ARL ACADEMY FOR TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE LEIBNIZ ASSOCIATION

Andersen, Hans Thor; Nielsen, Rikke Skovgaard; Nordberg, Lene Wiell; Buch, Sven; Andersen, Anne Juel:

The Danish Report

https://doi.org/10.60683/zqgy-1n80

In:
Alves, Sónia; Andersen, Hans Thor; Keunen, Els; Vuksanović-Macura, Zlata (Eds.) (2026): Social Housing Opportunities and Challenges – Perspectives from Denmark, Germany, Portugal and Serbia. Hanover, 8-23. = Arbeitsberichte der ARL 40.
https://doi.org/10.60683/49v1-jz17

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Leibniz Gemeinschaft

Hans Thor Andersen, Rikke Skovgaard Nielsen, Lene Wiell Nordberg,
Sven Buch, Anne Juel Andersen

THE DANISH REPORT

Aalborg / Photo Sónia Alves

Contents

1 Characterisation of "social housing" in Danmark
1.1 What are the goals of social housing?
1.2 What is the proportion of social housing in relation to the total housing stock? What does this measure include?
1.3 Who can get access to social housing, and by which procedure and criteria?
1.4 What is the socio-economic composition of the population living in social housing projects?
1.5 Who owns the social housing stock?
1.6 Who pays for the construction and maintenance of social housing?
2 Characterisation of "affordability"
2.1 How is "affordability" defined in conceptual and operational terms in the country's social housing system?
2.2 What mechanisms guarantee that social housing is affordable for households?
3 Policy trajectory
3.1 Main developments in the recent past
3.2 Current main challenges of the social housing sector
3.3 The future of the social housing sector
4 Social housing in Aalborg
4.1 How does the local situation compare with the national characterisation presented above?
4.2 What have been the main developments in the recent past (30 years)?
4.3 What are the current main challenges and developments in the sector, and how do you see the future development of the sector?
References and further reading

Abstract
The Danish housing sector, which most closely resembles "social housing" in other countries, is the "public housing" sector (although it is privately owned). It is open to anyone who signs up for a waiting list - regardless of income and family circumstances. The sector is also called "non-profit" housing because the homes are rented out for the costs of land purchase, construction and financing, but not for profit to the developer (a housing company). The sector has tenants' democracy, i.e. tenants have a decisive influence on, for example, renovations and in relation to operations. The sector dominates in some suburbs of Copenhagen, where its share can reach over 50% of the housing stock; nationally, the sector constitutes approx. 20% of all housing. Residualisation is visible with a growing share of vulnerable groups among its tenants – e.g. single people, early retirees, people with an ethnic groups and low-income groups. The result is, among other things, the controversial 'ghetto law'.

Keywords
Non-profit housing – access for all – residualisation – private but public regulated – rent support to low-income households

1 Characterisation of "social housing" in Danmark

1.1 What are the goals of social housing?

The Danish social housing sector is open to everyone who puts their name on a waiting list (Skovgaard Nielsen & Haagerup 2017; Skovgaard Nielsen et al. 2023). Thus, it is not as such a social housing sector, as it is not only for households in a deprived or disadvantaged situation. Rather, it is a non-profit sector that offers housing for everyone, regardless of financial situation. Applicants are not means-tested, either before they move in or subsequently. Contracts are permanent. For three main reasons, it does make sense to call it social housing. Firstly, because, in an international comparison this sector most closely resembles social housing sectors in other countries. Secondly, because the sector also provides housing for those who are unable to find housing themselves and houses the majority of those with limited options and finances for housing. Private rental housing, which could be considered an alternative for those who cannot afford to buy, is often either expensive (if built after 1991, which means no rent control), hard to get into (if built before 1992 and thus subject to rent control) or, in rural areas in particular, of very poor quality. Thirdly, because over the years the sector has become increasingly marginalised (Blackwell & Bengtsson 2023), making the sector more like a social housing sector than it was originally and ideologically planned to be.

The purpose of social housing in Denmark is "to make suitable housing available to everyone who needs it at a reasonable rent and to give the residents influence over their own living conditions" (Bekendtgørelse af lov om almene boliger m.v. § 5b). The core activities of a social housing organisation are to build, rent out, manage, maintain and modernize social housing. In addition, the individual housing organisations must, when renting, cater to groups who have difficulty in acquiring a suitable home under normal market conditions. Moreover, housing organisations must try to aim at a varied composition of residents.

A municipality has the right to offer one in every four vacant units to citizens who cannot find housing themselves, e.g. people leaving the psychiatric system. In return for this, the municipalities cover 10% of construction and land purchase costs.

1.2 What is the proportion of social housing in relation to the total housing stock? What does this measure include?

A fifth (20,8%) of all dwellings belongs to the social housing sector (2023). All units are for permanent residential use. They are inhabited by 17% of the Danish population (Statistics Denmark, n.d). The measure includes only social housing units (*almene boliger*); no other types of housing are relevant to include, as the only other types of housing with a social aim are institutions e.g. children's homes, mental hospitals and care homes. Social housing falls into three main categories: family housing, student housing and sheltered housing units for the elderly (accessible units).

1.3 Who can get access to social housing, and by which procedure and criteria?

All citizens have access through signing up on waiting lists for the individual housing organisations, cf. 1.1. Originally, you received an offer for housing when it was your turn in the queue. This is however not the case anymore – at least only with some exceptions. Recent years, in particular since 2018, has introduced limitations for some groups in gaining access to specific social housing areas. Attempts to change the social composition of the most deprived areas towards increased social mix has meant that in some areas people in job or under education are given priority, making the wait longer for those who are not, and in other areas, unemployed people are not able to get housing and thus have to apply elsewhere (Skovgaard Nielsen & Kromhout 2023). All in all, the otherwise simple and equal waiting list system has become more complex and more unequal (Skovgaard Nielsen et al. 2023). This is described further in section 3.3, under the development tendencies in the Danish social housing sector, in particular the tendencies on municipal allocation and the section on increased use of flexible letting.

Generally, the social housing sector still has a strong competitive position in the larger cities, as it provides attractive housing at prices considerably below market value. Consequently, the waiting lists for social housing in the larger cities are long. In rural areas, quite the opposite is true due to low demand, and private landlords are sometimes forced to accept lower rents. However, as social housing rents are cost-based, they do not follow the market, causing empty units and economic challenges for the housing department. It is possible to move within a housing department via an internal waiting list, on which current residents have priority.

1.4 What is the socio-economic composition of the population living in social housing projects?

As described, the social housing sector is accessible for everyone. Therefore, it is per definition not only for those of limited means or in a challenged social or housing position. In comparison to countries with a means-tested sector, it will thus have a less socially deprived profile. However, as also described above, the sector does have a less affluent composition compared to society in general, mirroring a general trend of marginalisation of the social housing sector across the world (Borg, 2019). The sector is the only part of the Danish housing market that takes social considerations into account when allocating vacant housing as it is used by the municipality for aiding those in acute housing needs. Furthermore, the sector offers some of the most affordable units in Denmark, thus offering good quality housing at affordable rates for those of limited means. Thus, the social housing sector houses a growing share of unemployed people, early retirees, and ethnic minorities (Skovgaard Nielsen et al. 2023). At the same time, the Danish taxation rules favour home-owners as interest rates are deducted from income tax. This has been part of producing a clear social split between upper- and middle-class home-owners and working class tenants.

Generally, the following groups are overrepresented in the social housing sector in Denmark: elderly people, people of low income, early retirement pensioners, unemployed people, people of non-Western origin, people with low educational outcome and single households. Of the residents between the ages of 18 and 64, 60% of residents in the social housing sector are in employment while in the population in general, this figure is 78% (4. Quarter 2022) (Statistics Denmark, n.d.).

1.5 Who owns the social housing stock?

The sector is owned by private, independent non-profit housing associations. The housing associations vary greatly in size: the largest have around 20,000 homes, the smallest less than 10. Most associations have housing units in specific parts of the country while only few have units all over the country. The day-to-day operations are in some cases handled by a management company; here, KAB (*Københavns Almene Boligselskab*) and DAB (*Dansk Almennyttigt Boligselskab*) are the largest with 60,000 and 50,000 homes respectively. The 511 housing organisations of Denmark are organised in BL (*Boligselskabernes Landsorganisation*), i.e. the national association of housing associations.

1.6 Who pays for the construction and maintenance of social housing?

The overall principle is that the costs of purchasing land and constructing dwellings is paid by the future residents. Similar with maintenance. However, local governments have the right to dispose of up to 25% of all vacant units to solve social and/or acute housing problems. In return, local governments must finance 10% of the land and construction costs. With the exception of 2% that is covered by tenant deposits, the remainder is borrowed at market conditions, although with state guarantees. This model has generally survived a series of social, economic and political changes in the last fifty years and the sector continues to supply affordable housing.

2 Characterisation of "affordability"

2.1 How is "affordability" defined in conceptual and operational terms in the country's social housing system?

Rent is not defined as affordable, but "reasonable rent" (§5,1 in Act on social housing). In practice, the basic principle is "cost based" – i.e. rent depends on costs for purchasing land and construction of buildings plus running costs for operating the housing stock. The overall principle behind the non-profit housing organisations was to provide decent and well-maintained dwellings to ordinary people at lowest possible costs. Originally, the housing was organised by labour unions and aimed for members of the working class. The social concerns were introduced in the Social Housing Act, as local and national governments assumed responsibility for providing good housing

for socially vulnerable households. The Act regulates the sector by e.g. defining what non-profit housing is and the different types of non-profit housing, determining the economic rules, and stipulating the role of the resident democracy (Lilius & Skovgaard Nielsen 2024), the rules for rent setting and the allocation rules. Local governments are responsible for provision of housing for vulnerable groups, and the municipalities can fulfil this obligation through the right of assignment for every fourth vacant dwelling in the social housing sector. This right is also stipulated in the Social Housing Act, as are the principles for rent-setting.

The principle of cost-based rents does also mean that rents within the sector vary due to year of construction, location and other local peculiarities. There is then a rent gap between dwellings in older and newer estates. Social housing from the 1950s are often located relatively close to city centres and are attractive due to their location and low rent. In contrast, more recent estates may be located at less attractive localities (e.g. outskirts of larger cities) and financed at market-based costs (no discounts or public support for construction). In particular, building materials and construction-ready land have risen sharply in price in recent years. Moreover, while the social housing sector is competitive in the larger cities (as it does not include a profit), it cannot follow market prices at a declining market. Social housing is thus relatively more expensive in rural areas and smaller towns compared to private rental dwellings. Rising rents and property prices have made the sector attractive in the larger cities. In mid-November 2023 the sector had no vacant family dwellings in the three largest cities of Denmark (Metropolitan Copenhagen, Aarhus and Odense). Aalborg city, the fourth largest city and the case study city for DASH, had only 22 vacant units. Since the social housing sector is the only part of the housing market that is used for housing households with acute housing needs, aiding vulnerable groups is particularly difficult in the larger cities. With just over 100,000 households living in Aalborg, 22 vacant homes do not ensure that the municipality can provide suitable housing for all people in need. Most of the vacant social housing dwellings are found in medium and small towns in Jutland. As the departments are financially independent units, empty units become a substantial, local problem.

2.2 What mechanisms guarantee that social housing is affordable for households?

For those who struggle to pay rent, rent subsidies are available to those of limited financial funds, e.g. low-income families, students and pensioners. Cost-based rents do not guarantee affordability; it depends on the market costs for construction and land. To support low-income households, the social legislation supports low-income groups. This support depends on household size, income as well as the size and costs of the dwelling. One person can at the maximum get support for 65 m^2, two persons up to 85 m^2 and for each additional person +20 m^2. The maximum support is 592 € monthly (2023). These rules apply also to people living in private rentals. People living in cooperatives or owners may also get public support, but this must be paid back when they sell their dwelling.

3 Policy trajectory

3.1 Main developments in the recent past

The social housing sector in Denmark gained substantial importance in the 1930s and in the post-war period, when the sector accounted for close to half of all new construction. Social housing was strongly represented in the big cities but was also built in smaller towns across the country.

With the boom from the late 1950s, private construction grew tremendously in scope; it resulted in the construction of just over 900,000 homes between 1960 and 1985. However, the social housing sector also took part in the growth with new construction of just over 250,000 homes in the same period. The strong economic slowdown from the late 1970s also affected housing construction. Especially the housing construction in the private sector declined sharply (figure 1).

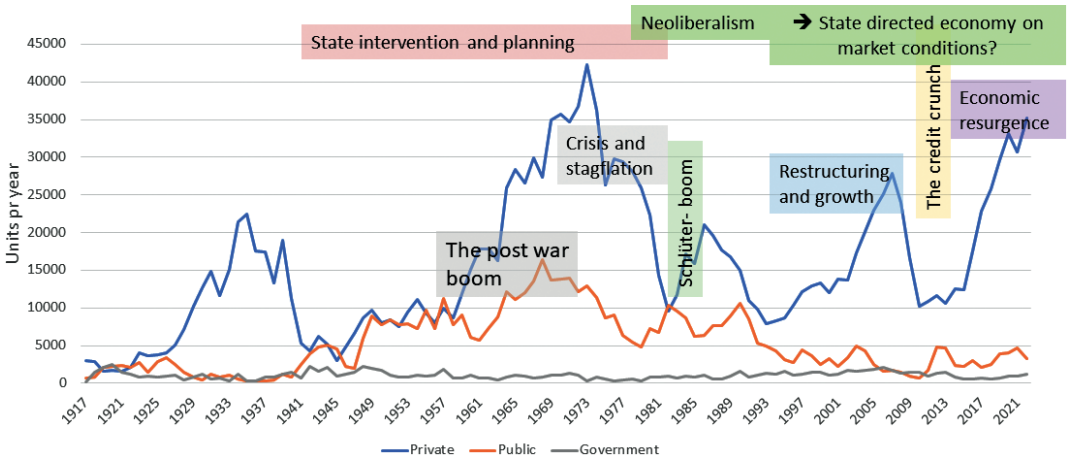

Figure 1: Housing construction in Denmark 1945-2023. Source: Hans Thor Andersen (2023): Housing in Denmark. DASH lecture, August 2023. Statistical figures from Danmarks Statistik (BYGV05B).

Through the 1980s and up to the mid-90s, total housing construction fell from approx. 50,000 homes in 1970 to only approx. 15,000 in the early 1990s. The tight fiscal policy in the 1980s meant, among other things, that the favourable rules for tax deductions from interest on private debt were drastically reduced (from approximately up to 70% for high income groups down to 32% for all). In the second half of the 1990s, the new Social Democratic government implemented an expansive fiscal policy that led to an increase in housing construction, although not for the social housing sector. The Liberal-Conservative government that came to power in 2001, tried to copy the British "Right to Buy" policy. It failed as the sector is not publicly owned, but self-owned, in combination with the fact that the income level in the social housing sector is relatively

low and that the rent would rise significantly in the event of a sale. A political compromise meant that tenants, municipalities and housing associations had to agree for a sale to be completed. The result was a very limited sale: less than 50 homes have been sold (out of approx. 592,000).

Several housing units, typically built from the late 1960s onwards, have benefited from large renovation projects financed by the National Building Fund (*Landsbyggefonden*), whose funds have been able to ensure the necessary modernisation (replacement of heating systems, insulation, new kitchen and bathroom facilities). A part of the goal of these renovations have been to make the homes attractive to a wider audience.

The National Building Fund is an independent institution funded by the social housing organisations and established by law. Apart from renovations, the fund supports and develops non-profit housing construction through various grant and loan schemes and funds social initiatives and infrastructure investments. The fund is a cornerstone in the Danish self-financing model. When the mortgage on a specific estate has been paid off after e.g. 30 years, the housing department must continue to pay an amount corresponding to the instalments and the interest on the loan. The revenue then goes to the fund instead. The general spending policy of the National Building Fund is politically decided by the national government through the Social Housing Act and Housing Agreements made in parliament. One example is the extensive physical and social efforts presented in the "parallel societies legislation" that is fully financed by the National Building Fund.

Over the past decades, the social housing sector has struggled with rental difficulties in smaller towns and rural areas, while demand has been clearly greater in the big cities. Demolitions or downscaling of housing units with rental difficulties are co-financed by the National Building Fund. Thus, all in all, the Fund is crucial for securing the construction of new non-profit housing and for financing social and physical initiatives that are crucial for securing that the sector continues to provide good and desirable housing.

3.2 Current main challenges of the social housing sector

Throughout the 1980s, the social housing sector was affected by residualisation, i.e. the sector has increasingly been rejected by 'ordinary' people in favour of owner-occupied or co-operative housing. In this way, the sector has come to appear as primarily a form of housing for weak groups, immigrants, low-income households, singles, pensioners, single parents, etc. The families with children that the sector was originally intended for are today typically living in owner-occupied homes. Contributing to this development is the significant upgrading of other forms of housing; the private rental stock in the big cities has been modernized and units built or taken into use after 1/1 1992 are no longer subject to rent control making the private rental sector less available to low-income households. The sale of municipal housing has also reinforced this development. In this way, the social housing sector has effectively become the only sector to take care of the social housing task.

The Danish social housing sector has in recent years been subject to several policy interventions and political changes, which have affected the sector substantially. Below, we present in short five policy changes of recent years with substantial consequences for the sector. They are presented in greater detail in Skovgaard Nielsen et al. (2023). As we write in the paper, these changes: "have had and will continue to have substantial consequences for the development of the sector and that will shape its future. These changes and associated initiatives are essential in order to avoid residualisation of the social housing sector. However, they come at high cost as they effectively cap the availability of affordable housing and further curb housing opportunities for those who already have the most limited opportunities in the market. We will argue that these five changes constitute a threat to the very raison d'être of the Danish social housing sector." (Skovgaard Nielsen et al., 2023, p. 141).

The first change was the physical restructuring of social housing neighbourhoods. Most social housing areas are part of Danish history's most significant building boom, built with industrialised methods and new, untested materials (Bech-Danielsen 2022). Shortly after construction, the first building damage began to appear. In 1985, a re-prioritisation law allowed the National Building Fund to support the maintenance and restructuring of social housing areas, leading to extensive restructuring efforts in these areas from 1985 until today. The first renovations focused on repairing building damage, which did not solve the fundamental challenges of their often-outdated architecture and physical isolation from the surrounding city. Subsequent efforts introduced social initiatives besides the physical improvements, but the areas remained isolated with social problems. Today, the approach is more strategic, aiming to connect the social housing neighbourhoods with the neighbouring areas by opening them up and creating traffic connections. The aim is to create more attractive neighbourhoods. The years of effort of the physical restructuring have created the basis for the even more drastic approach with the so-called 'parallel societies legislation' described below.

The second change is the parallel societies legislation. Since 2018, Denmark has had parallel society legislation, based on a policy suggestion, by the then government, called "One Denmark without Parallel Societies: No Ghettos in 2030" (The Danish Government, 2018). The legislation is aimed at disadvantaged social housing areas with a high concentration of ethnic minorities and socially vulnerable residents, and it is to increase the social mix of the neighbourhoods and physically transform them. The legislation encompasses several policy fields and entails a range of measures. Some of them are radical housing measures regarding structural layout, architecture, ownership and social mix; not least the measure to reduce the proportion of social family housing from 100% to 40% by 2030 through demolition, sale, rebranding (from family to senior or youth accommodation) and the construction of new non-social housing units. This will lead to forced relocation of residents and fewer social housing units for future residents. It can be seen as a vast social housing experiment with substantial consequences for residents and neighbourhoods (Bech-Danielsen et al. 2021; Mechlenborg & Stender 2022).

The third change is a move from 25% to 100% municipal allocation in selected municipalities. Danish municipalities have the right to allocate residents to every fourth available social housing unit in return for paying part of the construction costs. Thus, we have no municipal housing in Denmark, apart from few specialised institutions. The municipal allocation has been, and in most cases continues to be, a tool to secure housing for those in an acute housing need that they cannot solve themselves. However, in some municipalities, recent years has seen a change towards using the tool for steering the resident composition of the different social housing areas of the municipality: "While the purpose of the right to allocate 25% is to secure housing for those who are most vulnerable in the housing market, the purpose of 100% allocation is to redistribute vulnerable and unemployed citizens more thinly" (Skovgaard Nielsen et al., 2023, p.143–144). The tool works by steering who is offered units in a given area, thereby distributing people according to characteristics, in particular employment status. For the unemployed, this negatively affects their own agency in choosing where to live.

The fourth change is increased use of flexible letting. Since 2000, social housing organisations and municipalities have had the opportunity to use the tool of flexible letting to steer the resident composition. Until then, the only criterion for gaining access was how long you had been on the waiting list. Flexible letting made it possible for specific groups of people to jump the queue in specific housing areas (Skovgaard Nielsen & Haagerup, 2017), usually students and people in regular employment. In 2005, combined letting was added to the toolbox; making it possible to refuse units in specific areas to people receiving social benefits, even if it was their turn in the queue. They would then have to be offered a unit in another area. The parallel societies legislation made flexible letting compulsory in certain areas but at the same time, housing associations and municipalities are increasingly using flexible letting in non-deprived areas as well.

The fifth change is the possibility for municipalities to set aside up to 25% social housing in new neighbourhoods, an initiative that deals with new builds to accelerate cities to develop socially sustainable housing with a share of affordable housing. In 2015, a planning tool gave Danish municipalities the right, but not the obligation, to demand that 25% of the housing stock in new neighbourhoods are social housing, regardless of whether the land is privately or municipally owned. The aim was to secure a share of housing targeted at less resourceful residents and prevent a situation where market forces alone dictate housing prices and availability, especially in the largest cities in Denmark, where housing prices are rising. However, only few municipalities have used the tool and not to the full 25%, as the Social Housing Act sets a maximum price for construction costs, which comes under pressure during economic growth when land prices typically rise.

It is remarkable that housing policy in the broadest sense has all but disappeared in favour of a one-sided focus on socially disadvantaged housing areas in the social housing sector. The National Building Fund, by virtue of its size, is politically interesting

and, in combination with the prevailing discourse regarding immigrants, has become the focal point for several political markings and initiatives, the latest of which is the parallel societies legislation. Since the general guidelines for the use of the National Building Fund's funds are made through political negotiations, there is an opportunity to finance extensive interventions in the sector, including the demolition of homes in problem-affected buildings. LBF's funds are thereby used for other purposes than originally intended. In reality, there is a danger that the sector's opportunities to offer housing to vulnerable groups will decrease or partially cease - in combination with less social benefits and rising construction costs, the real supply of housing that vulnerable groups can pay for will be significantly reduced (the older, smaller housing with relatively low rents).

3.3 The future of the social housing sector

Social housing constitutes a relatively large share of the Danish housing market compared to other countries. It is part of the housing sector that makes it possible for less resourceful residents to get a home at a reasonable rent, but it is also a sector under pressure. For instance, the parallel societies legislation introduces drastic measures, such as demolishing social housing to improve social conditions and make neighbourhoods more attractive. However, the initiative reduces the proportion of social housing. This, and the other measures described above, means that the allocation criterion for social housing has become more complex and that unemployed, deprived households will have fewer options in the Danish social housing sector. Furthermore, economic growth and market-oriented developments are challenging the construction of new affordable social housing for everyone. All in all, this leads to a sector undergoing substantial change, due to a range of political and market changes. The deregulation of rents for newly built homes, which was carried out in the 1990s, has meant a real boom in foreign investment in rental construction in particular. Not only can the landlord set the rent according to the market level, but the expected continued increases in the rental income also result in an increasing property value that can be capitalized on sale. Owner-occupied homes are therefore only being built to a limited extent in the central parts of Copenhagen; with the current rules, a municipality cannot order the owner to build homes with a certain form of ownership. The government would like to change the latter, i.e. to ensure young people the opportunity to become homeowners or ensure a higher proportion of affordable housing.

In recent years, there have been proposals to give young people the opportunity to withdraw parts of their pension or relax the requirements for buyer co-financing. There are also proposals to introduce the possibility of 'shared ownership' (as in Great Britain). Liberal/conservative politicians want the removal of housing taxes and continued deregulation of the housing market, the left is generally a supporter of rent regulation and supports the social housing sector.

The current net movement towards larger cities is expected to continue. A growing number of households is expected, primarily in the form of singles. This points to more smaller homes, particularly in the big cities. It has created a regional disparity in housing costs; the big cities are clearly more expensive than the rest of the country and in distinct rural areas, property values have barely increased in recent decades, compared to an almost explosion in central Copenhagen. Finally, there is a politically expressed desire for more mixed urban districts; so far this seems to mean the conversion of social housing into co-operative or owner-occupied housing.

The social housing sector had its heyday in the period up to the end of the 1980s, after which the sector's expansion has been modest. But it still has an important role in Danish housing policy, namely, to offer affordable housing and aid in solving acute housing problems.

4 Social housing in Aalborg

4.1 How does the local situation compare with the national characterisation presented above?

The proportion of social housing in Aalborg is 26% (2023), slightly higher than the national average of 21% (Statistics Denmark, n.d.). Today, social housing units target different groups such as families, young people, people with disabilities and older people around the city, both in the city centre, in the suburbs and in rural areas within the municipality's borders.

Aalborg is located in northern Jutland, an area with less pressure on the housing market and generally lower housing prices than, for example, the capital area. This means that, in comparison to the capital area, more people of comparatively lower incomes will be able to become homeowners. Thereby, more income groups are allowed the choice of owner-occupied housing, and the social composition of the social housing sector can become less resourceful (as there are fewer people of the middle-classes to pull e.g. the income average upwards). It also means that empty units are an issue in some areas of Aalborg. This is, however, mainly in comparison with the capital region where the pressure on the housing market limits the access to the owner-occupied housing, increasing the demand for social housing to a wider range of income groups and ensuring that no units are empty. In a general comparison, the situation of Aalborg is similar to that of the national situation.

For years, Aalborg Municipality and several housing organisations have determinedly worked on revitalising the municipality's social housing areas and housing stock, which means there are no social housing areas in Aalborg subject to the parallel society legislation. Today, Aalborg East is highlighted as an example of project cooperation between Aalborg Municipality and Himmerland Housing Organisation, transforming a potentially socially vulnerable area into a diverse and attractive residential area through early user involvement and public and private investment.

4.2 What have been the main developments in the recent past (30 years)?

1945–1990: Housing shortage
Social housing construction in Aalborg was prevalent from the end of the Second World War until approximately 1990. It was primarily about combating the housing shortage. The primary target group was nuclear families because many of the private rental homes in the centre of the city were of poor quality – e.g., without a private bath/toilet. Up to approximately 1970, for example, it was only possible to get social housing if you could present a marriage certificate.

Until 1960, the new homes were built as apartments (60-70 m2) in brick buildings – In Vestbyen (Aalborg West), Østbyen "eastern neighbourhood" or centrally in Nørresundby. From the 1960s until the mid-1970s, relatively large multi-story dwellings (100-110 m2) were built as prefabricated buildings (concrete) in the new suburbs like Aalborg East, Grønlandskvarteret, Skalborg, Gug and Løvvangen. Despite their high technical standards, these buildings weren't generally perceived as attractive, and the problem of social segregation began to arise. From the end of the 1970s, there was a change in building style. The new homes from this period are mainly low-rise/terrace houses (80-100 m2) built in concrete with shell walls. They are still huge developments in addition to the new suburbs, and buildings are being built in upland towns – e.g. Svenstrup, Godthåb, Vodskov and Vester Hassing. These settlements are considerably more popular. In the same period, detached houses are emerging as an achievable alternative to social housing.

1990-2010: Urban renewal and social initiatives
Around 1990, there was a significant change with a substantial slowdown in social housing construction as the urgent housing shortage was solved. The focus shifted to urban renewal in the city centre, and social housing buildings are built as smaller infill projects in that context, often for different target groups with special needs like youth housing, housing for the elderly, nursing homes, and housing for people with disabilities. From approx. 2000, Aalborg saw a further slowdown in both general new construction and urban renewal. Instead, the focus is on renovating the large assembly buildings from the '60s and '70s and, later, the old departments in East and Westtown from the 1950s. The overall renovation plans unfold after approx. 2010 with major physical transformations and comprehensive social housing plans in Aalborg East, *Løvvangen, Grønlandskvarteret* and *Skalborg*.

2010–2020: Youth housing and urban transformation
From approximately 2010, a significant change occurred with a massive effort to build social housing for young people to accelerate the city's development towards a university and education city of both national and international importance. From 2000 to 2009, there was an increase of approximately 2,000 social housing units. From 2009 to 2019, the increase was about 7,000 homes – primarily for young people. The investment in social housing for young people coincides with the financial crisis, as private construction comes to a standstill. Social housing is then used as an engine for urban development – to, for example, set in motion the transformation of former

industrial areas, e.g., *Godsbanearealet, Østre Havn and Spritfabrikken*. Social housing construction has also strengthened the "growth axis" and the Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) Plus Bus approach.

4.3 What are the current main challenges and developments in the sector, and how do you see the future development of the sector?

Trends towards 2030: the mixed city and sustainable construction
Since 2020, there has been a focus on the socially diverse city as a central task for Aalborg Municipality, ensuring room for diversity in all parts of the city. It is centred on guaranteeing cohesion across social divides. The municipality's social housing strategy focuses on districts with the lowest proportion of social housing – e.g., Midtbyen, Westbyen, Hasseris, Skalborg, Kærby and the University Quarter. The target groups for the new social housing in these areas are families with children (including single parents) and seniors. But there is also an increasing focus on how social housing can contribute to strengthening development in the upland towns, both the larger ones and the smaller urban communities in rural areas.

A demographic development characterised by increasing shares of older people is becoming a prominent theme, leading to requirements for more housing that can match this group and offer them an alternative to living in detached housing. There is a demand for community-oriented housing – something that the social housing sector can offer in the form of new construction and adjustments to the existing housing stock. In the coming years, housing policy is also linked with the need to rethink health efforts and care for older people. Several initiatives will presumably be initiated, where the social housing sector, in collaboration with the municipality, is assigned new areas of responsibility and tasks within this area. Finally, a lot will happen concerning reducing the CO_2 footprint by converting existing buildings and using biogenic materials significantly in new construction.

References and further reading

Andersen, H.T. (2023). *Housing in Denmark.* [PowerPoint slides]. DASH lecture, August 2023. Retrieved from https://www.dashousing.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Presentation-1-DASH-Aalborg-2023-AAU-Team.pdf.

Bech-Danielsen, C. (2022): Ideology of the Welfare State in Solidified Concrete for Housing. In: *Architectures of Dismantling and Restructuring: Spaces of Danish Welfare*. K.M. Raahauge, K. Lotz, D. Simpson & M. Søberg (red.). Lars Müller Publishers. 400–411.

Bech-Danielsen, C., M. Stender, L.W. Nordberg, M. Mechlenborg & R.B. Sundstrup (2021): *Forskere: Parallelsamfundsaftalen er danmarkshistoriens største boligsociale eksperiment* [Researchers: The parallel community agreement is the largest housing social experiment in Danish history]. Forskere: Parallelsamfundsaftalen er danmarkshistoriens største boligsociale eksperiment - Altinget: By og Bolig, accessed 22/9-23.

Bekendtgørelse af lov om almene boliger m.v. Lovbekendtgørelse nr 1203 af 3. august 202.

Blackwell, T. & Bengtsson, B. (2023). The resilience of social rental housing in the United Kingdom, Sweden and Denmark. How institutions matter. *Housing Studies, 38*(2), 269–289, DOI:10.1080/02673037.2021.1879996

Borg, I. (2019). Universalism lost? The magnitude and spatial pattern of residualisation in the public housing sector in Sweden 1993–2012. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment, 34*(2), 405–424.

de Meere, F., Hermens, N., Smits van Waesberge, E., Eskes, M., Tinnemans, K., Skovgaard Nielsen, R. & Jepsen, M. B. (2019). *Vulnerable neighbourhoods in Belgium, Germany and Denmark: the link between national and local politics.* Verwey-Jonker Instituut. https://vbn.aau.dk/ws/portalfiles/portal/391250057/119220_Vulnerable_Neighbourhoods_SUM_WEB.pdf.

Lilius, J., & Skovgaard Nielsen, R. (2024). Alive and Kicking? Resident Democracy in Nordic Social Housing: The Cases of Denmark and Finland. *Nordic Journal of Housing Research, 7*(1), 50-63. https://doi.org/10.18261/tfb.7.1.5

Mechlenborg, M. & Stender, M. (2022): Holes in the spaces of the welfare state: Media coverage and residents' responses in the so-called hardest ghettos in Denmark. In: *Architectures of Dismantling and Restructuring: Spaces of Danish Welfare, 1970–Present.* Raahauge, K.M., Lotz, K., Simpson, D. & Søberg, M. (red.). Lars Müller Publishers, 160–173.

Skovgaard Nielsen, R. & Haagerup, C.D. (2017). The Danish social housing sector: recent changes and future challenges. *Critical Housing Analysis, 4*(1), 142–149. DOI:10.13060/23362839.2017.4.1.333

Skovgaard Nielsen, R., H.T. Andersen & Nordberg, L.W. (2023). Taking the social out of social housing? Recent developments, current tendencies and future challenges to the Danish social housing model. *Nordic Journal of Housing Research, 6*(2), 136–151. https://doi.org/10.18261/tfb.6.2.6

Skovgaard Nielsen, R. & Kromhout, S. (2023). Imposed from above or applied for from below: comparing Dutch and Danish social mix strategies in deprived neighbourhoods. *International Journal of Housing Policy, 25*(1). Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2023.2282235

Statistics Denmark (n.d). *BOL101: Boliger efter område, beboertype, anvendelse, udlejningsforhold, ejerforhold og opførelsesår* [Data set] https://sdg.statistikbank.dk/statbank5a/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?Maintable=BOL101&PLanguage=1.

Stender, M. & Nordberg, L. W. (2022). Learning From Covid-19: Social Infrastructure in Disadvantaged Housing Areas in Denmark. *Urban Planning, 7*(4), 432–444. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v7i4.5687

Further reading and relevant projects:

- Evaluation of the so-called Danish housing-social masterplans: surveys and interviews with professionals involved in carrying out social initiatives in selected Danish social housing areas. Case studies of three specific projects, visited twice to follow their development. Further description: Skovgaard Nielsen & Larsen 2022 : For all publications from the project, see https://vbn.aau.dk/da/projects/evaluering-af-landsbyggefondens-boligsociale-indsatser-finansiere.
- The Danish part of a comparative project on vulnerable neighbourhoods in Belgium, Germany and Denmark, focusing on the link between national and local politics, desk research and interviews with selected actors in vulnerable social housing neighbourhoods. Further description: de Meere et al. 2019.
- The Danish contribution to a research project on housing policies in the European Union, in preparation for the German Council Presidency in the second half of the year 2020, based on desk studies. Further description, see: https://vbn.aau.dk/da/projects/research-project-on-housing-policies-in-the-european-union.
- A ten-year evaluation of the physical regeneration of Danish deprived housing areas, focusing on how physical transformation projects affect social life and the area's reputation, interviews with residents and local actors, and analyses of housing prices and media coverage. Further description: Bech-Danielsen 2022; Mechlenborg & Stender 2022;Stender & Nordberg 2022. For all publications from the project, see https://vbn.aau.dk/da/projects/f%C3%B8lgeevaluering-af-danske-ghettoomdannelser-for-landsbyggefonden.

Authors

Hans Thor Andersen, *https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0684-4701,*
research director, Department of the Built Environment, AAU. Copenhagen, Denmark.
E-mail: hansthor@build.aau.dk

Rikke Skovgaard Nielsen, *https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0308-1275,*
senior researcher, Department of the Built Environment, AAU. Copenhagen, Denmark.
E-mail: risn@build.aau.dk

Lene Wiell Norberg, *https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3344-0574,*
associate professor, Department of the Built Environment, AAU. Copenhagen, Denmark.
E-mail: lwn@build.aau.dk

Sven Buch,
Development manager, Himmerland Boligforening, Aalborg.
sbu@abhim.dk

Anne Juel Andersen,
Architect, City of Aalborg, Department of By og Land, Aalborg. Denmark.