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## REINTEGRATING GHETTOS INTO SOCIETY – LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE DANISH GHETTO STRATEGY

METTE MECHLENBORG

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### Abstract

In 2010, the Danish government launched a ghetto strategy with 32 initiatives in order to “dissolve parallel communities” in Danish housing areas and to (re)integrate them into Danish society (Regeringen, 2010). Despite its negative offspring in the Muhammed riots (Freiesleben, 2016; Houliind, 2016), the strategy arguably presented a strategy for revalorization of space and, thereby, a new strategic approach combining social and physical initiatives in order to permanently transform deprived housing areas in a Danish context. With the ghetto strategy, Denmark is aligned with similar international regeneration programmes in order to close the socio-economic gap between housing areas and residents. Based on the recent architectural evaluation of social housing renewals for the Danish National Building Foundation (Bech-Danielsen and Mechlenborg, 2017) and with a Lefebvrian perspective of *a spatial trialectic* (Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996), this paper reflects on why Danish – like international – transformations are not able to realise the potential of the initiatives in the strategy. What are the effects of the initiatives they do realise? And what does that tell us about the social impact of physical transformation in relation to the overall aim of the ghetto strategy?

Keywords:

Disadvantaged housing areas,  
architectural transformation,  
ghetto, ghetto strategy, social  
effects, Lefebvre



## Introduction

The French thinker Henri Lefebvre claimed that the social revolution in Russia in the 1920s did not succeed because the Soviet activists failed to understand the importance of the spatial setting: “Change life! Change Society! These ideas loose completely their meaning without producing an appropriate space”, Lefebvre said, “A lesson to be learned from Soviet constructivists from the 1920s and 30s, and of their failure, is that new social relations demand a new space, and vice-versa” (1991, p.59). The quote is from *La production de l'espace* (1974, trans. *The production of space*, 1991) in which Lefebvre gives his fundamental interpretation of spatiality. To Lefebvre, every society, every place, every little site, is constituted by three experience-based and semiotic aspects of space, a *trialectic of space*: The perceived space (physical, actual space which constitutes the spatial practice, the ways in which the space is being used), the conceived space (the design or ideology behind space which has to do with power) and the lived space of everyday life in which the perceived and the conceived spaces merge and come to life. A space for meaning, passion and creating. A true and permanent change can only happen, he argues, if all three aspects work coherently in the same direction creating a (new) balance between the conceived, the perceived and the lived spaces (Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996; Goonewardena, et al., 2008).

The Danish ghetto strategy *Ghettoen tilbage til samfundet* (Eng.: *The ghetto back into society*) is the first coherent Danish national strategy with the purpose of reintegrating deprived social housing areas into society (Regeringen, 2010). The strategy was launched in 2010 as a consequence of a negative development in the social housing sector (Houliand, 2016),<sup>1</sup> culminating with the Danish Cartoon-crisis-related riots in Rosenhøj in 2004; a deprived housing estate outside Aarhus.<sup>2</sup> In strong political language, it argues that “the strong values binding Denmark together” are not fully grounded in some housing areas, where “laws, that counts for the rest of the country [...] do not have the same effect” (Regeringen, 2010, p.5). In order to eliminate these parallel societies that ghettos produce, the strategy offers 32 initiatives that will “integrate the ghettos back into society”, e.g. the title.

In a Lefebvorean reading, this is an example of how ideology influences materiality of space. The point is that no space can truly be perceived without being conceived in advanced, geometric, intentional or ideological. According to research on Lefebvre, the conceived space, is about control over knowledge, signs and codes; this means control over the way we interpret the perceived space through certain perspectives, words and discourses (Soja, 1996, p.67). As an example of territorial stigmatization (Wacquant, 2007; 2008), the ghetto strategy has therefore rightfully been criticized for its powerful *dystopian discourse* (Freiesleben, 2016).<sup>3</sup> However, the Danish ghetto strategy *also* offers a coherent strategy for permanent spatial transformation in a true Lefebvorean perspective: The

- 1 As researchers have stated, the Danish social housing sector called almen boligsektor bears similarities with both the non-profit housing sector and the public sector, leaving the translation slightly incorrect (Scanlon and Whitehead, 2014; Nielsen Skovgaard, 2017).
- 2 The Danish Government has launched three subsequent ghetto strategies. The first one, from 2004, Regeringens strategi for ghettofisering (Eng.: The Governments strategy for ghettofication), represents the first approach to what is named “ghettofication” (Regeringen, 2004). Later, in 2010, came a fully, coherent strategy and the first ghetto list (Regeringen, 2010), which was slightly revisited in 2013 with Udsatte boligområder – de næste skridt (Eng.: Deprived housing areas – next steps) (Regeringen, 2013), in which five criteria was introduced: Housing areas with more than 1000 tenets.
- 3 As Freiesleben (2016) stresses in her dissertation, this is exactly what is the case with the use of the term parallel society in the governmental rhetoric in the strategy and in related medias. The point is that the way that parallel society is being framed is draws a dystopian discourse that by words alone stressed the dichotomy between “them” and “us”. Secondly, the definition of a parallel society and a ghetto is explicitly linked to a normative socio-ethnic profiling: The criteria for being listed as ghetto has to do with the amount of inhabitants from non-Western countries, level of education and income, unemployment and crime rates. Especially, the link between ethnic segregating and stigmatization plays a vibrant role in the research on territorial stigmatization and is a central reason for its development, as it constructs a link between certain ethnic groups and “bad neighborhoods” (Wacquant, 2007; 2008).

32 initiatives introduced in the strategy combine architectural, social, economic and organizational initiatives and an understanding of a mutual approach to the perceived (spatial practice and built environment) and the conceived (image and branding value).

The Danish ghetto strategy also fully matches contemporary trends of international transformation strategies of deprived neighbourhoods. The purpose of HOPE programmes in the US (1992–), Wijkenaanpak in Holland (2007–), Housing Market Renewal programmes in UK (2002–2011) and ANRU (Agence National pour la Renovation Urbaine, 2003–) in France is to work for social and physical changes in housing areas from post-World War II in order to close the socio-economic gap between housing areas and residents. The different programmes have pushed forward a social sustainability agenda in urban regeneration, but also a need for a more coherent, radical approach to the matter (Turkington and Watson, 2015; Scanlon, Whitehead and Arrigoitia, 2014; Colantonio and Dixon, 2010). As McGreal puts it “regeneration needs to be bolder and encompass larger swathes of cities and embrace not only employment and environmental issues, but the wider provision of hospitals/medical centres, schools and leisure facilities” (Colantonio and Dixon, 2010, p.xiv).

Despite the grand ambition of the recent urban regeneration programmes, research and reports have found that, with the exception of certain forms of housing improvement, local pride and image improvement, the programmes are far from executing the potential when it comes to a permanent positive change of the social practices and inequalities (Lelévrier, 2013; Boisseuil, 2015; Emre, 2016; Turkington and Watson, 2015; Priemus, 2006). Nonetheless, there is a commonly stated public policy expectation, like the Danish ghetto strategy, that regeneration and improvement of residential environments will reintegrate disadvantaged housing areas into society. This undermines the need for a coherent understanding of how spatiality is being produced and reproduced, e.g. McGreal.

### Aim of the study

Lefebvre’s *The production of space* (1991) has gained a renewed interest within academia, especially in relation to the social agenda in urban studies that focuses on the relation between space and social inequality (Schmid, 2008, pp.27–45). This interest has started a third reading trend in the history of Lefebvrian reception in which Lefebvre’s trialectic has become a crucial element for understanding how power, space and social performances are related.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, the riots of the French socially stigmatized suburbs, the *banlieues*, in the autumn of 2005 resulted in a number of reinterpretations of the relationship between the conceived space, perceived space and living space in French self-understanding (Goonewardena, et al., 2008).<sup>5</sup> As argued by Goonewardena et al. Lefebvre’s trialectic is a radical development of Hegel’s classical dialectic, in

- 4 This third reading paradigm in the Lefebvre reception focus on reading his text as Marxism oriented critic of society, and differs from the first paradigm, which focused on the spatial economic aspects, and the second, which, led by Edward Soja, put a dominant attention to the third space, the lived space, e.g. Thirdspace (Soja, 1996; Schmid, 2008; Merrifield, 2005).
- 5 Lefebvre himself says: “The fields we are concerned with are, first, the physical – nature, the Cosmos; secondly, the mental, including logical and formal abstractions; and thirdly, the social”, which suggest that Lefebvre himself defined the three aspects as independent topological aspects of a coherent spatiality (1991, pp.11–12).



which the dialectic is both a way of understanding how the world works (ontological) and a method for analyzing and understanding the world (epistemological) (Goonewardena, et al., 2008).

The trialectic between the first, second and third spaces should therefore be seen as a model for interpretation of how development and change can be perceived within the same system of thinking. This means that spatial change is about struggle and conflicts, or as Lefebvre puts it himself: “the supreme court where knowledge, wisdom and power are brought together” (1991, p.6; Goonewardena, et al., 2008). The point is that all conflicts and opposition are relationally connected within the same system. This makes it impossible to understand one element within the trialectic without understanding its role in the wider dynamic (Merrifield, 2005, pp.517–558).

Based on findings in the recent evaluation of architectural transformation projects in Danish housing estates for the National Danish Building Fund (Bech-Danielsen and Mechlenborg, 2017), this paper focuses on physical programmes for social change initiated by the Danish ghetto strategy. The objective is to scrutinize what happens when a strategy gets transformed into actual, specific development processes in actual, specific settings of everyday life: How are the programmes influenced by social programmes, consultants, municipalities, local knowledge, specific needs or challenges in the process? With a Lefebvrian perspective on the relationship between the conceived, the perceived and the lived spaces of spatiality the research questions are:

*What can Lefebvre’s trialectic of spatiality on the perceived, the conceived and the lived spaces teach us about the physical reintegration of deprived neighbourhoods and its (lacking) social effects?*

The overall purpose is to get a deeper insight into the processes of physical transformation in a field of ambivalence between spatial stigmatization and power to change, or between the conceived space of ghetto strategy and the actual, transformed sites of everyday life.

### Theoretical and methodological framing

The 32 initiatives in the Danish ghetto strategy are divided into five major strategic approaches. The first one, *Mere attraktive boligområder, der bryder isolationen* (Eng.: *More attractive housing areas, breaking isolation*) is concerned with the transformation of the built environment (Regeringen, 2010, pp.8–13). On the basis of five related initiatives, the purpose is “reopening the area – physically and socially” in order to reintegrate the ghetto into society (see Table 1).

Table 1

In order to properly frame the empirical study, the five initiatives related to the physical and social opening of the ghetto in the ghetto strategy are briefly presented here (Regeringen, 2010).

Initiative in the Danish ghetto strategy	Description of the initiative	Agents
1. Strategic collaboration with municipalities	The strategy anticipates “radical changes in the ghettos” (Regeringen, 2010, p.9). Therefore, the government recommends strategic alliances “based on specific initiative-commitments [...] between the local municipality and its housing associations and with the municipality as a natural anchor” (ibid.).	Governance reform 2009 (2016) <sup>6</sup>
2. Strategic demolition of housing blocks	In order to downsize a large-scale housing area, the government allocates a large budget for demolition and reduction of housing blocks in deprived housing areas.	Local physical programme
3. From ghetto to attractive neighbourhoods	Infrastructure is perceived as a huge barrier for interconnecting deprived housing areas with its surroundings. Therefore, funds are given in order to expand accessibility, roads and paths in order to gain more social circulation as well as to divide the areas into smaller units	Local physical programme
4. Renewals	In order to make the housing estate more attractive to a diverse social profile, the government opens for (continuous) financial support to modernize outdated apartments and outdoor spaces.	Local physical programme
5. Social programmes	The governance reform for the social housing sector (2009) commits municipalities and local housing associations to coordinate a social program for their disadvantaged housing areas.	Local social programme

As showed in Table 1, physical programmes play a vital role in this strategic approach and are directly linked to initiatives 2–4, whereas initiative 5 strictly concerns social programmes (see Table 1). The purpose of the physical programme is to develop a coherent, long-term plan to strengthen the “competitiveness of the housing state” by reconstituting its function and its image (Regeringen, 2010; Houllind, 2016). The programmes are targeting “concrete buildings from the 1960s and 1970s, which do not appear welcoming and attractive” and which are often secluded places “without any natural exchange between housing blocks and the surrounding city” as the interpretation goes (Regeringen, 2010, p.9). Initiative 1 relates to the organization and governance reform from 2009 stating that municipalities are obligated to plan and coordinate development of their deprived housing areas in collaboration with the local housing association. At least one meeting a year must be held where mutual goals and initiatives are the centre of a dialogue (Regeringen, 2010, p.12). At the same time, both social and physical programmes

6 A slightly revised governance reform was launched in 2016, but it did not have any significant effect on how the ghetto strategy is organized.

must be approved by the municipality before and by the tenants' democracy of each housing association in order to get funding from the Danish National Danish Building Fund (ibid.).

### Three case studies

The National Danish Building Fund has subsequently evaluated their programmes.<sup>7</sup> In the recent, newly published evaluation of physical transformations 2014–2016, 11 geographical and architecturally representative cases, among them five deprived housing estates, are being scrutinized (Bech-Danielsen and Mechlenborg, 2017). Three of them are subject to Lefebvrian investigation. The three cases are: Rosenhøj, Aarhus S, Sjælør Boulevard, Copenhagen and Houlkærvænget, Viborg, located in three different spatial settings: An urban (Sjælør Boulevard), and urban/suburban (Rosenhøj) and a suburban (Houlkærvænget). Architecturally they represent three typical post-World War II large-scale housing estates and as such new typical building techniques and planning. They are all suffering from a poor social and physical image with a high crime rate, low income and educational levels and a concentration of non-Western citizens. Common for the cases is that social programmes have been implemented in parallel with the physical transformation, as suggested in the ghetto strategy (Regeringen, 2010).

7 The social programs are also being evaluated but will not be subject to this paper.



Figure 1  
Map with the location of the three cases presented in the study: Houlkærvænget, Viborg, Rosenhøj, Aarhus, and Sjælør Boulevard, Copenhagen.

### *Methodological reflections*

For each of the three cases, desk research of relevant documents, reports, and surveys were made. Among these, a screening of social indicators, social programmes and their effect, background analysis etc. An architectural mapping was performed before and after the transformation, where, among other things, the physical changes were recorded and visually documented. Interviews with relevant consultants and architects were executed, along with a focus group interview with actors from the local housing association and/or building group as well as residents recruited by the association.

A critical reflection on the methods is not part of this paper, though it needs to be said, that it was difficult to recruit a representative selection of residents to be interviewed. As others have stressed, it is often already familiar names, older residents who might even have been actively involved in the construction process, while young people, families and residents with a non-Western background are absent or under-represented (Boligkontoret Danmark, 2014). In this study, this bias is addressed through the sensitive use of residents' perceptions. Secondly, it needs to be said, that none of the cases had fully experienced the potential effects of their physical transformation. Rosenhøj (Aarhus) finished their transformation in the summer of 2016, but new projects as well as the overall strategy of the neighbourhood are still in process. Sjælør Boulevarden (Copenhagen) had just finished in the summer of 2017 and Houkærvenget (Viborg) will need another year until 2018 before the physical transformation will have been completed. This means that the effect is limited, and that social indicators like income, educational level and ethnicity etc., have not yet been registered. In this study, waiting lists in the three housing estates are therefore one of the only solid indicators apart from more obvious qualitative effects (Christensen, 2013; Leather and Nevin, 2013; Scanlon, Whitehead and Arrigoitia, 2014) that point to some verified change in the social environment, though it does not have the same validity as traditional indicators. Thirdly, and most important, this Lefebvrian study is based on data collection that was not intended for a Lefebvrian analysis, but for the evaluation of contemporary physical transformations project in a Danish context. This means that the study should not be seen as a coherent, academic Lefebvrian analysis, but as a reflection of the lessons learnt from the evaluation framed by a Lefebvrian understanding of the perceived, the conceived and the lived spaces.

### *Theoretical framework: Lefebvrian reflections*

How is the ghetto strategy transformed into a project planned by the architect or planner? And what happens when this project meets the actual, specific location of everyday life? Obviously, something will always get lost on the way from the beautiful visuals of the architect to the actual physical and implemented project. But why, and more

interesting, how are plans translated from the conceived to the perceived to the lived life of space, and what are the roles of conflicts and oppression on the way? This is what a Lefebvrian perspective of space helps us answer.

To Lefebvre, the transformation of an idea of space into the space of everyday life is not just a minor aspect of his reflection on spatial experience; it is the very fundamental message of his trialectic of spatiality. As Lefebvre argues, spatiality has to do with power, and power is directly linked to the conceived space as “the dominant space in any society (or mode of production)” (1991, pp.38–39). This means that it is from the conceived space that power originates, from where the world is being transformed through utopias, strategies and ideas. The conceived space works on the level of discourses, in language, Lefebvre says, it is “a system of verbal signs” in terms of definitions, ideals and understanding of space and place, including maps, visuals (1991, pp.38–39; Schmid, 2008). On the other hand, the real, actual power, the *dominated* space is the space of everyday life.

It is in everyday life that we experience power as real. As Lefebvre defines this space, it is “... alive: it speaks. It has an effective kernel (noyau) or centre: Ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling, house; or; square, church, graveyard. It embraces the loci of passion, of action, of lived situations, and this immediately implies time.” (1991, p.43). The lived space is where temporality and performance go hand in hand. Despite – or because – being based on emotion, bodily experience and use, it is in everyday life that space becomes alive, and therefore meaningful. The perceived space, and the discourses behinds it, is “alive: It speaks”, as Lefebvre says, in the space of everyday life, which means that the production and reproduction of spatiality has to do with how we are making symbolic meaning out of actual space, or how buildings, landscapes, things and objects are coated with discourses, ideologies and values (1991, p.43; Soja, 1996; Schmid, 2008). But – and fortunately there is a *but* – the space of everyday life is also where revolt takes place.

If spatial change, as Lefebvre stressed, is “supreme court where knowledge, wisdom and power are brought together”, you may argue that struggles and conflicts, is where the reproduction of space is changing, and where the balance between the three spaces in the trialectic gets out of order. The break will happen because under the passive and dominated surface in a hidden underworld of the obvious spatial practices of everyday life, the lived space exists that has to do with the use and “imagination”, the creativity (1991, pp.39–43). The use and creativity allow the user to inhabit or appropriate the space, i.e. make it your own. Appropriation is done through the creative use of the physical objects, the concrete spaces and the available materiality, adding value that “overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its object” as Lefebvre says (1991, p.39).

By focusing on conflicts, controversial perceptions, insights and explanations, the purpose of a Lefebvrian perspective is to show how power, knowledge, agents and different factors influence the specific physical transformation of a housing estate and the social change that has been registered and experienced along the way.




### **Analysis: Three cases – three local transformation narratives**

In order to compare the three cases and relate them to the ghetto strategy, the analysis is based on two comparable analyses: First, the cases are presented in a reductive template where their qualities, local aspects and factors are eliminated, see Table 2. However, this template allows us to screen each case in terms of how it fulfils the ambition in the ghetto strategy and the five initiatives in order to “open up the ghetto” as perceived.



Table 2

A template with the three cases. The purpose is to show what kind of initiatives within the ghetto strategy is being used in each case. All qualitative elements are eliminated in order to compare the cases with the ambition of the ghetto strategy.

Initiatives in the ghetto strategy at stake in the recent renewals			1	2	3	4						5
Case	Background for renewal	Picture before the renewal	Part of a regeneration strategy	New infrastructure	Building demolition	New common building	New façade/ variations	New outdoor setting	Safe neighborhood strategy	New zoning of the building	New housing types	Social program
<b>Houkærvænget, Viborg, 1975.</b> A typical concrete housing estate with 504 flats outside Viborg in an area with relative many vacant houses. It consists of 20 housing blocks placed in a "horseshoe" position.	Vacancy, high moving frequency and a negative image due to social problems and a "fortresslike" architecture. Project: 2015–2018.	 CREDIT: BOLIGSELSKABET VIBORG				X		X	X		X	X
<b>Rosenhøj, Aarhus S, 1968–1971.</b> Originally 27 identical housing blocks in concrete placed in pairs around a green space with 840 flats. Situated in a neighborhood outside Aarhus, Jutland. Project: 2014–2016.	Largescale physical and social problems, bad reputation and a political "hot" case. Project: 2014–2016.	 CREDIT: UNKNOWN	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Sjælør Boulevard, Copenhagen, 1971.</b> Typical modern housing blocks administered by two housing organisations in four and eight stocks, originally in brick façade with 537 units, now reduced to 521. Situated in a neighborhood in Copenhagen.	Not able to benefit from the positive development of the overall neighborhood due to social problems, architecture and negative image. Project: 2013–2017.	 CREDIT: AAB		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Secondly, and this is the actual Lefebvrian reflection, an analytic study of each case serves as a more qualitative insight into the process of the transformation, from the conceived space of transformation (the idea of what the housing estate should turn into), the perceived (the actual, specific physical initiative implemented) and the consequences for the lived life in the specific housing estate (the effect, experience and understanding of the transformation).

*Rosenhøj: Urban regeneration with the municipality as the natural anchor*

Subjected to riots in 2005, a large-scale housing estate with 27 identical concrete blocks and a consistent place on the ghetto list, Rosenhøj in Aarhus S is the very symbol of a Danish ghetto.<sup>8</sup> As a direct response to the first national ghetto policy (2004), the municipality of Aarhus launched their own local strategy in 2007 with the purpose of making permanent positive changes in Rosenhøj in Viby S and Gellerupparken. With the combination of social, physical and organizational approaches and with a huge public investment and political engagement, the physical programme for Rosenhøj is a proto type of a “strategic collaboration” between municipality and the housing associations and with “the municipality as a natural anchor” (Regeringen, 2010, p.9). This case is therefore the first to be discussed.

*A radical new spatial setting*

Traditionally, Danish physical programmes are initiated as the result of technical problems or a bad physical condition in a housing estate; then social issues are added in the process.<sup>9</sup> But in this case, the physical programme is the result of a long, strategic process: Based on thorough background analysis, user dialogue and knowledge, it was first framed by a large-scale cross-disciplinary regeneration strategy for Viby S and politically adopted in 2009 (Aarhus Kommune, Viby Andelsboligforening and Boligforening Aarhus Omegn, 2009). Later it was part of a national architect competition with the overall purpose to develop Viby S into “a coherent, and liveable neighbourhood” with private and public housing estates, more urban life and a more balanced social mix as stated in the vision (Aarhus Kommune, Viby Andelsboligforening and Boligforening Aarhus Omegn, 2010). Investments for new infrastructure outside the premises, updating urban space, investments in office building, public jobs and a new common house on the outskirts of Rosenhøj are also important steps in order to kick start a positive development and attract private investors (Aarhus Kommune, Viby Andelsboligforening and Boligforening Aarhus Omegn, 2009). The ambition to change the spatiality in the neighbourhood has been radical, suggesting an overall new, spatial setting, not only for the premises of Rosenhøj, but for the area of Viby, as a coherent, dynamic space of diverse social production and reproduction of norms, flows and perception. In terms of Lefebvre, the vision has

8 Again, the Danish ghetto definition is based on five national criteria and cannot be compared to international definitions neither in size, organization or social stigma, e.g. Wacquant (2007).

9 This process has several times been problematized by experts (Bech-Danielsen, Kirkeby and Ginnerup, 2014).

been to produce an appropriate space for a new social life of the neighbourhood.

The winner project<sup>10</sup> for Rosenhøj addresses many of the unique characteristics of the large-scale, architecture of Rosenhøj. In its origin in 1971, it symbolized the heyday of modern housing architecture and planning: A culmination of a democratic approach to everyday life of everyday people with equal access to light, air and green surroundings with infrastructure that separated heavy traffic from leisure life and with the best housing comfort of the period. Closely related to an articulated social consciousness in housing architecture with the purpose of creating the best setting for a modern life, e.g. Athen Charter (Le Corbusier, 1933/1943).

10 The competition was won by Arkitema Arkitekter, Viggo Madsen & Effekt.



The overall purpose articulated in the winner project is to break the anonymous, large-scale building structure into a hierarchy of scales: By infrastructurally dividing the premises into three local neighbourhoods by establishing two new streets that compared with the original streets are integrated into the life on the premises with integrated parking spaces and shared flows. The three neighbourhoods are again downscaled into 11 small housing units centred on a modernized courtyard with direct access from each block. This means that the original south-facing-block structure characteristic of this period of building architecture has been radically changed. Though not part of the physical programme – but initiated by the municipal strategy – the architects proposed to raise 11 new double houses at the end of each courtyard, in order to create “a horseshoe” formation that would protectively close in on the semi-private area and the small private gardens (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2**  
Situation plan before (left) and after the renewal (right), showing two new streets, a new outdoor setting and a visual opening toward the school and new urban center (right).

SOURCE: ÅRHUS OMEGN AND ARKITEMA ARCHITECTS.

Thirdly, the traditional concrete façade of all 27 buildings has been transformed into three different expressions with different material and colour as well as window and balcony solutions. The vision was to give a more diverse experience walking through the premises, but also to pair the buildings in the horseshoe formation with expressions that distinguish them from the surrounding buildings.

Finally, the whole area has been opened up to the surroundings: First, by reducing/demolishing four buildings in the edge zone and transforming them into seven slim building blocks toward the local school which plays a vital role in the neighbourhood strategy. Simultaneously new infrastructure with facilities, including learning facilities for the local school (based on dialogues), have been initiated in order to turn it into an alternative route between the new public urban centre with upcoming offices at one end and a train stop at the other end of Rosenhøj. One-third of all apartments have been modernized to include access for elderly and disabled. Balconies and extra windows are established to blur the border between public and private, to open up the blocks to the outdoor community and also in order to be “safe eyes” in the streets.

The renewal of Rosenhøj has just ended and the results have not yet had time to establish themselves. Yet it is fair to say that the transformation as described above, serves as an important part of the overall integration of Rosenhøj into Viby S: Locally, the physical transformation has succeeded in a radically lower moving frequency, new type of residents to the modernized apartments and the new double houses, for which a waiting list is up and running. Due to a recruiting strategy targeted at the construction sitework, the crime rate and unemployment among young people have decreased (Bech-Danielsen and Mechlenborg, 2017). But the real spatial transformation is still to come, though in its potential: The housing association has recently decided moving their head office into Rosenhøj. At the same time, they are planning additionally two new building projects – a new student house in the edge zone of the premises, and a multi-storey building with senior apartments and penthouses is also *planned* with interests from private investors. The municipality has decided to move additional 40 to the already planned 100 public jobs to the urban area and is now taking action to construct the urban space, build a common house for all residents of Viby S and a public office building. With these significant investments in the edge zones of Rosenhøj, a new structural division of the large housing estates into 11 community courtyards with the new path from the station and with the positive change, stones have been laid for a radical change within the next decades.

### *In a Lefebvrian perspective*

In a Lefebvrian perspective, the transformation of the characteristics of post-World War II housing architecture targets what Lefebvre pointed out to be the problem with the Soviet revolution, as they failed to recreate a new appropriate spatial setting that could match the idea of a space, e.g. quote (1991, p.59).<sup>11</sup> In this thinking, the perceived space becomes a space of spatial practice when it is turned into epistemology. By spatial practice, Lefebvre points to the “material” dimension of social activity and interaction which means that everything that can be perceived and put in a verifiable system; for example: In summertime, an

11 Some researchers point to this aspect of Lefebvre’s trialectic as social practice, not spatial practice (Milgrom, 2008). Nonetheless, the definition is the same: Social and spatial practice is verified practices on a (specific) location that can be counted for (Soja, 1996; Merrifield, 2005).

overrepresentation of residents uses the courtyard for social activities, or 80% of all residents consider the courtyard as part of their everyday life space. Therefore, you may say that spatial practice is the result of the physical space plus everyday life, as it deals with properties that keep spatiality together through routines, patterns of movement and systems (ditto, Soja, 1996; Schmid, 2008). To Lefebvre, the perceived space will never be able to stand alone, and a physical transformation – or a new spatial setting – is not a guarantee for a specific spatial practice. Meaning that despite what the architect intended by a new setting, something else might happen, when users appropriate, or when an idea of space meets the perceived (and in this case – transformed physical) space.

What is interesting in the case of Rosenhøj, is that the architects suggested a social initiative that, according to them, would help the transition to a new social practice and a more fundamental attachment to place: Parallel with the downscaling of the premise into 11 small physical communities, they suggested downscaling the housing organization equally so that the residents would gain total economic and political control over their own courtyard. Unfortunately, the proposal was declined due to formal restrictions. Instead, each courtyard has been subject to an activation strategy forcing the local tenants in each courtyard to decide collectively what facilities they wanted in their common space (e.g. playground, barbeque facilities, herbs etc.) and thereby giving them a sense of belonging and self-initiative. Despite difficulties in changing the (old) spatial practice (meaning that only few tenants have been active in urban design tasks), the housing association have observed a changing culture toward a more involved community, which they claim is directly connected into the new tasks and opportunity for influences and control over one's premise (Bech-Danielsen and Mechlenborg, 2017). This is also confirmed in literature on homemaking and place attachment (Després, 1991; Douglas, 1991).

**Figure 3**  
Breaking down the large-scale housing estate into 11 courtyards by turning half of the south facing blocks around and raising a new semi-detached block at the end of the yard.

CREDIT: ARKITEMA ARCHITECTS.





At the same time, efforts were put into dialogues and bottom up-activities with the tenants during the process. At the beginning, the tenants in Rosenhøj were very sceptical about the fact that the municipality planned to transform their building estate, and it took the housing association months and lots of meetings, events and dialogue to turn the tenants' democracy in favour of the transformation. In Kjærslund, the housing association next to Rosenhøj, this never succeeded. It means that the outdoor plan, which is part of the overall strategy competition regarding the Rosenhøj masterplan, has therefore never been executed (Bech-Danielsen and Mechlenborg, 2017). Tenants' democracy in the Danish housing sector is unique. On one hand, it makes it difficult for municipalities and housing cooperation to secure the best plan. On the other hand, it is an obvious and very clear example of resistance of every day space as it shows how social agency is mobilized if tenants feel they have not been understood or if they feel threatened by a powerful discourse. This is not an option in other countries.

To further the transformation of the lived life of everyday space, image-changing communication has been working internally with the tenants. Among other things, an event to celebrate new names of the two new streets, open houses, social activities, coordination etc. Effort has also been put into telling more positive stories about Rosenhøj to a public audience. In a Lefebvrian trialectic, this served as an important way to build up new symbolic values and stories that could "overlay" the physical change and help create contemporary meaningful understanding of the new spatial setting.

*Sjælør Boulevard: The effect of new infrastructure is context based*

Rosenhøj is not the only case that exemplifies a collaborative alliance with the local municipality; also Sjælør Boulevard in Copenhagen had a strong social collaboration with Copenhagen municipality, when in 2004 it became part of the first Hot Spot-initiative – a public project to solve gang-related crime. When the physical plan was initiated, the two housing associations therefore planned to contact the municipality to coordinate an infrastructure project with the purpose of opening up the area in parallel with a municipal project next to the premise, a graveyard which is to be made more open to public use.

Like Rosenhøj, Sjælør Boulevard in Copenhagen was suffering from a bad reputation, a poor architectural condition and a prior listing on the ghetto list. Despite a positive development of the neighbourhood of Sydhavnen and a rising local economy, Sjælør Boulevard was not able to benefit from it. In order to ensure a more stable economic future for the housing estate, the idea was to increase the overall housing comfort of the estate and integrate it visually and functionally in the surroundings.





Figure 4  
Sjælør Boulevard, situation plan before the renewal with the public graveyard, the train station and the high school area.

CREDIT: GOOGLEMAP.

Three key components constituted this integration strategy: An infrastructure project with new urban facilities and design connecting the station area (formerly the site for the Hot Spot-project) at one end of the premises with the two high schools at the other end. A visual opening of the premises toward the parallel road along Sjælør Boulevard in order to benefit from a mutual opening of an old graveyard opposite the road, a project the municipality organized. Finally, the area was opened up and “unsafe” zones were eliminated.

At the same time the blocks were renovated: One-room apartments were integrated into larger two-room apartments, all units got bigger balconies and extra windows (also serving as “eyes”) and integrated kitchens/glassed-in balconies. Initially a new insulating brick façade was planned in order to restore the original architectural expression of the housing estate, but due to financial challenges, the association chose a cheaper version, which however guaranteed a better indoor climate and a reduced heating bill.

The results? The elimination of one-bedroom apartments means that a number of disadvantaged residents have permanently moved out and been redistributed elsewhere. The new, small but modernized two-room apartments are attractive to students and young couples interested in an apartment in the neighbourhood, as stated by the association. The upgraded path from the station to the institutions at the other end of the premises is frequently used as a popular shortcut for pupils. To some extent it seems like Sjælør Boulevard is now benefitting from the positive growth of the neighbourhood.

On the other hand, the visual opening towards the graveyard has been downscaled dramatically. In parallel with cutting down the huge trees facing the graveyard, the housing association decided to put up a small fence to prevent bikes and strollers from crossing the green area. At the same time, the municipality has put up a fence along the graveyard at

the other side of the road to prevent access after dark. This suggests that the collaboration with the municipality has failed which to some extent is also the case as implied by an employee from the housing association. Simultaneously, the visual opening is now competing with a new mental and physical barrier.

### *In a Lefebvrian perspective*

The physical change in Sjælør Boulevard is founded on an understanding that the problems of the housing estate have to do with the lack of integration with its surroundings, socially and economically. So far it is aligned with the ambition in the Danish ghetto strategy, as it seeks to re-integrate with society through new streets/paths, inviting students and citizens to cross the premises to get from the station to the public functions at the other end. As such it breaks down another characteristic of the post-World War II housing architecture as secluded places “without any natural exchange between the housing blocks and the surrounding city” as the interpretation goes in the ghetto strategy and elsewhere (Regeringen 2010, p.9).<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the infrastructure project with the new path through Sjælør Boulevard eliminates what originally was the conceived idea of the planning: To build a housing area which socially and practically would function as a small town in a bigger town, a closed community in itself.

In Rosenhøj, the opening of the premises has been undertaken simultaneously with the breakdown of the large-scale area into smaller communities with defined semi-private areas, isolated from the public eye and use with place attachment and social ties as a crucial element in the transformation. This is not the case in Sjælør Boulevard. Inside the premises, the tenants are adapting to the fact that it might not be a neighbour that they now meet in their green garden, “but a stranger”, as one respondent put it and concluded that with the opening up to outsiders, he was afraid that they would eventually lose the feeling of social connectedness (Bech-Danielsen and Mechlenborg, 2017). In order words: Turning their common area into an urban, public space might have cost them their semi-private space between the building blocks that was fundamental for a feeling of social cohesion and community ties. Similarly, only one resident and the local kindergarten have accepted an offer to get private access to the ground level from the ground floor. As one tenant put it: “It is nice to get out [in the open], but everyone can also get in!” (Bech-Danielsen and Mechlenborg, 2017).

To David Harvey, a major voice in the Lefebvre research,<sup>13</sup> the implementation of architectural visions also has to do with understanding, not only transformation in the perceived, actual space. It is implicitly understood that, in the design, the tenants in a transformed or new housing area share a common dream (values, ideals and perceptions of the good life) not only with their neighbours and peers, but with the architect

12 Christian Norberg-Schultz has been an important voice in the architectural critic of modernistic planning and housing.

13 According to recent interpretations of Lefebvre, Harvey is an icon of the first paradigm of The Production of Space, focusing on the political-economic aspects of the trialectic (Milgrom, 2008; Goonewardena, et al., 2008). Nonetheless, his influence on the understanding of Lefebvre cannot be underestimated.

(Harvey, 2000; Milgrom, 2008). This identification, or shared conceived space, allows differences in transforming perceived space, as long as it fulfils the same “system generated according to a particular law”, in this case the architect’s law (Lefebvre, 1991, p.372). Meaning that a transformation must either be predominantly objective, that is rational and authoritarian, and therefore reduced to the lived life of space (like a football stadium built solely to control events and people), or it must target values and passions in the lived space, like “an affective kernel (noyau) or centre”, e.g. the centres of lived-life practices and meaningful processes in one (Lefebvre, 1991, p.39).



**Figure 5**  
Sjælør Boulevard welcomes students and invites them to use of the premises as a shortcut to get from the station to the school. This has made the premises much more urban – and public.

CREDIT: CLAUD BECH-DANIELSEN.

In this perspective the transformation project in Sjælør Boulevard lacks the powerful agency offered by the municipality, like it is the case of Rosenhøj in Viby S. Sjælør Boulevard is neither in a position to force a new radical spatial practice, nor is it corresponding sufficiently with the core of the everyday life of the tenants, which could have activated engagement and energy. Both weaknesses point to the lack of a powerful conceived space. This lack has resulted in compromises that instead of changing the perceived setting into something new are modelling it into the same picture, just slightly different, e.g. the fences along the graveyard. In other words: The physical transformation of Sjælør Boulevard has not to a sufficient degree offered the tenants a new conceived space in which they could adapt the practices of everyday life. Instead valuable qualities have now been eliminated from the original spatial practice due to the (semi-)opening up of the premise.

### *Houkærvenget – transformation of everyday life*

In Houkærvenget, Northern Jutland, a reintegration strategy was also initially central to the renewal of the classical post-World War II housing estate, but like at Sjøløv Boulevard, it was radically adjusted during the process, but for different reasons as described above. Two elements are crucial: The adjusted reintegration plan, and the targeting of a housing type.

Houkærvenget, situated outside Viborg in a suburban area, is a typical housing estate from 1975 with 20 housing blocks placed in pairs in a “horseshoe” formation with 504 dwellings, access to private gardens from the ground floor, and a common green space in the middle. Due to an earlier renewal in the 1990s, the current transformation was primarily initiated by social factors and a challenging economic consequence: Houkærvenget had been on the national ghetto list until its population decreased and it no longer met the criteria.<sup>14</sup> But a poor reputation and a monolithic and “fortress-like” architecture had resulted in vacant apartments and a fairly high moving frequency. With a strong competition from the private housing market, a high energy consumption and lack of accessibility for the elderly and the disabled, the housing association concluded that it would have difficulties in breaking the negative spiral without a radical modernization and a new brand.

<sup>14</sup> In several years on of the criteria on the ghetto list is housing estates with more than 1 000 inhabitants.



Figure 6  
Situation plan, Houkærvenget with its identical building blocks in a horseshoe formation. The graphic, red spots points to the location of the new planned common activity house.

CREDIT: STATENS BYGGEFORSKNINGSINSTITUT (SBI).

Originally the landscape plan focused on opening up the premises by inviting people into the area. Especially the large green space in the middle of the “horseshoe” was intended as the centre for new facilities that could attract new activities into the estate. But a user-based dialogue and the influence of the social programme, focused attention on the spaces between the housing blocks “in the shoe”, instead. The message was that these spaces were dominated by – mainly non-Western – unattended children playing several hours a day, and they needed a more comfortable, secure zone that could at the same time be overlooked by parents from the windows.

In combination with uncomfortable isolated corners and sites, the tenants and the social workers argued for a restructuring of the outdoor strategy. At the same time, a brief context analysis showed that even a strictly programmed green space would have difficulty in attracting people into the premises as the surrounding areas were already full of facilities and common functions. The result was a zoning plan for different target groups (small children and the elderly), and a visual opening of the rather closed, green spaces. At the same time, a new planned activity house with glass facades and bricks would be strategically placed in the public corner of the housing area. The house offers a shared space for the more secret and fragmented social life of the estate; second it is functioning as a visual portal from the outside and serves the purpose of opening up the premises to the surroundings. Notably, due to restrictions that passers-by are not allowed in.

The renewal of Houlkærvænget was initiated in 2015 and is expected to be finished by 2018 when the planned common house is built. This means that the results are only tentative; but the housing association has already benefitted from the local rehousing of tenants and new residents are moving in which means that vacancy is (temporarily) on standby. A waiting list of local seniors has been initiated and plays a vital role in relation to a more sustainable economic future. With the attraction of more resourceful tenants the social balance in the estate is changing and the housing association estimates the economy to be much more positive than before the renewal.

It must be emphasized that there is a direct connection between the new waiting list and the transformation of 1/3 of the housing units into senior-friendly apartments with new kitchens, bathrooms, floor heating and integrated stairways. The target group for these upgraded housing units are local seniors on the verge of selling their private homes and preparing for senior life.





Figure 7  
One third of all apartments in Houlkærvenget have been comprehensively modernized in order to attract local seniors.

CREDIT: BOLIGSELSKABET VIBORG, 2017.

As part of the renewal, the housing association made these housing units subject to a marketing strategy in online advertising, brochures and open-house events. In a general introduction, it is mentioned that Houlkærvenget is “placed close by a public nursing home” and that paths through the estate “are making visits easy” and comfortable (Boligselskabet Viborg, 2016). In the same material, the new zoning of the green spaces between the buildings in the “horseshoe” formation are described as opportunities for meeting “with neighbours – close to one’s own home” (Boligselskabet Viborg, 2016). This suggests that Houlkærvenget have solved the vacancy problem, not by reintegration the housing estate into the surrounding areas, but by strategically focusing on a new type of dwelling for a new type of tenant.

#### *In a Lefebvrian perspective*

The adjusted reintegration strategy of Houlkærvenget shows how the “wisdom” of the lived space of everyday life is able to provide a conceived space with new information. First by targeting a new profile, the local seniors, and strategically transforming the dwellings into the ideal setting for the spatial practice of the aging group of citizens, and at the same time by consequently building up an image of a “senior haven”, e.g. the marketing material. More importantly, Houlkærvenget has turned an authoritarian regeneration strategy into a tactic initiative, supporting the lived space of everyday life.

As previously explained, the balance between the three aspects in the trialectic makes it difficult to spot the difference and the hierarchy between the perceived, the conceived and the lived spaces, also because there should be some kind of correspondence between the architect or planner’s vision and the vision of people in everyday life in order to make spatiality produce and reproduce itself. Roughly speaking, you may say that a spatial practice that does not correspond to the norms and



average behaviour does not correspond to the conceived space either (Harvey, 2000). The Danish ghetto strategy points out this behaviour and calls it “parallel societies” where “laws, that count for the rest of the country [...] do not have the same effect” (Regeringen, 2010). Traditionally, these parallel societies are targeted in social programmes with initiatives within the social-political area, and with the municipality as a key collaborative partner, whereas the physical programme, as described in the ghetto strategy, strives to regenerate the parallel society by adjusting its bad behaviour and turning it normative (for instance by place-attachment initiatives in Rosenhøj).

In Houlkærvænget this normalizing transformation occurs by understanding the codes of everyday-life space, not a one-size-fits-all solution. By wisdom and knowledge from the social programme and through dialogue with the tenants, the housing association has not only accepted the spatial practice of a small, but socially excluded group of tenants, as a valid spatial practise. In this case families of primarily non-Western cultures who have a different perspective on child rearing and the use of public space. Instead of excluding this practise, they have adjusted the perceived space, so it could include this differentiated practice, and thereby normalizing it.

## Discussion

What do the three cases tell us about the Danish ghetto strategy and its ability to fundamentally transform ghettos into society in a Lefebvrian perspective? As shown in the above case studies, the potential of the Danish ghetto strategy is far from being implemented in local projects, e.g. Table 1. Apart from Rosenhøj, the physical programmes lack several initiatives in order to comply with the recommended strategy. Secondly, the study shows that physical programmes with even few initiatives can actually generate a positive social change, if done properly with wisdom and knowledge from the lived space of everyday life. Meaning that initiatives, e.g. the ghetto strategy, in themselves do not necessarily lead to poorer projects or the lack of social effect. The success of a transformation has to do with the amount of power over knowledge and wisdom, e.g. Lefebvre’s understanding of spatial change as a supreme court where the aspects of the conceived, the perceived and the lived spaces come into question. What can Lefebvre’s trialectic of spatiality on the perceived, the conceived and the lived spaces then tell us about the physical reintegration of deprived neighbourhoods? Three themes are discussed.

### Positive and negative struggles and conflicts

As some of the cases illustrate, resistance to transformation comes from the lived life of spaces. Of course, this has to do with the fact that in the Danish housing sector the physical programme has to be approved by

the tenants' democracy of the housing estates, not only the municipality.<sup>15</sup> And a negative attitude can, in the worst scenarios, have the consequence that the tenants dismiss the programme as was the case in the neighbour association of Rosenhøj in Viby S. Or it can demand another approach to the matter, as we saw in Houlkærvænget, Viborg, where focus was put on the small spaces between the houses instead of a comprehensive renovation of the green space in the middle of the horseshoe formation. But the resistance goes further than the formal tenants' democracy; it is also a matter of behavioural attitude. When only one tenant in Sjælør Boulevard applies for direct access to the common garden where the infrastructure project is being implemented, it shows how practices and tactics, or what Lefebvre defines as "the imagination" that "seeks to change and appropriate" are used in order to oppose the powerful discourses that are presented to them by the physical transformation and the ghetto strategy (Lefebvre, 1991, p.39). Or put in another way: People of everyday life have a natural ability to appropriate even powerful strategies in order to live with and even to surpass the stigmatization of being oppressed (Soja, 1996, pp.86–88).

In a positive light, conflict can also turn a physical programme into something better. Knowledge from the current social programme gives insight into social dilemmas that are not normally addressed in physical programmes. Often a social programme will focus on the weakest residents causing the social problems and part of the statistics that the criteria that define the ghetto list, but these are mainly approached with social interventions. On the other hand, the physical programme aims to raise the overall housing standard in order to maintain and attract more attractive, resourceful residents (Bech-Danielsen and Mechlenborg, 2017; Houllind, 2016). This is the case in Sjælør Boulevarden, where young people have been an important target group in the social programme and in Hot Spots collaboration with the municipality; however, in the physical transformation of the outdoor space they have become remarkably invisible. By putting a spatial perspective on the social target group, as they did in Houlkærvænget, Viborg, the physical transformation may help to solve some of the social conflicts in a housing area, and therefore improve the housing standard not only for the deprived members, but also for the functioning tenants.

Also, local knowledge of the site-specific context, i.e. its flow of pedestrians, bicycles etc., functions and social profiles seems to serve as a positive conflict when used properly. As shown in the study, infrastructure projects work differently in different contexts and are influenced by different factors: First of all, it is important that new paths and street have something outside the premise to link on to (e.g. in Rosenhøj where a new path connects the new urban centre and the train station). Secondly, infrastructure project can have a major impact on the inner social organization of space like in Houlkærvænget, where the new path turned

15 A key finding in the evaluation is also that almost every physical programme contains lifestyle improving elements like new or better balconies, kitchens, baths etc., and that these often are used as themes in the dialogue with the tenants.

a common space into a public space, and as a result broke the sense of community.

The point here is that deep knowledge of the space of everyday life is decisive for how individual initiatives should be implemented or whether they should be implemented at all. Maybe a better understanding of how tenants understood their common space would have given an insight into the nuances between private, semi-private and semi-public spheres that could support the new path through the premise.

### *The power to change*

Another issue concerns the role of the municipality. In a Lefebvrian research the potential to be an agent with the power to change (Lefebvre, 1991, pp.59–61). Being presented as the first initiative in the ghetto strategy (see Table 1), the municipality is, except from the Rosenhøj case, remarkably invisible. In the Rosenhøj case, the municipality plays a vital role in which the physical plan is only one important element of the overall strategy.

Compared with the more “traditional” physical programmes analysed in this paper, which have been restricted by the geographical boundaries of its estate, the case of Rosenhøj shows a different spatial take to the matter. With the municipality as an anchor, the transformation of Rosenhøj has been framed with knowledge, power and ambition that has allowed the architects to rethink the fundamental structure of the estate and given them power to do it with elements that are not limited to the physical programme, but to a strategic transformation of the built environment. The case shows the potential of a powerful agent. The housing association has also rightfully been publicly recognized for its ambitious approach to transformation.<sup>16</sup> Or in other words: Rosenhøj has less to do with a physical programme and much more to do with urban reintegration strategy (Colantonio and Dixon, 2010; Savini and Majoor, 2017). Yet, it shows that the ghetto strategy should not be a strategy for housing associations, but for municipalities.

### *Changes for whom?*

It should be noted that positive social change can happen even though not all initiatives in the Danish ghetto strategy are at play, and even though the municipality does not play a central role in the process or the framing of the transformation.

Retrospectively the renewal of Houkærvenget has strategically addressed vacancy problems by upgrading apartments and outdoor spaces for local seniors who wish to leave their privately-owned single-family house, but not their neighbourhood. The strategy is not based on an opening up of the premises, but on creating a housing type that can compete with more traditional housing types on the local housing

<sup>16</sup> The Viby S/Rosenhøj project has been subject to architectural, social and political attention, at latest the transformation received the prestigious RENOVER Anniversary prize, 2017.

market. The same line of renewal is done in Sjælør Boulevard, where upgraded smaller apartments have been able to enter the private housing market and thereby benefit from its central location. Secondly, the adjusted outdoor plan in Houlkærvænget shows how a transformed physical environment can support the integration of an excluded spatial practice, while addressing it with wisdom and respect. Finally, all three cases show that changing an image of a housing estate is also related to communicating it. All three cases mentioned have spent extra resources on marketing, communication and target-group-specific events and actions. Thereby the housing estates have put an effort into commercializing their housing supplement (Houllind, 2016), or as Lefebvre would say – changing the conceived space of the housing estate. This suggests that image changing transformations do not rely on only radical physical changes itself, but also on radical physical change *and* a new discourse.

## Conclusion

I have shown that recent Danish transformation projects do not fulfill the potential of the Danish ghetto strategy. In that perspective, they match international surveys and research. But the findings cannot be explained only by the process of stigmatization of discourse, as some researchers claim, though some of the initiatives in the strategy can be understood as a further stigmatizing factor. Rather the lack of fulfilment has to do with ability to correspond to the power of agency with the knowledge of the perceived space and wisdom of everyday life. As such smaller initiatives can have a major social effect if done properly and wisely. Large-scale strategies like infrastructure projects risk ruining some of the existing qualities in post-World War II housing architecture.

An overall finding is that struggles and conflicts are natural responses in the process of transformation; and further that struggles and conflicts should be considered as privileged insights into the dynamic relationships between what we would like it to be (conceived space), and the instruments we use in order to transform it (the perceived space) and the actual, disorganized and local, specific spaces of everyday life. Parallels should not be drawn between physical programmes and the Russian revolution in the beginning of last century, but it shows that even radical, fundamental transformation should be better equipped with knowledge and wisdom on how the dynamic of the material and symbolic life of everyday life are working. We need to expand the programming phase of every physical transformation and put more effort into filling it with social, historical, spatial and local knowledge before we can decide what the actual problem is and how to fix it. A more strategic collaboration with the local municipality, which has the power to change the existing setting, could be a place to start.

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Mette Mechlenborg has more than ten years of experience within the branch of the built environment. As a researcher Mette Mechlenborg has focused on space and place theory, suburban culture and housing in a cross-interdisciplinary research field bridging social and material studies. She has held several positions at Southern University of Denmark, School of Design and Copenhagen University and now Aalborg University. Further to her research career, Mette Mechlenborg has a great practical experience, first of all from her position as head of research at BARK consultancy (2012–2016). She has been enrolled in several networks, e.g. Housing and Welfare/Center for Housing Research 2006–2012.

