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Learning from Corona

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Learning from Corona – Density, community and social infrastructure in Danish housing areas

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The postwar housing areas originally epitomized the dawn of the welfare state with modern housing blocks organized as enclaves surrounded by open green spaces, promoting ideals like hygiene, light, fresh air, equity and community. Often, these postwar housing areas were developed on open fields and the planning of social infrastructure became an important part of stimulating the sense of community. Social infrastructure and common facilities served as physical frames for organized social activities. Some of these areas have today become disadvantaged neighbourhoods and in Denmark many of them are currently regenerated in an attempt to increase their density, urban infrastructure as well as the social and functional mix. The current corona-pandemic has however revealed critical aspects of how population density, community and social infrastructure interact in such housing areas. Dense neighborhoods and shared spaces have thus proven to entail danger of contamination, and most places tenants' houses and common facilities were temporarily closed and all organized social activities canceled. Yet, the Corona pandemic also activated communities in new ways and rendered visible more informal and ad hoc social infrastructure with new channels of communication, practical help among neighbors, and community singing from balconies. Based on recent architectural-anthropological field studies in Danish housing areas, this paper localizes social infrastructure in a time of corona, and discusses what general lessons regarding density and community can be learned from the pandemic's period of emergency.