Ellen Braae

FROM COMMONS TO PUBLIC SPACE

Relational Green Open Spaces
in Danish Housing Estates

1   The mixed city, in Danish "den blandede by," has within recent years become a generally accepted term used by politicians, architects, and the public yet it lacks a clear definition. However, the concept is mainly used in the context of socially vulnerable housing areas and not in rich districts albeit they are both segregated. The main tool put into use enhancing the mixed city ideal is diverse ownership forms.

2   Ali Madanipour, Sabine Knierbein, and Aglaée Degros, eds., *Public Space and the Challenges of Urban Transformation in Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

3   Claus Bech-Danielsen and Mette Mechlenborg, *Renovering af almene boligområder: Evaluering af fysiske indsatser gennemført i perioden 2014–2016* [*Renovation of public housing areas: Evaluation of physical efforts carried out in the period 2014–2016*] (Kongens Lyngby: Polyteknisk Boghandel og Forlag, 2017).

4   Regjeringen [Government of Denmark] (2018) *Ét Danmark uden parallelsamfund. Ingen ghettoer i 2030* [One Denmark without parallel societies: No ghettoes in 2023]. Økonomi og indenrigsministeriet, Copenhagen, https://im.dk/fejl/publikationsmigrering/ét-danmark-uden-parallelsamfund-ingen-ghettoer-i-2030.

Landscape and welfare are tightly related. Landscape is literally molded into large-scale Nordic postwar housing estates, which provide plenty of green open space. These spaces are embedded with multiple welfare values and services aimed at the residents and their neighbors; moreover, they work as concrete spaces for encounters and shared uses among multiple people, regardless of ownership—that is, they are forms of *public space*. However, having mainly been conceptualized as the result of "neighborhood unit" planning and (modernist) spatial frameworks of "objects floating on a surface," these spaces go beyond the typical urban stereotypes of public space. Given the radical transformation of many Nordic postwar large-scale housing estates to mirror the ideal of *the mixed city*—that is the antithesis of the socio-culturally and economically segregated city[1]—and the pursuit of market-driven development, these formal frameworks and categories of spaces today need to be revisited.

All over Europe, cities and their public spaces—including the large-scale postwar housing estates—are changing rapidly.[2] While some of these transformations rely on more incremental processes of growth, decay, appropriation, and abandonment, others are more deliberate and more radical. In Denmark, the concrete social housing estates of the 1970s have had a bleak public reputation since their erection, despite being built for all social classes. Today, they stand as symbols of former ideals related to welfare and the mid-twentieth-century welfare state; they are also perceived as dull, monotonous, and even "failed architecture."[3] Such areas are often located near city centers and as a result of subsequent urban development and its often plentiful green open spaces, they also represent attractive new building opportunities for investors. In late 2018, the passing of the "Ghettoloven" (the "Ghetto Act") by the Danish parliament, which at the time was led by a right-wing government, created an opening for a significant politicization of the (already ambiguous) social housing sector, manifesting the processes of deliberately radical physical and socioeconomic transformation underway at that time. The Ghetto Act defines a so-called ghetto as "a physically cohesive social-housing area with at least 1,000 residents" and the potential classification depends on the employment, crime, education, income, and ethnicity/immigration characteristics of the people who live there. If these metrics are high, the number of social housing units in a given "ghetto" must be reduced by 60 percent by means of eviction, demolition, or privatization (including densification)—either individually or in combination.[4] This process of transformation was reaffirmed by the social democratic government installed the year after the Act's introduction, using "mixed city" ideals (which we will return to shortly). As such, no matter what strategy justifies them, in transformations of

5   Ellen Braae, "Welfare Landscapes and Communities," in *Forming Welfare,* ed. Katrine Lotz et al. (Copenhagen: Danish Architectural Press, 2017).
6   Braae, "Welfare Landscapes and Communities."
7   Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).
8   Braae, "Welfare Landscapes and Communities."

this scale, the spatial structure will change significantly and the amount, structure, character, use, users, and classification of open spaces will be deeply affected.

The transformations that took place before the enactment of the Ghetto Act, and those that were fueled directly or indirectly by it (even with the aim of avoiding becoming a "ghetto"), stimulated many relevant arguments relating to demolition and displacement as a planning strategy. These include concern over the weakening of the constitutive role of Danish social housing, both in the Danish welfare city context and as part of the "Danish model"; the neglect of existing resources; the entailed CO_2 emission increase and applying the same scheme everywhere lacks logic. The more recent densification aims, which stem from the Ghetto Act, the ideal of the mixed city, and (private) investor-driven development have only added to these concerns. Important as these questions are, though, my focus here is on understanding the open spaces of such areas—their materialities, uses, and discourses—in terms of a physical and formal shift from acting as "commons" to being *quasi-public spaces*, with the latter aiming to invite in new users and promote new values. As such, I here ask: How can the socio-spatial divide which characterizes much of the research related to the open spaces of social housing be overcome? What happens to these now recommodified open spaces once large-scale private investors enter the field? And what ideals relating to welfare does this shift and social engineering entail?

WELFARE LANDSCAPES

From the 1960s onwards, the design of large-scale housing estates in Denmark—as elsewhere in Europe—rested on modernist spatial configurations of "objects floating on a surface." The estates were made using prefabricated concrete assembly constructions, and erected using cranes; the structure of their open spaces was affected by this production mode. These spaces were thus an integral part of how housing was thought of and made at the time.[5] The estates also materialized ideas about welfare as it related to open space and nature at large, taking inspiration from contemporary and historical international sources (for instance, the Garden City movement and CIAM planning) and translating those ideas into a Danish postwar architecture and planning context. In Denmark, welfare became specifically associated with the distribution and consumption of good and equal living conditions for every individual, from cradle to grave, and with the strengthening of community and democratic spirit.[6] Equally important, because of the Danish welfare state's design and use of its own "social housing association" model, which sought to keep the housing estates free from market forces, the open spaces were a de-commodified resource.[7] Welfare and landscape are thus held together in Denmark by a cluster of values involving strong communities and equal and free access to nature, health, and well-being for all, with special attention paid to children.[8] By emphasizing the collective role of green open spaces, the Danish postwar large-scale housing estates established a new set of human relationships and expanded notions of *welfare* and *public*

Four blocks were torn down to make room for a Paris-like boulevard as one of the main concepts to disrupt the estate's spatial Radburn-logic guiding the first radical Danish social housing estate transformation.

9 Serge Chermayeff and Christopher Alexander, *Community and Privacy: Towards a New Architecture of Humanism* (New York: Doubleday, 1963).

10 Kenny Cupers, *The Social Project: Housing Postwar France* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

11 Tom Avermaete, Klaske Havik, and Hans Teerds, *Architectural Positions: Architecture, Modernity, and the Public Sphere* (Amsterdam: SUN Publishers, 2009).

12 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Random House, 1992 [1969]); Jan Gehl, *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1987).

13 Ali Madanipour, *Public and Private Spaces of the City* (London: Routledge, 2003); Anne Tietjen, ed., *Public Space in European Social Housing (PuSH)*, Copenhagen: Copenhagen Architecture Festival, 2022. Published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same title, curated by Anne Tietjen and presented at the Copenhagen Architecture Festival (CAFx), April 21–May 1, 2022. www.pushousing.eu.

space; this made the landscape of the estates anything but a neutral backdrop for everyday life.

The estates were built on virgin, mostly agricultural, land. They were mainly, in line with international practice, planned as "neighborhood units" and were conceptualized as vehicles to stimulate people's sense of "community,"[9] "neighborhood,"[10] and a larger "public realm."[11] Set within a "floating" spatial framework, which placed buildings as solitary objects on a unifying ground or surface, the open spaces on these estates have been subjected to much criticism for their effects on public life.[12] The critics have argued in general ways that the open spaces, loosely defined by multistory concrete buildings and often characterized by a monotonous character and lack of human scale and experiences, left no room for individual expression and inhibited public life, even sustaining a sense of unsafety. Critics also maintain that the functionally segregated city, with its large car-based infrastructures and rationally produced large-scale housing estates, was unable to live up to its own optimistic idea of architecture as *social engineering*, which, in Denmark, involved providing good housing for everyone, and mixing social classes within a culturally and ethnically very homogeneous population. Among the most prominent critical voices, we find the American Jane Jacobs and the Dane Jan Gehl, who both instead advocated for pedestrian-friendly and human-scale principles in the design of public space.

Despite the criticism and their bleak public image, the postwar housing estates came to house an ethnically diverse population that was nonetheless less socially diverse than intended. Today, many of these estates' open spaces are the daily locus for multiple cultural encounters and have been recognized as public spaces that sustain public life.[13] Yet the ongoing transformations are more than an aesthetic makeover: the physical changes are fundamental in the sense that they impact upon uses, users, and embedded values. From a theoretical point of view, they highlight the need for new approaches to understanding and describing the open spaces in question. If we fail to conceptualize and theorize these changes, we lose our grip on one of architecture's most important roles: to enable social encounters and to sustain public life in a way that actually makes it happen, and, moreover, we may overlook the full consequences of the embedded and potentially incongruent intentions. Here, I argue that previous conceptual frameworks, including those of *the commons* and *public space*, no longer adequately mirror the complexity of open spaces being driven by the ongoing transformations of the postwar housing estates.

In what follows, the concept of *publicness* and its capacity to grasp these transformed open spaces is discussed. "Publicness" here denotes the interaction between physical spaces and people's ways of life; it informs a relational understanding of public space that can take into account non-material, yet highly embedded aspects, and do so over time. Public space is often handled as either a spatial concept *or* a social concept, thereby mirroring disciplinary demarcations, but thinking in terms of publicness provides a way to transgress these epistemic boundaries. The concept is therefore integral to a cross-disciplinary framework, combining aspects of heritage, policy, practice, democracy, and informality—all of which, both individually and together, may inform us about

14   Ali Madanipour, "Rethinking Public Space: Between Rhetoric and Reality," *Urban Design International* 24, no. 1 (2019): 1.

tensions between, for example, the individual and the collective, public and private interests, and informal and formal institutions or legal frameworks. The strategies applied at the shared open spaces in the Farum Midtpunkt estate, a social housing complex from the 1970s in Northern Zeland in Denmark worked as a model for reconfiguring the common spaces in other Danish social housing estates to public spaces, forming a point of reference for the ambitions of the later Ghetto Act and thus indirectly for conceptions of the mixed city. The concept of publicness helps to reflect on and understand the shifts at work in this particular case. It is important to note that the transformations wrought upon Farum Midtpunkt did not include the 60 percent ownership changes designated in the Ghetto Act, which would have resulted in demolition or intensive densification. This fact allows for the open space alterations made here—and their effects in a mixed city ideal—to be analyzed closely. While changes directly stemming from the Ghetto Act tend to be driven by municipalities inviting in private investors and using key open spaces as "an instrument of delivering investment and maximizing rewards,"[14] the changes witnessed at Farum Midtpunkt have been carried out by a collaboration between the housing association and a private foundation, thereby decreasing the commodification seen in Ghetto Act-driven transformations. As postwar housing estates are a widespread phenomenon, and similar transformation processes are occurring elsewhere in the Nordic countries and beyond, this case also has international relevance.

Farum Midtpunkt is an iconic case due to its remarkable appearance, yet it is also a representative case due to its distribution of welfare goods and its recent transformation mainly turning a central green area into an "activity square" addressing users coming from outside the estate and adding new public pathways throughout the estate. The 1,650-unit estate was built in the early 1970s in the town of Farum, situated about 25 kilometers north of the Copenhagen city center. The buildings were designed by Fællestegnestuen (Jørn Ole Sørensen, Viggo Møller-Jensen, and Thyge Arnfred) and the landscape by Edith and Ole Nørgaard. The estate is structured around 24 terraced, parallel, four-story apartment buildings, subdivided into four clusters. All buildings have parking areas on the terrain level and terraced apartments on the upper three levels, linked by elevated, partly outdoors, partly indoors infrastructure. The apartments have large individual terraces facing west or balconies facing east; they are accessed via wide corridors, which serve as shared spaces as much as entrance areas. The estate holds various open spaces in a fine-grained, multi-scalar network consisting, besides the private terraces, of small squares, neighborhood squares, pedestrian pathways, an elevated pedestrian high street, parking areas, and a surrounding green area. Consisting of the housing blocks, shops, and a school, the estate is situated on a 31-hectare large shell-shaped parcel of land, spatially enforced by green open spaces and a forest-like perimeter plantation. Within the area, many public and shared facilities are located on and next to the elevated pedestrian street, which serves as a backbone for the estate and provides access to the apartment buildings and the common open areas via perpendicular streets, which also connect the estate to the town of Farum.

15 David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (New York: Verso, 2012), 73.

16 As formulated by first Clarence Perry in *The Neighbourhood Unit* [1929] (Reprint London: Routledge/Thoemmes, 1998), 25–44, and then by Lewis Mumford, "The Neighborhood and the Neighborhood Unit," *Town Planning Review* 24, no. 4 (January 1954): 256–70.

COMMONS, NEIGHBORHOOD, PUBLIC SPACE, AND THE TERMS' LIMITS

Various theoretical frameworks have guided the sociospatial development of postwar housing estates and thus their open spaces: most notably, ideas about common space, community planning, the neighborhood unit, and ideas about public space in addition to categories such as parks, open and closed gardens. The commons can be understood as a social practice of governing a resource by a community of users, who self-govern the resource through the institutions they create.[15] In this sense, the concept of commons ranks among the main aims embedded in the mixed city, as common space may become central to sustaining the ideal of the democratic citizen. Since the Danish social housing sector owns or has a long-term lease on the land of the estates, and their governance moreover is characterized by tenant democracy, the estates' spatial appearance and governance converge into the traditional understanding of a commons made up of large parcels of lands collectively managed. The housing estate's common spaces form part of a larger web of shared welfare resources such as schools, libraries, and sports facilities encompassing open spaces too. However, these institutions and their spatial entourage do not provide access to direct decision-making. This complicates how an estate's open spaces can be characterized: despite the shared goals of welfare provision, they should, rather, be considered public space.

Ideas of community planning may relate directly to commonly used space, and in large-scale Danish postwar housing estates, such ideas merged with modernist design principles. Here, the US-born idea of the neighborhood unit pointed specifically to centering the school, placing arterial streets along the perimeter, designing internal streets, restricting local shopping areas to the perimeter, and dedicating at least 10 percent of the neighborhood land area to parks and open spaces, thereby creating places for play and community interaction.[16] These strategies, in combination with modernist principles of admitting daylight into the housing blocks (a practice sustained also by the montage crane logic), placed new buildings in a syntax of parallel lines, with all open space operating as a unifying floor or surface. A new open space paradigm thereby emerged. In general, this denoted a paradigmatic shift in urban design away from conventional public spaces such as streets, squares, and galleries and toward a city of "public landscapes," which are extensive, open, and traversable. It also denoted a new balance between open and built, and green and petrified, as well as between public and privately owned spaces in the city. Moreover, in Denmark, the neighborhood unit and the common green area also merged with the green tissue that linked the blocks together and provided them with egress. Later, this spatial distribution—which materialized the "Radburn principle" of a cellular street pattern, with a ring road linking the cul-de-sac roads serving the housing units, situating the shared open green area in the car-protected center of the housing estate—increased the public perception of the estate as introverted and private, and the green center as being for residents only. In other words, divided by large infrastructures, this new shared open space paradigm partly appeared as detached islands of which one part—the one owned

Farum Midtpunkt is an iconic Danish social housing estate characterized by stacked terrasse flats in parallel rows with lush green in-between areas.

The new Activity Square is located next to the main pedestrian arteria and has replaced green in-between space.

The plan shows the clustering of parallel row houses within a green framing. The Activity Square is located next to the main entrance to the estate.

17 Sarah Watson, *City Publics: The (Dis)
enchantments of Urban Encounters*
(London: Routledge, 2006), 2.
18 Ali Madanipour, ed., *Whose Public Space?
International Case Studies in Urban
Design and Development* (London:
Routledge, 2010).
19 Madanipour, *Public and Private Spaces*.
20 Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the
Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*
(London: Faber, 1990); Doreen Massey,
For Space (London: Sage, 2005); Harvey,
Rebel Cities; Ash Amin, "Collective Culture
and Urban Public Space," *City* 12, no. 1
(2008): 5–24.
21 Massey, *For Space*.

by the housing association and governed by the tenants—worked as a common.

However, the resulting spatial framework sustained social and cultural encounters, and hence sustained a kind of public life across the estate. Public life refers to the many and diverse ways that "people rub along, or don't, in the public spaces of a city."[17] The related concept of public space is widely understood as those places where public life unfolds.[18] Public space is a very prominent concept, and outdoor meeting places—often associated with classical urban places, such as boulevards, urban squares, and metropolitan entertainment or commercial districts—are seen as defining spatial characteristics of European cities, implying a certain normativity within the concept. However, urban public space goes beyond typical urban stereotypes and that which is publicly owned.[19] It also does not relate to collective government. As places of public life, public space also includes the open spaces of social housing areas, even if formally these are semi-public in the sense that their ownership, use, and governmental structures are closely linked to the tenants. While constituting public spaces, the open spaces of postwar social housing estates do not resonate with the traditional public space typologies and their structural distribution.

The ideal steering the ongoing transformations is that of the mixed city. This concept has in general terms been advanced by prominent urban theorists such as Richard Sennett, Doreen Massey, David Harvey, and Ash Amin.[20] They highlight it as key for sustaining social cohesion through social contact between different social groups, for its potential for openness, for its use and sharing by all, and for its capacity to integrate and support the coexistence of social and cultural difference. In other words, the mixed city ideal holds the promise of remedying the negative social and cultural consequences of increasing inequality, spatial sorting, and social segmentation (which, incidentally, is far more prevalent elsewhere than in Denmark). In practical terms, the mixed city promotes social and cultural interaction via a spatially framed "thrown-togetherness" of people,[21] ensuring peaceful coexistence.

However, the mixed city does not in and of itself maintain a coherent consensual formula concerning the scale at which mixing should take place. If we are to judge from the ongoing transformations, we can conclude that the scale of the 1970s social housing estates apparently justify for an ideal mixed city district unit, as the estates are deliberately chosen to form such future mixed city districts. Nevertheless, while the mixed city is an undisputed ideal, its meaning is unclear. What is the size of the mixed city's units, how are they structured, and what means can be applied to achieve a mixed city? These are all unanswered questions. It is thus surprising that these non-explicit ideals apparently turn out to fit precisely with the size of postwar large-scale developments and their location in the larger urban landscape, and that the mixed city is supposedly achieved by lowering the proportion of social housing to a maximum of 40 percent. Moreover, the current realization of the mixed city ideal within the framework of social housing estates is somewhat of a paradox, since the aims of today's mixed city to a huge degree mirrors the aims of the past, echoing the postwar neighborhood unit ideal in its aim of bridging social and cultural differences; as such, it aspires to provide equal access to welfare

22 PuSH, "Public Space in European Social
    Housing," was a three-year HERA funded
    research project led by myself and
    conducted by four national teams from
    Denmark, Italy, Norway, and Switzerland.
    Farum Midtpunkt was the Danish case.
    For an introduction, see Ellen Braae et al.,
    "Examining the Publicness of Spaces
    on European Social Housing Estates:
    A Position Paper," *ARQ: Architecture
    Research Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (June 2023):
    143–57. https://doi.org/10.1017/
    S1359135523000155.
23 Chiara Tornaghi and Sabine Knierbein,
    eds., *Public Space and Relational
    Perspectives: New Challenges for
    Architecture and Planning* (London:
    Routledge, 2016), 4.
24 Tornaghi and Knierbein, 6.

goods and services *for the second time in exactly the same area*. Here it is worth noticing that the criticized spatial framework of "floating" open space (open space as a surface) has already proven itself capable of enabling social interactions and being both inviting and accessible, so how much should be changed to widen the user group? Process-wise, the mixed city introduces another paradox, as two of the large-scale postwar estates' main challenges—its gigantic scale and "once-and-for-all" planning ethos—are to be repeated: the full-scale entity of the housing estate will once again become subject for a once-and-for-all masterplan.

PUBLICNESS AND THE INTERACTION BETWEEN PEOPLE AND PLACES

How can the pitfalls of open spaces of large-scale housing estates be avoided when discussing their past, present, and future, and their role in the wider urban context? We are in dire need of concepts that can help us to understand, assess, and consider how to intervene in these complex spatial, social, and cultural contexts. The concept of *publicness* may help to conceptualize these transformed open spaces while retaining a focus on the intersection of people and places, as well the core values that informed their construction; it may also assist in going beyond the simple social engineering that drove the conceptualization of the first large-scale housing estates built on virgin land. In the "PuSH" research project, publicness worked as a starting point for a multidisciplinary exploration of how large-scale postwar housing estates act as sites of public life, and as active co-producers of cultural encounters across social and material domains.[22]

In Farum Midtpunkt, the estate's main open space was subject to a significant transformation between 2012 and 2016, and changes included a new "activity park" for play and sports, a new pedestrian infrastructure, and some small-square makeovers. All of these places can be analyzed as potential sites of publicness where people and places may interact. The aim of the transformation was to open the estate to its adjacent areas and to people living nearby, and the more subtle open space changes can be regarded as the first step in a mixed city initiative.

Interrogating public space beyond the architectural object, the notion of publicness is one way to address the new and complex entity of the former social housing estate as it transitions toward a mixed city ideal. Publicness builds on a relational conception of space that helps us understand the material and immaterial aspects of different urban development phenomena, its spatial, cultural, and temporal normativity. In the words of Tornaghi and Knierbein, "relational space approaches involve concepts that define 'lived space' as phenomena that can only be explained by their social, political, and cultural context and by the relations between people and objects, both at a given moment in time and in the course of history."[23] Publicness is thus a working concept that helps us to think about the relation between public life and public space and not a fixed characteristic determined by the main function of a space. It focuses on spatial and social processes, as well as on their cultural and political contexts and inequalities, over time.[24]

The Activity Square is programmed with
hard surfaces sustaining mainly skating
and soccer.

25 Braae et al., "Examining the Publicness of Spaces on European Social-Housing Estates."
26 Madanipour, *Public and Private Spaces*.
27 Madanipour, *Public and Private Spaces*.

In order to address the combined social, political, and cultural contexts at work within specific moments and over longer time-frames, four analytical categories or lenses can be applied to the concept of publicness—namely, heritage, policies and practices, informality, and democracy. Each category represents a sphere of fluid and context-specific relations which allow negotiations and an ever-changing meaning of publicness that can transgress normative definitions given by location, form, regulation, or function alone.[25] Moreover, this combination of analytical categories also works as a cross-disciplinary framework bridging the gap between social and spatial professions, between place and people, and grasping the tensions and crossing the epistemic boundaries that traditionally hamper public space discourses.[26]

The first aspect, heritage, is here understood as lived heritage, starting at the local level—that is, starting from the histories, concerns, and values of residents and other local actors. Regarding large-scale housing as heritage in this way reveals unique local interactions between lives lived and their material framework, and potentially holds an empowering aspect. The Farum Midtpunkt heritage analysis addressed a local and much-contested site of publicness: the internal semi-public corridors that, in later becoming semi-private, pushed the public life and circulation system to areas not originally intended for such uses (ground-level parking areas that many residents have experienced as lacking security partly due to drug dealing). It also revealed that the long-term residents shared positive memories of the communities constituted by past everyday life in the corridors, and that some of the decentered open spaces have been domesticated by dog owners, and some by gardeners, in both cases constituting much-debated yet also important meeting places for various subgroups. The lived heritage outside the individual dwellings mainly concerned nearby areas and past and ongoing domestication battles, the sense of insecurity, and the demarcation between private, semi-private, and semi-public zones.

The second aspect, made visible through the lens of policies and practices, supports a long-term sociospatial perspective of space as something that is relational and socially produced. A housing complex can be seen as an open system connected to everyday life and experiences as well as to public and individual narratives. Over time, policies and practices shape place and space in a dynamic and performative manner.[27] From the Farum Midtpunkt analyses, it became clear that the relationship between policies and spatial practices at Farum Midtpunkt cannot be reduced to a mere opposition between top-down and bottom-up. In some places, practices and policies have brought about ways of sharing places where a variety of interest groups have gained the right to use specific places through formal policies and regulations by the tenant board and the municipality; in other places, specific groups (such as the already mentioned dog owners and gardeners) have occupied underused spaces over time until they became habitual and accepted.

This also touches upon the third aspect, which focuses on democracy; this lens is related to social interactions intertwined with physical space and its embedded qualities and ways of sustaining politics. These embedded and sustaining factors/elements may be found in the distribution of spatial resources (who gets to

28 Madanipour, *Public and Private Spaces*.
29 Madanipour, *Public and Private Spaces*.

use which spatial resources, when, and how?), in decision-making processes (who decides and who is represented?), and in spatial practices (how is space adapted, performed, perceived, and used?).[28] In Farum Midtpunkt, the aforementioned domesticating groups, along with the lack of sense of security when going to the parking level, demonstrated the way in which not everyone is welcome. Moreover, the tenant board is dominated by white, elderly persons who have lived at the estate for many years and are reluctant to include new voices.

Informality, our final aspect of publicness, is a concept based on an implicit divide established by an authority that sets normative standards and opposes anything that falls outside its realm or does not conform to its precepts. This may be examined through planning laws (through which we can detect unplanned/spontaneous/illegal land uses); cultural, moral, and religious norms (by which something can be judged as anomalous, non-belonging/ alien, even harmful); design codes and rules (through which we can distinguish unexpected affordances of objects); and state welfare regulations (through which we can detect the self-provisioning of collective goods and services).[29] Some places in Farum Midtpunkt, like the parking areas, have gradually come to be used in ways that they were not planned for, in reaction to some of these often rigid spaces or spaces with designated uses defined by the tenant board. While other sites intended to "invite users in" from outside the estate by means of material upgrade and a higher level of maintenance were not, for instance, used at all.

The four aspects of publicness—heritage, policies and practices, informality, democracy—came together when examining Farum Midtpunkt's newly formed Activity Square and the new circulation system. The transformation was based on the two aims of opening up Farum "to increase the experience of community and the perception of safety" by fostering activity in the outdoor common spaces, and of better connecting the housing estate to the surrounding town of Farum. The new Activity Square, as a pronounced renewal site for publicness, introduced a materiality, an aesthetic, and a conceptual take that departed boldly from the existing 1970s architecture. The strong visual contrast to the architecture, and the immediate decoding of its heritage, can be seen as evidencing a disregard of what was there already. The spatial order of the estate has been reconfigured with this significant centralization of the estate's largest and spatially most integrated public space, and its appearance in a structure of otherwise decentralized and distributed shared spaces, which were located close to clusters of residents' homes. By enhancing the hierarchy of the internal infrastructure and facilitating the use of key entrance areas by people from inside and outside the estate, the sense of security and accessibility has increased in these areas while other areas (the parking areas, and smaller, less central open spaces) are experienced as even more "remote" and inaccessible. However, a new system of boardwalks placed within the lush green areas at ground level and located between the parking areas has reopened and made accessible—and thus public—the longitudinal infrastructures of the estate that were terminated when the wide interior corridors and entrance areas working as semi-private space for the block's residents and walk-throughs for non-residents were

30 Bettina Lamm and Svava Riesto, "Farum Midtpunkt / Renewal of Shared Spaces," in *Public Space in European Social Housing (PuSH)*, ed. Anne Tietjen et al., Copenhagen: Copenhagen Architecture Festival, 2022, 136. Exhibition catalog. www.pushousing.eu.

closed off. The materiality of the boardwalks corresponds with the rusted Corten steel on the facades, and they weave in and out of the parking areas, introducing new functions such as ping-pong and inviting new users in.

One of the social consequences of the new Activity Square design lies in the tendency for one group or activity to be dominant, as much of the equipment is only suitable for one activity or age group at a time. Playable structures such as a climbing wall, a street basketball court, trampolines, skating areas favor physically active children, that is, most often, tweens and young teenage boys. While maintaining the historical focus on children's play, focus is now on performative modes of being. The open space now works as a public event.[30] While some types of equipment and the spatial setting invite diverse groups of users, specific design features may indirectly continue to exclude specific groups—for example, the elderly, who might be discouraged to sit on uncomfortable benches, or those who don't play soccer or pingpong. Another challenge lies in a new tension between generations promoted by a clash between the long-term goal of demonstrating that the estate is attractive for children and young people and the needs of the currently dominant tenant group of elderly people, who find the Activity Square too noisy. The changes thus also shed light on the core aspect of the commons—that is, as a social practice that governs a shared resource for the tenants. With the new design, people coming from the adjacent areas are equally users of the Activity Square as a public space, yet it is governed by a semi-private institution, that is, the housing association, which is mainly ruled by a white, elderly group.

The transformation was initiated in 2014 as a collaboration between Realdania, Denmark's largest philanthropic association for the built environment, the local housing association, Furesø Boligselskab, and residents' representatives. The tenants' democracy—a key feature of the Danish housing association tradition—was thus partly in play, yet was also questioned, given that this new area was aimed at both the tenants and people living outside the estate and no option was given to decline the transformation initiative. In this case, the area is still formally owned by the housing association and thus the tenants, while in other ongoing transformations such as that occurring at the iconic housing estate Tingbjerg, which is being driven by the Ghetto Act, the land is being sold off to private investors and open spaces will be reconfigured for a new target group of buyers. In the latter case, the concept of the commons is no longer valid and collective government is being dismantled. While the concept of the commons is no longer fully adequate, the concept of the neighborhood unit and its embedded welfare values may still, however, be valid as long as proximity to green open space with a high degree of publicness to schools and other public institutions is maintained. For better or worse such spaces maintain the messiness and entanglement of everyday interactions that make up lived heritage, and through the various user groups, top-down and bottom-up policymaking, and everyday practices, aspects of democratic expression and involvement, and some room for informality, remains. It is extremely important to examine the results and experienced consequences of ongoing transformations in detail, and to discuss them in the context of the
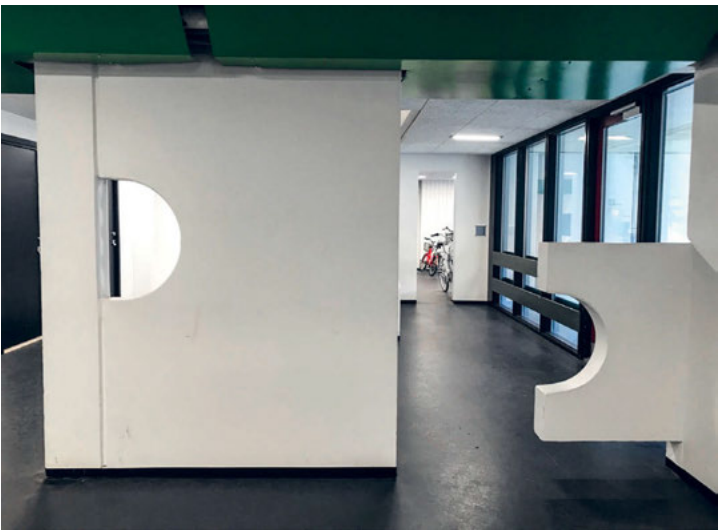
The lush green areas between the parking lots at ground zero have provided space for a new pedestrian infrastructure since the corridors were closed off.

The programming of the covered parking areas beneath the apartments has been expanded so that the parking areas are perceived as less unsafe.

The interior corridors were planned as both a semi-private/semi-public area and part of the estate infrastructure. Yet they were soon closed off to work for the residents in block only.

31   Noortje Marres, "Issues Spark a Public into Being," in *Making Things Public*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 208–17.

significant number of welfare-imbued public space transformations taking place in the Nordic countries. The goal is not a seamless society—there will always be tensions and frictions—yet we must learn how people and places interact to sustain productive and enriching encounters.

CONCLUSION

Social and cultural encounters in shared open space are key to the ideal of the mixed city. However, when the mixed city takes form in Danish social housing estates—either through tough means (demolition and densification) or lighter methods (such as the redesign pursued in Farum Midtpunkt)—while ideas of public life and many key welfare values might be maintained, where ownership shifts, traditional concepts such as common, community, public space, and public life are inevitably challenged.

The need to better understand public space, beyond only its spatial or only its social aspects, calls for relational thinking, which involves a series of re-conceptualizations. Ideas of spatial identities, everyday uses, planning practices, and policy environments must be revised and viewed as being built relationally and contextually: they must be understood as highly entangled. The concept of publicness and the four analytical categories of publicness introduced in this text—heritage, policies and practices, democracy, and informality—bring in various disciplines and theoretical framings. Individually and in combination, they enable an examination of how interactions between people and the spaces they share create sites of public life (albeit of a more performative kind of public life), how the interaction between space and people changes over time, how spaces become a public concern and "spark a public into being,"[31] and how such spaces might make living with others (who are different from oneself) possible. Bringing together the social and the spatial, they help reveal sites of publicness within the spatial and conceptual reconfigurations and ongoing transformations of the Danish social housing estates, beyond general questions of what spatial, infrastructural, and social paradigms are "preferred" or rigid ideas of public space and social engineering. Transformations deeply affect the embedded values, uses, and users of open spaces and unlike the virgin land development of the postwar period, a multitude of places, people, practices, memories, and rules are already in place in Denmark's housing estates. As a heuristic concept and tool, publicness may also help us understand how embedded welfare values are being twisted and challenged, traditional concepts of commons and public space exhausted, evaporated, and replaced—despite the fact that the areas continue to be conceptualized with the "floating" space paradigm of an earlier modernism. The shift from commons to relational public space has changed the relationship between the enlarged group of citizens and the open spaces as a consequence of the transformations aiming for mixed-city districts. This means commodifying the housing and their open spaces and inviting new users in, potentially resulting in an alienation of the open spaces in terms of a sense of heritage, democracy and practices, as they are no longer a shared responsibility of the people using them.