Summary

AN ATTEMPT TO CONNECT THE PRISON AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD
This thesis revolves around an action research project conducted in an open prison. The purpose of the project has been to link the outside world closer to the prison in order to enable prisoners to enter social relations that are otherwise absent in the prison context. The project is rooted in the normalisation principle, and the intent is to let this principle unfold to a larger degree than is currently the case. The thesis is based on my reformist impulse, and thus seeks to challenge what a prison should be, resulting in an academic contribution to the discussion of the structuring of prison praxis. The thesis consists of three sections. The first section constructs a frame for the action research project. This section initially describes the different purposes that are historically linked with prisons, after which the complex relationships between the prison and the outside world are examined. The section concludes with a description of the harmful characteristics associated with the prison. Additionally, the theoretical foundation for admitting the outside world into the prison is explored. The second section unfolds the action research project and the thesis' methodological foundation. In this section, I advocate for my choice of action research, which is a research approach where the evolution of praxis is the focus of the research process. Subsequently, the section describes the action research approach and the specific action research project at Søbysøgård Fængssel. Finally, the research methods consisting of ethnographic field research and qualitative interviews are unfolded. The third section of the thesis consists of three articles. The articles make up the thesis' analytical aspect. Both article one and two arise directly from the action research project, while the third article is an analysis of the open prison where the action research project has taken place. The first article, ‘Bringing the outside in – the prisoners' perspective’, explores the prisoners' experiences of the outside world’s presence in the prison. The article makes clear that only a smaller group of prisoners involve themselves in the project. For this group, interaction with the outside world reduces the societal rejection associated with a prison sentence. Furthermore, the prisoners express that meetings with citizens from the outside world enable them to adopt roles other than that of prisoner, by which the relationship creates a feeling of being free from the prison context. However, an episode during the research process highlights that this sense of freedom in a prison is always only temporary. The thesis' second article, ‘When imaginings of the prison and the prisoners meet reality’, changes the perspective from the prisoners to the citizens from the outside that have participated in the social activities. The article presents the paradox attached to the prison in late modernity. While the prison simultaneously occupies significant space in both the public debate and popular culture, it is also an institution that exists in the periphery of society. The article shows that citizens from the outside have a range of imaginations about the prison and the prisoners, which are far from the reality they encounter in the prison. The article asserts that the point of contact created by the project creates an opportunity to change the public’s attitude of the group of prisoners. The thesis' third article, ‘The smell of freedom: The experience of serving time in an open prison’, is an analysis of the open prison as a field. The prison research traditionally focuses on closed prisons, but the last 10 years have seen renewed interest in the qualitative differences that exist in the prison landscape, with the acknowledgement that a prison is not just a prison. The distinct characteristics of the open prison are highlighted through a comparison with the closed prison. The article shows that the experience of freedom is much greater in the open relative to the closed prison, but that some prisoners face difficulty in handling this freedom. The lacking safety measures in the open prison are demanding of the prisoners' self-control, turning prisoners into their own jailors.