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Christmas fairs in Danish churches abroad: a resource mobilisation perspective

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ABSTRACT
An important source of income for Danish churches abroad is the profit from the traditional Christmas fairs. Arranging a successful Christmas fair requires that the church engages in a resource mobilisation effort to get donations of goods and free services for the fair and to raise voluntary labour among the local expatriate Danes. This requires a concern for both Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. Data on economy and number of person-hours spent on Christmas fairs at five Danish churches abroad showed that the profitability of the fairs could be questioned in some cases. During field studies at three of these Christmas fairs, I investigated many volunteers’ motives for spending their time and efforts on the Christmas fair. I also tested their willingness-to-accept (hypothetically) to substitute the Christmas fair with an annual lump sum. The answers showed that the Christmas fairs are highly valued for their strengthening of Gemeinschaft in the expatriate milieu.

The Danish Folk Church has a special constitutional status as the national church of Denmark. The domestic church activities are largely financed through a special income-dependent church tax (levy) paid by the members of the Danish Folk Church. By 1 January 2017 about 76 per cent of the Danish population were members (StatBank Denmark). It is, therefore, unfamiliar to most Danes to finance church life by direct contributions from the congregation. However, this becomes an issue for Danish emigrants when they seek religious services in one of the about 50 Danish churches and congregations abroad (Warburg 2012). The emigrants are here encountered with the fact that the Danish churches abroad by and large must operate on market conditions. However, as will be shown in this article, important limitations to the market thinking are also prevailing among the expatriates participating in fund-raising activities for the church.

The legal and organisational position of the Danish churches abroad

A Danish church abroad is an independent legal entity in the host country managed by a board of trustees, usually called the church committee. The church committee is responsible for all practical affairs of the church, except when it comes to the position of the

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pastor. The decision to fill a vacant position is taken – in conjunction with the church committee – by the umbrella organisation of the church, the Danish Church Abroad/Danish Seamen’s Church. In theological matters, the pastor is supervised by one of the bishops of the Danish Folk Church (Warburg 2012). The Danish state is also more directly involved in many of the Danish churches abroad; for example, in the Danish churches in Berlin, Brussels, London, New York, Paris and Singapore, the local Danish embassy or consulate is or has been represented in the church committee (Warburg 2012). Conversely, a pastor in the Danish churches abroad sometimes serves as social attaché at the embassy and enjoys diplomatic status.

The Danish churches abroad are also in other contexts more than providers of Evangelical-Lutheran Sunday services and pastoral care for the religiously active expatriate Danes who are members of the church. My studies of the Danish churches abroad have demonstrated that they resemble other immigrant religious institutions by playing a much wider role as social and cultural centres for the local Danish immigrant communities (Warburg 2013). Not the least because of its tight connection with the Danish state, a Danish church abroad offers a professional, blue-stamped organisational frame for the expatriate Danish community life.

The number-one resource mobilisation event: the Christmas fair

Although the Danish churches abroad receive some state support in varying degree, a substantial part of their expenses must be covered by private means. This exposes the churches to market conditions to a degree unparalleled to the conditions facing any ordinary parish church in Denmark. Such a challenge forces the Danish churches abroad to engage in systematic resource mobilisation activities in order to acquire the means for upholding congregational life.

Among the most important income-generating activities are the traditional Christmas fairs arranged by many of the Danish churches abroad (Jacobsen and Warburg 2013). The Christmas fairs mobilise and attract a wider circle of Danish expatriates than any other church activity. In fact, in most Danish churches abroad the Christmas fair is advertised as the highlight of the year and the most important yearly event in the church:

The Christmas fair is the biggest event in Frederikskirken [The Danish church in Paris]. With stalls abounding with pork roast [flæskesteg], pixies [nisser] and doughnuts [æbleskiver] there is a genuine Danish Yuletide spirit for every penny. (www.frederikskirkenparis.dk. Accessed 10 October 2014. Translated from the Danish)

The Christmas fair is the biggest event in the church [in Rotterdam], and it is the only thing that people talk about all the year round. It has great social significance for all the volunteers, but for the church it also contributes to secure the economy. (Nyt fra danske sømands- og udlandskirker, no. 4: 15 November 2013. Translated from the Danish)

The Christmas fairs in Danish churches abroad are shaped over the same traditional mould wherever they are held, and in many big cities, the Danish congregations have successfully organised profitable Christmas fairs for decades. The second quotation above indicates that arranging a Christmas fair is not just a way of providing important income to the church – apparently, this form of resource mobilisation has a sustainable resonance among the volunteers, and it has positive social implications for the
congregation and for the local expatriate community. To investigate this assumption, the present paper analyses in more detail the mobilisation of resources at a number of Christmas fairs in Danish churches abroad.

An intriguing aspect which arose from my field trips to Christmas fairs in Danish churches abroad was that many of the volunteers whom I interviewed definitely declared that they were not interested in the Sunday services and never attended them. This leads to the question: Why is it possible for the church to mobilise these non-users to support the church by volunteering at the Christmas fair?

Sources

The present work is part of my study of the Danish churches abroad (Warburg 2012, 2013). The sources were acquired through my field trips to Christmas fairs at three Danish churches in the late autumn 2013 (Berlin) and 2014 (South France and Paris). In addition, the paper draws upon my pilot study of the Christmas fair in Rotterdam in 2010 and from field trips to the Danish churches in Hong Kong, Sydney and Zürich in 2015.

Theory

Resource mobilisation is a traditional and widely applied term among economists who have analysed as diverse issues as improving agriculture in India, why the allied won the Second World War, and devising more effective taxation systems in less-developed countries (Khan 1963; Harrison 1988; Di John 2008). In the study of social movements, the resource mobilisation approach was pioneered by John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, and it quickly gained a position in this field as a more satisfactory alternative to earlier theories based on shared discontents among people (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Klandermans 1984; della Porta and Diani 2006, 11–16). The resource mobilisation approach seeks to direct attention to the less conspicuous, but no less significant, economic and organisational aspects of social movements (Gamson 1987; McCarthy and Zald 2001).

The resource mobilisation approach was soon applied in the sociology of religion in order to understand how some new religions were able to accumulate large fortunes through fund-raising among their followers (Bromley and Shupe 1980; Hall 1988). Conversely, resource mobilisation has been applied to argue why other religious movements fail after some time and disintegrate (Balch 2006). In the same vein, the rise and decline of the anti-cult movements in the USA can be linked to their ability of mobilising people and money in a sustainable way (Shupe 2011). It is also commonly proposed that one of the reasons why Muslims in Western Europe has a disproportionate low political influence is that they have not proven the ability to mobilise the resources to effectively promote their causes within the political system. The argument certainly has merit, but it is hardly the sole explanation (Soper and Fetzer 2003; Tatari 2009).

The resource mobilisation approach is pragmatic and seeks to identify and analyse the resources that a group can raise and has at its disposal. These resources are not just pecuniary in nature; apart from the members’ money, a voluntary organisation such as a congregation in a Danish church abroad can also draw upon the members’ willingness to invest their time in congregational life, and when financial resources are scant, paid labour may
to a certain extent be substituted with voluntary labour. Not all kind of labour is equally useful, however; inexperienced volunteers working for Christmas fairs cannot, for example, take responsibility for decisions on purchasing goods for sale, for accountancy, or for organising and supervising the preparation of food to be served. In a resource mobilisation analysis, it is, therefore, often necessary to distinguish between the human resources of specialists, including leaders, and the unspecialised supporters (Jenkins 1983). This is well known among the religious organisations themselves; for example, a practical handbook of church fund-raising written by a Baptist pastor from Houston spells this issue out: ‘The number one priority in your church budget should be quality staff’ (Bisagno 2002, 9).

Critics of the resource mobilisation approach have targeted its inherent assumption of rationality, stating that the resource mobilisation approach overdoes the rationality of collective action (della Porta and Diani 2006, 14–16). Factors such as ideology, group solidarity and individual expectations as to the value and effect of participating or not cannot be overlooked (Klandermans 1984; Buechler 1993). However, there is a big step from questioning individual cost–benefit considerations to assuming that religious organisations, including the Danish churches abroad, in general, do not act rationally in their mobilisation and management of resources.

In my earlier study of the Bahá’í religion (Warburg 2006), I have found it analytically rewarding to combine a resource mobilisation analysis with the use of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft (Warburg 2006, 374–376). A few introductory comments are needed though (see also Warburg 2006, 111–118 for a more detailed discussion of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft).

The concepts of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft were originally proposed by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1970, 1974). Unfortunately, in much of the literature referring to Tönnies, Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft has been seen primarily as an evolutionist historical transformation of human relations from the rural close community to the modern impersonal society, not as the general and time-independent ideal types, which they ultimately were meant to be (Tönnies 1931; Heberle 1973; Schachinger 1991). The evolutionist understanding of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft can be traced both to ambiguities in Tönnies’ early writings and to Émile Durkheim’s biased reading of Tönnies, and it has been perpetuated in later literature (Tribe 2004).

However, by reading Tönnies carefully it is clear that he goes beyond an idealisation of European societal development and conceives of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft as general ideal types (Normalbegriffe, Tönnies 1931; Heberle 1973; Schachinger 1991). The paired concepts of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft must thus be seen as ideal types of structural relations between people within a given social entity (a business, a religious group, a nation, etc.) (Tönnies 1931; Heberle 1973).

Gemeinschaft relations are unspecific and rest on sentiments of kinship, neighbourhood and friendship; Gesellschaft relations are limited and specified and are based on rationality and calculation (Tönnies 1931; Heberle 1973). This, however, should not lead to mistaking Gemeinschaft with informal groups and Gesellschaft with formal groups (Cahnman 1973). Nor is Gemeinschaft the characteristic social order of the village, and Gesellschaft that of the city – a misconception that can be traced to influential American sociologists, in particular, Talcott Parsons (Schachinger 1991). As Tönnies emphasised: ‘the essence of both Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft is found interwoven in all kinds of associations’ (Tönnies
2001, 17–18). The fact that a group of people know each other well and are bound together by sentiments of loyalty does not exclude that formal rules play a role. On the contrary, Gemeinschaft relations are often best served when people in a group also obey formal rules and where the practical needs of the group are managed in a rational way.

Both activities that strengthen Gemeinschaft and activities that strengthen Gesellschaft are important for any kind of group or community – at least all those based on voluntary participation (Warburg 2006, 374–420). There must be activities that fulfil the members’ expectations of Gemeinschaft – otherwise, they may become disinterested in participating in community life. However, proper functioning of the organisational backbone of the community, in this case, a Danish church abroad, requires administrative efficiency and rational management of resources, which are Gesellschaft-oriented activities. Any voluntary group embarking on a specific project – in this case arranging a Christmas fair – therefore, face the strategic issue of how to mobilise resources most effectively, and at the same time find a satisfactory balance between activities that strengthen Gemeinschaft and those that strengthen Gesellschaft (Warburg 2006, 376).

In the present study of resource mobilisation at the Christmas fairs in Danish churches abroad, I shall show that the Christmas fair is the foremost event that serves both Gesellschaft and Gemeinschaft purposes – Gesellschaft through the provision of money, and Gemeinschaft through creating a space where Danish expatriates nurture their Danish belonging. I shall further apply a resource mobilisation approach investigating the significance of the two purposes for arranging the Christmas fairs, year after year.

**Christmas fairs in three Danish churches abroad**

Christmas fairs in Danish churches abroad are very much like each other wherever they are held, as mentioned above. There are local variations, of course, but these are expressions of a pragmatic adaption to the available resources in the form of people and premises.

The Danish church in South France does not have its own church building, and the Christmas fair takes place in a small hotel rented for the purpose. Likewise, in Zürich, the congregation borrows the school of a local Reformed Church for the fair. However, in those Danish churches abroad that have their own building, such as Berlin, Paris and Rotterdam, the church premises are used for the fair. The church room is utterly transformed during the weekend in November when the fair is held. The altar and the furniture are set aside, the cross above the altar is covered (in Paris for example with the Danish flag), and the church room and the adjacent space, both inside and outside, is one large Christmas fair area.

The many stalls are decorated in red, green and gold, and volunteers man the stalls and sell Danish food items, Danish Christmas decorations, Danish knitwear, second-hand books, second-hand children’s clothes and other items according to individual stall entrepreneurs’ interests and access to supplies of goods. Food and drinks are offered for sale, and tradition dictates that this always includes hot sausages, Danish Christmas doughnuts (æbleskiver), freshly prepared Danish open sandwiches (smørrebrød), hot spicy red wine (glögg), beer and Danish schnapps.

The core customers in the fairs are expatriate Danes, of course. A survey study from 2009, Religion Among Danes Abroad, showed that the respondents’ Danish identity was
particularly expressed at Christmas, where Danish Christmas traditions are held in esteem (Jacobsen and Warburg 2013). Thus, 64 pct. declared that they perceived themselves to be most Danish at Christmas time. The Christmas fair offers the special foods and items which characterise a ‘real’ Danish family Christmas, and it, therefore, supports the customers’ sense of their belonging to the imagined community of Danes.

However, the fairs also attract many people with no particular relation to Denmark; in Berlin, where there is a great tradition for Christmas fairs, there were between 4000 and 5000 visitors in 2013, and the far majority of them were Germans. This segment of customers is rather important for the Gesellschaft purpose of the Christmas fair, namely to generate income to the Danish church in Berlin. The pastor and her husband clearly expressed this in my interview with them on 3 December 2013: ‘This is cool business. We sell to the Germans to make money, but it is also a promotion of Denmark.’

Tradition also dictates that the Christmas fair is officially opened by a Danish ambassador or consul. This little ceremony where a red ribbon is cut is a very strong signal to visitors that the arrangement enjoys the support of the Danish state.

**Organisational embedment of the Christmas fairs**

During the Christmas fair period, all other churchly activities are suspended. In most of the Danish churches abroad, the pastor is essentially the director of the Christmas fair and assisted in this capacity by a few key persons, usually present or former members of the church committee. A competent accountant is essential, for example. The pastor’s function is not a question of voluntary work – the duty of organising the Christmas fair is part of the employment interview with a new pastor. I was informed by the chairman of the church committee in Paris that they would dismiss a pastor who, rather hypothetically though, turned out not to take this responsibility seriously.

There are some differences in the way the organisation work is carried out. In South France where the congregation is relatively small, the pastor is not only the top manager of the Christmas fair but also takes care of many of its practical details, such as renting and transporting extra frost cabinets for the food to be sold. In Rotterdam, in Berlin and in Paris, the pastor has an important managerial role in relation to the paid church assistants who take care of much of the practical work. In Paris, which is the biggest of the Christmas fairs, experienced volunteers run the different stalls as separate businesses, which include that the stall managers have the responsibility for buying the goods to their stall. This flat organisation was introduced in the Paris church in 1972 and has functioned well since then (Grosbøll 2003, 172).

In all cases, the workload on the pastor is considerable, and from my interviews with the pastors, I estimate that at least 15–25 pct. of the work of a pastor in a Danish church abroad is associated with the Christmas fair.

The anchoring of the Christmas fair in an established organisation and the fact that it aims at generating a substantial and predictable profit for the church spur a professionalisation of the key persons involved and a routinisation of the activities. At the same time, the Christmas fair is dependent on a large number of other volunteers who have the interest but are inexperienced in Christmas fairs, and many have signed up for this voluntary work for the first time. There are plenty of tasks that these inexperienced volunteers can take care of after a little instruction. For example, arranging the Christmas fair in Berlin
required the assistance of about 80 volunteers who primarily manned the many stalls that were temporarily erected inside and outside the church. Many of these volunteers were young people who did manual work, such as baking Danish Christmas doughnuts.

In Paris, the youth secretary arranges a get-together evening every Tuesday for the many Danish students and au-pairs who live in Paris. These young people are informed that in return for these free evenings they are expected to work for the Christmas fair. Typically, they are asked to man the different stalls, help in the kitchen, and to assist with unpacking before the fair and tidying up afterwards. When I interviewed the au-pairs they told that very few of them attended Sunday service, neither in Paris nor in Denmark. The used the church for social reasons; as one of them said: ‘The reason why I chose to go to Paris [as an au-pair] was because of the Danish church. Then I knew that I could always go there if I wanted to meet other au-pairs.’

So in November, these young people are enrolled in the rank and files of unskilled helpers. In Paris, I saw five to six young men, all busy making open sandwiches for the kitchen. There are established traditions in the making and decoration of different types of open sandwiches, and in Danish restaurants, these sandwiches are prepared by professionals having three years of training and education in this trade. Such a professional lady was, of course, in charge of the kitchen, while the young men obviously were not trained. They were therefore provided with photos of standard types of open sandwiches. Working tongue-in-cheek, they prepared the sandwiches, although hardly at a competitive pace!

The management structure of the Christmas fair is not static, but bound to change in response to the changing possibilities for resource mobilisation. During my interviews with stall managers at the two Christmas fairs in France, it became quite clear that donations from businesses are a dwindling resource. It seems as if more and more Danish companies are not as generous as they used to be some years ago supporting the Christmas fairs with donations – they are probably more focused on calculations of return on investments than of supporting activities just because they are Danish. Another trend affecting resource mobilisation is a demographic transition among the volunteers, where the present cadres of housewives or women working part-time are growing older and approaching retirement without apparently being released by other, younger women with a surplus of time for voluntary work.

There is little doubt that these trends will affect the resource mobilisation negatively in the future. For example, I learned from the Christmas fair in Paris that the turnover from the fair has risen during the last years, but the profit has stagnated, indicating a decline in the mobilisation of resources in the form of donations of goods, either for free or at reduced prices. It could also be formulated so that the Christmas fair in Paris seems to be losing some traditional income-generating social capital among Danish companies, and the fair, therefore, has to operate more and more on pure market conditions.

**Resource mobilisation in quantitative terms**

Through interviews with key persons and use of other sources such as written manning plans I was able to estimate the person-hours spent on the different tasks for arranging the Christmas fairs in Berlin 2013, and in South France, Hong Kong and Sydney in
These estimates are given in Table 1, where I have categorised the different tasks as mainly *Gesellschaft*-oriented, mainly *Gemeinschaft*-oriented or intermediates of both. *Gesellschaft*-oriented tasks are primarily tasks carried out by one or a few people working alone, such as planning work, ordering of goods, contacting potential sponsors and similar administrative work. Such work is mostly the pastor’s responsibility, though with the support from the paid assistants in the larger churches. *Gemeinschaft*-oriented tasks typically include manning of the stalls by the large number of people who volunteered for these tasks and evidently enjoyed the company of each other. This is obviously a popular task; for example, I was told at the Christmas fair in South France in 2014, that there even was a waiting list for serving as a volunteer!

As appears from Table 1, the Christmas fair in Berlin needed to mobilise 2400 person-hours, which is equivalent to one-and-a-half years of full-time work for one person working typically about 1600 hours per year. Of these, 2400 person-hours, 1300 hours are mainly *Gesellschaft*-oriented and 1100 hours are mainly *Gemeinschaft*-oriented. The additional hours spent on preparing items at home for sale are not included in the total sum of person-hours, as they should rather be regarded as donations on par with the many other donations from individuals or commercial suppliers.

The turnover from the Christmas fair in Berlin is typically about 28,000 EUR, and the profit is around 18,000 EUR, according to information from the pastor and her husband. This is a profit rate of about 64 pct., which should be an attractive business. However, it required an investment of 2400 person-hours to obtain this profit, which means a return of only 7.5 EUR (= 18 000/2400) per hour. This is on a par with the minimum wage of 8.5 EUR per hour in Germany introduced in 2015, and this indicates that if the Berlin Christmas fair was run on a strictly commercial basis, it would be a rather poor business.

Similar brief economic analyses are given in Table 2 for all five Christmas fairs, and the figures will be briefly commented upon.

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**Table 1. Person-hours spent on four Christmas fairs.**

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<tr>
<td>Contact sponsors, ordering, organise manning, receive and store goods, economy control(^a)</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>420(^b)</td>
<td>380(^b)</td>
<td>Gesellschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set up stalls and tables, cleaning, re-organise church room, tidying up(^c)</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Gesellschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make open sandwiches, bake cakes, cook soup (Berlin only)(^c)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Gesellschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manning of stalls, jazz band (Berlin only)(^d)</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Gemeinschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum of person-hours</td>
<td>2400</td>
<td>870</td>
<td>1050</td>
<td>950</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional voluntary resources(^e)</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gemeinschaft</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Interviews with the pastors.

\(^b\) Estimated as proportional to the manning distribution in South France.

\(^c\) Interviews, written manning plan.

\(^d\) Participant observations, interviews.

\(^e\) Needlework (Berlin) and Christmas decorations (South France) prepared at home and sold at the fairs. Data from interviews.

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1. The available data on the personnel resources at the Christmas fair in Paris were too incomplete to allow the same specification as for the other fairs. This is partly due to the decentralised organisation of the fair, as discussed above. My own rough estimate from participation observations is that the fair, which runs over three days, requires at least about the double of the person-hours as the fair in Berlin (2400 person-hours, cf. Table 1). This gives an estimate of at least 4800 person-hours for the Christmas fair in Paris.
The person-hours spent in South France are 870 person-hours in total, which is equivalent to 6½ month of full-time work for one person. Four hundred and twenty person-hours, or a little less than half of the total hours, are mainly Gesellschaft-oriented. The profit is higher than in Berlin, and this is obtained by investing less than half of the person-hours. This corresponds to a return of 29 EUR per hour, which is a decent but not impressive profit. The better profitability of the Christmas fair in South France compared with that of the fair in Berlin can probably be ascribed to two factors: the volunteers are nearly all experienced in organising the Christmas fair, and the expatriate community in South France is more well-to-do and is willing to spend more money. For example, the popular open sandwiches were sold in South France at twice the price in Berlin, although they were identical in composition. According to the accountant’s data, this price policy made the stall with open sandwiches one of the most profitable at the fair in South France.

The turnover from the Christmas fair in Paris which runs over three days is typically around 150 000 EUR; there are about 3500 visitors and the profit is about 87,000 EUR, placing this fair in a league above the other Christmas fairs. A crude estimate of the return on invested person-hours is 18 EUR per hour.

The data from Hong Kong and Sydney indicate that these two Christmas fairs are rather profitable. The high profitability may to some extent be due to that these fairs only run over one day, which means that less person-hours are invested. However, the Christmas fair in Hong Kong undoubtedly also profits from the many well-to-do expatriate Danes there.

In a comparative light, the Christmas fair in Berlin stands out as having a peculiar low profitability, but I have not been able to pinpoint if there is a bias caused by an underestimate of the total earnings or an overestimate of the input of person-hours.

### Valuation of the Christmas fair as a congregational community venture

A Christmas fair shares characteristics with community ventures such as establishing a local festival, which also strengthens local community cohesion besides generating local economic activity (Vestrum and Rasmussen 2013). For a community venture to be successful it is important to be embedded in the community with mutual trust and reciprocity between the actors (Vestrum and Rasmussen 2013). This is clearly the case among those engaged in the Christmas fairs, and the embeddedness even extends beyond the community of Danish expatriates to other resource providers; for example, in Berlin, I was told that a German neighbour to the church who was a professional electrician usually established all the outdoor electric installations for free.
The profit from the Christmas fairs is important – it covers about one-third of the running expenses of the church in Berlin, about one-fourth of the running expenses of the church in South France, and nearly half of the running expenses of the church in Paris. It is evident that the churches cannot do without the income from the Christmas fairs. However, the above calculations demonstrate that the churches must mobilise many person-hours to arrange the Christmas fair, and that the return on invested person-hours is rather modest, at least in the case of the Christmas fairs in Berlin and Paris. So, is it really worth for the expatriate community to have all the trouble arranging the Christmas fair?

In order to probe into this issue, I interviewed many central persons who were involved in arranging the Christmas fairs at the churches in Berlin, South France and Paris. The interviewees included the pastors, the chairpersons and the treasurers of the church committee, the senior staff manning the stalls, and a number of other key persons. I asked them why the Christmas fair was so important to the congregation. Most of them answered that it was really a cosy event, and the labour was meaningful because the money was needed. The fair was also regarded as important for the social coherence of the congregation and for attracting the local Danes to the church. The informants knew that most of the volunteers only came for the Christmas fair.

The families with children come for the Christmas fair, and the newly arrived come and meet the church and the pastor. It is only the grey- and white-haired who attend the Sunday services, but everybody comes for the Christmas fair. (Interview with the chairman of the church committee in South France, 22 November 2014)

The church is also known for its Christmas fair. It is part of the Berliner landscape. Many Danes only come to the church once in a year, and that is for the Christmas fair. Here, young and old are together. (Interview with the vice-chairman of the church committee in Berlin, 30 November 2013)

A key question in the interviews was:

Imagine that I am a millionaire and that I detest Christmas fairs. I even detest Christmas fairs so much that I will pay the congregation an annual sum in ten years for giving up the Christmas fair entirely. How much should I then pay?

Sometimes I added: ‘I can inform you that the profit from the fair is about X EUR (X depending on which of the fairs I visited).’ This question was answered by about 40 interviewees altogether in Berlin, in South France and in Paris.

The question is basically asking the interviewees to give their valuation of the Christmas fair. Economists here distinguish between willingness-to-pay measures of value and willingness-to-accept measures of value when asking interviewees to engage in deals such as exchanging the Christmas fair for an annual sum (Shogren et al. 1994). Willingness-to-pay typically involves situations where the alternatives are readily exchangeable, for example, asking car drivers how much they will pay to use a new toll road to save some minutes of driving time. In short, willingness-to-pay indicates how much people are willing to pay for gaining something. Willingness-to-accept often concerns a more far-reaching question, such as the acceptance of losing something of immaterial value if an economic compensation is given. An example from the Bible is the story about Esau who accepted to give
away his birth right to Jacob for a bowl of lentil stew. In general, the willingness-to-accept value is considerably higher, often many times higher, than the willingness-to-pay value which better reflects a true market value, provided that the market exists (Shogren et al. 1994). Cases of willingness-to-accept rarely involve a real market, however; and the answers are much influenced by individual values because the deal involves items that are not ready substitutes to each other (Shogren et al. 1994).

The answering pattern to the millionaire question, therefore, depended very much on how the interviewees perceived the consequences of the deal offered by my imagined millionaire. The majority were not immediately ready to accept the deal at all, namely to give up arranging the fair – ‘it would be like selling your own soul’, one answered at the fair in Berlin. About half of the informants gave similar ‘protest’ answers, such as ‘10 million Euros’; ‘There are things you can’t buy for money. We only see each other once in a year, and it is so cosy’; ‘I will drag this millionaire type down in the bicycle cellar and beat him up until he begins to think differently.’ Several of the informants at the Christmas fair in South France said to me that I would have to ask the pastor about this, demonstrating how central the pastor is in the arrangement of the Christmas fair. However, not only this pastor but all the pastors I asked declined to engage in the millionaire question, arguing that it was the congregation’s decision to hold the Christmas fair.

Among the other half who were willing to consider the deal at all, some informants wriggled like a worm on a hook before answering, while others thought it over and then typically asked for an annual sum of between two and five times the profit. Quite a few informants added ‘but we will hold the Christmas fair anyway!’ which essentially is a protest answer. Only a few, about five of the altogether forty informants were immediately willing to accept the millionaire’s deal for an annual sum of less than twice the profit. These few informants apparently regarded the Christmas fair as having its primary function of generating income to the church, because they were willing to seriously consider alternative funding opportunities.

The informants were contacted at random during the fairs and they probably represent the majority of those with vested interests in the Christmas fair. However, the amount of money mentioned is only indicative and not a validated data set which can be used in a quantitative assessment of the valuation of the Christmas fairs. Furthermore, the question is hypothetical and it is known that people do not react in the same way when facing a real choice and not a hypothetical and ironic situation like the offer by the Christmas-fair-hating millionaire (Fitzsimons and Shiv 2001). But the qualitative conclusion that can be drawn is valid: The far majority of informants regarded the Christmas fair as something of much more value than the Gesellschaft-oriented purpose of earning money. They either rejected to ‘sell’ the Christmas fair altogether or they claimed a sum which far exceeded the pecuniary value of holding the fair. They were more steadfast than Esau tempted by his hunger! So, although everybody agreed that the Christmas fair would not give meaning

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2Willingness-to-accept may also involve asking people how much they are willing to pay for reducing the risk of an undesirable event. For example, Shogren et al. (1994) asked people in an experiment how much extra they were willing to pay for food where the risk of Salmonella infection and other food-borne diseases was virtually eliminated. Here, the informants are asked to substitute money for a further reduction in the minute risk of catching an illness which may be fatal. If the alternative has a low probability to occur but has drastic consequences if it occurs, as is the case with the example of food poisoning, it is generally observed that people are willing to pay more than probabilities dictate for avoiding severe negative consequences (Kahneman and Tversky 1979). If that were not the case, insurance companies would go out of business.
if it was not profitable, the majority of respondents simply did not regard the Christmas fairs as a classic economic exchange which would be selling individual Christmas items to individual customers with the purpose of maximising the profit of the church.

Like many other markets, a Christmas fair in the Danish churches abroad is only to some extent about ‘the meeting of supply and demand between the self-interested, rational, maximising individual of the liberal-utilitarian model’ (Gauthier, Woodhead, and Martikainen 2013, 17). Continuing with these authors, the Christmas fairs fit squarely into their characterisation:

Markets are marketplaces: loci for complex social interactions and social re-formations. They are socially instituted and socially embedded institutions that are best described as networked and hyper-mediatised arenas of mutual exposure. They are also opportunities for the dissemination of information that can serve as resources for experimentations and interpretations. With respect to religion today as with the whole of consumer societies, ‘markets’ are where the complex rapport linking identity and recognition occur. (Gauthier, Woodhead, and Martikainen 2013, 18)

To accept the millionaire’s offer would mean to give up all these Gemeinschaft-strengthening side-effects of the Christmas fairs as marketplaces.

A space of expatriate gemeinschaft

So what kind of Gemeinschaft is valued by the volunteers? Some of the volunteers also regularly attended the Sunday services, but as described above, others – the majority of volunteers – never did. Quite a few of the Christmas fair volunteers also supported the church economically without even being registered members of the church. For example, a professional Danish cook donated and personally sliced all the smoked salmon for the sandwich buffet in Paris. His reason for giving this support ran as follows:

When I came to Paris for the first time and did not know even one person, I went down to see where the church was. I sneaked by because I did not want anybody to see me, and I did not enter. I just wanted to know where it was, because if one day it became really difficult for me, it would be there, and I could get help there. (Interview in Paris, 30 November 2014)

This informant supports the church to be sure that it exists for the sake of all eventualities apart from housing the Christmas fair. In this respect, he is representative of many Danes of today who appreciates the existence of the church but rarely, if ever attend the Sunday services (Gundelach, Iversen, and Warburg 2008, 136–149). When they use the church, they do it in a more selective way, choosing only what fulfils their individual needs, rather than following the conventional practices of active church-goers.

The Christmas fair is the visible, tangible result of the joint mobilisation of labour and money among both religiously active and religiously passive expatriate Danes. When the Christmas fair is arranged by a Danish church abroad it offers the opportunity for the expatriate Danes to gather in an unconditional social space that feels officially Danish, but is owned and controlled by the expatriate community (Warburg 2013). Data from the Danish Seamen’s church in Singapore demonstrated that the mobilisation at Christmas-related events involved more expatriates than any other event in the church (Warburg 2013). This was confirmed in the present field studies and reflects the paramount symbolic significance of Christmas for Danish identity. I suggest that this resource
mobilisation effort every year creates a temporary but unique space of expatriate Danish Gemeinschaft, which is so highly valued by the expatriates that a considerable contingent among them is willing to invest their time, labour and money in the Christmas fair.

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**Notes on contributor**


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