Governance relations and collective action dilemmas in Danish social housing

Lars A. Engberg

Danish Building Research Institute, Aalborg University, Dr. Neergaards Vej 15, Hoersholm, DK-2970, lae@sbi.dk

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Abstract

The current social housing reform in Denmark aims to promote new collaborative practices within the social housing sector, and between the sector and local government. The sector is highly regulated and the reform articulates a discourse of deregulation and collaborative planning. Supposedly, the reform will stimulate the development of new collaborative governance relations in regard to social housing. In the article, I explore the reform trend and its potential for changing the institutional forms within the sector. To move beyond the reform rhetoric, I trace the social issue understood as a perceived social obligation and a proactive social role for social housing providers at three levels: At the estate level with a particular focus on tenants' democracy; at the level of housing associations with a focus on central and local managers' perspectives; and at the municipal level with a focus on the role of social housing in area-based interventions to combat ghettoisation in distressed neighbourhoods. The analysis shows how institutionalised collective action dilemmas and power dichotomies that surround the social issue at the three levels are interlinked and likely to create path-dependencies that will affect the outcomes of the social housing reform.

1. Ghettoisation in Danish social housing

Social housing[1] in Denmark is owned and managed by private, non-profit housing associations (HAs), governed by a system of tenants' representatives and subject to detailed public regulation. Historically, the purpose of the sector is to provide universal access to adequate housing, and rents are subsidised to allow access to persons with relatively low incomes. Allocation is regulated by a system of waiting lists, and 25 per cent of vacant housing units are earmarked for persons who cannot

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[1] In Danish, the term for social housing is 'almen bolig' which linguistically translated into English means 'universal housing', implying housing for a broad segment of the population. 'Social bolig', directly translated 'social housing', means housing for socially deprived residents. In the paper, the term 'social housing' is used in the meaning of 'almen bolig' (*universal housing*) and when a distinction between the two terms is necessary, this will be highlighted.

provide for their own housing need, a scheme administered by local government. The individual housing estate is a financially independent unit, and no cross-subsidy between estates is possible in principle. Social housing accounts for 21 percent of the total housing stock or about 510,000 units. Most units are relatively new, only 5 percent have been built prior to 1940, and since 1980 the number of social housing dwellings has risen by 50 percent. About 700 social housing associations administer a total of 5100 housing estates. The Danish model is similar to that of an integrated rental market model (Kemeney 2006, p. 2-6) characterised by universal access, a non-profit social renting sector that equals the size of the for profit-renting sector, and a history of social democratic corporatism that has effectively halted privatisation initiatives (Jensen, 2006, p. 45-100) by the national right-wing hegemonic coalition in power since 2001.

Tenants who live in housing sections built prior to 1970 pay an annual contribution to *The National Building Fund* ('Landsbyggefonden') as a part of their rent. The fund re-channels economic resources back to the social housing sector, subsidising 1) housing constructions, repairs and maintenance, 2) shoddy construction work and environmental programmes, and 3) running expenses of less well-off housing sections. With the finance reform in 1998 the main burden of subsidising social housing was shifted from the state to the sector itself (Engberg 2004). National Housing Agreements (2005 and 2009) have further placed an obligation on the fund to finance anti-ghettoisation measures in distressed social housing estates.

In the 80s and early 90s, local governments implemented the municipal allocation scheme somewhat uncritically. Apartments were available in the least attractive sections of the social housing market, and the allocation patterns accelerated ongoing segregation processes in these most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. For the last decade, this trend has been put to a halt, but not reversed (Skifter Andersen 2005). In response, local governments and housing associations have entered allocation agreements that exempt the most distressed estates from municipal allocation.

In 94-95 a number of social democratic mayors initiated a Danish ghetto debate, arguing that the combination of relative poverty and a concentration of ethnic groups in social housing areas caused substantial social, cultural and financial problems in their municipalities (Vestergaard 2004). Since then, numerous anti-ghettoisation measures have been implemented combining employment measures, re-mortgaging schemes, physical upgrading, community outreach schemes, cultural and educational initiatives etc. It is estimated that presently approximately ten percent of the social housing stock or 50,000 dwellings are exposed to processes of ghettoisation (Ministry of Social Affairs 2006, p. 259).

In 2004, the Liberal-Conservative government set up a committee ('Programbestyrelsen') to combat ghettoisation and turn the self-sustaining negative cycles of segregation, lack of integration, unemployment and marginalization etc. around. The committee initiated a survey of governmental strategies to combat ghettoisation in 24 local governments (Engberg 2006). Despite positive experiences with social outreach activities and various concerted efforts together with the social housing sector all local governments expressed pessimism with respect to their institutional capacity to reverse the trend. Professional government teams coordinate activities and intervene in case of vandalism, car burns, and social unrest etc., events that occurred on an unprecedented scale in the fall of 2007.

From 2004 to 2008 the committee monitored 37 districts, all of which are social housing districts primarily located in the major Danish cities (Programbestyrelsen 2008). Around 108,000 people live in the 45,000 apartments that constitute about 8 percent of all social housing (ibid p. 34). In 2007, the share of immigrants and their descendants comprised 21.4 percent of the social housing sector against 6.2 percent of the population as a whole. Every fourth young person with an ethnic origin other than Danish lives in one of the 37 ghetto-areas (ibid).

Percent	Districts monitored by the committee	The social housing sector	All housing
Share of residents outside the labour market	40.8	33.5	14.4
Share of immigrants and descendants from non-western countries	53.4	21.4	6.2
Share of children under the age of 18	33.1	21.8	22.2

Source: Programbestyrelsen 2008, p. 6.

When integrative measures are successful, residents move out of the districts and are replaced by others, typically people outside the labour market. Thus, despite growing success in terms of labour market integration, the segregated neighbourhoods tend to become more segregated (Skifter Andersen 2005). Local government policy makers discuss whether to adopt normalisation policies aiming to influence the social composition of residents towards a mainstream profile, or whether to accept the housing market dynamics and strengthen existing qualities and potentials of segregated neighbourhoods (Engberg 2006). In practice, both strategies are adopted but there is a growing concern that efforts are in vain (ibid).

The ghettoisation agenda in Danish social housing has been a prime drive in the Conservative-Liberal government's recent reform proposals concerning social housing reform (Indenrigs- og Socialministeriet 2009). A key governance element in the reform is the proposition that local governments and social housing associations shall develop a 'steering dialogue' that will nourish a proactive and holistic approach to the fight against ghettoisation. In the following, the paper develops an analysis of

the existing governance practices of the social housing sector, illustrated from three stakeholder positions; tenants' representatives, and local and general housing managers. To supplement the stakeholder analysis a case-study of the organisation of area-based interventions in distressed neighbourhoods in the City of Copenhagen (Engberg 2008) rounds up the analysis, to illustrate the challenges of a spatial reorientation. The purpose of the analysis is to discern possible institutional dilemmas and path-dependencies likely to impact the implementation of a proactive, holistic and spatially-oriented governance regime in Danish social housing.

The Danish reform

With the Housing Policy Agreement of 2005, the right winged government in Denmark initiated a reform process in the social housing sector. The reform focuses on *governance* (Socialministeriet 2006), (Velfærdsministeriet 2008) and *finance* (Indenrigs- og Socialministeriet 2009). The reform is intended to pave the way for a deregulation of the social housing sector, with less emphasis on detailed state regulation and more emphasis on goal- and agreement management at the level of local government. The sector is highly regulated and there is a political wish to deregulate it in order to reduce administrative burdens and encourage more innovative behaviour within the sector. Also, the Municipal Reform of 2007 centralised local government, merging 275 municipalities into 98, and the reform creates a push for a centralisation of social housing associations to parallel the municipal development. Further, the sector is becoming more self-financing, a development that legitimise increased operational autonomy. But most importantly, the growing segregation and ghettoisation of social housing areas over the last 20 years calls for new proactive responses by the sector and local and national government.

The whitebook on governance reform was launched under the headline "*More freedom to fight ghettos*" (Velfærdsministeriet 2008). The government argues that the relative concentration of socioeconomically disadvantaged people and people of a different ethnic origin in the social housing sector have negative consequences for the residential areas in question, the individual residents as well as for the social cohesion in the Danish society as a whole. The reform therefore aims to promote initiatives that ensure a broader residential composition in all social housing divisions.

In April 2009, a new Housing Agreement has been adopted and the parties behind the agreement have introduced a bill in parliament. If the bill is passed it will become effective from January 1 2010 (Indenrigs- og Socialministeriet 2009). The bill prepares the ground for implementing a new governance practice – termed 'steering dialogue' – between local government and the social housing associations. Together the parties will identify and discuss social housing goals in the context of local

government housing policy and developments in the local housing market. The steering dialogue is meant to strengthen the *area-perspective* on local social housing estates in order to ensure that these areas are continuously modernised and economically and socially well-functioning. To implement the steering dialogue, the parties must:

- Clarify the future need for coordination and agreements between local government and housing association and agree on a timetable for this
- Enter agreements on comprehensive development plans
- Enter regeneration agreements concerning specific estates or overall areas that address social, constructional and letting-related initiatives as well as minor activities initiated by the housing association
- Enter letting and housing allocation agreements concerning combinations of the different letting instruments developed to combat ghettoisation
- Enter agreements concerning housing standards, new build, architecture politics and municipal housing policies etc.

The National Association of Housing Associations supports a deregulation of the sector and a structural adjustment to accommodate the local government reform. Collaborative bodies with elected social housing representatives exist in all municipalities, and a constructive governance dialogue is formulated as a key strategic goal. The steering dialogue is considered a means to develop urban areas, and to formulate municipal housing and construction goals together with necessary public investments

Research questions, theory and method

When reviewing the reform proposal and the latest housing agreements it is apparent that ghettoisation dominates the agenda, and reform emphasis is on *the social obligation of the social housing sector* and *the proactive social role* of social housing associations. The primary means to realise this end is the 'steering dialogue'. The dialogue is intended to draw the parties closer together in order to develop better anti-segregation measures and results. As a proactive, collaborative framework, the dialogue will enable the parties to develop local, context-sensitive strategies for the social housing districts, and a better understanding of local needs and development opportunities. Additionally, a better utilisation of existing professional resources and welfare functions in both local governments and the sector will be promoted. The dialogue is intended to cause a strategic mobilisation in both systems, a mobilisation with an area perspective focused on the needs of deprived districts. Essentially, the key reform premise is that the governance framework will establish a self-reinforcing mechanism: The anti-ghettoisation measures will create a push for the mobilisation of

collaborative governance, which in turn result in better effects of anti-ghettoisation measures.

Governance relations and institutionalised collective action dilemmas

In the following I question this reform premise asking whether there is empirical support to the conjecture that 'ghettoisation leads to steering-dialogue' judging from an analysis of the existing governance practices to be observed in the Danish social housing sector. To do this, I assume that the ways in which stakeholders perceive the ghettoisation issue 1) reflects their interests; 2) reflects how they strategically position themselves to defend these interests in the governance relations of the sector; and 3) inform us of how they define the basic purpose of the sector as such, the last two points further adding to the analysis of the dynamics of the governance structures.

The point pursued in the article is, that the ways in which key social housing actors conceptualise what they see as the important dimensions of the governance practices of social housing influence the ways in which the same actors visualise and imagine possible futures, hereby conditioning or laying out specific paths along which the groups are likely to develop their governance relations and the values, norms and mores that support these relations.

The analytical approach is that of a pragmatic inquiry into the different concepts that stakeholder communities use to understand and describe a specific problem (Metcalfe 2008, p. 1094). The analytical task is to create a link between understandings (interpretive frameworks) and institutionalised governance relations, showing how actors "*in fact organize the particulars of their institutional environment to move about in an effective and feasible manner in the concrete situation at hand*" (Hajer & Wagenaar 2003, p. 20).

The institutional analysis is inspired by the neo-institutionalist perspective developed by Healey and others (Healey 2004) and theories of network steering (Kickert et al. 1999), (Koppenjan & Klein 2004). Healey defines institutions as the *"norms, standards and mores of a society or social group, which shape both formal and informal ways of thinking and ways of acting*" (Healey 2004, p. 92). With Healey, I understand collaborative capacity as collective action arrangements designed to achieve some general benefit (p. 87) i.e. a capacity to act collectively defining common goals and implementing these. The neo-institutionalist perspective shows how actors' interpretative frameworks both reflect institutionalised relations and condition how actors think and act trying to influence and change these relations.

Theories on network steering emerge from the governance perspective (Rhodes 1997; Jessop 1998a; 1998b; Stoker 1998, Bogason 2000, Sehested 2000, Engberg 2003) that investigate how stakeholders negotiate practical solutions in *governance games* understood as rule-regulated negotiation processes in which participants seek to optimise their preferences through strategic interactions. From a pragmatic inquiry position, the task is to show the dialectics between these games and the conceptual stories that inform patterns of collective behaviour in the network. When specific stories or narratives are agreed upon as representing a shared understanding they inform and direct the specific actions of participants in the network (Roe, 1994; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004).

The governance analysis can be divided into three analytical dimensions, an instrumental, an interactive and an institutional (Kickert et al., 1999; p. 167-191). The instrumental dimension has to do with substantial policy issues, the interactive dimension relates to the manipulation and facilitation of negotiation and dialogue in the specific network game, and the institutional dimension concerns the ways in which the institutional affiliations of network participants condition their roles, positions and strategic capacities in the game.

When organising the qualitative interviews to be analysed below, no specific network games were addressed, the interview-guide was formulated to generate knowledge in relation to the instrumental and the institutional levels. The strategy was to analyse the dynamics of the formal governance system by asking key stakeholders how they see the purpose of the system from the perspective of their participatory experiences, and how they critically assess its shortcomings and key challenges. The questions related to 1) stakeholders understanding of the ghettoisation issue in a broad sense; what do they see as the sectors' response to the ghettoisation challenge, what is the social obligation or role of housing associations and the social housing sector as such, and 2) an open-ended evaluation of how stakeholders perceived steering relations and strategic capacities of their own governance platform and of the system as such.

A polycentric governance system

Apart from the individual tenants, *three primary stakeholder groups* constitute the governance relations: Tenants representatives, estate managers and housing CEOs. The Danish social housing sector is governed by a democratic polycentric decision making system, no single decision-making body is the sovereign authority on all matters regarding social housing issues: At the estate level, tenants elect a *section board* responsible for daily management and financial governance. However, the primary decision-making unit is the *tenants' assembly* where all residents of the estate decide upon matters relating to section budgets, renewal activities and

collective house rules. The powers of the board are reduced by the assembly, but the board can influence tenants' opinions through its everyday operations.

The HA is governed by a *housing council* with a majority of tenants' representatives, and by *the executive board of directors* (also with a tenants' majority) nominated by the council. The housing council adopts annual budgets of HAs and decides upon all major administrative and financial issues. The board of directors appoints a housing director in charge of daily management. The chairman or deputy chairman is a tenant. While housing CEOs are subject to the authority of the elected tenants assemblies, they have discretionary powers in administrative matters, and they influence the change-agendas of HAs. Estate managers are in charge of strategic and practical housing management in a dialogue with tenants, and they hold a key position mediating strategic and practical issues between the two systems.

The stakeholder analysis is based on 42 qualitative interviews with 1) tenants' democrats, 2) estate managers and 3) CEOs, supplemented with a questionnaire to all residents of social housing dwellings on the Danish Island of Funen (Arndal & Engberg 2007). The case-study is based on a recent study of meta-governance and area-based interventions in the City of Copenhagen (Engberg 2008); (Engberg 2009). The qualitative data presented allows for an exploratory view into the positions of stakeholders. The tenants' representatives are members of a section board or a housing council or both, and represent the central and local level. The estate managers represent the local administrative level, the CEOs the central level. Note that some housing associations operate nation wide. The data provide a narrative of the governance relations and system dynamics of the sector, not an objective picture. The quantitative information in the article derives from the survey mentioned above, unless other information is given. The survey addresses all tenants, not only tenants' representatives. 672 tenants responded, equivalent to a response rate of 49, and the quantitative data is also only indicative.

1. Tenants' representatives

There is a long-standing tradition of resident participation within the social housing sector, and a fair amount of active tenants. Every third tenant has participated in a section meeting within the last year and this level of activity has been stable from 1997 to 2007. App. 5 percent of the residents are or have been active in the section board and just over 10 percent are active in a working group under the board. Most tenants within a section know of the section board (83 percent). In 1997, slightly more than half of the interviewed answered yes to the question of whether the tenants' democracy had "great or some importance for the contentment" of living in social housing (Jensen et. al. 1999). In 2007, the level was the same.

The tenants' democracy essentially has to do with the *running* of the estate, i.e. having a sound residence and a well-functioning housing section. The tenants care about the rent (which must not rise significantly), the green spaces and the playground, their entitlement to modernise the individual flats, the common house etc. A section chairman expresses the crux of her work like this:" "*[we agree:] who wants to be in charge of the playground, who wants to be in charge of the common rooms and the outside areas? Every bit is distributed. This is the way we live in the sections and each one keeps an eye on his or her area of responsibility, and if there is a situation, it is brought up at the end of the meeting… that is what local democracy is all about.*"

Work in the section board is concrete and focus on the problems and projects of everyday life. Being active requires a great involvement and an *acceptance of the culture* and the rules of the game prevailing in the tenants' democracy. Tenants who are invited to become active receive an *either/or*-invitation: Are you in, we ask of you to accept the whole package. You must learn the different roles and the distribution of roles on the board, devote time regularly to engage yourself (weekday evenings, weekends etc.) and demonstrate a regular involvement. A resident democrat formulates it like this: "*If we get involved, we think very stringent and rigid, we have to be part of everything. We cannot announce "on this matter I have a special interest, this is my preference", maybe even function as a resource until this project is closed down and then get out again. We really find it difficult accepting that. Either you are in for the whole deal or you are out. In that respect, we resemble an old-fashioned school. We run a democracy which only applies for one type of people.*" On the one hand, the work is eased when the active are closely associated and get on well with each other. On the other hand, conflicts are intensified and prolonged when they take place among neighbours.

Most tenants' representatives at local and central level emphasise the *recruitment problem*. The typical tenants' democrat is a man in his sixties. Young people, families with young children, single parents and residents of a different ethnic origin than Danish are under-represented. The need to attract new active tenants and the high average age among the current is seen as an urgent problem. Most boards are well-functioning because they are manned by passionate tenants dedicating a lot of time and resources. But tenants' democrats are frustrated by the small number of new volunteers: "*How can we get more people to take part? What will happen when the big generational shift kicks in?*"

Tenants' representatives criticise the ghettoisation agenda that dominates Danish debates because it stigmatises the sector, and what is seen as a major problem from the outside is for many not perceived as a major issue living in a 'ghettoised' estate. Yet, vandalism and the concentration of social problems is a growing problem, a

feeling of safety at home is a top priority amongst tenants. Some point to the fact that ghettoisation fundamentally challenge the democratic structures in the sector: *"The legislative framework regulation the democratic institutions formulated in the 80s and 90s have become overrun by segregation, and the model has not been capable of integrating tenants with an ethnic background. Many with an ethnic background do not share the Danish associational culture, and they do not understand that they can influence their housing situation"* (chairwoman, housing assembly).

Tenants' representatives experience a *dilemma between housing improvements and rent pressure*. In the Funen-survey it appears that should a modernisation result in higher rents, then almost 65 percent of the tenants prioritise cheap housing over quality improvement. In practice this means that even small improvements are obstructed in the decision-making process. The solvency and the willingness to pay differ and the relative competition among the sections sets a limit on rent increase if empty flats are to be avoided. The tenants are entitled to object to rent increases and exert their influence on what they perceive as a reasonable level of modernisation. Furthermore, becoming re-elected as a tenants' democrat may be easier if you have avoided implementing rent increasing-projects. Hence, the dilemma is evident: how is the necessary future-proofing ensured without a considerable rise in the rent? The dilemma materialises as a general conflict of interests between the current and the future tenants in relation to the continuous renovation and future proofing of the estates.

Another dilemma relates to the relationship between *internal focus and the external challenges*. First priority is the daily running of the housing estate. The democratic culture is based on a detailed knowledge of the many rules regulating the *internal* matters in the housing section. "*The section is our own little domain*". Learning how to become a tenants' democrat is essentially about learning how to administer your housing section. At the same time, *external* challenges exert pressure on the model (ghettoisation, segregation etc.). The tenants' democracy is not developed as an institution involved in dealing with problems external to the housing section. In practice, self-determination and the power of veto can result in great opposition against plans and initiatives that have not originated from the section itself. The result is that residents in support of change are left with a challenge when trying to make room for development projects in day-to-day administration.

2. Estate managers

Estate managers express a pragmatic analysis of strengths and weaknesses within the existing frames. The main political conflict in the social housing districts in relation to the challenges of ghettoisation stems from the government's agenda for the social housing sector. The government wants the sector to undertake extensive social tasks

without allocating extra resources. The interventions are financed by the Social Housing Fund and the political signal is: 'the problems are located in your districts – solve them yourselves'. This attitude is reflected in the policies of local government and has consequences for the sector's possibilities of developing anti-ghettoisation interventions: "*Today, all housing associations find that they have to bear the brunt, especially because of the economic restrictions put on local governments. In practice, disagreement on the distribution of economic burdens in relation to social problems is the typical core of conflict, especially in the smaller municipalities*" (estate manager).

The housing associations have detailed knowledge about the socially exposed tenants and the social life taking place in the social housing sections. This knowledge they share with the municipality, e.g. when a section is unable to take in more mentally ill residents or social problems necessitate an involvement of the social services: "*[We wish to] help solve some of the coordination problems but we are not capable of solving the social problems as such*" (estate manager).

A typical strategy is to make *local problems more visible* to the municipality to encourage decision makers to care less about cost savings and more about preventive and holistic social strategies. The social housing sector's management approach ought to be less social democratic and more pragmatic. This means cooperating with the private business sector in relation to employment and job training, developing professional social offers so the municipalities can outsource certain housing-related tasks etc.

The estate managers witness social pressure on the tenants' democracy which they believe confronts major challenges. *Housing councils and boards* function reasonably, and they have the capacity to deal with social matters. Focus is on distressed housing districts, ghettoisation, housing allocation agreements, sector-municipality cooperation etc. When councils and boards malfunction it is due to tenants' representatives' lack of qualifications and their inability to cope with the work involved. Housing administrations actively try to push the members to be more active, follow courses etc. But the political-administrative division of labour sets a limit on how far administrations can go in dealing with the problem.

In general, estate managers have a sceptical assessment of *section boards*, which – understandably – have a limited capacity to engage in strategic discussions of the social challenges. Concrete and practical matters rather than strategic matters are on the agenda. Several estate managers feel frustrated about the sections boards' lacking ability to and interest for adequate renovation of the sections in order to prevent a

drop in housing quality over time. Some criticise "little kings" that run the sections and cultivate their own interests as opposed to the section as a whole.

The most critical voices claim that members of section boards only care about cultivating their *own immediate interests* typically synonymous with the lowest possible rent, and that the same limited perspective goes for the housing councils. Solidarity has ceased to prevail; the residents are only concerned about their own estate, and more often about their own flat. Consequently, prioritising across the sections and concentrating resources where they are most needed becomes troublesome. A manager explains it like this: "*In some sections, the section board doesn't bother to force through the necessary improvements towards the residents. Before you know of it, it can evolve into a real mess. It's a time bomb.*"

Tenants' democracy suffers under a *generation and recruitment problem*. Ever fewer participate in the section meetings and several residents fear that the elderly generation will not be replaced: "*We administer 72 housing sections with 55 boards. The average age of board members, I believe, is above 60. The younger tenants only participate when it comes to specific projects, like playgrounds, not in daily operations. We need young dedicated persons who have an intention with living in social housing instead of people just using this type of accommodation as a stepping stone to an owner-occupied home*" (estate manager).

According to one manager, the democratic structure and the basic operations of the housing associations would be fundamentally renewed if the sector was able to attract *the middle class*. To realise this wish, and make tenants with middle class background opt for social housing and actively join the tenants' community, the detailed regulation of the democratic structure would have to be dismantled. A new participatory structure should facilitate ad hoc involvement and allocate funds for tenant activities not earmarked and controlled by section chairmen. *"The tenants' democrats must be visionary and think politically. To a great extent it has to do with the personal resources of the board members: Are they stable and do they know what they want. This is fundamental if the housing associations are to be developed"* (estate manager).

In general, the estate managers are interested in a *closer working relationship with local governments*. However, their experience is that the municipalities, especially the smaller ones, are passive when it comes to inspecting the sector. Some municipalities have an actual negative position on social housing which they associate with social problems, major social expenditure etc. This problem is not relevant in the bigger municipalities where the sector and initiatives to combat ghettoisation are in focus. The Municipal Reform has put local governments under

resource pressure and it will take a while before a pro-active stance on the social housing sector is adopted: *"We try to initiate a constructive collaboration but a number of the municipalities never respond to our enquiries. The lack of municipal involvement especially has consequences for social issues. We feel that we are carrying out the work of the municipality, that we are becoming a social services department. Often we are missing a coordinator from the municipal system, a person with whom we can cooperate."*

The Social Housing Fund's *comprehensive development plans* will potentially help the districts, stimulate the tenants' democracy, and create closer ties between sector and municipality. As an instrument to combat ghettoisation, the comprehensive development plans are meant as a social precautionary measure, not as tools for spatial reconstruction. One estate manager emphasises the need to break with the monofunctionality in the social housing districts and bring urban functions to the areas. But the majority perceives the plans as (ad hoc) catalysts for integrated social activities to combat ghettoisation. Plans function as an eye-opener for the residents to the development of the local area and the broader city-strategic discussions. Area-interventions contribute to ideas and initiatives being shared between housing sections and between the sections and the surrounding urban environment. Hereby, more housing associations discover the process, and estate managers expect that once the municipality and some of the housing associations start to collaborate, everybody wants to join.

Many local housing managers feel that association boards and section boards ought to strengthen their discussion of urban and housing policy. By cooperating on problems in certain districts and developing a more coherent strategy in their relation with the local government, the housing actors will be able to create a positive cycle of development.

3. General managers

The general managers generally advocate a national *deregulation strategy* in relation to the social housing sector as such. This strategy should result in a sector with greater operational freedom from the detailed public regulative framework; which is less occupied with social policy measures; and which is more geared towards strengthening the market position of social housing. The CEOs wish to strengthen collaboration with local government, but emphasise that the public sector has the primary social responsibility with regard to deprived neighbourhoods and residents with social problems. If the social housing sector is to take on extra social tasks these must be matched with additional funding.

The CEOs share the strategic viewpoint that the social housing sector provides *a mainstream housing offer*; it is not a social sector engaged with handling social problems. Lingvistically, they emphasise 'almen bolig' as opposed to 'social bolig'. Living in social housing should be for everyone, not just for the socially distressed part of the population. This distinction between 'almen bolig' and 'social bolig' is not up for discussion. The social tasks should be solved based on the universal quality of the housing model.

The *National Building Fund* is at the centre of the political disagreement between the policy actors within the sector, including some CEOs from leading HAs, and the government. Current Housing Agreements dispose of the Fund's resources for years ahead and from a CEO-analysis this freeze hinders the sector in adequately future-proofing the sector. Anti-ghettoisation measures should be paid for by tax money, not by means accumulated by the tenants in the social housing sector.

The big HAs are typically active in *national political debates* on the role of the social housing sector. Several CEOs are dissatisfied with the *conflict-ridden public space* characterising social housing. They wish to mainstream the sector and in the long term make a new social pact crossing the politico-ideological differences. They argue that it is necessary to orchestrate a shift from a housing organisation born out of the Social Democratic movement, where working in the HA is a vocation, towards the role of a professional housing provider. They seek to employ a larger proportion of staff with university degrees that deal with clients and markets, and to increase the portfolio through strategic partnerships and mergers.

The increasing ghettoisation implies that the administrative leaders are very vigilant of the *social balance* in the housing districts. The tenants' democracy is based on activism and tenants require reasonable working conditions as well as a purpose: "*identification and reciprocity is crucial. If a social balance is not upheld, the active and resourceful tenants will leave*" (CEO). Trying to make elected tenants take on stronger leadership roles in both section boards and assemblies is a clear objective.

With respect to *organisational modernisation strategies*, most CEOs are frustrated with the "organisational inertia" of their system: The elected assemblies think too much about short term vested interests and too little about required modernisations necessary to position HAs in a more deregulated and market-oriented housing market. Some CEOs struggle with a reluctant housing council that hesitates to support administrative rationalisations of management and administration routines, despite obvious ineffectiveness: "*as CEO I can only orchestrate change indirectly, as a quiet internal rationalisation, and there is a frustrating lack of strategic and political discussion about the future*".

The leverage of discussions about strategic development within the frames of a regulated housing sector is very constrained. And it is a challenge to work for necessary changes when the political leadership is not supportive. Therefore, the board and the CEO tend to focus on running the dwellings. The administrative decision makers are frustrated with the detailed regulation of the sector and the negative energy caused by the regulations. The rules promote a reactive and rule-conforming behaviour as opposed to an innovative and continuous organisational development: "*our system is put together in such a way that it is safeguarded against all types of risk. Firstly, we have the exhaustive set of rules and secondly, if one of the rules is broken, the National Building Fond will intervene. There is always the risk of losing money but there is also always someone to step in and solve the problem. This circumstance can function like a pretext for doing nothing – it is so obvious – this is the core of the problem*"(general manager).

Some CEOs emphasise the necessity of a *rent reform*. The principle of balancing costs and rents means that rent levels are conditioned by costs at the time of construction. The implication is that older, centrally located apartments of good quality are cheap in rent while newer, badly located apartments are expensive. A reform of the rent structure would create better coherence between price and quality and thus improve the social housing offer.

The CEOs have a strategic interest in *high housing standards* and collaboration with local government supports this. Many local governments have become more active and meet with the social housing sector on a more regular basis. The parties make agreements about allocation of vacant dwellings, letting agreements, renovations and integrated area-development. They also develop strategies concerning the composition of the municipal housing structure, e.g. emphasising housing for the elderly, social care functions etc.

The politico-ideological conflicts concerning social housing prevailing at the national level are less dominant at the local level. Most local governments adopt a *pragmatic attitude* and seek to modernise the local housing market. Yet, they typically adopt a rather passive role towards involvement in social housing projects and issues. This trend is gradually being reversed. In more and more municipalities, community projects in housing estates are being developed and informal contacts and mutual projects function as ice-breakers: "*if the planners feel that we have hidden agendas, they quickly step back from our joint settings. We go for informal face-to-face contacts without too much formality and our key contacts mediate the broader dialogue into the municipal system*" (CEO). Amongst municipal decision-makers there is a growing awareness that local anti-segregation measures can contribute to or

even support municipal welfare arrangements and ultimately benefit municipal finances.

The CEO's continue to be aware of the basic dilemma: they work to develop stronger ties to local government all while maintaining the local welfare state's basic social obligation towards its citizens. The dilemma pushes housing administrations into closer collaborative ties with local government, but the process happens with a critical eye to actual and potential costs of these ties.

Discussion

Tenants' democracy in the Danish model is characterised by a close relation between democratic form and everyday life (Jensen 1997, 2006b). The democratic process is characterised by a blurry line between political and personal matters, and those who take the decisions are also those who have to live with them on a daily basis. From the survey we know that 54 percent of the tenants feel that the tenants' democracy plays a crucial role for the social environment in the section. Only 11 percent disagree. The resident democratic bodies are mainly governed by residents of Danish ethnical background, and to fill the role of a tenants' democrat, assimilation to Danish practice is required.

The democratic practices as expressed by *tenants' representatives* at the estate level constitute the basis of the model. The governance culture at this level is based on parochial interests that relate to the quality and price of apartments. Tenants vote largely according to their purse. Despite its crisis tendencies (lack of representativity, recruitment problems, an ageing problem etc.) the model receives support from residents, and it works to the extent that most – also socially distressed - housing estates are relatively well-functioning. Active tenants' navigate the modernisation - cost dilemma in a rather conservative environment, a challenge that is further accentuated in the worst off estates because of the relative poverty amongst residents. Housing councils suffer from a lack of qualified membres and parochial interests, and their strategic capacities are hampered by the demand to assist specific housing sections troubled by a lack of participation.

Estate managers share a critical awareness of the national political conflicts in relation to the social housing sector and the resulting framework conditions. They have an incentive to facilitate coordination of local public welfare functions in the social housing environment, but no interest in taking on these functions unless there are financial incentives to do so. The local managers experience the practical shortcomings of the democratic model in their daily operations, and express a frustration with the parochial aspect of the model. They see a need to make it more flexible and responsive to ad hoc involvement ('before the time-bomb sets off…') but

their hands are tied in their ambivalent experience of feeling the need to empower the democratic bodies while being subject to their authority. Comprehensive development plans is emphasised as a central new instrument that develops closer collaborative ties with local government, and potentially invigorates the democratic culture of social housing.

From a *general managers*' perspective, the Danish social housing model needs to be somewhat disassociated from the social democratic movement and go through a silent transition to professional housing provision. Social housing should be a mainstream housing product with a quality and price that attracts a broad spectrum of the Danish population. To pursue this end, managers pursue a deregulation strategy and develop social housing that complies with individualised needs and preferences. However, managers are caught up in an internal dichotomy, when elected tenants oppose such transition strategies in reactive elected assemblies that are somewhat lacking in strategic leadership capacity.

The first collective action dilemma relates to the systemic balance between layman's' participation in the democratic system and the strategic governance capacity of the governing bodies; both qualities suffer when the model is put under pressure because of segregation and ghettoisation. The dilemma is that none of the stakeholders in the polycentric governance system can adequately optimise this balance because of (a tendency for) deadlocked internal steering relations: Housing assemblies do not fulfil their strategic governance role vis-à-vis the CEO-level, and housing associations do not adequately stimulate local policy processes or tenants' empowerment but focus on professional administration. The result is that the power balance shifts in favour of housing professionals. The problem is difficult to address: housing professionals emphasise strong representative leadership to modernise the sector. But weak representative leadership means more administrative autonomy, and in practice the parties disagree on modernisation objectives when market-orientation and professionalisation clashes with the democratic aspect. The dilemma, and its reactive consequence, is precisely described by a general manager: "*We need to professionalise the system. Not to dismantle the democratic structure, but I will make sure that managers are capable of manipulating practice a bit more in the direction of the market. The skilled manager gets the tenants' democracy on board. He makes them feel it's their ideas. That is the way it is*".

The second dilemma relates to the strategic balance between political opposition to residualisation of the sector and the positive effects of a more proactive social role (to reverse ghettoisation, improve image, reposition relationship vis-à-vis local governments etc.). When social housing players develop policy answers to the ghettoisation challenge as part of the steering dialogue they move the sector away

from what they define as their key interests; a mainstream housing product where social tasks are only secondary. Tenants' representatives, estate managers and general mangers all emphasise that social housing should be a mainstream housing offer for tenants who "just want to have a home". The distinction between 'almen bolig' and 'social bolig' is not up for discussion, and stakeholders oppose the notion that the social housing sector should become a social treatment sector primarily reserved for the most distressed part of the population.

In practice the dilemmas shows in the mismatch between how much ghettoisation dominate the national agenda and the relative lack of a comprehensive institutional response by the sector. Housing associations apply for funding of comprehensive area interventions and support these administratively, but they do not envision new professional routines and business areas in the social field. The primary reasons for this have to do with the political disagreement concerning the National Housing Fund and the funding of anti-ghettoisation measures, and the disagreement concerning a new social role for housing associations.

Case-study: Area-based collaboration in the City of Copenhagen

The 2005 Housing Agreement committed the National Building Fund to carry the main bulk of subsidisation of area-based initiatives to combat ghettoisation in social housing districts. A new instrument was introduced termed 'comprehensive development plans'. The plans signal a new approach to collaborative planning in area-based programmes and initiatives. They are developed by social housing associations but in collaboration with municipalities, and together the two parties coordinate and integrate new and existing activities targeted at the districts within the framework of the plans. The National Building Fund finances each plan provided that 25 % of the project's total budget is co-financed by way of funding or manpower. In most cases local government provide the co-financing.

For 90 percent of all the disadvantaged areas, a comprehensive plan or a strategy for developing the area has been developed (Programbestyrelsen 2008, p. 272) and 8 out of 10 HAs have entered a written agreement with the local government. It is interesting to note that only 6 out of 10 housing associations have entered a written agreement with other housing associations (ibid.).

The City of Copenhagen

In the early 90s, the City of Copenhagen privatised its municipal rental dwellings. The consequence was the City now only allocates social clients to the social housing sector, putting pressure on the most distressed neighbourhoods. In reaction to this, in 1996 the City made a housing allocation agreement with all but a few of the social housing associations in the municipality, to make sure that social burdens were more

evenly distributed amongst social housing estates. "*Segregation can easily capsize the social housing sector in Copenhagen, and we scan all estates, about 5000 units we define as ghettos, while 7000 or 30 percent of all housing is in the risk category. We do not allocate to these districts, which in turn puts pressure on the remaining 20.000 units. But we aim for a maximum of 30 to 40 percent unemployment, in average*" (CEO Housing Department, City of Copenhagen).

From the perspective of the housing department, it is difficult to achieve a proactive governance relation with a social housing sector for a number of reasons. It is difficult to assess whether individual HAs meet their obligations. None of the parties have strong incentives to enter a strategic and proactive role, collaboration mainly has to do with municipal control and sanctioning. There is no culture of cooperation between housing associations in Copenhagen, who compete for tenants and building opportunities. Housing associations hesitate to become more involved in urban renewal and collaborative projects outside the social housing districts. From a steering-perspective, a key proposal in the current reform is the cancellation of the tenant veto: "*From our perspective you have to consider the collective good and set aside the tenants' veto against a proper compensation. The problem is that it gives unhappy faces, complaints etc., and it is pivotal to develop accept towards projects at the local level* (CEO of Housing Department, City of Copenhagen).

Comprehensive Development Plans

Together with the social housing sector, the City of Copenhagen has initiated 35 plans (2009) that cover a wide range of initiatives in relation to children and youth, social activities, integration and employment, culture and spare time etc. (Engberg 2008). The plans build on residents' participation and combine social integration measures, physical regeneration and re-mortgaging of social housing estates to improve their market position. In each plan an analysis of the specific area's problems and resources has to be formulated, as well as a coherent local change strategy in dialogue with locale stakeholders (ibid, p. 14-15; 54-62).

The project-owner is the social housing organisation in collaboration with the residents' board of the housing estate in the distressed area. But the plans presuppose municipal co-financing and practical involvement in implementation and therefore presents a coordination and governance challenge. The schism is accentuated by the fact that each plan is comprehensive and requires municipal cross-sector coordination, and by the fact that the number of individual interventions increases on an annual basis.

Housing associations are formally organised in national districts, and the Copenhagen district has discussed the strategic perspectives of increased spatial-oriented

collaboration with the City of Copenhagen. An agreement exists that a collaborative framework has to be developed. Currently many fragmented projects suffer from a lack of coordination, and HAs cannot justify to tenants that specific activities are not better integrated and coordinated. At the same time, the incentives to develop this framework are vague or absent, housing associations will only participate in joint governance activities if they do not involve a transfer of power and resources from HAs to these collaborative bodies.

At the level of housing estates similar collective action dilemmas can be observed, illustrated by the following example. In a Copenhagen neighbourhood there are three social housing estates. One has historically been exposed to ghettoisation, and has received funding for area-based projects from the National Building Fund. The projects are partly successful, and the social pressure has shifted towards one of the other estates, which in turn also initiates NBF-projects. Witnessing this development the third estate applies for funding arguing that it is eligible for funds because the anti-ghettoisation measures initiated by the other two estates exposes it to a potential risk of ghettoisation. The three estates at no time have had a dialogue or coordinated their social preventive strategies.

Discussion

Socio-spatial segregation creates a push for policies and programmes with a territorial focus, as when the NBF-projects require new capacities for collaborative governance to be developed in local government and in the social housing sector. But as illustrated by the Copenhagen example, the development is ambivalent.

The development of the spatial perspective in the steering dialogue requires that housing associations and housing estates collaborate practically and strategically, and the case illustrates that there is a distinct lack of a collaborative culture at both levels. In the law proposal, the steering dialogue will take place in the relationship between the local government and the individual housing association. In urban contexts with little or no inter-agency collaboration between HAs the steering dialogue will tend to segment existing practices. HAs will each compete for satisfying local government requirements, with little incentive to support horisontal and local capacity building. Similarly, as expressed by housing managers some local governments show a passive attitude towards the local social housing sector, and the reform contains no tangible means to commit these to the dialogue or promote inter-agency mobilisation and coordination.

The analysis shows that the strategic dilemma between the opposition to residualisation tendencies and the potential spinoffs from a proactive social role emerges in regard to the issue of urban involvement. Collaborative ventures that go

beyond the social housing district challenge the core interests of the sector to the extent that they result in a transfer of money from the sector to non-social housing districts. At the same time, involvement in urban policy and urban programmes can result in more comprehensive strategies to anti-ghettoisation, it may reinvigorate tenants' democracy, and provide HAs with a stronger profile vis-à-vis local governments.

However, the analysis shows that place-based institutional capacity building does not sit easy with the main strategic orientation of housing managers in the Danish social housing sector, who emphasise service-orientation and a silent transition to market-oriented housing. Tenants focus on estate expenditures and local management issues, not on wider urban issues that transcend estate boundaries. Yet, according to our survey, residents are in general supportive of the social efforts in the housing district. Almost half of all residents find that their housing section and housing association should engage themselves in local social activities. Tenants are motivated by relatively narrow interests, but they also orient themselves towards collective issues, and care about the common good of their neighbourhood. The ghettoisation challenge is likely to bring out both coexisting realities.

	Agree	Disagree	Do not know
As a resident, I have a certain social responsibility towards the other residents in my local area	67 %	17 %	16 %
Housing department and HA should get involved in social activities in my local area	46 %	14 %	40 %
The tenants' democracy is an important factor in the development of my local area	58 %	9 %	33 %
The tenants' representatives should play an important part in the development of the neighbouring parts of town	37 %	19 %	44 %

Source; Arndal and Engberg 2008

If the proposal that the housing assembly can override the tenants' veto against major renovation projects is adopted, it will impact the dynamics of the internal steering relations. The mere threat in itself will function as a governance mechanism that puts pressure on tenants to evaluate their priorities and consider the benefits of a long-term perspective. But the shift in power does not remove the conflict between rent levels and modernisation needs, and it will challenge the basic autonomy of the representative system.

Conclusion

The ghettoisation challenge exposes the basic governance dilemmas in the Danish social housing sector. The key stakeholders struggle to maintain an image of a mainstream housing sector accessible to all, an image that ghettoisation threatens to undermine. Neither housing managers nor tenants' representatives come up with a

clear and comprehensive answer to the challenge, and proactive forward looking responses tend to be deadlocked by internal contradictions in the governance culture. Administrative modernisation strategies and the tenants' system of representation both segment a focus on individual flats and individual housing estates, a focus not likely to be shifted by a future 'steering dialogue'.

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