

# Lived Space and Support as Interrelated Phenomena in the Context of Young People with Mental Health Problems

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“Every change ‘in’ the human being entails a change to his lived space” (Bollnow, 2011, p. 21).

## Abstract

The Norwegian welfare system due to human rights is in charge of providing necessary support of life to every citizen in terms of a safe place to live, the opportunity to education or employment and meaningful life accomplishments. We explore how public sustenance is experienced by a group of young receivers of public support. The article is one of three sub-studies drawing on empirical material from in-depth interviews with 14 young adults with mental health challenges and experiences from being partly or fully out of school or work. The interviews reveal that in particular three aspects of support are significant to the young. These are personal and shared space (e.g., supportive personal and professional relationships), the opportunity of a safe home, and the prospect of not being trapped for a lengthy time in their problems (an effective ‘standstill’ or suspension of agency of life), but be part of the “world out there.” Could public support provide some temporary or permanent help with regard to these basic aspects of life? We explore in this article the potential interrelatedness between space and support in a hermeneutic phenomenological manner with basis in experiences from four of the young in the study. David, Mia, Oda and Simon (all pseudonyms) each in their way, describe moments where support and space seem to be existentially and experientially interconnected. We wonder if analysis of the two phenomena can inform our understanding of the qualities that characterize what we might call a ‘supportive’ environment within public welfare.

**Keywords:** Lived space, support, existence, phenomenology, mental health, inside, outside, relationship, freedom.

## Introduction

The fact that many young people with mental health problems experience interruptions of school and work participation is of great concern to society. Feelings of ‘outsiderness’ among young people, due to being disengaged from education and work, is of increasing concern for within Nordic countries, as well as for the member countries of the European Union (European Commission, 2014; Wulf-Andersen, Follesø & Olsen, 2016). A particular understanding of this group of young people considers them to constitute a socio-economic problem; a threat to a sustainable welfare state. Although the majority of young people with mental health issues are regular students or employees (Strand & Nielsen, 2015), an increasing number is at risk of not finishing basic education or having permanent work and thus they tend to remain outside of the social arenas considered economically productive (Kierkegaard, 2016). Debates on social participation (being *inside*) and marginalization (being *outside*), dominate the welfare agenda in many European countries. A variety of reports discuss the distance between being inside and being outside in education and employment, and new ways to secure participation and inclusion of young people with mental health problems (e.g., Strand & Nielsen, 2015; Kierkegaard, 2016). In addition, improvement of school-to-work transition is emphasized in ‘The EU Youth Guarantee’ (European Commission, 2014). Belonging within a social setting is central to human existence and culture and to the experience of a good life (Malone, Pillow, & Osman, 2012). For the target group of this study, to be ‘inside’ and feel connected and to belong to social and interpersonal settings like work and school is found to be critical in recovery from mental distress (Tew et al., 2012). The terms “outsiderness,” and its opposite, “insiderness,” direct our theoretical and empirical attention toward (young) people’s possibility of connecting to positive aspects of social life, or remaining on the outside, at the margins. These phenomena, discussed in mental health literature, are intertwined with emotional issues and identity processes, social networks, sociocultural discourses and processes of social inclusion and exclusion (Wulf-Andersen, Follesø, & Olsen, 2016).

Being inside or outside of a situation, event or life circumstance as a physical and literal condition might be compared to being inside or outside of a room or a building. In the latter, a person can intentionally move from outside to inside, or from inside to outside, and by doing so change their current actual and physical position. However, a change of social or mental life condition is not so simple. The social exclusion/inclusion mechanisms that constitute and control human relationships as well as social systems and institutions, are well known phenomena in sociological and psychological literature. While belonging to a particular society provides the right to be on the inside (for instance the right to be under consideration for job or education), not all young people are facilitated or motivated to exercise that right. In a certain sense, being at the outside of “society,” if the majority of the citizens one’s age are inside, is experienced as a problem, a disability or even a failure. This is particularly so if the person is at an age where he or she is expected to be in school, or after mandatory school, is expected to continue studying or start working. The young people in this study are out of school or work, and in addition they suffer from mental health problems. Because of their general life condition, they are more likely to be considered “high risk people” by social and public systems due to the fact that they more often than others remain outside of education and employment, and are disadvantaged with regard to economy, housing and social relationships (Karlsson & Borg, 2017). Outsiders are wanted “in” for a variety of reasons; for instance for life quality reasons, and because they are considered expensive for society. Therefore, high-cost efforts are made to include them in society. Such programs are not always efficient, effective or equitable. The outside – inside dichotomy is the point of orientation of the welfare system, and inclusion (e.g., “moving” the person from the outside to the inside) is the overall aim. With regard to being at

the inside or at the outside, as is the terminology of the welfare state, the classic phenomenological geographer Edward Relph (1976) addresses the same problem in a phenomenological manner oriented to the human experience of being outside or inside. He sees inside(r)ness as the existential core place experience for human beings. He argues that the “existential relationship between *insideness* and its experiential opposite *outsideness* is a fundamental dialectic in human experience” (Relph, 1976, as cited in Seamon, 2008, p. 3) (Italics in original). The experience for a person of being at the inside of a group is the mode of experience where place or location is experienced “without any directed or self-conscious attention yet is laden with significance that are tacit and unnoticed unless the place is changed in some way” (Relph, 1976, p. 55 as cited in Seamon, 2008, p. 4). This unspoken unawareness can generate a tension related to change in spatial as well as social circumstances. This is exactly the problem for the young informants in this project. Spatial terms, such as outside, inside, far away from (education or work), on the edge of (society)<sup>1</sup>, are frequently used in order to describe young people’s location in social arenas. The dichotomy is a political conceptualization of a socio-political condition understood as theoretical conceptualizations with actual meaning. To the human being existence is a genuine endeavor and reality includes real life experiences that might come also with the signs reversed. The human condition of being inside or outside of significant settings in life is existentially sensed and lived when it becomes a problem to the person, and thus is a complex and context related experience. The philosophical phenomenologists Casey (1993), Mugerauer (1994) and Stephanovic (2000) argue that “being-in-place remains a non-contingent necessity for people because having a place is an integral, inescapable part of who and what we are as human beings” (as cited in Seamon, 2008, p.11).

## **Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

In this paper we explore what we consider existential core aspects of lived space and lived support in a hermeneutic phenomenological way. These existential phenomenological meaning structures (van Manen, 2014) orient to experiences of life as lived and lived through, rather than to sociological labels of political welfare system terminology. Seamon (2017) provides a helpful distinction between phenomenology and hermeneutics by saying: “For phenomenology the aim is a more accurate, comprehensive knowledge of human *experience*; for hermeneutics, the aim is a more accurate, comprehensive knowledge of human *meaning*” (p. 67) (Our Italics). He continues: “What the two approaches have in common is, first, an emphasis on qualitative description and interpretation; and second, a recognition that knowledge of experience and meaning is inexhaustible” (p. 67). To us, in the context of this article, the young people describe their lived experiences of space in encounters with representatives for the public support system in which they are enrolled. The direct and original contact, as Merleau-Ponty (2002) emphasizes, can be experienced only as moments of lived meaning or meaningfulness; as understanding or comprehension of those particular experiences, both as individual and group phenomena. The phenomenological reduction as method is meant to surface essential aspects of meaning that belong to the phenomena of our lifeworld; e.g., the distinctive qualities of the phenomenon that we decide to direct our attention to. This of course is not fully attainable, as the moment of the experience is ‘always’ gone before the time of reflection, and it can only be incompletely regained in memory and language. The researcher is not socially and culturally in the same circumstances as the participant, hence this ‘remove’ also impacts on the validity and completeness of interpretation. However, rather than trying to conceptualize or theorize about a situation, the method of reduction aims at regaining the experience as closely as possible to how it was in

the moment of experience, for the person/people having that experience. Thus the encounter between the young and their professional helper has to be described and the description has to be interpreted, although insufficiently and incompletely, as Seamon (2017) asserts. Each encounter is contextually bound to a situation loaded with supportive possibilities although always potential and not yet offering positive answers or results. Our focus is how the experiential encounters might be understood from the perspective of the young.

## Space and Place

Space and place - two related but different phenomena - are often confused or mentioned in the same breath in daily speech. Our lives are so place-oriented and saturated with place that we cannot imagine what it would be like to live without a place (Casey, 2009). We live our lives in places, and we cannot escape the place in which we find ourselves. But according to Seamon (2008), we can “learn from that place and thereby decide whether and in what way [we] will offer that place commitment or not” (p. 1). Nevertheless, *topos*, the Greek term for place, as in topography – landscape - refers to the human body as the subject of experienced distance and position (up/down, front/behind, left/right) in relation to where the person is. According to Bollnow (2011), place refers to a particular point that I can indicate with my finger. Place depends on my position and thus differs according to how and where I move. Places are in a sense neutral, or “lie side by side” (p. 31) with other places, inherent in nature. Place is bound to a particular “somewhere” which I position myself according to and can move to and from. On the other hand, places in a person’s world are profound centers of meanings, symbols and experience, and, as such, lie at the core of human existence (Godkin, 2015). Places might be characterized as the “focus of meanings or intention, either culturally or individually defined” (Relph, 1976, p. 55). Godkin (2015) defines place as “a discrete, temporally and perceptually bounded unit of psychologically meaningful material space” (p.73). The relation between places and identity-development are acknowledged in literature concerning sense of place (Buttimer, 2015; Casey, 2009; Tuan, 2014). Both people’s personal and cultural identity are intimately bound up with place identity.

There is an extensive literature regarding a phenomenological approach to place, including recent edited books on the topic with chapters by leading researchers (e.g., Donohoe (Ed.), 2017; Janz (Ed.), 2017). Key contributions relevant to this study emphasize how conceptualizations of place are influenced phenomenologically not only by the physical nature of the landscape, be it urban, rural or wild, but also by the language spoken, the daily activities of people dwelling there and their culture (including spirituality). Each of these factors interact, thus it is impossible to comprehensively understand the impact of place without considering the relevant spatio-socio-cultural framework, which holistically impacts on landscape conceptualization (Turk, 2016). This applies especially to understanding of the role of place in the lifeworld of marginalized peoples, including alienated youth.

In this paper we focus on the *experience* of human space. *Chora*, the Greek term for *space*, is less concrete than place and means to give room, to shrink back or to have room to receive something (Bollnow, 2011, p. 30). “There is no empty space,” Bollnow asserts (p. 31). While I can move to and from a place, I move in space and might also move space. Space is always filled up with something and does not extend further than its content. Unlike a place, which always has a location - *is* somewhere - space is everywhere and fills itself up. While place is something that is at our disposal, space is “part of the transcendental condition of man,” Bollnow says (2011, p. 43).

Oda, one of the young participants of the study, talks of space like this: “If I have to plan weeks ahead then I feel that my head explodes. It does not work. I can just as well stay in

bed and sleep.” Her experience is that some thinking and planning “take up” more space than she contains. At the point of the interviews, future planning exceeds her capacity. There is no room in her to receive more thoughts and plans. Space exists only for humans as lived, and as a human experience, lived space is about room for movement and action. Bollnow even says that “[s]pace [...] is not already in existence, but is created only by human activity” (p. 34). Oda describes her space as limited or even filled up. Her experience of packed space gives no room for movement or action. Human activity, if it were in this situation a supportive act, what would it be like if it should ease her sense of overload of capacity, and give her room for movement, space, openness, and perhaps even a sense of freedom?

A considerable amount of spatial studies have been accomplished in the humanities and social sciences during the last twenty years (Casey, 2009). For the purpose of this paper we concentrate on the work of Otto Friedrich Bollnow because of his phenomenological attention to human space in several of his numerous publications (e.g., Bollnow 1941, 1955, 1966, 1989) that despite of being of age still are relevant and in frequent use in Germany and other European countries. His perspectives on lived space is fully developed in his book *Mensch und Raum* from 1963, that was revised in a number of new editions in the 1970’s and 80’s and most recently in 2010. *Mensch und Raum* was translated into English as *Human Space* in 2011 by Christine Shuttleworth, edited and with an afterword by Joseph Kohlmaier. Apart from in the introduction, we build on the work of Bollnow as educator and phenomenologist. With regard to lived space as what Heidegger (1962) called “existentialia” or existential; conditioning human life, as discussed by Hannah Arendt, Arendt’s understanding of activity and freedom, discussed in her books from 1958 and 1968, is influential in this project.

This said, little, if anything, has been written explicitly about how spatiality is woven into the experience of support services for marginalized people, at least not in the context of existentially challenged persons like the young people in our study. In order to uncover some key aspects of the role of space in support services, we move reflectively between the experiential examples told by the young participants and the methodological qualities of epoché and reduction. Throughout the reflective hermeneutic process between experience and meaning, three phenomenological themes evolved indicating how space and support services might give and add meaning to each other. These themes will be presented and discussed successively throughout the paper. The themes address the real experiences of the young and ways that spatial experiences are intertwined with life as lived, rather than of life as an ideal or predefined desirable condition.

## Personal Space and the Space of Coexistence

I am *in* space, and I *experience* space. The experience of space is subjective and oriented to my sense of the situation I am in. My experience as it is, always is related and directed to something – it is an experience of *something*, as Merleau-Ponty (1997) suggests. I sense space but my sense is always directed toward something else external or other to my sensation or thought. What then is this “other” that my sense of space relates to? It could be a variety of “things” (material, mental and social; existing and non-existing, except as assumptions or fears) – as a matter of fact “everything.” In this context however, we will try to identify this “some-thing” as the experience of support. Support services/activities always happen within a relationship (Sommer & Saevi, 2017). Because human life is a condition that takes place in plurality (Arendt, 1958), our coexistence with others is formed in a variety of relationships to family members, friends, lovers, spouses, colleagues, service providers and a variety of strangers. Some relationships are long-lasting or ‘scheduled’ as part of a formal process, while others are occasional and accidental encounters. The space of coexistence has all kinds of qualities from

non-violent and quiet where space is open and given to the individual, to a mutual struggle for space and room to live and act. In love relationships, Bollnow (2011) observes, space can expand without the sense of space lost for any of the parts. The sense is that there are “no places or positions at all, and therefore no dispute over them,” Bollnow asserts (p. 242). To human experience, love is space-creating while envy or hostility is space-limiting. Being truly loved by someone can be a refuge or a home for a person. Another human being can make space available and meaningful by caring and sharing his or her personal space with me. I might see myself in the act of the other and such potential freedom might open, or I might leave the other out of play and close the opportunity for his or her freedom. Space is experienced in all kinds of manners, and as relational phenomena, space as well as freedom are actualized only in the concrete and direct spontaneous occurrence of the relationship (Arendt, 1958). This means, in the context of this paper, that “the very relationship seems to ‘speak’ directly to the receiver of support” (Sommer & Saevi, 2017, p. 9), whether the other intends it or not. Because human plurality is our common condition (Arendt, 1958), and we are dependent on if, and how, our initiative for establishing a relationship is taken up by the other person, the consequences of the relationship (perhaps an enhanced sense of freedom) are, at least initially, potential rather than real. Everything except my “I” can be shared, Levinas writes (1998), and our dependency on other people’s reception of what we do and say reveals our shared exposure to the indeterminability of life. How do we respond to the exposure of the human being in relationships where supportive professional practice and reflection is intended? How can a productive response by the recipient be facilitated by the attitudes and actions of the service provider?

### **Creating Space in Shared Relationship**

The sense of any place as lived space is not uniform and unchanging, but is influenced by the person’s experience of his or her surroundings and their practical circumstances, social relationships, habits and moods. The same room, may feel bright and spacy one day and dark and cramped another, and other people influence – little or much - our sense of lived space. One of this study’s participants, Simon, shares his experience of days when it is hard to even get out of bed:

*I really want to go to school. But my anxiety sometimes makes it hard to get out of the house. Yesterday, I woke up and knew immediately it was “one of those days.” I had this well-known heavy lump in my stomach and couldn’t manage to get out of bed. Martin, my service provider, phoned me and asked if I was out of bed and ready for school. I told him I was not feeling well and that I was too late for the bus. He offered to pop in to see how I was and to drive me to school. Feeling some pressure, but knowing that he wants the best for me, I accepted his offer.*

Simon reacts to his lived space differently under different conditions. Sometimes his sense of space is narrower and sometimes wider than the day before, as in this situation when he is feeling down and has a bad day. This particular morning space closes in around him. The space that yesterday “gave” him room to enjoy life has shrunk today. He painfully collides with the claims around him and for a while his space is limited to the size of his bed. A psychological explanation might be that action, or the lack thereof, is caused by his anxiety problem. In a phenomenological understanding, however, nothing is generically primary or secondary, cause or effect, since subject and object are sensed as a unity. Anxiety, as in its original derivation

(from German: ‘Angst’) denotes a sense of narrowness around the heart. A narrowness of heart is a constriction of world and heaven, and conversely, the constriction of world and heaven is anxiety of our hearts (Bollnow, 2011). The felt lump in Simon’s stomach may be understood as a tightness of heart and consequently, space narrows too. Distance to school is extended, even the door of the house that in other situations supports his dealing with the world, today seems out of reach. Space encloses him, and the objects around him become more distant. What is usually at hand requires the utmost exertion to reach, and today familiar movements become unattainable.

In this situation Martin calls him and offers support. From experience we know that not all support is felt as supportive by the one receiving it (Sommer & Saevi, 2017). Still, Simon accepts Martin’s offer to pick him up and drive him to school despite the pressure he also feels. But what is this combination of offer and pressure, and how or in what sense might pressure be sensed as something good? The term ‘pressure’ has two different meanings varying from *coercion* and *persuasion*, to the act of *weighting down* and *shaping* or *forming* someone or something<sup>ii</sup>. Experientially, pressure and resistance are what Løgstrup (2007) calls joint antagonists: opposites, and without the other each of them loses their full meaning. Simon feels some pressure from his service provider to go beyond his sense of a “bad day experience.” If we relate Løgstrup’s understanding of joint antagonists to this situation, we might see the sense of pressure that Simon feels as a certain resistance. Without resistance, Martin’s offer would not have been experienced as pressure. The significant thing here, however, is not to pursue how pressure and resistance are related, but how pressure can be something positive and good in some situations and not in others. What constitutes the potential difference? We might think that the very relationship between Simon and Martin is of importance. If it is, could the relationship be of a quality that supports Simon to endure the pressure?

Simon and Martin are both adults and in this respect the power differential between them is equal. The professional relationship however, complicates the question of power and makes it factually asymmetric in favor of the professional— a starting point which leaves it to the professional to be responsible for how the power is practiced in the particular relationship between them (Skjervheim, 1992; Saevi, 2015). If we presume that a certain mild pressure is exercised – pressure as an attempt to shape the bad-day-experience into a potential school-day experience – how can we interpret Simon’s accepting response?

Simon did not ask explicitly for support this morning, but he might have experienced it earlier in similar situations when Martin has intervened in his bad days in ways that he can accept. Simon thus might in a certain sense be prepared for a phone call and a supportive suggestion that could alter his present situation. He might be oriented toward wanting to be supported (Sommer & Saevi, 2017). His orientation toward support however, does not mean an immediate readiness for change and intervention. To be prepared for support is more a question of the quality of the relationship, which might not so much be based on rationality as on a deeper sense of togetherness (Bollnow, 1989). Simon senses that Martin cares about him, a sense reflected in his words: “Feeling some pressure, but *knowing he wants the best for me (...)*”. Simon understands that he is recognized and not judged, and the relational qualities support his courage to surpass the barriers of acting. In Simon’s description we sense that Simon also cares for Martin. In a caring relationship, care might go both ways and honor the persons as mutual (Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). This mutual care seems to strengthen Simon’s will to recover his lost space. We may say that their shared relationship holds the potential of a transformation of lived space. Simon embraces Martin’s initiative, and thus a possibility of a new beginning opens to him.

We do not know Martin’s inner professional or personal motives for the favor he offered Simon, or if he envisioned a particular effect. What we know is Simon’s response. Simon received the support as a possibility to get to school on this particular day. Martin acknowledges

Simon's free will to accept or not accept his offer. To Martin the positive response from Simon was not a certainty but included the risk of rejection. One might say that Martin's offer is a gift that Simon is free to take or leave. Their relationship though, does not depend on Simon's response, but seems to be strong enough to stand up to rejection and difference in opinion. The acknowledging and non-judgmental relationship gives room or space for difference and risk because it does not insist on defined positions and power. Martin's supportive suggestion – although exerting some mild pressure on Simon – is a response to what Martin sees as the young man's need in the very moment of the phone call. Support – in this context and in other contexts like this – might not have been sensed as supportive without the quality of a caring relationship. Simon and Martin's relationship allows the other to act freely on a respectful basis of care. Lived space to act reduces the inherent power differential between the person supporting and the one supported. The situation calls upon professionals to give special attention to how caring relationships might evolve with the persons they support. The relationship is essential, and care as phenomenon balances the power. To Hannah Arendt, human freedom is to be able to act at one's own initiative; to have effective agency, even if the option of acting is not taken up, which is in itself is a type of act. We are free as long as we act – in the act of acting - neither before nor after: "... to be free and to act is the same" (Arendt, 2006, p. 151). Simon's response to Martin's suggestion is an act that opens the possibility of a new beginning to him. What this new beginning might entail, is not given, not even as imagination or as an object of cognition, and is not yet known to any of the two.

### **Home as the Base of Action**

Home is situated in a place, a particular spot, as a centre of the surrounding environment to which it is connected in a wide variety of ways, because there is not in actuality an impervious spatial 'horizon.' Home can be wherever a person disposes a space of his or her own that offers a reliable shelter against outer threats; a place for 'dwelling.' The words we use for people without a home, 'the homeless,' or for people searching for a home, 'the refugees,' indicate that the meaning of 'home' implied here is a protected space of one's own. However this is only one sense of 'home.' The word refugee, which today means 'one fleeing from home' originally in French meant 'to take shelter or protect.' This double meaning of the word is interesting as tension in our exploration of place, because it indicates the foundational meaning of a place we call home. Being away from home is possible because you also are at-home somewhere. Home, however, is not only a place in space but also a place in time. Because human life is tossed between past, now and future (Arendt, 1958), what we call home tends more to address atmosphere and mood than the time we actually spend at home. Just think of how home is recaptured in our memories; how we recall persons, episodes, rooms, places, the sense of personal and joint space in ways that confuse and blur time and space, body and relationality. The refugee is fleeing from his previous home (probably hoping to return one day), but is also desperate for a protected place to live now, a place she/he can call 'home,' at least temporarily. This is also the case of the protagonist in Robert Frost's poem "Death of the hired man" (Frost, 1914) who in reality has no home of his own, but needs a place to do his last act, dying. Frost describes a home in these words:

Home is the place, when you have to go there,  
they have to take you in.  
I should have called it  
something you somehow haven't to deserve.



My home belongs to me in the sense that I cannot be denied access<sup>iii</sup>. I am not a guest to invite in or someone that can be excluded, but an obvious dweller. Even the dying man in Frost's poem had the right to die in the place he called his home. Home can be wherever a person has a space of his or her own that offers a reliable shelter against outer threats. Our home is more than a house within which to live, rather it is a safe place – a shelter, “a soul activity to be retrieved from the numbness of the world of modern objects” (Sardello as quoted in Lawlor, 1994, p. 29). It is the concrete center of our world, the place we move from and return to after acting in the world. To go away and to return, is true to experience, Bollnow (2011) observes, and as such these to and fro moves are a basic dynamic of human life. Our always repeating rhythm of going away and returning to the space where we move around freely is, in principle, the whole world in all its expanse. Some people explore the possibility of free and unlimited movement by travelling. But going away and returning require somewhere to start from and return to, if these movements are not to be aimless rambling and roaming. We need an orientation point where we are rooted in space and to which all our relationships in space refer – we need a place (Bollnow, 2011). Being sheltered and leaving the shelter reflect the completeness of human movements in the world. In a variety of ways we advance into the public space, and perhaps the private space of others - before we return to home base. The act of moving is what Arendt (2006) understands as the “free man's status, which enabled him to move, to get away from home, to go into the world and meet other people in deed and word” (p. 147). What does having a place that belongs to you mean to young people in the context of space and support? Drawing on the experiences of three participants in our study, Oda, Simon and Mia, we explore the meanings of going and returning and of sheltered space.

## At Home in the World

Having a place to withdraw, rest and be with ourselves, seems to be a basic need for human beings. We need a secure and intimate sphere, as, elsewhere, “an inner subversion of the individual is unavoidable” (Bollnow, 2011, p. 130). Even stronger, Bollnow asserts that the human process of becoming oneself has spatial prerequisites: “Only as a dweller, only in possession of a house, only in having at one's disposal such a private domain separated from public life can man fulfil his nature and be fully human” (p. 130).<sup>iv</sup> We need a place for inner dwelling to be able to dwell in ourselves in the external world, or in Heidegger's words: “The relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, strictly thought and spoken” (Heidegger, 2001, p. 155). Bollnow (2011) claims that home is the intimate place that “educates the heart and mind” [...] “we are guided back to ourselves in the atmosphere of its intimacy,” (p. 146). The intimacy – this inner relationship with the home enables us to be with ourselves and for the dwelling-place to fulfill its purpose of providing the security we need. A dwelling is more than merely a location. The intimate sphere we refer to is an embodied connection between ourselves and our home, a place with a rhythm familiar to us. Lingis (2007) observes how there is a certain pace and repeated structure to body movements which synchronizes with the environment:

Our home base is not set before us as a spectacle; it is a rhythm of rooms passing, each with its own chromatic tone and hue and intensity of light. [...] We move back and forth with the staccato of the morning light or the continuo of its afternoon gloom. (p. 14)

We may not give any thought in our daily life to the protocols and shifts of rhythm which are part of being at home. The sense is just *there* in our natural way of being in our home. We might

recognize in a knowing way that we are *at-home* if we have been away for a while and are coming back. Then it might be like returning to a long-known dear friend and without effort, we fall into each other's rhythm. Of course, some people have no home of their own. Oda is one of them. She says:

*Not knowing where to live the next week is very stressful. I cannot manage to think about getting a job if I have nowhere to live.*

Not having a home is stressful to Oda. She considers a home more basic than a job. We tend to associate stress with the psychological state of being under pressure, or exposed to a time squeeze. The original meaning, however, is *narrowness* or *oppression* (from English *distress* / French: *estrece*).<sup>v</sup> The etymological roots of stress emphasize its moral dimension. Someone or something makes my life narrow and oppressed. The words 'narrow' and 'oppressed' allude partly to space – limited and restricted space. To Oda the stressful situation of not having a permanent home delimits her sense of space, and her options for action, physically and emotionally.

Simon, who recently got his own place to live, values the freedom that comes with having a home. He says:

*To have my own place to live is a freedom for me. I can withdraw from exhausting surroundings. It gives room for my own life, a possibility to stand on my own.*

Dwelling, the intimate connection between ourselves and our home, holds the potentiality for freedom. To have room, place, literally makes space for action. Space for action<sup>vi</sup> in Bollnow's terms is "the space occupied by man when engaged in meaningful activity, working or resting, [and] dwelling in it in the widest sense," (Bollnow, 2011, p. 193). For Simon to have his own place, a home, opens up space. His space to live literally expands. His outer circumstances are changed – he has a home – and thus the space within himself is also changed. Bollnow asserts: "Every change 'in' the human being entails a change to his lived space" (p. 21). For Oda not to have a stable place to live, not knowing where to stay a week ahead, makes her inner and outer world narrow and limited. Not to have somewhere to start from and return to disturbs her movement in space. Her space is less purposeful and comprehensible, and her ability to manoeuvre in life is narrowed. The relationship with self, others and the world must be situated from somewhere, and to Oda and Simon a home is this place.

## Place as Space

A home as phenomenon is a sheltered place where the persons who live there share space in a variety of ways. What the inhabitants of a home have in common according to Robert Frost is that they cannot be denied access<sup>vii</sup>. In schools the situation is slightly different. Although children and young people are pupils and therefore formally have access to the school and to a particular class or group, the experience of a secure and indisputable space is not always an obvious experience<sup>viii</sup>. Mia, one of the young participants of the study suffers from an anxiety that to her makes feeling secure and welcome in her class especially challenging. She says:

*When I started in this class, I got my own desk in the classroom. It made me feel more secure as I knew that this desk belonged to me. But, because I had*

*low attendance I was not entitled to keep my own desk. I had to sit at vacant desks every time.*

For Mia to have her own desk gives her the sense of safe space. Initially, she had a place which she could arrive, act, move and finally leave when the school day ended. Her desk was her protected space in the classroom. The frequent times when Mia was not in school she still had a desk, and her desk made her absence visible to the others. When she did not fulfill the regulations of the school for keeping her desk, however, she became not only without her desk but actually without a place to be. Mia became a refugee. The double meaning of the word ‘refugee’ is interesting as a tension between fleeing from and taking shelter in a place. Being *away* is possible because you also are *at-home* somewhere. When Mia was deprived of the place she was comfortable with, she lost the place to be away from and to be at-home in, and she lost aspects of her lived space to act and move.

To have space - having-space - is different from being-in-space. As human beings we are fated to be in space, as space is the transcendental life-condition of all man. To have (possess) space refers to a specific human relationship with space, and the way we live and sense space in various modes as open, restricted, refreshing, narrow and so on. To have space (or not), whether personal or shared, is the experiential basis of human spatiality. However, space can be taken away from us – either by interruption or by accident. The verb to *interrupt* from Latin means to “interfere with a legal right” or to “break apart.”<sup>ix</sup> To Mia the rules of the school disrupted her sense of safety and left her without a personal place to move to and from. Her need for a place collided with rules and regulations and hence her space was interrupted, as part of the breakdown of her relationship with the school.

Bollnow (2011) refers to the possibility of space as beyond the sense of mere spatial-physical movement. What we talk about is the person’s ‘space to live’ (*Lebensraum*), a phenomenon that also captures space to move forward in life. My ‘*Lebensraum*’ can be threatened by disturbances, like illness, economic living circumstances, social factors, formal regulation of space, other people’s needs and desires and so forth. Therefore humans must secure their freedom to move, claim his or her space, and defend<sup>x</sup> and protect it (Bollnow, 2011). But sometimes the person does not possess the means to claim, defend or protect. For example, where is the freedom to move forward in life for Oda, who is dependent on other people’s hospitality or on the welfare system’s short time crisis accommodation solutions? How does it feel to be accommodated temporarily and depend on other people’s goodwill and sense of responsibility? Or for Mia, how does she establish a secure place when she is at school, and how does it feel to be without such an anchor. The experience of being a stranger, an intruder, or even a guest, is different from being in your own legitimate place, even if it is shared with family or friends.

For Simon living in his own place - a home - opens up space. His ‘*Lebensraum*’ literally expands. In his case, space is something specific that is determined by his new life situation. He factually lives in his space and forms a relationship with his place. In a certain understanding, it is not truly possible to differentiate between the person and his or her space; they form a unity (Bollnow, 2011). Simon moves from one place to another, in which his life takes place; and his life moves as well. His life unfolds in space, and life unfolds differently in new living places. For Simon, having a concrete space is freeing him from exhausting surroundings. Even though the new place may be smaller in measurable terms, it is more spacious in terms of the life that takes place there. His place gives room for his own life to unfold differently and supports his effort to stand on his own feet. Mia attached her life to a desk in the classroom and then suffered a lack of space for action when she lost her permanent desk. Oda feels she cannot attach to a job without first having a stable home. Simon enjoys his freedom to act from the basis of a home, even though it is also true that to him some days his

home turns to a narrow and inescapable trap. How do we extract the meaning of lived space and place out of these complex and paradoxical experiences? What does in fact freedom to act and move mean to humans?

### **Anchored while Orientated to the Horizon**

David, another of the young participants in the study, is without a job or school opportunities and spends most of his time at home without particular responsibilities and routines. He says that this situation makes him feel that he has *lost his bearings*, a nautical spatial expression indicating the loss of an orientation point, direction or horizon. “I have nothing to attach myself to,” he says. The well-known moorings of activities and plans that secured him in his life have slipped and he feels adrift. Being attached to routine practices and personal commitments keeps David attached and anchored to his life. Without this attachment David feels unmoored and directionless.<sup>xi</sup> The root of the word *attach* used by David, originates from Old French and interestingly has “to support” as one of its meanings<sup>xii</sup>. The sense of attachment that David misses involves the experience of responsibilities, habits and tasks to undertake, over which he has agency.

Plans and dreams that once oriented him in his lived space have faded and consequently, the future he visualized and moved towards has also vanished. In Bollnow’s words (2011), David’s horizon has become invisible to him. Life, as he once knew it now lies outside the horizon of his existence. Horizon, as a geographical term is the line where the vault of heaven seems to rest upon the surface of the earth. As long as it is not obscured by some object, the horizon line in itself limits the view. To the Greek *horizon* means “that which bounds or limits” (Bollnow, 2011, p. 72), and thus as the borderline between sky and earth, the horizon is a paradoxical phenomenon. Horizon both denotes a boundary and a possibility. It describes a limit although at the same time it opens to limitless space and to the not yet known. The dialectic between boundary and openness gives meaning to how we find a direction and might orient toward something ahead of us.<sup>xiii</sup>

While looking toward the horizon – factually or literally - our vision might open to imagination and possible futures. When the horizon is unclear or invisible to us, we feel a loss of functional space that leaves us unprotected and closed in. The future is disconnected with the present. David says: “*I was stuck, I couldn’t get anywhere, my future became uncertain, I just couldn’t see it.*” He no longer has part in the life he used to live. His spatial world has shrunk and is now so tight that he can no longer move. This standstill of life is not his wish but is forced upon him by circumstances beyond his control. When we are hindered in life and forced to a standstill, such as when we become physically or mentally ill, the present cannot escape. Under ordinary circumstances we typically orient to the future. We literally move through a present that supports the future. When we are at a standstill however, the present is saturated with itself and no longer serves the future. Being in the present for the sake of the present feels useless and directionless<sup>xiv</sup>. Waiting for the future to come is a very different and most often an unwanted experience of life than moving toward an open future. The condition might be compared to being in a boat at sea in a dead calm with no possibility to move and no prospect of when or how the circumstances will change; when might the wind rise and set us back on course. David responds with the sense of being blocked, stuck, frozen, and of being unable to move or act. The freedom to act might be related to our capacity to orient ourselves to our circumstances and hence be more able to care for ourselves. The care of self, as Foucault (1996) sees it, is “an exercise of the self on the self” (p. 433). Knowing oneself includes familiarity with and acceptance of social norms and regulations and to consider them relevant

for oneself. To be engaged with knowing and caring for oneself this is to lead a life that to a certain degree is attached and at the same time free.

In David's situation, he received effective support services that eased his sense of being frozen and unfree (Sommer & Saevi, 2017). The support he received anchored him to his life through everyday routines and regular interactions with other people. His days were again attached to life through a tangible structure of direction and his horizon of a future again became visible to him. He says:

*I am no longer in that enclosed and shadowed place. I have moved on. The support I was given opened up a new direction and hope for the possibility of something good to come.*

Being anchored in the present prevents a person from drifting and opens a possibility to orient toward what lies ahead. By envisioning a potential future a person can act and care for him or herself. Acting, by caring for oneself is a way for the person to be anchored as well as open to change, like the poet, Maya Angelou, writes in her poem "On the Pulse of Morning" (2015, p. 266):

*The horizon leans forward,  
Offering you space  
To place new steps of change.*

How can we support young people to be moored in their lives while at the same time helping them to look ahead so that they can move out of a stuck place or a dead calm? Support needs to successfully navigate the paradoxical tension of being in the present while envisioning a possible future.

## **Discontinuity of Life and Interruption of Lived Space**

The way we think about interruptions in school and work is influenced by numerous descriptions of the lack of desirable consecutive and harmonious paths of life for young people. We might start looking at young people's lives and see lack of progress, unproductivity and stagnation. We might think that interruption and discontinuity are abnormal life conditions for people - especially for young people - and something that we should clear away and replace with continuity and harmony. The focus on the correlation between mental health problems and 'outsiderness' might also constitute a risk that we reach generalizations and prejudices about young people who do not appear to be complying with social standards for acceptable behavior. But is that not to pull the wool over the eyes of life – to confuse real life with ideal life?

"Life lay ahead of me. Nothing was settled" (Pettersen, 2010, p. 151). These are the words of young Arvid, the protagonist of Per Petterson's novel *I curse the river of time*. He says that life lies open before him, undetermined, not yet made out. To the reader, his situation at this point in his life seems to be at its most difficult and we expect it to fall apart at any moment. In reality, the future is a condition where nothing is settled. But the future is also a 'lived experience' additional to a 'factual condition.' Future is defined as that which "is yet to be,"<sup>xv</sup> and thus the future is hidden and concealed from the now, although we tend to see our future as a certain continuation of the present (at least when the present is satisfying and to our liking). When the continuation between present and future is interrupted by something negative, and becomes uncertain and undesired, we respond with surprise, anger and a sense of being

treated unjustly. The common expectation to life – and more so the less old we are - is that the (hopefully positive) future lies open ahead of us. The word ‘open’ in many Indio-European languages is the opposite of to be closed or shut, and the etymological meaning of ‘open’ includes space for sight and movement being physically ‘unobstructed’ or ‘unencumbered.’ The adjective “open” has synonyms like ‘accessible, clear, wide, expanded, unbarred, unsealed, airy, passable and navigable.’ Such synonyms indicate how we understand what it means to have an open future, with openness always indicating new possibilities. Thus, the future is not only time that will come, but also space filled with potential activities and movements.

The future however, never happens. What happens is in the present. But my expectations of what is going to happen in the future, my hopes or fears, accompany my present. If I am expecting someone to come to visit, I prepare the event that I expect will come. While doing the preparation I might think of the person and the moments that will come. What I expect to happen, the happiness (or worry, angst, etc.) I feel about the coming visit, shapes the present. The future somehow is mixed with my present being. ”When that which I expect is realized, it will no longer be the future, but the present,” Berger writes (1967, p. 192). Van den Berg (1972) describes how a bottle of wine symbolizes a feeling of loneliness when a friend he is expecting calls and cancels the visit. The bottle of wine that he has opened with expectation now turns to disappointment and loneliness. Our sense of self speaks in the interaction with things around us, like Simon and his home, Mia and her desk or David who lacks routines and things to do.

‘Future’ as a concept is an abstract construction. But my *lived experience* of the future is happening now and manifests in my interactions with the world in the present. Tuan (2014) notes that open space is an image of hopeful time imagined in the present. He continues: “Open space is cone-shaped: it opens up from the point where one stands, to the broad horizon that separates from the sky,” (p. 123). The open space, or the open future begins from where I stand. To Arvid as to David, Simon, Mia and Oda, their future starts from now, despite that the now is difficult and perhaps not so promising. To Arvid in the novel, the year is 1989 and the Berlin Wall collapses, his mother is dying from cancer - each in their way existential changes for him - and from this present his future begins. In the lives of David, Simon, Oda and Mia, and the lives of many others, due to their present life circumstances, their future prospects seem to be built on sand.

## **Concluding Remarks**

To support someone who is working on his or her (problematic and paradoxical) life has to include the recognition that every person has a future that is open and unknown. Effective support services might benefit from being more open and available in alternatives ways, involving optional action paths. Those might include futures that we did not have in mind before we entered the situation (Saevi, 2015). The relation between action and freedom in fact is a paradoxical possibility for the one who provides support and the one who is supported. Arendt (1958) contends: “The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected by him, that he is able to perform that which is infinitely improbable” (p. 158). How do we in concrete situations operationalize an attitude like this?

The starting point for the article, and the phenomenological exploration it entailed, was our wonder about whether, and how, support and space were related, and if some ways of providing support might influence and shape the participants sense of lived space. We see that support and lived space indeed are related in nuanced and complex ways. Both seem to unveil

insights and reflective understanding to us in moments of clarity, before connections and insights escape and hide from attention. Effective support might open, for the supported person, a sense of spaciousness, room to live and be nourish in, and freedom to be and become. There seem to be ways of support that open up space and sustain hope for the present and the future of the young. But the opposite might be true as well. Real support seems to be anchored in care, autonomy and respect for the supported person's own ability and preparedness to live a good life in ways that are open to undetermined changes.

Our study might add a new dimension to the current discourse about young people with mental health challenges, in the context of school and work, by offering a critical view on how the social constructed terms "outside" and "inside," and related terms, could stigmatize some young people and inhibit a deeper understanding of their life situation. The experiential descriptions of the participant's actions and words reveal that lived space may enclose and expand in a variety of modes in school or at home. This can involve the young person being alone or with others. As a quality of professional and personal support the sense of lived space is a non-static, shifting, but always a *there* experience. A phenomenological reflective and interpretive approach to the young participants' lived experiences reveals insights that disturb the common view of what it means to be out of school and/or unemployed. It provides a set of 'abnormal interruptions' that represent discontinuity and stagnation, inconsistent with the ideal of progress and harmony of 'normal' life. The experiences of the young, however, are contextual but not extraordinary. They are not unrecognizable to us as a common human experience of present or future life. Rather, the young people's descriptions depict recognizable human experiences to the ordinary non-linear mode of life as we know it. Life makes detours and unexpected and unwanted turns. Space opens and closes, moves and returns, we live and address the present, past and future and they reflect a basic rhythm of life; like breathing in and out. This rhythm, *expansion* and *contraction*, is life itself. To the young people of this study, as well as to all of us, the horizon of life leans forward and sometimes sustains our moves and actions, and at other times the future is veiled and keeps us blocked and hopeless. This might be the time when discontinuous space of change and interruption might disclose new possibilities.

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<sup>i</sup> See also: Casey, E. S. (2017) Being on the Edge: Body, Place, Climate. In: Janz, B. (Ed.) *Place, Space and Hermeneutics*. Springer. pp. 451-463.

<sup>ii</sup> [www.etymologyonline.com/pressure](http://www.etymologyonline.com/pressure)

<sup>iii</sup> This may (or may not) apply to a house as 'home' but definitely may not apply to a country or a region which you think of as home but from which you have been 'ethnic cleansed' or excluded from by invaders/colonisers.

<sup>iv</sup> We are aware of the period in history, culture and class assumptions inherent in this quote, and think of 'travellers' («gypsies») in say Ireland or England at that time, and today of refugees and people fleeing from war and persecution.

<sup>v</sup> [www.etymonline.com/](http://www.etymonline.com/) / stress

<sup>vi</sup> Such spaces may not be conventional homes for marginalised young people – in fact home may be somewhere they don't like because it is where disagreeable parents live – pseudo homes are share-houses with friends or even parks, video parlours, abandoned buildings, etc. Social programs can provide more suitable pseudo-homes, not just low-cost housing.

<sup>vii</sup> We are aware that home as a social realistic place in society is not always safe and good. Here home is a spatial phenomenon and we explore this phenomenon for its spatial phenomenological qualities relevant for the focus of the article.

<sup>viii</sup> Some homes are insecure and dangerous to children and young people, and some schools are experienced by young people to be better and more secure than others. Here the examples direct our attention to how space and support interrelate and how lived support and lived space are conditioning our sense of self, others and the world.

<sup>ix</sup> [www.etymonline.com/](http://www.etymonline.com/) / interrupt

<sup>x</sup> By light of the situation in many parts of the world today, we might think that to share (our wealth and properties) would be a better word than to protect our home.

<sup>xi</sup> It is not the lack of a 'home' as such, but of a place where he feels at home and a sense of purpose, which could well be a place other than a traditional home – a work place or a youth centre or a community garden.

<sup>xii</sup> [www.etymonline.com/](http://www.etymonline.com/) /attach

<sup>xiii</sup> Even this physical usage of horizon is deceptive for it depends on whether you lie down, stand up or climb a tree or a mountain. You are an agent with respect to the horizon and you can see (e.g. smoke from a fire) and remember, or imagine, things that are over that so-called horizon.

<sup>xiv</sup> The experience of being stuck in the present as a useless and directionless condition might be different for some persons, in particular for small children. Van den Berg's description of the child living in the pure present is an example of how time is sensed differently for adult and children. See: van den Berg, J.H. (1970). *Things—four metabletic reflections*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

<sup>xv</sup> [www.etymonline.com/](http://www.etymonline.com/) / future