relevance in functionally differentiated society is to engage with other function systems. Vanderstraeten (2015, 180) recounted Luhmann's reference to how religious organisations have engaged in 'this wordly activism' and 'tried to establish strong links with other, more successful systems'. Luhmann, in short, was critical of religious and theological involvement in the economy and politics, which he saw as futile.<sup>51</sup> Beyer and Casanova, on the other hand, saw religion as a more potent social force. Their work on 'public religion' focussed on politically influential religion (Beyer 1990; 1994; Casanova 1994; 2008). They represent a movement in the social sciences over the last few decades towards questioning the secularisation theory that religion would wither away or become privatised and invisible with the advancement of modernity without discarding the concept of secularisation completely. I read their work as implying a second way in which religious organisations can impact communicational permeability: by communicating with organisations belonging to other function systems.

In *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Casanova (1994, 17) wrote that '[t]he theory of secularization may be the only theory which was able to attain a truly paradigmatic status within the modern social sciences'. Yet, it was not formulated explicitly until the 1960s and was not even then formulated as a single, coherent theory (see also Dobbelaere 1999, 229-230). Casanova (1994, 19-38) famously outlined three separate theses that had commonly been grouped together under secularisation theory: that religion – or measurable religious beliefs and practices – would decline with modernisation, that religion would become privatised and 'invisible', and that religion would be differentiated into a separate sphere distinct from the secular sphere. In line with Luhmann, he contended that the differentiation of religion was the defining trait of secularisation and that empirical research should investigate the other two theses as possible correlates to or outcomes of the differentiation of religion. However, his account of their interrelations differed from Luhmann's (2013b)

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<sup>51</sup> In a passage about liberation theology, Luhmann (2013b, 221) wrote that '[r]essentiments, whether pro-Marxist or of the anti-liberal kind encountered in theological circles today, are not particularly helpful in confronting economic-political conditions that are insufficiently understood. They reveal instead just how poorly adjusted theology is'. Referring to the integrated and therefore contingent nature of functionally differentiated society, which mean that resolving social issues is always also a question of decisions beyond political control, he continued, 'religion is almost forced to adopt a conventionally critical stance with regards to this state of affairs, while unable to suggest anything better'.

account, which suggested that the differentiation of religion would lead to the privatisation of faith and individualisation of religious experience, as noted above.

Casanova (1994) investigated the relationship between the three theses across case studies from Spain, Poland, Brazil and the United States. His results suggested that differentiation did not necessarily lead to religious decline and that the privatisation of religion was merely one of several possible responses to functional differentiation. He suggested that a process of the ‘deprivatization’ of religion had been taking place since the 1980s, making the verdict some years later that the most important contribution of his book had been ‘the analytical-theoretical and normative challenge to the liberal theory of privatization, namely, the claim that the thesis of the privatization of religion in the modern world was no longer defensible either empirically or normatively’ (Casanova 2008, 101). Instead, Casanova (1994, 218-221) distinguished between ‘public religions’ at the state level, the level of political society, and the level of civil society. He suggested that ‘public religions at the level of civil society are consistent with modern universalistic principles and with modern differentiated structures’ (Casanova 1994, 219). Although Casanova has modified his position somewhat since the publication of *Public Religions*, notably with reference to increasing diversity in Europe and the United States due to immigration (Casanova 2007),<sup>52</sup> *Public Religions* remains very influential. While Europe has been the exemplar of secularisation and secularisation theory suggested that the rest of the world would follow an European trajectory, the last few decades have shown that modernisation is not necessarily connected to secularisation in all parts of the world and immigration to Europe of people with different religious aspirations from the European majority population has challenged the expectation of secularisation also in Europe (Davie 2002). In the last section of this chapter, I discuss recent work on religious organisations in civil society in the Nordic countries, some of which refers to *Public*

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<sup>52</sup> Asad (2003, 182-183) wrote that Casanova’s (1994, 219) argument implied that certain kinds of religion were compatible with functional differentiation (or ‘liberal modernity’), while others were not. It was clear from Asad’s examples that he conceived of this in terms of a distinction between Christianity and Islam, at least to a certain extent. His critique implied that Casanova’s argument was Western-centric. In many way, it was, for example in being presented through case studies only from Christian majority countries, as Casanova (1994, 10) himself noted. Responding to Asad’s critique, Casanova (2006, 30) suggested that there was a need for ‘better and more critical analytical tools than those provided by the traditional theory of secularization and corresponding theories of religious fundamentalism’. In a revisitation of *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Casanova (2008, 105) wrote that ‘the [secularisation] category becomes problematic once it is generalized as a universal process of societal development’. Other researchers have since presented work on ‘multiple secularities’ that develops such a line of inquiry (e.g. Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012; see also Davie 2002, 156-159).



*Religions*. As I showed in the introduction, the population of Søndre Nordstrand shows the kind of diversity resulting from immigration that Casanova (2007, 66) has suggested has become ‘consciously or unconsciously associated with seemingly related and vexatious issues concerning the role of religion in the public sphere, which European societies assumed they had already solved according to the liberal, secular norm of privatization of religion’. I ask what the public role of the religious organisations in the super-diverse city district is.

In his work on religion and globalisation, Beyer (1990; 1994) drew on Luhmann’s (1985b, 35; 2013a, 96-97; 2013b, 33) distinction between function and performance to outline the options facing religious organisations in functionally differentiated society. Religion’s function referred to “‘pure” religious communication’, communication coded by the immanent/transcendent binary, such as prayer or worship, while its performance occurred when religion was “‘applied” to problems generated in other systems but not solved there’ (Beyer 1990, 379; 1994, 79-81). Beyer (1990, 393; 1994, 93) wrote that ‘[f]or leaders and their organizations, religion seems to be going in one of two directions: concentration on ministering to private religious choices or entering the political and public arena’. He argued that the two directions were not mutually exclusive options but rather had to occur at the same time if religion were to be a successful function system: ‘the *functional* problem of religion in the modern world is actually a *performance* problem [... I]f there is pressure toward the increasing privatization of religion, then the solution lies in finding effective religious “applications”, not in more religious commitment and practice’ (Beyer 1994, 80; 1990, 380). Thus, Beyer suggested that religious organisations might need to get involved in non-religious matters to attain relevance, even as religious actors.

Beyer (1990; 1994) further distinguished between a ‘liberal’ option and a ‘conservative’ option for religious leaders and religious organisations. The liberal option was based on the acceptance of private choice and pluralism, concentration on the provision of ‘helping services’, such as rituals for those who chose so themselves and on showing that religion was important, influential, and advantageous through religious performance (Beyer 1990, 385-389; 1994, 87). The conservative option, in contrast, was based on the appropriation of traditional religious antagonistic categories and could lead to religion championing the cultural distinctiveness of particular regions, for example through promoting the legislation of religious norms (Beyer 1990, 389-393; 1994, 90-92). The results from my research suggest that most, if not all, of the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand were aligned with the

liberal option. The clearest evidence of this is in their mutual recognition and in their cooperation in the suburbs and the Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation (Paper 3).

While Beyer's and Casanova's work on public religion has been influential in the sociology of religion, it informs my research from Søndre Nordstrand only to a limited extent. Their books (Beyer 1994; Casanova 1994) present case studies on a macroscale with limited comparative value to the mesoscale research of religious organisations in a city district presented in this thesis (see page 33, above). Furthermore, their work focusses on politically influential religion but less on other roles that religious organisations can play in the public sphere. In Luhmannian terminology, they focus on structural couplings between religion and politics but do not address the possibility of couplings between religion and other systems to the same extent. In my research, there is little reference to couplings between religious organisations and politics. When I nevertheless refer to their work in this section, it is because they have shown how religion and religious organisations can play an important role and be influential in functionally differentiated society. They have influenced the research on religious organisations as part of civil society. In my reading, their work thereby implies a second way in which religious organisations can contribute to communicational permeability in functionally differentiated society: by communicating with other organisations and engaging in the public sphere, which can contribute to system integration. I return to how this applies to the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand in the final section of this chapter.

### *Religious organisations and youth exclusion*

My research for this thesis followed two different, but interrelated, tracks (Chapter 1). The first track of my research aimed to address the relevance of religious organisations among other networks and engagements in the lives of NEET young people, a category of excluded youth, in Søndre Nordstrand. As I tried to find and meet NEET young people in Søndre Nordstrand, however, my attention was drawn to how the NEET concept was understood as referring to street youth, groups of boys who met outdoors and whom many people associated with delinquency, crime, and drugs. These connotations of the NEET concept did not correspond with the statistical NEET category. Thus, Paper 1 discussed the different meanings of the exclusion concept in different contexts. The second track of my research built on this and investigated inclusion in and exclusion from the religious organisations' activities and engagements for youth in Søndre Nordstrand. One of the Muslim organisations reached out to the street youth to include them in their activities and encourage them to revise their lifestyles, but the other religious organisations did not, seeing themselves rather as

shelters from or alternatives to the streets (Paper 2). Thus, in Luhmannian terms, ‘street youth’ was a category of exclusion from the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand. In this section, I discuss why working with excluded youth – whether in the form of NEET young people or street youth – was not a priority of the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand. This also amounts to a discussion of how Luhmann’s (2013b, 220) suggestion that the accumulation of exclusions could provide opportunities for religious organisations, which I outlined in the previous section, applied to youth exclusion in Søndre Nordstrand.

In Chapter 2, I outlined how people, according to Luhmann’s theory, were granted access to function systems in modern society by being included in organisations. Religious organisations were in a position to include people who were excluded from other systems because religion was not very tightly ‘integrated’ with the other function systems (Luhmann 2013a, 114; 2013b, 174, 220): anybody could believe, pray, or preach, including those without citizenship, money, or educational qualifications. Luhmann (2013b, 220) suggested that this could provide opportunities for religion. However, Luhmann (2013a, 26) also wrote that the accumulation of exclusions was ‘a side effect of functionally differentiated society’ that could not be solved within single function systems and that ‘[a] new, secondary functional system could therefore be expected to develop that concerns itself with the exclusionary consequences of functional differentiation – be they at the level of social welfare or at that of development aid’. This suggests that the opportunities afforded religious organisations by the accumulation of exclusions must be understood relative to other efforts to alleviate exclusions in any particular context; the social role of religious organisations must be understood relative to the welfare, aid, and other forms of help available in any given context (see also Martikainen 2014b, 52-54). Given the dominance of public welfare services in welfare service provision in the Nordic countries, the public welfare services available to youth in Norway are an important context in my analysis of the interrelation, if any, between youth exclusion and religious organisations’ activities and engagements for youth in Søndre Nordstrand. The public welfare services have responsibilities relating to youth exclusion in Norway, in relation to which religious organisations’ activities and engagements for youth must be understood.

In Gøsta Esping-Andersen’s (1990) seminal typology of welfare states, Norway was classified as a ‘social democratic’ welfare state. The social democratic welfare states were characterised by the provision of the same universal benefits and services to all, leading to high levels of de-commodification (Esping-Andersen 1990, 27-28). The latter is particularly

important in the present context. ‘De-commodification occurs when a service is rendered as a matter of right, and when a person can maintain a livelihood without reliance on the market’ (Esping-Andersen 1990, 21-22). In Norway, the provision of free and subsidised public services means that access to education, health services, and other vital systems should not depend on being in employment or on having access to money, at least for citizens and legal residents. In this way, and in Luhmannian terms, the welfare state contributes to preventing the accumulation of exclusions for its citizens. Being uneducated or without a job should not lead to exclusion from the health services or other vital systems, or to one’s children being denied an education or a future career.<sup>53</sup>

Other important mechanisms in the Norwegian welfare system are insurance based programmes that ensure economic inclusion for those who have contributed and are unable to work and financial assistance to provide a temporary income for those in need who do not have any other rights. In Luhmannian terms, the welfare system should thus prevent the possibility of exclusion from the economic system. However, this applies to youth only to a limited extent. Register data indicate that between a third and a half of Norwegians aged 18 to 30 years who were in NEET situations in the years 2000–2009 and 2012 did not receive any benefits (Bø and Vigran 2014, 11; Grødem, Nielsen, and Strand 2014, 51; see also Paper 1). The ‘work line’ (*arbeidslinja*) in Norwegian social policy since the 1990s entails a reluctance towards ‘passive support’ and a tendency to linking benefits to various efforts (Kildal 1998).<sup>54</sup> Activation programmes are preferred over benefits.<sup>55</sup> Of particular relevance to youth exclusion, a follow-up service (*Oppfølgingstjeneste*) in each county is responsible for contacting and following up on young people aged 15 to 21 who have a legal right to an education but who are not in NEET situations (Sletten, Bakken, and Andersen 2015). The

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<sup>53</sup> Compare this with Luhmann’s example quoted on page 53, above.

<sup>54</sup> The provision of student loans and grants to students, as well as free and subsidised education, in Norway is interesting in this regard (see also page 75, note 58, below). It constructs the role of ‘student’, which allows young people to access money without being in employment. From the perspective of the economic system, it amounts to a form of passive support. Furthermore, this role is widespread. During the 2014/15 academic year, 397 306 individuals, or approximately eight percent of the total Norwegian population, received student loans and grants from the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund (Lånekassen no date). Consistency is re-established, however, by the argument that students are included in the education system, an important means of securing future economic inclusion through employment. As implied in the EET/NEET binary, being a student is another ‘active’ status.

<sup>55</sup> Reviewing the vast body of literature on the adaptations of welfare states to new demographic, economic, and other kinds of risks since the 1990s is beyond the scope of this thesis. It suffices to note here that the shift away from passive support and towards activation in Norwegian social policy is in line with shifts that have taken place elsewhere.

purpose is to ensure access to some form education, employment, or training for all young people (Sletten, Bakken, and Andersen 2015, 36) and ideally to eradicate youth exclusion.

Researchers working on system theory have discussed whether welfare and social work are Luhmannian function systems (see Mik-Meyer and Villadsen 2013, 67, 82-85).<sup>56</sup> Jan V. Wirth (2009) described social work as a system operating through the binary helping/not helping (see also Moe 1998). The aim of social work, in his view, was ‘enabling and arranging (re-)inclusions of persons into the most relevant function-systems of modern society’ (Wirth 2009, 414). Albert Scherr (1999), on the other hand, did not see social work as a function system. He suggested that it could rather ‘be described as dealing with the perceived social consequences of functional differentiation which appear as individual or collective risks and which cannot be dealt with as standardizable, insurable services’ (Scherr 1999, 22). He argued that social work’s contribution to modern society was ‘to prevent exclusion, to encourage inclusion, and to manage exclusion in cases where inclusion (or re-inclusion) proves impossible’. His view of social work ran parallel to Wirth’s in that he saw its role as making clients includable in other systems (Mik-Meyer and Villadsen 2013, 84). Ideally, social work should include people as clients and help them regain includability in other systems. ‘Social work is successful at the very moment substitutional inclusion [as a client] is no longer necessary, that is, when a client regains his/her addressability for other social systems’ (Schirmer and Michailakis 2013, 60).<sup>57</sup> Scherr’s (1999) ‘exclusion management’ concept connected discussions about social work with the Luhmannian idea that exclusions accumulate (see page 53, above) to argue that social work should take care of those subject to exclusions to help deal with their problems and protect society from the risks they pose (Mik-Meyer and Villadsen 2013, 84-85). In theory, then, social workers and the public welfare services should help NEET young people seeking inclusion in education, employment, or training – and provide substitute inclusions in cases where it is needed. As I noted in Chapter 1, NAV, the Child Welfare Services, the police, and the local upper-secondary school all had responsibilities towards vulnerable youth in Søndre Nordstrand.

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<sup>56</sup> Dirk Baecker’s work on ‘social help’ and other important texts on this topic have been published in German, but are, to the best of my knowledge, not available in English. I do not refer to this work here (but see Schirmer and Michailakis 2015, 74-75, for a brief overview).

<sup>57</sup> In an essay originally published in German in 1995, Luhmann (2008, 42) similarly suggested that ‘[d]eviant behavior is now no longer a reason for exclusion, but rather a reason for special treatment of inclusion [...] Joblessness, begging, etc., is not defined as fate or a plague, but answered with educational programs, labor houses, industrial pedagogies, etc.’.

To the extent that the Norwegian welfare state successfully alleviates youth exclusion through the provision of free education, student loans,<sup>58</sup> follow-up services, and other public welfare services, youth exclusion may not present any opportunities for the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand or elsewhere in Norway. Luhmann's (2013b, 220) suggestion that the accumulation of exclusions could provide opportunities for religious organisations does not apply if exclusions are alleviated by other systems and do not present a problem. However, as I noted in the introduction, public statistics indicate that there are 70 000–105 000 NEET young people aged 15–29 years in Norway, corresponding to 7–11 percent of the population in that age bracket (page 17, above; see also Bø and Vigran 2014; 2015; Grødem, Nielsen, and Strand 2014; Olsen 2017; Paper 1). Furthermore, the research on youth exclusion indicates that interventions aimed at including these young people in education or employment have not had strong effects, especially not for the most vulnerable groups (see Hyggen 2015, 37-45; Sletten, Bakken, and Andersen 2015). Many young people in NEET situations in the Nordic countries report feeling isolated and lonely, and they are disproportionately likely to struggle with mental health issues (Anvik and Waldahl 2017, 21-23). The high participation rates in education and the labour market makes education and work important social arenas in Norway, producing gaps in the lives of youth in NEET situations (see also Holte and Rabe 2017). Martin and Aalan, the two NEET young men I interviewed as part of my research, both said they wanted somewhere to meet other young people in life situations similar to their own, albeit for slightly different reasons (Paper 2).

This suggests that youth exclusion exists as a problem in Norway in general and in Søndre Nordstrand in particular and that at least some of the concerned young people find the public welfare services available to them inadequate to cover their needs, despite of the ambitions of the Norwegian welfare state. This may present an opportunity for religious organisations to provide welfare services in the form of activities for NEET young people. However, my research indicates that the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand did not do so. They did not see NEET young people as presenting opportunities. The NEET concept was rather

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<sup>58</sup> The importance of free education and student loans in keeping the numbers of NEET young people low in Norway becomes clear when Norway is contrasted with countries that do not have similar services. For example, the most cited reason for not attending an educational institution amongst young people between 15 to 24 years in South Africa is not having the money to pay the fees. Family commitments and pregnancies are also frequently cited reasons for non-attendance by women, while men are more likely than women to indicate that they are working, often to provide for families. Free education and the availability of grants and student loans mean that none of these reasons apply to the same extent to young people in Norway (Holte and Rabe 2017).

understood as referring to street youth, boys who gathered at certain outdoor venues and whom many associated with crime and drugs. In all but one of the religious organisations, the street youth were described as irrevocably different from the youth group members or as a position in which all young people were vulnerable to end up if they were not provided with better alternatives, for example by the religious organisations (Paper 2). The excluded youth were not seen as potential youth group members but as an ‘other’ to the youth group members. As suggested above, it was an exclusion category in the religious organisations. This is not to say that the religious organisations were not important to youth in NEET situations but that the religious organisations, with one exception, did not see this as a prioritised target group for their work. My research does not rule out the possibility that some of the youth in the religious organisations’ youth groups were in NEET situations or that religious leaders counselled or worked with youth in NEET situations in other ways. On the contrary, Paper 1 suggests that some of the young volunteers I met in a civil society organisation and one of the religious organisations during the exploratory participant observation in the first track of my research were in NEET situations. My research rather suggests that the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand did not have activities and engagements that targeted NEET young people. Yet, as suggested above, the religious organisations may have been in a position to provide meeting places for this group if they had tried and succeeded in identifying and attracting them.

Identifying the group is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the results from papers 1 and 2 can indicate where to start. Papers 1 and 2 both refer to the male connotations of the NEET and street youth concepts that I encountered during my research, which is at odds with how statistics indicate roughly similar NEET rates for young men and young women, with a slight overrepresentation of women in their late twenties (Bø and Vigran 2014; 2015; Grødem, Nielsen, and Strand 2014; Olsen 2017). However, as I noted in Paper 1, NEET young women may be ‘invisible’ due to traditional and socially sanctioned roles for women as homemakers and carers, which mean that NEET young women do not constitute a violation of social aesthetics in the same way that NEET young men do. In such a context, identifying NEET young people must be a process of disentangling the concept’s denotation and connotations and of identifying subgroups that correspond with categories with which the young people themselves identify. ‘Street youth’ may not be the best, and certainly not the only, such category. Other possible categories may include unemployed youth and young parents, in

particular young mothers.<sup>59</sup> Attracting NEET young people is a matter of identifying the different needs of the different subgroups. <sup>60</sup> Religious organisations' work for NEET young people may not have to aim for the young people to be included in education, employment, or training, as the public welfare services' work for the group does, but could for example, provide 'someone to talk to' (Paper 1) or daytime activities to counteract isolation and loneliness. While this may be controversial, I presume that this is precisely the kind of role Vandersstraeten (2015, 181) had in mind when he suggested that 'religion could still fulfil a specific social function [after functional differentiation] – albeit as a counterculture'.

At this point, however, the general discussion of religion in this chapter so far needs to be understood relative to the situation on the ground in Søndre Nordstrand, where the different religious organisations' access and ability to engage in youth work varies. Paper 2 touches on differences in material resources available to the different religious organisations. For example, one of the Muslim organisations was without a meeting place at the time of my research, which the representative said had a negative effect on their youth work. The representative from this religious organisation was not able to summon youth for a focus group interview. Religious organisations that owned large, purpose-built buildings and had several full-time employees, such as the Church of Norway parishes and one of the Muslim organisations,<sup>61</sup> were in a better position to engage with youth than religious organisations run by volunteers and whose members met in venues they rented for a few hours each week.

Paper 2 suggests that the youth were segmented in the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand by roughly overlapping categories of ethnicity, race, and religion. This reflects how each religious organisation's scope for reaching youth and other people was limited.

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<sup>59</sup> Drawing on the labour force survey, Bø and Vigran (2014, 10, my translation) wrote that 'nearly 60 percent [of Norwegian NEET young people] identified as unemployed [regardless of whether they filled all the criteria in the formal definition of unemployment], 73 percent of the men and 46 percent of the women. By comparison, 13 percent identified as unable to work, while one woman in four identified as a homemaker'.

<sup>60</sup> As an example of religious organisations serving the specific needs of a specific subgroup of NEET young people, it is tempting to speculate that the success of baby singing sessions in many Church of Norway parishes relate to the community it offers parents who are on leave from employment or education, as well as its value for the babies. While many of the parents who attend baby singing sessions may be on leave and may thus not be counted as NEET young people in public statistics, their life situations can nevertheless show some of the same challenges as those of other subgroups of NEET young people, such as isolation and loneliness. However, this has not been a part of my empirical research.

<sup>61</sup> Another Muslim organisation has completed and opened its new building in Søndre Nordstrand since I completed my research.



Churches may not reach Muslim youth, while Mosques may not reach Christian youth. The Buddhist organisation may represent an anomaly in this regard. According to the representative interviewed in my research, some young people with mental problems contacted them in seeking help (Paper 2). This may have to do with Buddhism often being perceived in positive terms and associated with peacefulness, meditation, and yoga. On the other hand, the Muslim organisation that did work with street youth had attracted negative media attention some years before my research (e.g. NRK 20 February 2010; 24 March 2010; see Utrop 2016, 46). This may reflect how Islamophobic discourses have become mainstream (Bangstad 2014a) but also how proselytisation and active missionising is regarded with suspicion in the Nordic countries (Martikainen 2004, 75-76). Either way, religious organisations belonging to different religions may have been perceived differently.

In a survey of Norwegian attitudes towards different types of welfare service providers, Angell (2014) found that there is widespread scepticism of welfare actors representing ‘a foreign religion’, such as Islam but a positive attitude towards the Church of Norway and related organisations as service providers. In an article based on research from Finland, Norway, and Sweden, Anne Birgitta Pessi, Olav Helge Angell, and Per Pettersson (2009, 224) suggested that the majority churches were ‘not expected to take over responsibility for basic welfare services from the state’ in any of the countries but that they were ‘regarded as holding special competence or resources which the public authorities do not have. Thus it is accepted and even expected that the church will provide alternatives to the state, complementing existing public services in certain aspects or within certain fields’.<sup>62</sup> How this applies to the specialised field of youth services – which is heavily dominated by public service providers such as public schools and the Child Welfare Services – and how NEET young people, local communities, and the Norwegian public would react if religious organisations other than the one Muslim organisation did work for excluded youth was beyond the scope of my research. However, it may explain why the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand did not engage more actively with youth exclusion. Thus, while a system theoretical analysis suggests that the religious organisations may have been in a position to

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<sup>62</sup> This perspective was present in my research although it was not mentioned in any of the three papers in this thesis. When I asked youth in a focus group interview in one of the Church of Norway parishes responsible for helping youth when their families could not help them, a boy who participated replied: ‘It’s society. [...] Or Child Welfare Services. It’s teachers. The professionals, yes, who should see them in school and notice that they need help’. The other focus group participants agreed with him and said that their youth group could provide a community and a sense of security to those who came but that it did not have any particular responsibilities towards youth who needed help.

engage with youth exclusion, my research indicates that, with one notable exception, they did not do so. This may have reasons that are easier to explain outside system theory than within it.

### *Religious organisations as public space*

The second way in which religious organisations can attain relevance and contribute to communicational permeability, outlined above, was by engaging in the public sphere. This has been gaining momentum as a perspective on religion in European research in recent years, where religious organisations are frequently studied as part of the civil society (e.g. Baumann 2014; Bäckström 2014; Furseth 2018a; Leis-Peters 2017; see also Beckford 2010).<sup>63</sup> Recent work on the Nordic countries indicates twin processes of increasing secularisation on the individual level and de-privatisation of religion in politics, media, and civil society (Furseth 2018a). Some of this represents religious performance. In a recent book chapter on the public role of Nordic faith communities, for example, Furseth (2017) suggested that the emergence and role of interfaith infrastructure in the Nordic countries reflected the de-privatisation of religion in the civil society, as religious organisations have become more visible in the public sphere than they were a few decades ago. Furseth (2017) focussed on how the interfaith structures and religious organisations have lobbied for their interests and the interests of their members on the national level. Reviewing research from Sweden, Annette Leis-Peters, Martha Middlemiss Lé Mon, and Magdalena Nordin (2015, 119-120) suggested in another book chapter that interfaith structures exist on the local, regional, and national levels and that initiatives to form interfaith structures can come from public authorities or religious organisations, although differences in power and material resources between religious organisations mean that some have better access to doing so than others (see also Nordin 2017). I have already mentioned how differences in public perceptions and material resources may have affected the religious organisations' activities and engagements for youth in Søndre Nordstrand. In this section, I will focus on the role of the religious organisations in the city district in the public sphere. I use the term 'public

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<sup>63</sup> In Norway, the Church of Norway has been closely intertwined with the state as a state church up until recently. In the last few years, a gradual process of disestablishment has been disentangling the two as separate entities, also making the civil society role of the church clearer from an institutional or organisational perspective.

sphere' loosely to refer to the relatively open and accessible network of communication where public opinion is formed, which ultimately has political implications.<sup>64</sup>

In empirical research, the public role of religious organisations on the local level has often been discussed in terms of a distinction between engaging as critical voices and as service providers (e.g. Leis-Peters, Lé Mon, and Nordin 2015, 111; Pessi, Angell, and Pettersson 2009; see also Lundström and Wijkström 2012).<sup>65</sup> As part of the research project *Welfare and Religion in a European Perspective* (WREP), Olav Helge Angell and Trygve Wyller (2006) have written on the roles of the Church of Norway and the public welfare services in Drammen, a mid-sized Norwegian city. Their research suggested that representatives from the population and the public authorities expected the church to participate in the public discourse on welfare but were less familiar with the idea of the church as a provider of welfare services. They also found that the church and diaconal organisations provided services for some groups in Drammen, but they did not have a strong public voice on the local level, except when the leader of the Church City Mission participated in public discourse (Angell and Wyller 2006; see also Angell 2007; Angell 2010). Similar results emerged from the Swedish and the Finnish case studies of the WREP project, while a difference between the case studies was how the local public authorities appeared to be largely unfamiliar with the church activities in the Norwegian case, unlike particularly in the Finnish case (Pessi, Angell, and Pettersson 2009).

Paper 3 in this thesis gives a different picture from Søndre Nordstrand, where the police and local authorities were instrumental in setting up the 'Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation', which also included representatives from many of the religious organisations in the city district. The forum emerged as a way of coordinating emergency preparedness (Korslien 2017; Paper 3). The coordination of emergency preparedness between the police, public authorities, and parishes of the Church of Norway is commonplace in Norwegian municipalities (Angell and Selbekk 2005, 11-12). However, the Church of Norway could not provide services to the whole population in Søndre Nordstrand. The super-diverse population of the city district had diverse needs, and the forum was set up as a means to help meet these

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<sup>64</sup> Jürgen Habermas and Luhmann famously discussed the concept of the public sphere. A key difference was between Habermas's normative use of the concept and the more descriptive and analytical ambition of Luhmann's theory. However, a detailed discussion of their differences is beyond the scope of this thesis. In this section, I discuss empirical research and refer to how the concept has been used by the researchers whose work I refer to.

<sup>65</sup> This distinction can also be found in the outline of the YOMA project (see Swart 2013, 9-12).

different needs. Paper 3 suggests that once the forum was formed, it instigated communication among representatives from several religious organisations and contributed towards the formation of a sphere of communication among the religious organisations in the city district, akin to a local religious system. This local religious system was formed around performances related to emergency preparedness. It was closely interlinked with the local authorities through the Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation but also with the county authorities through the public subsidies for religious organisations that most of the organisations received. Furseth (2018b, 294-295) remarks on how the Norwegian subsidies for religious organisations come with certain expectations, and she notes how they can also explain the relatively high number of religious organisations in Norway when compared, for example, with Denmark.

Paper 3 shows how especially the larger minority religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand mediated contact between their members, public authorities, and public welfare services, for example by inviting representatives to hold seminars in their organisations. In at least some cases, leaders in the religious organisations also took it upon themselves to give members information about public services. Paper 2 mentions how one of the Muslim organisation held education fairs where the imam lectured on the importance of education in Islam before the youth and their parents could meet students and recent graduates from various forms of education. In this way, the religious organisations channelled information about public services – such as education – to their members in addition to providing certain services – such as youth groups – themselves. The leaders or board members who led this work justified taking on such roles by referring to how long they had lived in Norway (Paper 2). Some of them were also local politicians, illustrating how individuals can be a means of system integration by roving between different systems (Halsall 2012; see also Beyer 1990, 375-376). As a role in the public sphere, however, this differs from lobbying in interfaith forums (Furseth 2017) and from engaging as critical voices or service providers in civil society (Leis-Peters, Lé Mon, and Nordin 2015, 111; Pessi, Angell, and Pettersson 2009).

Leis-Peters, Lé Mon, and Nordin (2015, 118) suggested that religious organisations' roles in civil society are more complex than either being critical voices or providing services and that research should pay attention to the interrelations between these two dimensions. For example, receiving funding to provide particular services can limit a religious organisation's freedom to engage as a critical voice. In another vein, Angell (2016, 154-155) shows how service provision can be a political provocation, thus serving both roles. In showing how the

religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand acted as mediators between their members and secular organisations, opening up for their meeting places and venues *as* public spaces, my research suggests a third alternative.<sup>66</sup> This was especially clear in the larger minority religious organisations, the religious organisations that had many members with immigrant backgrounds.

That minority religious organisations mediate information from or about public authorities and welfare services to their members has been mentioned in several research publications on religious diversity and religious organisations in Norway in recent years (e.g. Erdal 2016; Furseth et al. 2015, 164; Thorbjørnsrud 2016, 77, note 17; see also Loga 2012, 63-64; NOU 2013:1, 47-48). Similar observations have also been made in American research on immigrant religion, although this work has tended to emphasise the religious organisations' role as service providers (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000a, 145-150; 2000b, 55-59; Foley and Hoge 2007, 117-130, 159). Suggesting a possible bridge across this difference, Martikainen (2014b, 53-54; 2014a) has argued that immigrants are more frequently in contact with public authorities and public welfare services in the social democratic welfare states of the Nordic countries than elsewhere, making the role of minority religious organisations as mediators relatively more important than in liberal welfare states such as the USA. Based on research from the city of Turku in Finland, he concluded that 'the [immigrant] congregations were not particularly focusing [sic] on general welfare activities, as those were taken care of by the municipality and the state' (Martikainen 2014b, 91).

In relation to youth exclusion and from a communications perspective, then, the needs and challenges identified by the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand related to navigating public welfare services and their sometimes implicit requirements, rather than alleviating youth exclusion, which they may rather have seen as the responsibility of the public welfare services (cf. Furseth et al. 2018, 279). To some extent, the religious

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<sup>66</sup> A particularly illustrative example of the religious organisations as public spaces, though one not mentioned in any of the three papers in this thesis, was how several, if not most or all, of the churches and mosques in Søndre Nordstrand had notice boards featuring information from public authorities and public welfare services, including posters from the health stations and advertisements for summer jobs for local youth funded through a public area development program, alongside information from the religious organisations themselves. I did not ask how this information came to the religious organisations, whether it was the religious organisations' own initiatives, due to the public authorities and welfare services contacting them, or brought to the religious organisations by individual members who also had other roles, for example as local politicians. An analogue is the Catholic Church in Norway's Polish magazine *Informator Katolicki*, which contains information on the Church and faith-related texts alongside texts on Norwegian society (Erdal 2016; see page 12-13, above).

organisations became public spaces, mediating communication from the public authorities and welfare services to their members. To the extent that the religious organisations contributed to communicational permeability, it was not by including excluded youth but by mediating between the welfare state and their members. In terms of communication, the religious organisations sought to close communicational gaps where they identified a structural lack of communication. As public spaces, the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand became part of the infrastructure facilitating the public sphere as a relatively open and accessible network of communication, facilitating certain kinds of non-religious communication rather than participating with a voice of their own. In Luhmannian terminology, this was religious performance, an ‘application’ of the religious organisations’ resources to problems generated outside religion, namely the problem of unequal access to the public sphere (Beyer 1994, 80; 1990, 380).

This chapter started with the observation that the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand did not contribute to social integration by including large shares of the population or otherwise excluded youth but that they communicated with other organisations and that this may have contributed to system integration. I have worked my way towards a description of the social role of the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand by addressing why the religious organisations did not have activities or engagements that targeted excluded youth and by discussing their communication with other organisations. That the religious organisations, with one exception, did not have activities and engagements for excluded youth may have been related to the widely held idea that the provision of welfare services is the responsibility of public authorities and welfare services in Norway. Leaders in the religious organisations may have shared this view, or they may not have wanted to risk attracting negative attention if their religious organisation provided services that were seen as inappropriate. The latter may be particularly acute for minority organisations and organisations that espouse religions unfamiliar to many Norwegians. It may also be particularly acute with regard to youth at a time when segregation and integration are hotly debated topics. My research indicates that particularly the minority religious organisations acted as public spaces, mediating communication from the public authorities and welfare services, which were the most important service providers, in addition to providing some services themselves. However, the social cohesion impact of doing so may have been limited by how the religious organisations did not include otherwise excluded youth at the time of my research – although some of their communication may have reached excluded youth

indirectly, for example through family members. I have also argued that some NEET young people could have been potential users of supplementary services to those of the public service providers if the religious organisations provided them. The religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand could have made a stronger contribution to social cohesion if they had more consciously identified and attracted youth who were subject to exclusions.

## Conclusion

This thesis is based on three journeys. The first journey was the journey from my home in Vestre Aker to Søndre Nordstrand alluded to in the field note excerpt before the introduction in this synopsis (see page 1, above). This journey was repeated many times over while I conducted research in Søndre Nordstrand. The second was a methodological journey, which took me from trying to adapt ethnographic research methods and conduct research with NEET young people to conducting interview-based research in religious organisations. The third was a journey through the literature on social cohesion and Luhmann's theory of society.

The research question addressed in this thesis is how religious organisations' activities and engagements for youth in Søndre Nordstrand contribute to social cohesion. The journey through the literature on social cohesion and Luhmann's theory of society was important to how I have approached the question. Working with Luhmann's theory shifted the focus of my research from socio-cultural integration – matters such as consensus, shared values, and trust that prevail in mainstream social cohesion research – towards social integration and system integration, or inclusion and differentiation. By drawing on Luhmann's theory of society, this thesis has outlined a way of understanding social cohesion that focusses on aspects of society, or on social relations, rather than on qualities of people. The communicational permeability concept, which epitomises my journey through Luhmann's theory, refers to how facily communication flows in society, among its subsystems, and with the people associated with it. It represents a new and different way of conceptualising social cohesion, but one firmly grounded in sociological tradition. Focussing on the interrelations between social systems and on the inclusion and exclusion of people in them, one of its main benefits for research in diverse contexts is that it does not take cultural, ethnic, racial, or other categories for granted.



In line with the more empirically derived super-diversity concept, it opens up for understanding people in terms of the interplay of the different inclusions and exclusions that apply to their situation at any given time. By analysing people in terms of systemically determined roles, Luhmann's anti-humanism provides a way of moving beyond essentialist categories in social research. At the same time, I have emphasised people more than many researchers working with Luhmann's theory would. This represents an adaptation of Luhmann's theory to qualitative research on micro and mesoscales, on which this thesis is based.

The methodological journey refers to how my research followed two different, but interrelated, tracks. As noted, it took me from trying to adapt ethnographic research methods and conduct research with NEET young people to conducting interview-based research in religious organisations. The first track of my research was a process of trying to find and meet NEET young people in Søndre Nordstrand. This track of the research led me to realise that, in qualitative research, the NEET category should not be approached as an objective and unproblematic category of youth exclusion but has to be understood against the context in which it is used. Indeed, the exclusion concept itself should be understood contextually in terms of the various uses to which it is put (as I suggested in the conclusion in Paper 1) or in terms of the social processes that lead to inclusion or exclusion in given contexts (as implied by the Luhmannian exclusion concept and the idea that exclusions accumulate). In line with the latter, the second track of my research was based on interviews in the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand and focussed on how the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand integrated youth into and were themselves integrated in different structures of communication.

The journey from Vestre Aker to Søndre Nordstrand represents how this thesis is based on qualitative research in one particular city district – one might even say one particular place or set of places. This has made it possible to look at the interrelations among the religious organisations in my research rather than compare them as different cases. My research focussed on Søndre Nordstrand, not on the religious organisations, as the unit of analysis. Søndre Nordstrand was selected for the Norwegian YOMA case study and my own research in part because it was highly diverse. It was, and still is, a Norwegian case of super-diversity. There was no single, homogeneous majority group in Søndre Nordstrand, and the wide range of differences in the population meant that some people may not have fitted into determinate minority communities, either (as they would have in a multicultural rather than super-diverse

context). Conducting research in Søndre Nordstrand provided insight into how religious organisations communicated in local communities, the city, the country, and even abroad as well as how they related to ethnicities and cultures. All the religious organisations were less diverse than the population of the city district. The religious organisations were all part of national and transnational networks of religious organisations that espoused the same faiths, but they also communicated with each other. The communication among the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand was not primarily differentiated into different religions but segmented corresponding to communities in the suburbs. Although the super-diverse situation in Søndre Nordstrand meant that there was no clear majority population in the city district, my research indicated that the majority religious organisations of the national majority population may have been preferred as partners for different forms of cooperation over the minority religious organisations where the leaders and most of the members had immigrant backgrounds. The majority religious organisations generally commanded greater resources than the minority religious organisations did, and they may have been perceived differently, as representing the national majority population. The simultaneous focus on youth exclusion in my research contributed to making the religious organisations' interconnections with other local organisations and public welfare services visible. This led to the observation that the religious organisations can be thought of as public space, as facilitating certain kinds of non-religious communication more than communicating with a voice of their own.

Through the three journeys, my research question about social cohesion has been transformed into one about communicational permeability, my methodological approach has come to focus on religious organisations more than on youth, and my qualitative research has produced data on the religious organisations' activities and engagements for youth in super-diverse Søndre Nordstrand city district. Communicational permeability refers to a synthesis of social integration and system integration. My data suggests that the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand did not make strong contributions to social integration by including large shares of the population or otherwise excluded youth. Alleviating youth exclusion may rather have been seen as the responsibility of the public welfare services. Instead, the religious organisations interactions with other organisations, including civil society organisations and public authorities in the city district but also organisations in other parts of the city, the country, and even abroad, may have contributed to system integration. Their impact on communicational permeability must be evaluated in terms of whether they

facilitated communication that would otherwise not have occurred or hindered communication that would otherwise have occurred. In this regard, my research indicates that the religious organisations made efforts to further communication between their members and local authorities and public welfare services; they were also important in keeping national and transnational denominational networks together. Qualitatively speaking, this was *how* the religious organisations' activities and engagements for youth contributed to social cohesion; quantitatively speaking, it does not say *how much* they contributed to social cohesion. However, I suggested in the discussion in Chapter 4 that the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand could have made a stronger contribution to social cohesion if they identified and attracted youth who were subject to exclusions. This was also where I went beyond Luhmannian theory, as the reasons they did not do so may be easier to explain in terms of the different material resources and public perceptions of different religions and religious organisations.

Like other journeys, mine may be evaluated in terms of lessons learned. As a contribution to research on religious organisations and religious diversity, this thesis has suggested that the religious organisations in Søndre Nordstrand can be understood as public space. For youth research, the thesis has contributed a critical analysis of the exclusion concept and a discussion of how religious organisations can contribute to alleviating youth exclusion. However, the most important contribution of this thesis is to the ongoing debates on integration and social cohesion in Norway and other Western countries that have diversified rapidly over the last few decades. This thesis shows how applying Luhmann's theory and focussing on the interrelations between social systems and on the inclusion and exclusion of people in them can provide a framework for future research that does not draw on essentialist categories of people or approach diversity as inherently problematic.

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## Papers

*Paper I*

Holte, Bjørn Hallstein. 2017. "Counting and meeting NEET young people: Methodology, perspective, and meaning in research on marginalized youth." *Young – Nordic Journal of Youth Research* 26(1): 1-16. Published online 16 March 2017.

***Paper I: Not in the file in the Dissertation because of copyright restrictions.***

*Paper II*

Holte, Bjørn Hallstein, Annette Leis-Peters, Olav Helge Angell, and Kari Karsrud Korslien. 2018. "Us and them: Faith-based organisations and street youths in Søndre Nordstrand, Oslo, Norway." In *Stuck in the Margins? Young People and FBOs in South African and Nordic Localities*. Edited by Ignatius Swart, Auli Vähäkangas, Marlize Rabe, and Annette Leis-Peters.

**Book manuscript in preparation.**

*Paper III*

Holte, Bjørn Hallstein. 2017. "Religion and integration: Religious organisations' communication in a diverse city district of Oslo, Norway."

**Article manuscript under review.**



**VID**