Overcoming the isolation of disadvantaged housing areas

Marie Stender
Danish Building Research Institute, Aalborg University, Copenhagen S, Denmark
e-mail: mas@sbi.aau.dk

Claus Bech-Danielsen
Danish Building Research Institute, Aalborg University, Copenhagen S, Denmark
e-mail: cbd@sbi.aau.dk

Abstract
Disadvantaged social housing areas in Denmark are currently subject to more thorough physical refurbishments, aiming to overcome the isolated character of the housing estates. The ambition is to attract new users and residents by opening up the borders of the area and establish attractive, new penthouse flats, new urban functions within the area or spectacular new public spaces near it. In this paper the social impact of such transformations are analysed and discussed based on case-studies in 3 Danish areas. The analysis shows that especially everyday-route strategies adding new public functions within the area can pave the way for integration with the surroundings. The applicability of such strategies is however highly dependent on context, location and existing image. Social distance may sustain though physical borders are removed, yet, the negative image of the areas can in itself call for attempts to open up and attract new users and residents.

Keywords: Social Housing, Integration, Disadvantage, Architecture, Refurbishment

Introduction

In an affluent residential suburb to Ålborg, a large provincial town in the Northern part of Denmark, the average life expectancy equals that of Sweden (Swedes live longer than Danes), whereas the inhabitants in its neighbouring, disadvantaged area 5 km away, can expect to live no longer than people in Ghana. This appeared from a recent TV-series from the Danish Broadcasting Corporation focusing on social inequality related to where one lives. In spite of its egalitarian welfare system, Denmark is today witnessing increasing segregation and in the public discourse there is a rising awareness of the concentration of social problems in particular disadvantaged areas. In 2010 the Danish Government launched the so-called “ghetto-list”, defining as ghettos areas that are characterised by high unemployment, a low average income, a low level of education, a large share of immigrants from non-Western countries and a high amount convicted for violation of the Penal Code. A majority of the listed areas are suburban social housing estates built in the 1960s-1980s consisting of relatively monotonous and monofunctional multi-storey residential blocks, and a separation of traffic, rendering the areas enclaves in the suburban fabric (Bech-Danielsen 2013, Kvorning 2013). Due to increasing functional, social and spatial segregation, the disadvantaged areas are also surrounded by other enclaves. In Hajer & Reijndorp’s words “Society has become an archipelago of enclaves, and people from different backgrounds have developed ever more effective spatial strategies to meet the people they want to meet, and to avoid the people they want to avoid” (Hajer & Reijndorp 2002: 60). A key challenge for contemporary urban policy and design is thus to link and connect various enclaves and create spaces of exchange between different social groups.
Residential buildings and architectural design

This challenge is most urgent in disadvantaged areas, and recent studies suggest that the enclave-like, monotonous and monofunctional built environments here reinforce vicious spirals, where more and more of the socioeconomically advantaged inhabitants move away and social problems are concentrated in an increasingly deprived area with a gradually worse image (Bjørn 2008). A pivotal question is thus, whether and how social transformation can be initiated by way of refurbishing the built environment? Refurbishment projects in Denmark have long sought to upgrade buildings and outdoor space in combination with various social initiatives, but evaluations so far show limited effect (Christensen 2013). Residents may be more satisfied with their surroundings, but the negative image and concentration of social problems are not easily changed. The trend among Danish municipalities, housing associations, consultants and other stake holders is moving towards more thorough physical transformations such as demolishing buildings, establishing new penthouse flats, or new infrastructure and public functions and activities within the area. The aim is to integrate the area better with the surroundings and possibly attract new users and residents.

In this paper the social impact of such thorough physical transformations are analysed and discussed based on case-studies in three Danish areas that have recently been refurbished. The objective is to analyse how the areas are used and perceived today and thereby to contribute to a better understanding of how physical transformation influence disadvantaged residential areas and their integration with the surroundings. The research undertaken is part of a larger project “Processes of change in disadvantaged areas”. Apart from 6 Danish areas, case-studies were also conducted in Gårdsten (Göteborg), La Duchère (Lyon), Ballymun (Dublin), Sant Roc (Barcelona), Park Hill (Sheffield), Kolenkit (Amsterdam), Leinefelde (Leipzig) and East Plaza (San Francisco). In all of these cases relevant actors were interviewed and documents, plans and evaluations were studied. This paper however confines itself to the three Danish cases, in which further empirical research was done.

The objective of the empirical research was to analyse

1) The background and aim of the refurbishment, what physical transformations were initiated and how they interplayed with social initiatives
2) The effect on the area’s social life, its integration with the surroundings and image seen both from the inside and the outside

In this paper we focus mainly on the question of integration with the surroundings. We will in the following briefly account for the methodological approach, and then we will describe the three case areas and their renewal and outline the most important empirical findings. This is followed by a discussion of the impact of attempts to link areas with the surroundings and thereby build a better image. Eventually, the notion of disadvantaged areas as particularly isolated is questioned, and related to processes of gentrification and marginalization, before the concluding remarks.

Methods: Combining approaches from architecture and social science

In order to better explore the complex interrelation between social and spatial at play in the cases, the methodological approach of the project was multidisciplinary involving competencies from architecture, anthropology, sociology and geography. For each of the three case-areas we conducted desk research on plans, written sources, webpages, demographic data and press coverage, an initial field visit and tour of the area, 4-6 interviews with key actors in the refurbishment and 6-8 in-depth qualitative interviews with selected tenants and users. Furthermore, over 3 days in September 2015 we conducted a survey among 140-210 tenants as well as other users (people moving through the area) as well as 9 registrations of urban life plus ethnographic field reports documenting patterns of use and other observations.
We will not further discuss the methodological implications of this multidisciplinary approach in this paper, but only explain the method behind the visual representation of the survey, as especially this part will be included in the present analysis. The survey was conducted by way of three assistants, who stayed in the outdoor spaces for three days in each of the three areas. Here they addressed all passers-by with a brief questionnaire. The geographical position of every respondent at the time of participating in the survey was registered. These geographical points together with the answers of the respondents have been processed through GIS-software implemented in the maps that are used to illustrate how tenants and other users respectively move in the area. The aim has been to represent as diverse a group of respondents as possible. However, one must take into account that not everybody have wished to participate in the survey, that it was only conducted over three days and was also depending on the assistants’ own routes through the area. The survey and the maps can thus give an indication, but not a thorough and fully representative account of the general use of the area.

Three places – three cases

The three areas were chosen as cases partly due to their different geographical location – urban, suburban and provincial suburban – and partly because they represent different types and scales of physical renewal. In the following, we shall briefly describe the areas and their recent physical transformation.

Superkilen/Mjølnerparken: An urban world exhibition

Mjølnerparken is a social housing estate situated at outer Nørrebro in Copenhagen. It was built in 1984-1987 and consists of 559 flats in 4-storey blocks around 4 green courtyards with playgrounds and benches, though there are no large open green spaces as in many of the suburban housing estates. It differs architecturally from the surrounding urban fabric, which consists mainly of 100 year old perimeter blocks. During the 1990s-influx of refugees, the City of Copenhagen directed many refugees to live in Mjølnerparken, and the area’s inhabitants today count more than 40 different nationalities. 85% have a non-Western background and 60% are unemployed. Mjølnerparken has for years been characterised as a “ghetto” and is often depicted in the media in connection with crime and radicalised Islamic groups. There have however also been many social programmes in the area and today a larger share of the young people get an education. In 2015 a majority of Mjølnerparken’s tenants voted in favour of a new plan for the physical renewal of the area, aiming to upgrade the flats, the safety and the coherence to the surrounding Nørrebro.

The ambition of improving this coherence was also the background for the establishment of Superkilen, a new urban space and park, neighbouring Mjølnerparken. In 2004 the City of Copenhagen entered a partnership with the philanthropic organisation Realdania in establishing a series of new urban spaces at outer Nørrebro. The aim was to attract a wider group of users and change the neighbourhood’s negative development and reputation. Initial analyses of the local inhabitants’ wishes were carried out, but it was also highlighted in the architectural brief, that the new urban space was supposed to function as a landmark of high architectural quality and international calibre. BIG Architects won the competition in collaboration with the artist group Superflex. Their proposal being a highly spectacular concept of three consecutive spaces with separate identities: The red square, the black square and the green wedge. Inspired by the ethnic diversity of the area they furthermore filled the area with objects – benches, lamp-posts, fountains and equipment for play and sports – from all over the world. The idea was to make Superkilen a sort of World Exhibition, rendering the ethnic diversity a positive quality and also encouraging the residents’ own sense of belonging, as the objects were chosen from the residents’ own suggestions.

There was substantial local resistance towards the new design of Superkilen, not due to the multinational objects, but rather due the very urban character of the spaces dominated by
asphalt, where local residents had rather wished for green and park-like spaces. However, not long after the realisation of Superkilen, a green park – Mimersparken – was established on the other side of Mjølnerparken. Superkilen has been rewarded with several architectural prizes, and the new plan for the physical renewal of Mjølnerparken seeks to connect the estate better with Superkilen and Mimersparken, by way of a new bicycle path and a public street-like space leading through Mjølnerparken, as well as groundfloor flats being converted into small shops.

**Gyldenrisparken: New functions to attract more life within the area**

Gyldenrisparken was built in 1964 and is a social housing estate located in a suburban area 5 km from central Copenhagen. The estate originally consisted of ten 4-storey blocks and one high-rise building containing all together 477 flats plus a number of one-storey buildings for commercial lease. Over the years the buildings had become worn down, and the temporary pavilions, housing various institutions were decrepit after 40 years. Windows and doors were leaking and there were cracks in facades and balconies. From the end of the 1990’s the area was also characterised by social problems. Elevators were full of graffiti, and the open green areas were increasingly perceived as unsafe. The City of Copenhagen assigned tenants for the blocks containing smaller flats, and especially this part of the estate was known to house criminals and drug-addicts. Gyldenrisparken was however never on the so-called ghetto-list – it has 44 % with a non-Western background and 45 % unemployed. Still, it was tending towards a disadvantaged area, and therefore the City of Copenhagen together with the housing association decided to engage in a thorough refurbishment. It was considered to tear down the whole estate, but refurbishment is more easily funded through the Danish National Building Fund. Furthermore, there was a strong sense of place among Gyldenrisparkens tenants – many of them had lived there from the beginning and were rather affiliated to the place and its community. The tendency was however that as they disappeared, it was getting more difficult to attract new tenants.

In 2006 the new refurbishment plan was carried by a majority of the tenants. The architectural company Vandkunsten won the competition and apart from upgrading the blocks with new facades and windows, its most remarkable concept was a new two-storey care home winding through the green area between the blocks. Also, a new day care institution called The Green Planet, implementing passive house standards, was built on the green area with an outdoor playground. The idea was to attract more life and users from the outside into the area between the blocks. The remaining smaller green areas were improved with new paths, lighting, play equipment and sports facilities. A high-rise building was sold, and the revenue was invested in the overall refurbishment. Furthermore, all one-room flats were merged two and two to form larger flats and some of the two-room flats converted to youth housing.

**Finlandersparken: Adding variety, new facilities and penthouses**

Finlandersparken is a social housing estate consisting of 530 flats distributed on eleven 4-storey blocks located 3 km North-East of Vejle, a provincial town in Jutland. It was built in 1967-1971 and in spite of a refurbishment of the façade in the 1990’s, the buildings as well as the green areas appeared outdated and worn down only ten years later. Furthermore, the area’s reputation was descending and tenants with jobs tended to leave the area, being replaced by unemployed tenants. Today 60 % are unemployed and 70 % have non-Western background, which gives the area a remarkably different demographic profile than the surrounding suburb.

Constructional problems and leaking roofs rendered it possible to apply for financial support for refurbishment. The first plan was to only refurbish bathrooms and green areas, but as the Danish National Building Fund did not consider this ambitious enough, a new master plan was made containing flats and blocks as well as common outdoor areas. A key concern was to add more variation and diversity to the monotonousness of the area. One strategy was the establishment of
nine new penthouse flats, aiming to both diversify the blocks’ appearance, but also to create a larger variety in the housing stock and be able to attract new and more socioeconomically advantaged tenants. Furthermore, the blocks have been grouped in five “clusters” each with its own identity developed through a process involving the tenants, as the interplay between social and physical was a key priority for the architecture company Pluskontoret. The distinct identities are expressed through different colours and new common indoor and outdoor facilities with different themes: The culinary cluster has kitchen gardens, the health cluster has facilities for exercising and so forth. In one block two ground floor flats were merged in order to establish a gate, rendering it possible to create a pathway connecting Finlandsparken to the surrounding residential suburb. The pathway has however not yet been established as representatives from the neighbouring estates have been reluctant towards the connection.

Findings: Integrating disadvantaged areas with the surroundings?

The maps (Figure 1-6) showing how respondents replied to the questions “Where do you live?” and “Why are you in this area right now” give an indication of how the three areas are used after the renewal. Unfortunately, no similar registrations were made before the renewal, and as already accounted for, the method has its limitations. However, in combination with the rest of the survey, the qualitative interviews and other forms of data, it can point to patterns of use in the three areas, as well as differences between them and their various groups of users.

Superkilen is today teeming with people from many different places passing along the area’s bicycle lane, using the play equipment, meeting friends or just hanging out watching people.
Residential buildings and architectural design

appears (see figure 1) that a lot of people from the rest of the city blend rather equally with tenants from Mjølnerparken, but only very few of the outside users move into Mjølnerparken. Those who do (see figure 2) are there either in connection with their job or leisure time, such as visiting friends, whereas only very few are in the area due to practical activities. Even neighbours living very close to Mjølnerparken are hesitant to move inside the estate. As one man explains: “My use of Mjølnerparken is very limited, I have only gone inside a few times to try the playground with my kids. But it seems like a ghetto, and not particularly humane. Especially due to the architecture – the small windows and the concrete that gives no life – it seems oppressive (…) I also think that it is a problem, that it doesn’t seem natural to walk through Mjølnerparken and see, that people in there are also just human beings”.

In Gyldenrisparken, on the other hand, tenants and other users are more mixed also within the estate (figure 3) and here the majority of the outside users are in the area due to practical activities (figure 4). This is primarily buying groceries in the supermarket and other shops located in the bottom left corner of the map, but also to pick up kids in the day care institution located on the upper middle of the map.

Further, there is a relatively large share using the area for leisure – e.g. taking the dog for a walk – and quite a few people working in the area, especially around the care home and day care institutions. It thus seems that the renewal of Gyldenrisparken has been succesful in creating a vivid and mixed life in between the blocks, partly due to the new functions in the area, but also
due to its location between a main street and several residential neighbourhoods. Among them is Oxford Have, a new neighbourhood of owner-occupied single-family rowhouses that have been built next to Gyldenrisparken (on the upper side of the map). The residents from here often walk through Gyldenrisparken, and several of them use the day care institution, The Green Planet, for their kids. One woman, who has lived in Oxford Have for 2.5 years explains that she was at first reluctant to buy a house next to Gyldenrisparken: “It seemed a bit ghetto-like. I don’t know if there were many parabolic antennas, but there were many immigrants. I actually checked out the nameplates to see the distribution of Danish and non-Danish names, but my impression was, that many Danes also lived in the area”. Today her child is in The Green Planet day care, and they often use the playground and like spending time in Gyldenrisparken’s green area. Her impression is that the various groups of users come along well, but it also seems to be of importance for her that she recognises several of her neighbours from Oxford Have within Gyldenrisparken – she stresses that they all go along that route, when buying groceries, and that several of her neighbours have recommended The Green Planet.

The situation in Finlandsparken is similar to Gyldenrisparken in that a couple of supermarkets and other shops are located in the fringe of the area in a centre called Nørremarkscntret (figure 5 – bottom of the map). This is also where most of the activity is concentrated and where tenants and other users blend. Like in Gyldenrisparken, most of the outside users are also there for practical activities – buying groceries etc. (see figure 6).

**Figure 5: Where do you live?**
- Yellow: tenants from Finlandsparken
- Red: other users

**Figure 6: Why are you in this area now?**
- (only other users) Yellow: passing through, Red: Leisure time (visiting friends etc)
- Blue: Practic activities (groceries etc)
- Pink: Working here
However, in contrast to Gyldenrisparken, only very few of them move into the area between Finlandsparken’s blocks. Those who do, are there either due to work, leisure or because they pass through Finlandsparkens paths. One tenant, who also runs a hairdressing salon in Nørremarksscentret, explains that the Centre is very worn down and that several of the shops have closed, and that he is also going to move his shop. Part of the centre is currently being refurbished, but the newer parts ‘turn their back’ towards Finlandsparken, and does not invite people into the estate, just like there are no public functions to come for here. Also, the gate that has been established in one block to open up the area, does not make a substantial difference as long as there is no path connecting to the surrounding residential areas. Most of the tenants are satisfied with their new facilities – play grounds, kitchen gardens etc – but this is not enough to integrate Finlandsparken with the surroundings. Though leaflets about activities taking place in Finlandsparken have been distributed also to neighbouring areas, only very few have showed up. One tenant explains: “It is fine with the clusters and so on, but if we are to change the place... then there should also be activities across Finlandsparken and other places in town... If one could make other people come here, it would be better”.

Neither do the new penthouses seem to have caused substantial change in the area as it is no more than nine flats out of 530. Only a few respondents mention them when asked about the area before and now, but those who do – mainly tenants – are proud that the headmistress of the local school moved in. A young family also moved into one of the penthouses, while building their own house in another neighbourhood, but when interviewing them it became obvious, that their involvement in Finlandsparken is limited, as they only live there temporarily: "Our kids don’t really use the playgrounds, as we have plenty of space on the roof and it is easier for us to keep them up there (...) I don’t really know much about the rest of the estate, as I mainly move between our flat and the car”.

**Discussion**

**Linking to the surrounding city**

As appears from the brief summation of empirical findings above, Gyldenrisparken seems to be the most successful case of renewal in terms of integrating the area better with the surroundings. This is partly due to the point of departure for developing this area, its location and the fact that it was not as disadvantaged – and had as burdened an image – to start out with as the other two areas. But also the strategy of densifying the area with new functions has proved to work well. The care home and day care institutions have added more life to the green areas between the blocks, and though the remaining green areas are smaller than before, most of the tenants perceive them as more safe and comfortable. So do neighbours and others who pass through the area, and the playground just outside the day care institution The Green Planet, signals that the area’s facilities are not solely for tenants. Many families stop on the way home to try the ropeway, and though they have limited social interaction with Gyldenrisparken’s tenants, they do become increasingly familiar with both the area and the people there, as a man from Oxford Have explains: “I think it is a very open and pleasureable area. It is not that I start chatting with people... Those groups of mothers wearing scarves, they don’t exactly indicate that they want to chat with you. But still, we can come along well, and we can think that each others’ kids are cute”.

Whereas the strategy for integrating Gyldenrisparken with the surroundings can be seen as an everyday-route-strategy, the strategy employed in Superkilen is rather a destination-strategy. Here the spectacular urban design and new facilities have succeeded in attracting a lot of attention (not least in architectural magazines) but also different people, who use the area in various ways. This has fuelled a development rendering this part of the city more attractive but also more expensive. Today hipster coffee shops pop up in the area and flats are sold with prospects stressing a location near “The red square”. The urgent question is of course, whether the tenants in Mjølnerparken in any way benefit from this development? It is rather
Mimersparken that they use as an everyday recreative space with playgrounds, soccer fields, barbeque facilities etc. But if Mimersparken can be said to function as their backyard, Superkilen rather has the status of a front yard with its more public and representative character. There is still a very manifest border – physically and socially – between Mjølnerparken’s estate and Superkilen’s urban space, and it is too early to say if the new refurbishment plan for Mjølnerparken will succeed in breaking this border and linking the area better to the surrounding city. However, there is no doubt that the establishment of Superkilen has been key in even putting such a link on the agenda. In refurbishment plans housing organisations are usually still mainly concerned with what goes on within the estate’s cadastral plot, and funding from the Danish National Building Fund is also tied to the estate.

These structural premisses have likewise had impact in Finlandsparken. Here the overall plan actually aimed at opening up the estate and the municipality invested in a new path linking the area to its surroundings, but today there is only a gate leading nowhere and the estate is still perceived as isolated from the surroundings. First of all, linking to the surroundings has not been top priority for neither housing associations, nor the tenants involved, and the funded refurbishment has been directed at the housing estate and not its borders or the commercial centre Nørremarkscentret. Furthermore the neighbouring communities have been reluctant to get more connected to Finlandsparken. This has also been a problem in Superkilen. Here the architects originally suggested to demolish some of the walls that are today demarcating Superkilen, but the neighbouring estates – turning their back to Superkilen – did not agree as they feared being associated with Mjølnerparken. This points to the intricate relation between the area’s image and its spatial layout: On the one hand, physical borders might reinforce the image of an isolated ghetto, but on the other hand, the social borders surrounding an area may resist, though the physical borders are demolished. As has been stressed in French researchers’ critique of social mix strategies spatial proximity does not necessarily reduce social distance (Chamboredon & Lemaire 1970 in Lelevrier 2013).

Building a better image

The refurbishment of Finlandsparken was rewarded with the local municipality’s annual architectural prize, yet the media was more concerned with the updated ghettolist that was released the very same day – and had Finlandsparken on it. Though the list is useful for monitoring and ensuring consistent demographic data on the development of disadvantaged areas, it doubtlessly also reinforce their status as deprived areas, thereby sustaining the ‘stigma’ (Goffmann 1963) of their tenants. Numerous studies have demonstrated how mass media and other social forces contribute to the creation of negative stereotypes, which damage the reputation of the places in which the underclass or poor reside (Hastings 2004, Devereux, Haynes and Power 2014). Similarly, a side effect of various initiatives to change disadvantaged areas can be a negative public attention, making it even more difficult to attract new tenants (Christensen 2013). In Finlandsparken tenants regret that many people from other parts of the city do not even discover the refurbishment, as they just sustain “the old image” distributed through the media, rather than seeing the area with their own eyes. As one tenant explains: “The image of the place has not really improved (...) People have to see it, in order to get a more positive impression of this area. And as it is not in the central ciy, there are not so many who come here. Instead they just sustain the old image of the area”.

With the renewal of Superkilen a lot of people pass by Mjølnerparken every day, but this does not necessarily give the area a better image – again mass media seems to play a more important role. Superkilen’s extraordinary collection of benches, lamp-post etc. is perceived as a positive statement about multiculturalism by most of the users, yet some of them still feel unsafe when moving through the area at night if many young men from Mjølnerparken are gathered there. One could argue that Superkilen’s image-boost of the area side-steps Mjølnerparken, though using its ethnic diversity and social roughness to provide an authentic background for the area’s new hipness. As Sharon Zukin has argued, the romantization of ethnic diverse working class
neighbourhoods as authentic, is key in the gentrification process that pushes the original residents out (Zukin 2010). However, also quite a few of Mjølnerparken’s tenants identify positively with Superkilen’s multicultural urban design, and are proud to take selfies in front of the bus stop with arabic characters. Superkilen’s image-boost of the area might also be in their favour in a more subtle way by improving the social status of their overall neighbourhood. A young woman for instance explained how she used to be met by prejudices among fellow students when telling them that she lived in Mjølnerparken – today she just rather says that she lives at Nørrebro close to the red square!

**Social mix, gentrification or marginalization**

As appears from the above discussion, this paper’s focus on thorough refurbishment touches on questions of gentrification and processes of social marginalization. There is no doubt that refurbishment of social housing estates is often also used strategically as a way to change the composition of tenants and push out particularly marginalized tenants by merging oneroom flats etc. When discussing the supposedly positive effects of a physical transformation, we therefore have to keep in mind that it – for instance in Gyldenrisparken – may be as much a result of the exclusion of the most disadvantaged tenants as of the physical refurbishment. Thorough physical renewal may thus rather than solve social problems, just push them to other areas. Furthermore, there is inadequate evidence that a socially mixed neighbourhood in itself improves the general social condition of the area’s residents. Research from other European countries, where housing diversification and social mix have long been an explicit goal in urban renewal policies, show that cross-tenant social interaction – and thereby positive neighbour-effects – are limited (Kleinhans 2004, Lelevrier 2013).

This confirms the present study’s findings from Finlandsparken, where the tenants in the new penthouses do not necessarily engage much in their local environment. Still, the diversification of both housing stock and tenants might have a beneficial effect on the area’s overall reputation. Also, the new types of housing may allow tenants to climb up the ladder of the housing career without leaving the area – thus contributing to its stability and social cohesion. Lelevrier’s study of regenerated neighbourhoods in France thus show that newcomers who already had a relation to the neighbourhood before moving in, had more social interaction with original tenants and exchanged services like child-care with them. Further, these newcomers served as mediators between groups and were more likely to intervene in conflicts (Lelevrier 2013). However, the housing diversification in these French neighbourhoods was more substantial and also included new, owner-occupied housing, whereas in Finlandsparken it was only nine new pent houses and still part of the same social housing association. On the one hand, this is possibly why the diversification has caused less conflict in Finlandsparken than in the French renewal projects, but if the social impact is to be more than symbolic, it would on the other hand probably take more than nine new penthouses.

Critical mass is also key in terms of getting neighbours and people living in other parts of the city to use or pass through the outdoor spaces of social housing estates. In Gyldenrisparken it has thus become the norm among many of its neighbours to take the shortcut through Gyldenrisparken, as well as use the playground there. Here the new public functions play a vital role both in terms of generating more life and thereby a feeling of safety, but also in terms of indicating that the area is not only for tenants. This however touches on a delicate and more fundamental matter in the renewal of Danish social housing estates, as their facilities are in principle exactly only for tenants. Refurbishments funded through the Danish National Building Fund are in fact financed by tenants’ rent, and one could therefore ask, why they should be willing to pay for play equipment and sports facilities for others to use? As argued in the introduction of this paper and elsewhere, it is certainly not only social housing estates that have an enclave-like spatial lay-out. Also more affluent residential areas in Denmark do these years increasingly tend towards ‘invisibly gated communities’, turning their back towards the surroundings and allowing only pseudo-public paths through the area (Stender 2015a, 2015b).
Attempts of opening up social housing estates and attracting new users might be seen as representing what has been described as a “pathologising discourse”, further stigmatising disadvantaged neighbourhoods by regarding their residents as possessing deviant norms and values, which represent a threat to mainstream culture (Hastings 2004). One can thus argue that it is inherently stigmatising to define certain disadvantaged areas as isolated ghettos in need of “being opened up” and integrated with the surrounding city.

However, a more pragmatic response would be that if the area is already stigmatized in the public discourse, the residents do have an interest in inviting the city in, in order to improve the image of the place. Also, as argued in the introduction of this paper, linking enclaves and creating spaces of exchange in the increasingly segregated city is a key challenge for contemporary, urban policy in general – not only in disadvantaged areas. Here the social housing sector may lead the way contributing with insight in what spatial strategies for integration can actually also pave the way for social exchange. Following Hajer & Reijndorp, enclaves are here to stay, but urban policy must continuously aim to create space for exchange between different groups: “The question should not be how to hold back the transformation of the urban fabric into an archipelago, but rather, what possibilities this new spatial and social reality offers for the creation of new and interesting forms of public domain” (Hajer & Reijndorp 2002: 60).

**Conclusion**

Based on three Danish cases, we have in this paper analysed and discussed the social impact of thorough physical transformations that aim to integrate disadvantaged social housing areas better with their surroundings. The everyday-route strategy applied in Gyldenrisparken appears to be the most successful of the three in terms of attracting new users within the area. This is partly due to the character of the refurbishment that integrates new public functions within the area and links new neighbouring residential areas to a main street with shopping and other public facilities. But it is also due to the location, context and existing image of the area that was not at the outset as problematic in Gyldenrisparken as in the other two. This illustrates that there is no universal solution that can be applied to all disadvantaged areas, but that strategies of refurbishment must always take local context into account.

The destination-strategy employed in Superkilen has succeeded in creating an urban landmark that turns the area’s ethnic diversity into a hip multicultural neighbourhood identity, but this development has so far only had little impact on Mjølnerparken. While it is still too early to say if the new refurbishment plan will succeed in linking the social housing estate better to the surroundings, there is no doubt that Superkilen has had an impact in even putting such a link on the agenda. Learning from both Finlandsparken’s new penthouse tenants and Gyldenrisparken’s new users, critical mass seems to be key, as it takes more than a handful of new tenants or users to substantially change the area and not least its image. Again, context is highly important, as strategies that seek to integrate urban life, new users and tenants are only applicable in urban areas with high growth and population density.

Though tenants and outside respondents seem to blend more in the maps of urban areas this is no guarantee for actual social exchange between various groups. As has been stressed in the discussion, spatial proximity does not necessarily reduce social distance. New residents may not engage much in their new neighbourhood, and if flats are merged and rents are raised they may even push out the original and more disadvantaged tenants. We have therefore also related the current refurbishment strategies to processes of gentrification and marginalization, and pointed out that the idea of disadvantaged areas as particularly isolated and in need of being “opened up” can itself be stigmatizing. The tenants interviewed in this study do however worry more about their area’s negative reputation and genuinely wish that more people would come by to see the area with their own eyes. This image-problem thus demonstrates, that linking disadvantaged as well as other enclaves is a persisting challenge in urban policy and design.
Residential buildings and architectural design

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