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Links between densification of private residential environments and family values in upcoming suburbs in Denmark

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Figur 1 NærHeden is a densified “suburb of the future” for inhabitant in all ages. Promotion material.

Introduction

Michel Foucault claims that the garden has a double meaning. It “is the smallest parcel of the world and it is the totality of the world”, it is a *heterotopia* (Foucault 1986). On one hand the garden is part of a dwelling, and could be seen as an appendix to the house, in which leisure and spare time are spent, on the other hand it is a field of projection, allowing the owner to re-create the world in his own picture, correct it from faults in society and reinstate cosmos in chaos (Foucault 1967/1986, Marckman, 2005, Soya 1996).

Recent suburban projects in Denmark show that the private residential environment and the garden's importance are in transition. The space that surrounds these new houses is remarkable smaller than the average private suburban garden; at the same time, the public space between the houses is getting bigger. Often the new private gardens are part of a planned

densification of new suburbs towards a more sustainable urban setting. However, what is interesting is from a cultural-sociological point of view is that this densification strategy seems to match new ideas of private residential environment and family life, suggesting a shift in the traditional lawn-centered lifestyle of Danish suburban families. Even though none of the suburbs has yet been build, they have already served a huge interest in the public, in term of media coverage, waiting list for houses and apartments and various local interest groups. In Vinge, 40 mins from Copenhagen, the first 23 building plots for villas were sold in 2015 in a very short period of time, in spring 2016 17 building grounds for townhouses followed very shortly.

Naturally, there are huge differences in how these suburbs will be processed and build. In Vinge for

instance, people build their own house, in NærHeden 30 min from Copenhagen the construction of the houses and the environment is designed by renowned architectural companies, leaving the new inhabitant only very little room for personal imprint. Nevertheless the organization of outdoor spaces in all these upcoming suburbs points to a continuous trend, not only in a Danish context, but internationally. In the Netherlands, there are several similar experiments, for example ReGen Village, outside Amsterdam in the Netherlands:¹ The classical suburban garden is shrinking and shared spaces are expanding. Could these new types of suburban residential environments reveal new ideals on outdoor living for the next generation of suburbia?

Background

Sustainability is a key question when it comes to suburbs with owner-occupied single detached dwellings, as they use more space, more energy and more materials compared to any other housing form in modern Western society and suburbanization is still an ongoing trend in most of the postmodern world, Western Europe in particular (Cox, 2009). Studies show it is extremely difficult to transform single house suburbs into more sustainable environment not because of lack of ideas but because of a very strong suburban culture (Bech-Danielsen & Gram-Hanssen, 2004, Fremtidens Forstæder 2014 among others). At least two key factors must be taken into consideration: The first factor is user behaviour. The second factor is housing ideals and family values.

The first factor has recently been recognised as a critical and very important counterpart to the more technical energy research, even though, as researchers point out, it has not yet had a major impact (Gram-Hansen 2013). The second factor deals with profound understandings of user behaviour and is concerned with motives and ideas on home in a cultural – sociological context: Why do people choose single detached houses? Why is ownership so popular? What ideas of home and family are implicated, and what value propositions do this housing ideal stand for when it comes to family

¹ The neighborhood will be the first ReGen Village in Amsterdam, a new type of community designed to be fully self-sufficient, growing its own food, making its own energy, and handling its own waste in a closed loop. ReGen Villages is developed by a California based developer and Effekt, a Danish based architectural firm, as design partner.

dynamics, work-life balance, nature, relatedness and community?

Research of this kind has traditionally fallen into two categories: Suburban cultural studies focusing on the cultural images of suburbia in film, TV, literature, etc., and cultural material studies interested in how objects, consume and lifestyle are intertwined (Silverstone, Douglas, Mattingly, Lind & Møller among others). Architectural and urban history research has just recently started to recognise a need for a more nuanced understanding on the fundamental motives for suburbanization. Yet, the gap between a cultural approach and an urban/architectural is historical and academically long and fundamental and very difficult to bridge (Fishman 1986, Silverstone 1998, Giles, 2005, Dahl 2008, Mechlenborg 2011/2013).

In comparison to other housing forms the suburbs of private owned single family houses have traditionally been perceived as cultural and architectural challenge: Owned by middleclass families with middle class incomes and middle politics, this group has traditionally been mocked for being self-centred, materialistic and only concerned with buying new equipment for their Weber grill, cultivating the lawn and worried about how market influences on the house equity (Reisman, Whyte, Friedman, Mumford e.a.).² Even the statistic will confirm the need to be master of one's own paradise as a fundamental motive in privately owned single houses: Asked why ownership is preferred, homeowners agree that this allows them a freely dispose of one's own property.³

² This critic of modern suburbia is canonized by a range of Anglo-American thinkers, urban historians and sociologists. Here among David Riesman's descriptions of the new homeless middle class in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), William Whyte's observations on organized commute as a group sociological phenomenon in *The Organizing Man* (1956), Paul Goodman's criticism of the suburbs as a place for children in *Growing Up Absurd* (1960), Betty Friedan masterpiece *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Lewis Mumford's persistent criticism of the suburban unimaginative and oppressive organization with "a multitude of uniform, unidentical houses, lined up inflexibly, to uniform distances, on uniform roads, in treeless communal waste, inhabited by people of the same class, with the same income, the same age group, witnessing the same television, eating the same tasteless pre-fabricated foods, from the same freezers [...]" it is, ironically, he says "a low-grade uniform environment from which escape is impossible" (1961: 7).

³ You can adapt and change single-family house without having to ask others to make noise - or peace - without being dependent on others, you can grow your garden - or leave it.

Even though counter-researchers describes this approach to suburbia as taking a position of “essential formlessness” (Vaughan 2009:8), neglecting the fact that suburbia is home to a lot of Europeans, in Denmark this count for more than half of its population, suburbia keeps being target by a powerful elite-academic critic (Mechlenborg 2011, Mattingly 2006, Silverstone 1996).⁴

When it comes to sustainability the need for action is obvious. But to maximum the possibility to transform existing and upcoming suburb, we need more insight into the motives, dreams and values that pull suburbanites to the single family house. When it comes to residential environment in the single houses suburb, knowledge on preferences, values and ideas on how a family life are to be organized ideally provide us with important information on the ways in which residential environments are perceived and how they can be (re)shaped – not only in the name of sustainability but in the name of individual quality of life.

Findings in my study on new densified suburbs in Denmark

This paper investigates links between densification of private residential environments and family values in upcoming densified suburbs in Denmark. The research shows that the upcoming suburban generation in Denmark have a strong desire for suburbs with community as a prime driver. This prime driver – or motivation – is closely related to new ideas on community in the aftermath of the financial crisis, articulated as a longing for relations and activities that are non-capitalistic and non-individualistic.

The freedom to be able to repair and furnish the house and cultivate the garden is located on an index about 80 - it has, on average, significant. From a survey on national housing preferences, being master of you own house reaches an index value of about 95 out of 100, which means that almost everyone says that this relationship between owning and deciding your self is of great importance (Danskernes Boligræferencer, 2009).

⁴ In a new comprehensive portrait of the rise to the Danish suburban house, *parcelhuset*, the author, historian Peter Dragsbo, notes that the community that was linked to the workers' self-construction has now turned into mass production and materialism (2009). The same opinion echoes in Jørgen Øllgaard's *Paradisvænget* (2011) who tries to actually proof the thesis that a house in a suburb will make you more materialistic and more concerned in your own economics rather than global issues and concerns.

This new upcoming ideal for residential environments in the suburb has a range of social, pragmatic and physical consequences for the organization of the suburban space surrounding the garden, which could be defines as an urban village in a free, pre-modern setting with strong postmodern values. Underlying this premise is a strong anti-thesis to the Danish suburbs of the 1970s as well as a revolt against experimental housing from the same period.

Additional findings are:

1. Sustainability is a major concern but it is also a vehicle for a social-cultural segregation and aesthetics
2. Gardening has become part of a work – live balance and the garden is a zone for self-discipline
3. Privacy is an impetus for public activities and community

Overall the study shows that it is possible to transform the classical residential environment of the suburb as long as it remains truthful to the key phenomenon of its popularity: The respect for privacy and a spatial organization of boundaries allowing middle spaces to play a key role.

Theory: Spatiality of conflicts

Theoretical, my project draws on an understanding of space as a field of conflicts by Henri Lefebvre (1971/1991), especially as he is interpreted by urban historian Edward W. Soja in *Thirdspace* (1996). Lefebvre analyses social space as three aspects of everyday life: The practices and perceptions (*le perçu /the perceived space*), representations or ideas of space (*le conçu /the conceived space*) and the lived space of time (*le vécu/ the lived space*). The last one is “the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’”(1991:39). It is on one side provided by the first and second spaces, but is also essentially different from these, and is perhaps best described as an everyday experience with the material space and the idea behind it. It is characterized by the emotion, the desire and the complex bodily experience and deals with values, discourses and symbolism. Even more important it brings space to life.

It is... “alive: it speaks. It has an affective kernal (noyau) or centre: Ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling, house; or; square, church, graveyard. It embraces the loci of passion, of action, of lived situations, and



Figur 2 Nature outside your door. Not a typical Danish suburban green setting Ringkøbing K, visuals by Arkitema

this immediately implies time.
(1974/1991: 43).

On the surface everyday life in the lived space seems to be passive and dominated. First, because the balance between the three aspects of spatiality is often stable. The transitions from one space to another are often slow and are almost impossible to detect. But sometimes, like, during the Russian revolution, Lefebvre says, there is outbreak that reveals the three compartments and provides a different approach to everyday life. It is in these significant cases that everyday life, as a hub for the thought, the perceived and the lived space, can be seen as "the supreme court where knowledge, wisdom and power are brought together" (Vol. 1, 1991: 6).

Of course new suburban gardens have nothing to do with the French revolution or other time changing events. In Soja's interpretation of Lefebvre is therefore offered another access to the trialectic, by solemnly focus on the lived space, *third space*, as Soja defines it (1996). The lived space is dominated by the conceived or imagined space, and represents a spatial experience to which it is possible to gain access to the knowledge, experiences and dreams. Soja draws on a range of postmodern theories and concepts in order to explain how this complex experience of space, could serve to a vivid understanding on the meaning of space. Foucault's "Of other Spaces", introduces the concept heterotopia (1967/1986) and in here Soja finds a way

to work with a specific, meaning of space, but without neglecting the cultural, sociological meaning production that space always generates.

In other word, Soja's errand is to formulate a new methodology that can bridge the gap between static epistemological traditions (architecture, sociology, urban study and so on) and work in an interdisciplinary field of meaning. Because the lived space, or third space, is containing both the perceived and the mental, the real and the imagined, and because the third space can never be fully emptied of meaning, but is in constantly evolving creation, the need for interdisciplinary and self-critical analysis is evident.

Suburbia as conflict of zone

My research aims to investigate how a global/national quest for sustainability in form of densification strategies are interpreted when it meet the ideals of the coming-to-be inhabitants. In a Lefebvian/Sojan approach, conflicts like this makes every day life's trialectic vivid and visible, and shows where power is being demonstrated and displayed. It proofs Lefebvre's point that a space cannot be perceived without first being imagined, physically, ideologically or intentionally, and that spatiality is impetus for life changing events. But it also shows that the lived space is able to transform the imagined space by using the physical space for their one purpose. By "embrac[ing]

the loci of passion, of action, of lived situations” time and use, can change the purpose of any intentional planned space and turn it in to something else (1974/1991: 43).

Based on Soya’s Lefebvrian understanding of spatiality as a social construction and production in one, I will examine what kind of ideas and images are related to the new suburban gardens in Denmark. I will, in other words investigate the ideas of family, leisure and community, associated with the noticeable smaller suburban gardens in upcoming Danish suburbs.

Method

My research is based on desk research, visuals, commercials and marketing material in relations to new building projects in Denmark. Existing literature on suburbia, single detached housing and gardens as well as research on community, family trends and architecture has been addressed when it was called for. Central to my research is five qualitative interviews with new or soon-to-be suburban inhabitants in one of the upcoming suburbs.

The interviews have given me a deep insight into what it means for them to consider/to choose an alternative suburban residential setting, how they imaging their family life in this setting, what they expect of the physical and social organization of the environmental space surrounding the house, what kind of outdoor living they picture themselves in etc.

I will not go into specific on more technical things in the different building processes, nor will reflect on the actual landscape context (size, edge zone etc.). My main goal is to give some insights into why a new generation of upcoming-suburbanites has chosen to outlive their dream in new suburban cities with a remarkable small garden compared to traditional Danish suburban houses and a strong tradition for a large lawn (Mechlenborg 2011/12).

The results of the field work together with existing knowledge, research and relevant materials form the basis for the paper’s conclusions and reflections on the link between the new densifies suburban environments and new family values.

Field of study

I have looked at upcoming suburbs being built from scratch in a Danish context. In the need for comparison

I have first of all chosen to focus on the projects that explicitly mention sustainability as a key theme in the marketing material as a motivating factor in order to creating a healthy, good home living. That means suburb which focus on becoming a green city, working with climate solutions, zero-energy housing etc.⁵ Secondly, I have selected projects than work with densification as a strategy, consciously or as a latent motivation in the masterplan. The densification strategy implies different secondary strategies –mixed housing, divers architecture and shared spaces and functions, and (as a consequence) remarkable small gardens compared to average residential environment of a typical Danish suburban house (see illustrations in this paper).

Thirdly, I have opted out projects that were too small to be defines as a blanc canvas project or that could be interpreted as a densified strategy in an existing urban setting. I have also opted single experiments in group homes (more families living together in the same dwelling), although some of the projects in my study, do includes such projects but as an integrated strategy or part of a mixed housing ideal.

My field of study in this project is NærHeden (in Hedehusene, 25 min from Copenhagen), Vinge (in Frederiksund, 40 mins from Copenhagen), Ringkøbing K (In Ringkøbing-Skjern by the North Sea), Ullerød (in Hillerød, 30 mins from Copenhagen).

Respondents

My five respondents are ready to build in one of the suburbs or seriously interested in buying a house when are released on the marked. They are all members of interest groups and take part in the process of making the suburbs into actual places of dwellings.

All respondents in my interviews represent couples or young families with one or two children. In age and life situation they are part of the category in the statistic which is most likely to move to the suburbs, invest and

⁵ Sustainability has been an underlying motivation in the development of all projects mentioned, not only because of the EU’s 2020 requirements, but as ideological motivation. Energy and supply systems meet the future demands for energy optimization, CO2 neutrality, drainage etc., at the least.

settle in a house compared to other groups in the life cycles (Kristensen, 2006 & 2009).⁶

The educational background also differs with an (not intentionally) academic dominant: One is a craft man, one is a social worker and academics, and three are men, two women. Currently, they all live in apartments in social housing, privately owned or housing cooperative. Two of them live in central Copenhagen, and are longing for lawn of grass under their feet. One couple live in a suburb with access to outdoor areas, but they want something they can call their own. One lives 30 mins from Copenhagen, but close to one of the projects. They have all been interviewed in April and May 2016.

Analysis

With names like CloseBy (Nærheden) and Winge (Vinge), the new suburban projects promote themselves with mottos like “The sustainable suburb of the future”/ “a smart and sustainable city of the future” with solutions that are “sustainable economic, environmental and in terms of health”. They promise you “a city in nature”, “a new kind of dwelling with an attractive nature outside your door”, where you can live a “smooth everyday life ..”.⁷ Despite these strong profiles my respondents, however, talked only very little or very superficial about sustainability, densification or any other environmentally friendly efforts.

One respondent, who was finishing his education on construction technology, was extremely interested in what kind of sustainable materials and solutions were to be used in then construction a zero-energy houses. He told me about the technical specifications and innovative initiatives concerning in door climate system. He was thrilled to mention the facts that “experts from more than 18 nationalities were involved

in this project – even Poland.” (young dad, Hedehusene). On the other hand he kept apologizing, saying he was a nerd and that his profession just made it all worse. But when we talking about the family life he pictured himself having there, sustainability wasn’t an issue at all.

In fact sustainability never became a dominant motive in any of the interviews. As another respondent sarcastically said “All that about sustainability, well .. it’s all fine. It was cheap [to buy]. And that mattered” (young dad, Hellerup). This doesn’t mean, of course, sustainability is not an issue, but from the view point of the inhabitants, they all felt that the issue was something others had already taken care of. And therefore they didn’t feel they had the knowledge or willpower to influence the ladder, it was more a genuine frame condition that they used for their own homemaking.

The chosen few

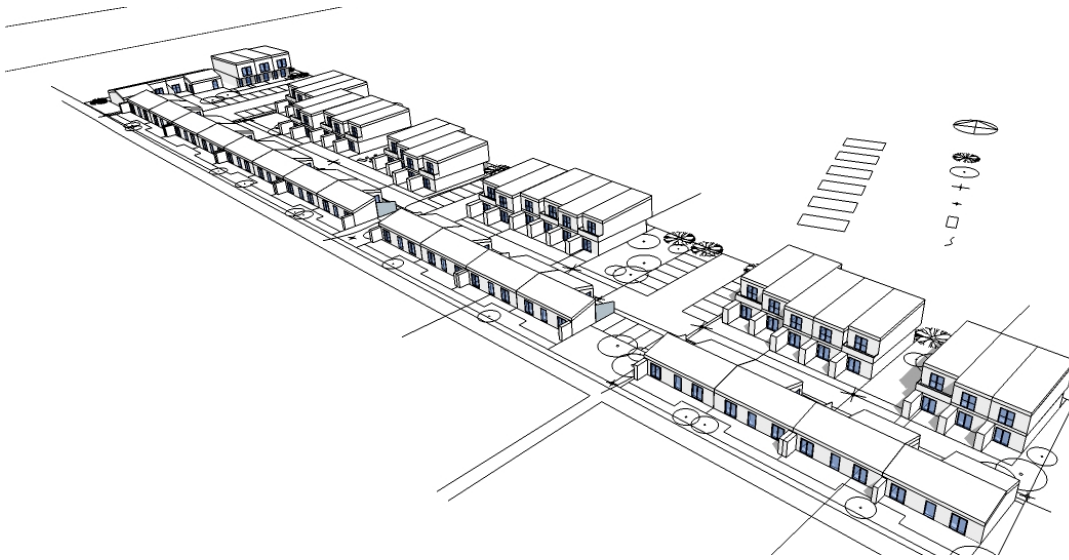
On the other hand, to say sustainability was not a matter at all, would be wrong. First of all, because the overall theme of sustainability made them feel part of an important project that needed the knowledge from a lot of experts and professionals, cf. “experts from more than 18 nationalities.” They took pride in being some kind of pioneers in building up a new suburb, not so much by hand (even though this was actually the case for some of them⁸), but as the chosen few. They considered, sustainability, as a cultural mark or sign that enables them to enroll in a particular cultural - social context.

One respondent said, he got interested in Vinge, when he in saw a promotion video saw “some neighbors talking to each other and somebody pulling a carrot out of the garden “ which to him signaled something about social relatedness” and he very much wanted to be part of it (young dad, Hellerup).

⁶ The study distinguishes between the following life cycle groups: (young) home residents, young single people under 30 , young couples under 30, families with children, single parents , singles 30-59 years , childless couples 30-59 years , older couples over 60 years and older single people over 60 years. The private own single family house is by far the most dominant preference, especially for families with children, which is up till 80 %.

⁷ From marketing and promotion materials, Vinge, NærHeden, Ringkøbing K, Ullerød (look at websites for information).

⁸ In Vinge the first building grounds that are sold are single family houses that the inhabitant construct themselves on behalf of a set of restrictions.



Figur 3 Houses in NærHeden have a front- and a backyard. The new inhabitants think this is perfect balance of the private and public space.

Another told me the project made it possible for him to choose his neighbor before his house: “Here [in this project] you seek somebody who wants the same thing as you. You know .. live sustainable and stuff like that. You choose the community before the house.” (young dad, Copenhagen.).

But as basic research on sociology shows, cultural – social activities and goods do not only bring people together, it also excludes the ones with another preference and value. Something that this young dad was very conscious about: “Yeah yeah.. you are looking for diversity, but when it comes down to it, you seek something very particular: Only a very few DF (right-wing-nationalist party-members)/detached-house people think it would be fun to stay in these houses, eat vegetarian joint dinners and care about sustainability.” (young dad, Copenhagen.)

In a close context my respondents were much more into this context of community with its shared functions and outdoor areas, than with the more technical or physical aspect of sustainability. As I will show, living a sustainable lifestyle was seen as a vehicle for experimenting with new forms of social relatedness and communities in the aftermath of the financial crisis. First I like to dwell on the more obvious motives and common reflections on the residential environments and family values among my respondents.

A recurring pattern in the way they talked about the residential environment was three perspectives pattern:

From 1) their own private small gardens, from 2) a shared common space, and 3) a larger, undefined “nature”. Even though the respondents didn’t have an actual experience with any of the spaces (because they are not yet built), they talked vividly about how and why, often with comparison to places familiar to them (childhood gardens, public parks, streets, places of personal matter) or by picturing what a certain experience *was not* about. This structure in scale – from the private small garden to shared spaces and a wider context will be the overall structure of my analysis.

From private gardens to shared community

Typical for young parents about to invest in a more permanent setting, my respondents talked from a position of hope, anxiety and big dreams. As all young couples in this phase they found themselves in a life changing situation which of course influenced their answers: Occupied with the new lifestyle that comes with starting a family, they put much effort into building up, what they think is a perfect setting for a family life and a perfect childhood for their children to come (Ærø 2002). This is how a future resident of the new suburb, Vinge in Frederiksund 40 min outside Copenhagen, picture his future in the dwelling is about to build:

It has been a big eye-opener for me, that there were other ways to organize the outdoor space. [Also because] our housing ideal has always been a house on the large lawn with a hedge around it outside the city. (...) Now our



Figur 4 Ullerød on Hillerød is close to a very traditional Danish suburb. But again, the gardens are minimal and you cannot walk around your house.

children do not have to look over a large hedge to see what happens next door. I think I can give my children, what I had when I was a boy, running and playing, having a huge social life! (young dad, Hellerup).

As the quote illustrates the parents are seeking a setting that invites for social belonging and a close community for their children which as a consequence provides them with a new kind of suburban residential area. The small personal garden is overall being perceived as part of the house. It is still part of the everyday routines and doings, and gives the family directly access to a green setting and kind of nature experience, just by open the door. In this perspective the new dwellers don't differ from a long suburban garden tradition (Lind 1996, Dragsbo 2008, Ravn 2009, Marckman 2005 etc.).

What differs is that my respondent all approached the garden with great pragmatism as if the garden was forced into the lowest call of requirement. To some extend the all said that "the garden doesn't have a very important significance to me." as a young dad, reveals to me, "when it comes to it, I just want a plain lawn for my children to play on. I don't need more" (dad, Hedehusene). Another tells me, she is not into gardening, she "doesn't have a need to cultivate or maintain flowers or so", she "just need a plain lawn" to play on, and it doesn't have to be big (young mum, Frederiksberg). They all agreed to the fact that maintenance was the key word: "The maintenance-free garden is an argument in itself. We would like to use a

minimum amount of time in our garden, so we may spend maximum time with our family," as a young mum explained it (Hellerup).

Yet another parent took this explanation a step further and told me the reason he wanted a maintenance-free garden, had to do with fact that gardens with a high maintenance factor to him represented a historic outlived phase. In other words: The ornamental front garden was passé:

The garden had a different significance when I grew up. At that time, the housewife maintained all things in the house, and there was time to do something extraordinary in the garden with nooks and pray and things like that. Today we don't have so much time. Both parents are working, so the garden does not need to be beautiful. It just has to work." (young dad, Hedehusene).

Looking at the private garden as something which "just has to work" was common for my interviews. And not only that. It was almost emptied of meaning. Or to be more specific: My respondents were very reluctant to tell me or had not yet made clear to theme selves what kind of role this private garden should play in their outdoor setting. They just didn't know. Except from being an appendix to the house, a kind of green scene lawn to play on, the private garden was not a specific dream.

Asked what kind of facilities they imagined in this garden they had only few wishes: An apple tree or a few fruit trees, at best, an herbs or vegetable garden or terrace with a grill. Nothing exotic, nothing that pointed to a personal interest or fetish, not even a large flower bed or an artificial lake.⁹ And the facilities they suggested to me they suggested with a kind of complicity as I had asked them what to put in their bathroom: Only necessities. Things that just had to be there.

A respondent tells me an anecdote from her husband's job that meant a lot to them and their life choices: Monday morning some of the senior colleagues come to work and they are completely battered and bruised because they have spent 50 hours on cutting a hedge in the weekend. And not with their families. "It is a pity", she stresses and tell me that is way the garden must be easy to maintain and easy to use.

It is therefore obvious to ask if these new suburbanites can be compared to what garden-sociologist Bella Marckman describe as "The relaxers" (2009): Suburbanites who are aware of the fact that they don't live up to the standards, they just don't care. The want to relax and they don't take things to serious. My respondents were not relaxed at all. And they do care a lot. But not about the garden, they care about their time. Time as all they see when they picture what to happen in the garden of their new house. And they approach the garden as part of the overall housing system.

The garden is private, disciplined and controlled, almost as a body, part of their life-work balance. The private garden therefore needs to be of a size that can be surveyed in order to be accommodated mentally and in order to be integrated in the daily discipline of the homemaking (Douglas 1991, Foucault 1967/). It is not something external to the inhabitant; it is part of a needy, tight schedule with a minimum left for spare time. And this spare time is reserved for family life, not gardening. The private garden becomes a household machine for outdoor life next to a washing machine or the internet. It has to be there, and it has to work.

⁹ In the late 1950s artificial lakes was a common motive in Danish suburban gardens (Ravn 2009).

Community and shared space

This secondary space is a shared space and contains of undefined shared functions and activities between the neighbors. From this point of view the private garden this secondary space frames the social relations and is at the same time a symbol of a new modern, ecological system. If the private garden is disciplined and pragmatic in its foundation, this space is very loosely structured, it is open and accessible. And something that the family can hook on to and off to when needed. The secondary space is the space of community and for my respondents this space is something new to them. In fact community - rather than technical, environmental sustainability - was a key theme they all pointed out, as their main motive for moving to this kind of suburb: They dreamt of "a more non-committing society. A kind of a village society" (young dad, Copenhagen), or a neighborhood where you can "help each other in everyday life, cook meals for each other or pick up your neighbor's kids" (Young dad, Hellerup). Several times during my interviews, many of them talked through a collective "we", not a we, as a personal family-we, but as something bigger, an extended family. As they had already begun their new life and were connecting to their neighbors.¹⁰

The community displayed in the secondary, shared space, has a practical and asocial side. Child caring, collective dining and borrowing household stuff from each other, was three important things that constituted the imagined community. Again it meets the young family in their struggle to balance life and work, and at the same time, it was offering them social network as a replacement or substitute for close family relationships and friends, lost in process:

It started for me when we got Agnes. I was pretty sure that we should not have more children. [...] Then I thought maybe we could find a kind of extended family, you know, a form of community that Agnes could get some replacement-siblings. Now we have got a little sister, but even with the two kids .. The grandparents live far away, and our friends, well, we do not take care of each other's children. I'm thinking that it might be nice to move in a kind of community which could help with everyday logistics (Young mum, Frederiksberg/Copenhagen).

¹⁰ For one couple, this was already a fact. Several times they have met their neighbors, and they were formally connected on facebook, already planning the community events and activities.

As another young mum argued her need for community was closely related to their life situation with two jobs and a child, and the fact that their social life had changed dramatically: “We just don’t have much time. It limits us a lot. We want some facilities that make things easy for us: Open your door to the garden, and you are there. Let your child go to the neighbor and play without any difficulties. Have a little chat.” (young mum, Hellerup). After the child was born, they didn’t get together with their peers as they used to and they were seeking replacement for the lack of social life they experienced when becoming a family. Their hope was that this new suburb “could end up with neighbors” and result in “a new social setup” (young dad, Hellerup).

The dream of a social and practical community that could replace the lost family and the lost social youth was to some extent rooted in a genuine critic of capitalism. One mum said, she felt like she was an isolated satellite in a capitalistic system: “When you need help”, she explains”, you don’t contact your close friends or relative. You check into a system, like .. we have a maid and pay a nanny to take care of our child. My dream is to get together in communities or network, instead of hiring somebody” (Young mum, Frederiksberg/Copenhagen).

Descriptions like “a village”, “a we” or “a community” rather than individual neighbors or persons, was a common feature when my respondent explained to me, what kind of social life she hoped to constitute, suggesting a strong longing for relatedness into something bigger than themselves. Again, this longing for being part of a group had to do with their life situation and the fact that they all felt they had lost something going from one life phase to another, but they all wanted something new as well. Something more profound which could serve as a better framing of the upbringing of their children, not only pragmatic, but socially.

One respondent told me social life in the city had become reduced to something unnatural or programmed, she said. Social relationship was something which only was executed with great coordination, planning and effort. Social life wasn’t just something that happened (after the children have been born). It was a project. Or as she puts it “When you a young family time is short. [...] So if you do

something socially, it becomes an event. It must be planned and coordinated. [...] Must of all we just stay home“(Young mum, Frederiksberg). She distinguishes between different spheres, saying that the social, urban life she is part of now requires a certain public attitude. Here she puts on makeup and proper clothing before going out, in this new homey setting, she expects everything to be more informal and unpretentious. So she will be able to “rush out of the door in leggings and without comping “her hair (ditto).

Another anti-picture that came up several during my interviews was an image of a traditional suburban street with high hedges and with isolated family life in each garden.

We all know these suburban streets [with hedge after hedge]. You so one can sense there are children in there who live their own lives. They have their own trampolines and slides. It's a shame. They never see each other, and they don't play together the way that we did.” (young dad, Hellerup).

Some also mentioned a need for social setting that could offer both adults, but children in particular, something else than the pseudo life of “social media and iPads” (young mum, Hellerup).

Compared to the lack of facilities in the private garden, they all had a vivid fantasy how this shared and social space between the houses could fulfill their dream of an alternative semi-public community: Community houses, kitchens, playgrounds, common farming, creative workshops, DIY-common place etc. Two things that dominated the shared social environment was free range chicken and urban gardening. Also circular economy is something that is mentioned. Most specific in Vinge, where the first inhabitants had already started to build the houses, they have “made a list with things they want to buy as a community instead of purchase everything individually” (young dad, Hellerup).

Paradoxical, time is not an issue in this space. Nor is question on responsibilities and maintenance. This space is ideally something that is optional and not binding. As already stated, the respondents are seeking for a “non-committing community”, cf. quote earlier presented. Of course this optional approach to the shared spaces has its consequences. But first, let’s have a look at another utopian perspective in the inhabitant’s image of the new suburban environment.

Nature as a moral and aesthetic site

Free range chickens and mutual vegetable garden played a central role in the mix of social activities and residential environment. But it also pointed to the fact that the outer the residential environment was loaded with ideological ideas on how childrearing, nature and learning should be like. The mutual perception of the residential context match to a large extend that of the promotion material: A romantic nature with corn flowers, wild herbs and fruit trees and As the couple put it, they were seeking “nature where you can get lost in” and pictured theme selves in wild growing grass. Because, as they put it, “we find a wild nature cozy.”

The concept of a wild nature must not be understood as dangerous or inaccessible, but wild as in uncontrolled or not disciplined. This opinion unfold it selves when “wild nature” is contrasted with the private disciplined garden described earlier: “Well, close to our house, everything must be maintenance free, that’s important. But out here – we like it to be something else,” a young mum explains to me and the husband fulfills her argumentation with the following picture: “The worst scenario is a wide, flat lawn. It doesn’t signals coziness. It is not very authentic. It becomes artificial. Predictably.” (couple, Hellerup).

Authenticity is also an argument for another respondent. He argues that it is important for children to experience an authentic nature and to learn how thing are *for real*:

Children also need to know where things come from. So they do not believe that the meat comes from a refrigerated case in SuperBrugsen [a Danish grocery chain]. It would be a good thing if, for example, if there was some kind of place where there were chickens and cows and things like that. So the [children] could walk around and maybe take the eggs home. Such things would be good to have also (young dad, Hedehusene).

The longing for community and shared spaces is closely related to this understanding of a “wild” residential environment in absence of polluting cars, industrial farming and a uniform, modern landscape. From an aesthetic point of view this picture is a sustainable landscape from user’s point of views. To the user the specific experience of sustainability is something to do with eggs coming out of a chicken, with carrots being pulled out of the soil. And with a

divers green environment, fruit tree and herbs, looking like a landscape from before the age of modernity. This perspective is a phenomological, hands-on experience of something that is very abstract, out of user’s control and involves knowledges and knowhow far beyond average understanding. It’s an image presented as a new life form.

As explained earlier they saw theme selves as being pioneers on the housing- and city marked, joining in with other pioneers and trying to build up something new and something better. Another said it is all about “taking a stand”:

You move into a place with no existing culture. You start all over. So we are the one to set the agenda. We should try to set the right framework from the very beginning. We must ensure that the physical environment provides the best condition for development with clear boundaries, so you animate the community and create a good spirit. (young mum, Frederiksberg).

But this “taking a stand” for something else, is not, paradoxical, to replace what suburbanites has always asked for in the surround areas: Smooth infrastructure, good schools and daycare institutions, access to sports, shopping and urban facilities, or a sustainable living 100%. Again, it points to a romantic longing for nature that is not industrialized and mono-functional, and to a community that doesn’t alienates, but includes.

It is not a traditional pre-modern village that these inhabitants of tomorrow’s suburbs are seeking. Neither a new kind of town. It is rooted to a new understanding of relatedness and sustainability in the age of a post-financial, upcoming climate change-crisis. Or, as one of the respondent ironical, puts it, when talking of the romantic aspect of their future life “Maybe it’s because we come from the city”.

Middle spaces and drawing new boundaries

Seeking the qualities of suburbia, but not its form, is one of the two fundamental major paradoxes in this new suburban residential environment. The other paradox is a longing for an integrating community that can lift practical tasks and be a frontier in building a better future, but without limiting commitments. In both paradoxes the secondary space, the space between the private setting and a defined public space, is crucial.

Generally, my respondents had a very strong perception of suburbia. The high hedges which made families isolate themselves from each other, the endless work in the garden and dominant private space that made conversation difficult often stood in contrast when they talked about their own upbringing in a similar suburban residential setting. A more crucial analysis also showed it had to do with boundaries and perception of spatial ownerships.

Explaining why suburbia is “both very positive and very negative” a young mum, (Frederiksberg), drew a picture on the differences between (suburban) private space and (urban) public spaces:

Today public space is a room you are entitled to leave when you are finished using them. So you throw the litter and stuff, because you expect someone to come and clean up after you. It will never do so in your private setting. On the contrary. Here no one should come and decide what you should do. If you listen to for example [a Danish debate program for listeners to call in with their everyday life problems] Mads and monopoly, you will experience how many people call in and complain about their neighbor's noise, jumping in the trampoline to late at night, and so on (young mum, Hellerup).

What this new suburban setting offers, she says, it “middle spaces”. Middle spaces, she continues, animates people to do things together, to care and to make a change. This opinion was also stressed by a young couple, but from a completely different perspective.

Asked why they have chosen to buy a house with almost no garden instead of just cancelling the garden completely and buy a much bigger house, the husband, answers it is all about choices. He draws me a picture of a picnic situation in two settings: The first one in a setting with a big house, but no private garden, the other in a traditional suburban house with a huge garden around:

If, for example, we were to picnic or grill in a public space we would have no options where to be part of a community or not. The choice – to actively be part of a group – is most important. If not [you don't have this choice], I'm sure we quickly will get tired of being in a community.

On the other hand, I'm sure we would not really be part of any community, if we [as we first planned] had settled in a large garden with a hedge around. First of all the physical environment wasn't initiating it, but also because it is not part of our personalities. We do not like to be pushy. We would never dare and go and knock on the neighbor's door. Never. In that case we would become isolated (young dad, Hellerup).

To him a private garden is a zone where to withdraw to and at the same time it is a portal into a shared community due to the size of it. Had it been bigger, he would have isolated himself never daring to “go and knock on” the next door. Had the private garden not existed at all, the public space and the community would have become too invading, leaving him no room to actively choose to be part of it. It would have been a matter of selecting and deselection.

The same argument could be made about the social commitment in the idea of community. All of respondent, strongly opposed to an ideological driven community, and they all looked to the 1970s housing collective experiments as anti – thesis to what they want. “Community should not be dogmatic, or holistic, if you know what I mean. It should not be that one must feel obligated to eat vegetarian with the group, if you .. are more up to having burgers from McDonald's”, stating the importance of standing up for your own interests (young dad, Copenhagen). Their concerns about the commitment to the community were explicitly expressed in various forms and variations.

Several of them had already made alternative plans if the social environment got too dominant or if they got to feel obligated to participate in common activities that they didn't feel like in terms. So they have allowed themselves also to invest in a private summer cottage in Sweden or by small secondary house in a rural setting somewhere far away from the community. In this perspective the close interaction between the small private garden and the secondary shared spaces constitutes the frame of a new kind of flexible semi-public space. But it is very fragile and a key to potential conflicts.

Conclusion and further discussion

In this project I have focused on new family values, ideas of community and nature in upcoming densified

suburban settings in Denmark. Through five qualitative interviews and with Soja's Lefebvrian understanding of *thirdplace* as a conflict zone of perceptions and ideas, I have shown how my respondents create their own heterotopia, cf. Foucault: By picturing themselves in a new setting they also gave themselves the opportunity to re-create the world in their own picture and "correct it from faults" by "re-install" the world as a better one, cf. introduction.

I have showed that sustainability is a major concern. But as my respondents expressed it is not conceived as a challenge on the individual level but as a collective task involving society, experts and professionals leaving the inhabitants the end-user. From this everyday life perspective sustainability is a vehicle for a social-cultural segregation and enables the new suburbanites to build a foundation on common values with their peers.

This perception also forms the image of nature. Free range chicken, fruit trees and herbs gardens constitute a picture of a pre-modern world before industrialization and climate changes. It is romantic in its performance, but not, however, an expression of nostalgia. Rather it reflects a fundamental fear of the future.

I have also shown how the garden has become part of a work – live balance and is approached as a zone for discipline and control. Not that the garden doesn't matter at all, but it is part of a very tight schedule and is has been consciously neglected on the behalf of more family time.

In context of the community the garden is a portal into social interaction. It is not viewed as an obstacle, on the contrary, its prior to the interaction. In fact, as my respondents strongly put it is, privacy is impetus for public activities and community.

Viewed on a larger scale my research is an example of how suburban cultural studies can through light over

how housing ideals transform physically, culturally and socially, in one of the most dominant housing form in Denmark as well as in most of the Western modern society: This image of upcoming new suburban environments drawn by the soon-to-be-users, is a utopian marriage between the privatized suburban setting and the social housing experiments with in the 1970s, as well as it is a revolt against the dystopia in both of them. On the one hand, the new suburbanites want to transgress the private isolation that have dominated the culture of single-family house's large garden with hedge and the self-sufficiency. On the other hand the want to dethrone the ideology of the well known family housing experiments from the 1970s and will reinstall the lost privacy and independency that this experiments lacked.

My research shows that the historical critic of the private dominated residential environment of the suburbs to some extent is being implemented by the suburbanites themselves and their new ideas of outdoor life, family dynamics and community. But it also shows that the densification of the suburban garden could never work as a singular vehicle. It must be combined with an equally expansion of the mutual spaces between the houses and is must be related to a wider green space for shared activities.

Secondly, it must be empathized that the fundamental longing for another kind of relatedness that was expressed in my analysis, is not necessarily linked to the suburbs alone, but could be seen an expression of a social trend.

A thesis is that this trend is more related to the generation that is establishing itself, than to the upcoming suburbs. It draws the attention to the role of "middle spaces" as a vehicle to negotiate between private initiatives and public concerns, cf. a more sustainable living.



Figur 5 The private space is perceived as impetus to building up a strong community. Ringkøbing K, visual by Arkitema, EFFEKT among others.

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