Tom Nielsen

THE DANISH WELFARE CITY

The concept of *the welfare city* sets the political idea of *the welfare state* in relation to that state's *urban development*.[1] In a "welfare city," form and structure stand in direct relation to welfare policies. Whilst its origins can be traced to the early twentieth century, the Danish welfare state is a political narrative and system that still exists and continues to develop and transform in the present.[2] In many ways, the urban development and architecture of the Danish welfare cities is similar to what is found in the development of other cities of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries—even those that developed under other political systems. Its origins, after all, lie in the great acceleration experienced by industrialized western societies in the postwar period, a moment that was not unique to places with distinct welfare policies. As a product of the Nordic version of the welfare state that emerged in the Nordic countries—specifically, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, which share a number of cultural and linguistic characteristics—during the postwar period, the Danish welfare city is similar to its counterparts in the other Nordic countries. Exceptions are for example the role of regional policy (Denmark is far smaller and much more densely urbanized than Sweden and Norway) and the relation to economic cycles (the Nordic countries differ in their focus on industrial sectors as a result of varying access to resources). In the following chapter I present a concise, linear history of the concept and built reality of the Danish welfare city; this history is structured in terms of three distinct phases (the planning and building of the welfare city, 1950–70; the crisis of the industrial model of the welfare city, 1970–90; and the welfare city in the competition state, 1990–2020).[3] Following this overview, I also engage in a brief discussion of the future of the Danish welfare city in light of possible adjustments demanded by pressing issues of sustainability (resource scarcity) and social equity.

PLANNING AND BUILDING THE DANISH WELFARE CITY (1950–70)

After the Second World War, welfare states were built in many democratic and capitalist European countries, including those of the Nordic region. These states shared a number of features, including a focus on the construction of economically prosperous industrial societies; attempts to balance the interests of individuals, civil society, and the market; and the deployment of the modernist architecture and urban planning principles initially developed in the 1920s and 1930s, as concrete tools in the rebuilding and expansion of cities.[4] The Nordic countries followed similar paths in building their welfare states.[5] The ideology behind the Nordic welfare states

1 The first mention in a Danish context was in Jens Kvorning, "Velfærdsbyen" [The welfare city], *Landskab* no. 4 (June 1996): 74–77. In 1997, "Velfærdsbyen" was the title of a research project at The Aarhus School of Architecture which resulted in the publications Poul Bæk Pedersen, *Arkitektur og plan i den danske velfærdsby 1950–1990. Container og urbant raster* [Architecture and plan in the Danish welfare city 1950–1990. Container and urban grid] (Aarhus: Arkitektskolens forlag, 2005); Niels Albertsen and Tom Nielsen, eds., *Welfare City Theory*, special issue, *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research*, no. 2 (2004); and Tom Nielsen, *Gode intentioner og uregerlige byer* [Good intentions and unruly cities] (Aarhus: Arkitektskolens forlag, 2008). Recently the welfare city has also been understood as a contemporary phenomenon. See, for example, Signe Sophie Bøggild, Pernille Maria Bärnhein, and Kristoffer Lindhardt Weiss, *Welfare City in Transition*: *A Compilation of Texts and Images 1923–2020* (Copenhagen: Danish Architectural Press, 2020), and Kirsten Marie Raahauge, Deane Simpson, Martin Søberg, and Kathrine Lotz, eds., *Architectures of Dismantling and Restructuring* (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2022).

2 For the development of "The Welfare Space" see Niels Grønbæk and Runa Johannessen, "Introduction: The Welfare-Space Nexus," in *Architectures of Dismantling and Restructuring*, ed. Kirsten Marie Raahauge, Deane Simpson, Martin Søberg, and Kathrine Lotz (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2022), 30–44.

3 This periodization and several formulations in this chapter builds on Tom Nielsen, *Byen Danmark* (Copenhagen: Danish Architectural Press, 2023), primarily chapters 3, 4, 5, and 12. That book will be published in English as Tom Nielsen, *The City Denmark* (Copenhagen: Danish Architectural Press, 2025).

4 Mark Swenarton, Tom Avermaete, and Dirk van den Heuvel, eds., *Architecture and the Welfare State* (London; New York: Routledge, 2015) or, for a more general history of modern urban planning, see Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow. An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design Since 1880.* Fourth edition (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2014).

5 See Braae, *Urban Planning in the Nordic World*, 17–29.

can be described as a form of marriage between *social democracy* and *social liberalism* (as defined by John Stuart Mill), where the goal was one of balancing individual freedoms and providing support for those disadvantaged by a market-driven society. This has also often been described in terms of what Jeremy Bentham, another liberal thinker, expressed as "the greatest possible happiness for as many as possible." [6]

The Nordic model focused on a strong state and on universal access to welfare benefits (i.e., not linked to income or family status), which went well beyond securing basic human rights (housing, food, medical care, etc.) to also deal with access to culture, education, work, leisure activities, mobility, recognition as a citizen, and democratic participation.[7] In Denmark, the welfare state was developed as a *dannelsesprojekt* (cultivation project)[8]—an ideal of a society living together with shared values that derived from equal rights and delivered almost equal possibilities for all.[9] Material aspects, including housing for all, well-functioning cities with high-quality amenities, and—not least—well-designed educational institutions (from kindergartens to universities and public libraries) were key to realizing this cultivation project. An emphasis on the high quality and democratic character of physical environments was therefore positioned as one of the core aspects of the Nordic welfare city.

The welfare state also arose in Denmark as the result of a political agreement between the political parties representing the bourgeoisie, the farmers, and the workers, after various shifts in the balance of power in the period between the First and Second World Wars. As such, what came—in the 1950s—to be labeled "the welfare state" [10] was established by way of pragmatic political deals.[11] By stretching what metaphorically was understood as a "safety net" that would support the working class, the leading parties hoped to secure themselves and the nation against the electoral landslides toward fascism or communism that were seen elsewhere in Europe in the 1930s. It worked.

The postwar welfare state, with its orientations toward both growth and consumption, was, to a large extent, a tax-financed project. The postwar wave of industrialization made it necessary to extend existing urban areas in order to house the expanding urban population, as people moved from rural areas to work in industry and the growing public service sector.[12] Already by 1950, two thirds of the Danish population were living in cities.[13] This proportion increased in subsequent decades, which were characterized by a general population increase and the postwar baby boom. From the initial phase of the welfare state, housing policies were deemed a central component in the endeavor to construct a modern and just society. These early housing policies tended to focus on building as many homes as possible as quickly as possible everywhere they were needed (primarily in and around existing Danish cities). The high volume of new homes being produced were supported through interest rate policy and public subsidies for non-profit construction, as well as state-guaranteed loans for building housing.[14] Policies for full employment meant that a great number of women began to enter the labor market. This in turn meant that children and the elderly lost their primary caretakers, and it became necessary to create institutions and spaces to care

6 See Hans Fink, *Samfundsfilosofi* [Philosophy of society] (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2003), 109–12, 150.

7 See Niels Albertsen, "Transformations of the Welfare City in Denmark 1960–2016. Five socio-spatial panoramas" (paper presentation, Velfærdsbyen i forandring, Arkitektskolen Aarhus, September 2016).

8 "Dannelse" is a Danish word which translates into German "Bildung," but not into English. The idea is that there are moral and ethical aspects and ideas of raising the character through education of the individual to a higher and more civilized state.

9 The Danish Welfare state is without an actual definition. The social democratic party's political program from 1945 *Fremtidens Danmark* (Denmark of the Future) is an example, where full employment, social security and efficiency, and democracy in industrial production are key goals. See, for example, Niels Wium Olesen, "Planer for velfærd. Sammenlignende studie af de nordvesteuropæiske socialdemokratiers efterkrigsprogrammer," in "Den nationale velfærd? Den danske velfærdsstat i international belysning," ed. Johnny Laursen et al., special issue, *Den Jyske historiker*, no. 82 (December 1998): 62–91.

10 The terms *velfærd* and *velfærdstat* (welfare and welfare state) seem to have been introduced in Denmark in 1952 in Jørgen Paldam, *Planlægning for velfærd* [Planning for welfare] (Copenhagen: Forlaget Fremad, 1952). See Preben Etwil, "Velfærd nu og i fortid," *Samfundsøkonomen,* no 4 (2005): 10–13.

11 Kanslergadeaftalen (The Kanslergade-agreement) from 1933 is often mentioned as the deal that put the project on track.

12 The public administration and service grew as part of the building of the welfare state. The number of jobs increased from 200,000 in 1957 to 500,000 in 1973. See Mogens Rudiger, *Oliekrisen* (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2019), 25.

13 See *Befolkningen i 150* år [The population in 150 years], Danmarks Statistik (2000), 16.

14 See, for example, Erik Nygaard, "Boligmangel og billige statslån," [Housing shortage and cheap state loans] chap. 1 in *Tag over hovedet* [Roof over your head] (Copenhagen: Arkitektens forlag, 1984), 17–24.

for these groups. Homes for the elderly and kindergartens were built in even the smallest urban communities. Together with educational facilities, public administration buildings, and housing, these functional typologies became the building blocks of the welfare city. Industrial parks with large plots of land and space for expansions were laid out, farmland was bought by municipalities and housing associations for park housing or as plots for detached houses. These changes included extensive redevelopment projects (in effect demolitions) in the existing city, which also formed an important part of the development of what was expected to be rational, zoned cities according to the functionalist principles of separation and connection formulated in the Athens Charter.[15]

The architects of these new parts of the cities drew on a number of sources for their inspiration, although they rarely described these references explicitly. The idea of the garden city and the new town movement in England, the German *Siedlung*, and concepts in other Nordic countries (most notably, the "ABC" new towns in Sweden) clearly served as inspirations. The idea of "the functional tradition"—in its Danish version formulated by Kay Fisker—is the closest we get to a theoretical backdrop for the early stage of the welfare city.[16] The idea here was that of a *regional modernism*, devoted to sensible solutions in a downplayed formal language, which drew upon historical form and used local materials such as brick and wood in order to create atmospheric and emotionally suggestive environments with simplistic and legible functional qualities. This approach resonated deeply with what evolved in the other Nordic countries and what in the British journal *Architectural Review* was, in the years around 1950, dubbed "New Empiricism."[17] In relation to urban development, the functionalist approach was characterized by an ideal that envisaged the architect as creating meaningful relations between the house, the district, and the regional plan, employing principles of simple organization and legibility in order to work across multiple scales.

The welfare cities were thus slowly established as a result of the rolling out of the welfare state policies of the early 1950s. From the 1960s onwards, an economic boom meant that an increasingly complete version of the welfare state could be realized. The prosperity of the Danish state doubled between 1950 and 1970. The overall effect of this emphasis on material aspects of building society was an overwhelming restructuring of cities and the countryside. Development took place around the big cities, the market towns, and the station towns. Stimulated by government subsidies and policies that sought to promote even development, villages situated close to larger cities also began to develop, with the result that earlier, preindustrial distinctions between urban and rural began to collapse. The welfare city was built in all parts of the country.[18]

The utopian, modernist visions that were conceived of and drawn by architects and planners[19] in the interwar period fit well with the welfare state's growth paradigm and its mindset of equality. The roll-out of this first, industrial version of the welfare city was, however, based on a generalized notion of "the citizen" and as such there was little adaptation to individual needs. This approach was an extension of an ideology that held that everyone should be given equal opportunities within Danish society, an ideal that was

15 See the description of the Danish welfare city as architectural typology and structure in Poul Bæk Pedersen, *Arkitektur og plan i den danske velfærdsby 1950–1990. Container og urbant raster* [Architecture and plan in the Danish welfare city 1950–1990. Container and urban grid] (Aarhus: Arkitektskolens forlag, 2005).

16 See Knud Millech and Kay Fisker, *Danske arkitekturstrømninger 1850–1950* [Danish architectural currents 1850–1950] (Copenhagen: Østifternes Kreditforening, 1951; repr. 1985), 321–58.

17 See Nils-Ole Lund: *Teoridannelser i arkitekturen. Arkitekter og ideer fra 40'erne til i dag* [Theory formations in architecture. Architects and ideas from the 40s to today] (Copenhagen: Arkitektens forlag, 1985), 31–46.

18 See the account of urban planning during the postwar period in Arne Gaardmand, *Dansk byplanlægning 1938–1992* [Danish urban planning 1938–1992] (Copenhagen: Arkitektens forlag, 1993).

19 For example Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse/Ville Contemporaine, Ludwig Hilbersheimer's New City, and Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City.

The suburban development outside the medieval core of the merchant town Elsinore, shown in this aerial view from 1960, is an example of how sports facilities, schools and daycare centers were built simultaneously with the many new homes.

dependent on an industrial logic for its realization: large numbers of similar units would be produced for a market that could absorb them. The idea of functionally separated cities was the dominant concept, but it was complemented by a number of other rationales and agendas: love of high-rise buildings and dense urbanity, love of cars and extensive "American suburbia," nostalgia for the half-timbered houses of market towns and villages, and Cold War fears of nuclear war and the accompanying logic of thinning that such fears promoted. These differing ideas and understandings of how the material form of the welfare state should be structured and what it might look like related to the slightly different architectural and planning ideals at play at this time. In combination with a lack of overarching planning controls, this resulted in a relatively heterogenous urban form. The cities in Denmark were quite small; as such, building the welfare city became a step-by-step task undertaken by a diverse array of actors including small municipalities, entrepreneurs, housing associations (which, outside of the main cities, were all rather small local entities), individual investors building private homes for themselves, and businesses building for themselves. The pragmatic, bit-by-bit approach and aforementioned lack of central planning controls meant that large-scale developments and satellite towns, echoing international references, were not regular features of the welfare city, with the only examples of such settlements being in proximity of the largest cities (Copenhagen, Odense, and Aarhus).

A built reality emerged out of all of these projects, ideals, and models that was significantly less ideal, and significantly messier, than anyone had wished. The welfare cities did not have clear and unambiguous forms like the villages, market towns, or station towns that preceded them. Instead, the welfare city was a hybrid, full of clashes between the new and the old, with parts that promised efficiency and radiated future optimism often built in direct adjacency to parts that were remnants of past times and other economic and technological logics. In the period 1950–90, more buildings were built in Denmark than in any other period in history. As a result, the welfare city was at least half-modernist, but it was also somewhat collectivist and in part at least centered around more conservative ideas of the family and the private house. It was generally quite low density, with some exceptions.

CRISIS OF THE INDUSTRIAL MODEL OF THE WELFARE CITY (1970–90)

New ideals started to reshape the welfare city at the end of the 1960s: modernist architecture and welfare planning began to be met with increasing criticism and, as the international oil crisis of the early 1970s set in and the momentum of the second wave of industrialization began to subside, a paradigm shift took place. The welfare state was not just hit by an economic crisis and the politically very difficult problem of removing benefits that had been introduced under more favorable economic conditions. The very belief in progress had begun to wane. Two critical positions on the welfare city drove the resulting transformation. The first was a basic critique of the relationships between the individual and the

collective, and between planning and freedom.[20] The second lay in the discovery that the historic city was not so bad after all. The top-down, industrial, homogenizing, and universal approach to planning thus became subject to criticism from those who were not directly involved in making the decisions—first from an intellectual elite, and then ever so slowly from the people that the city was meant to serve.

Critics pointed out that the planned parts of the welfare city—the large-scale housing developments with their concrete and asphalt surfaces and windblown green lawns—appeared alienating.[21] Addressing the "rational" modernist aesthetic, which was seen as homogenizing, repetitive, and cleansed of recognizable symbols and forms, this critique did not reject the idea of the welfare state but rather aimed at including perspectives that, a couple of decades into the development, seemed missing. One of these missing elements was "community," which modern urban planning had somehow forgotten or abandoned as a consequence of its own (justified) critique of the poor health conditions that accompanied the very dense early industrial cities. Lowering densities and dispersing urban functions had, it was realized, negative consequences for social life. Studies of how communities formed around the classic street, with its sidewalks and shops and street-life, started to appear.[22] These ideas resonated with a young generation, which, inspired by the 1968 student revolts, found the old and partly abandoned city an attractive alternative to modernism's high-rises, park buildings, lawns, and asphalt, which did not—in their view—allow for communities to thrive. Hippie dreams evolved into metropolitan nostalgia and the counterculture gradually began to divert attention away from the suburbs and newly built parts of the welfare city. Spearheaded by an alternative youth culture, fragments of the old city were transformed into districts for a renewed consumer culture, which emerged amongst young people who had grown up in the suburbs but found the opportunities there too limited. In the centers of the largest cities, which had developed as central business districts as a consequence of the focus on housing in suburban areas, there was free space to unfold. Discos, cafes, subcultural shops, and meeting places began to appear, first in Copenhagen and later in the big market towns such as Aarhus, Aalborg and Odense.

This interest in the aesthetic and social qualities of the historic city led urban development actors (including politicians, investors, housing associations, architects, and urban planners) to perform a 180-degree turn, shifting their attention from the fields around the cities back to the dilapidated city centers that were now to be re-urbanized. This renewal approach, in contrast to the "sanitation" projects (in reality demolitions) of the 1950s and 1960s, meant that housing conditions and urban environments were now to be preserved. Focus shifted to acts of renovation: installing bathrooms and merging smaller apartments, lowering building densities by clearing courtyards and adding outdoor facilities in connection with the apartments. Citizen involvement and public consultation became a legal requirement through the planning law reforms in the early 1970s, and—with the sudden end of the frantic period of the 1960s, which was characterized by a whole lot of action and vastly less reflection—more began to be said and discussed than drawn and built. The economic crisis and what turned out to

20 See Tom Nielsen, "Velfærdsstatens krise og interessen for individet," [The crisis of the welfare state and the interest in the individual] chap. 3 in *Gode intentioner og uregerlige byer* [Good intentions and unruly cities] (Aarhus: Arkitektskolens forlag, 2008), 55–72.

21 See, for example, Eric Allardt, *Att ha, att älska, att vara: om välfärd i Norden* [To have, to love, to be: on welfare in the Nordic countries] (Lund: Argos forlag, 1975).

22 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961) was a major inspiration for community groups. An influential Danish example was Jan Gehl, *Life between Buildings. Using Public Space* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1987; original edition *Livet mellem husene* published in 1971).

This aerial view from 1989 from Kolding shows a heterogeneous totality: the sum of planned but never fully aligned patches of urban development after the expansion period of the welfare city after the Second World War.

The so-called freetown of Christiania in the 1970s. Christiania and Sofiegården in Copenhagen or the Sjællandsgade-neighborhood in Aarhus were examples of the new "self-made" urban quarters defined by youth culture and the idea of community that developed in inner cities from the 1970s.

be an oversaturation of the housing market (especially for rented apartments) at the start of the 1970s severely lowered construction levels. The development of new parts of the welfare city slowed markedly. Some new housing continued to be built, either in the form of single-family houses or as "dense-low" architecture that mimicked the village and the self-built environment, and was a result of the modernism-critical "environmental debate."[23] With this, planners and architects hoped that the same close community that had traditionally existed could emerge again through this new way of building the city. Dense-low became a dominant local Danish version of the renewed interest in the historic cities that had arisen in the south and central Europe. Where in Germany, Italy, and elsewhere, the focus was on the reconstruction of the urban block of the metropoles, wherein neo-rationalism and postmodernism were guiding design principles, in Denmark it was largely an idealization of the village and a desire to reconstruct traditional communities that motivated this position.

THE WELFARE CITY IN THE COMPETITION STATE (1990–2020)

Individualism and liberalism, which were now seen as having been suppressed by egalitarian welfare state ideology, reappeared and gradually became dominant figures within political, but also urban, thinking. The belief in the great societal visions of new cities was over, and the small and close-knit community and the individual were now seen as necessary focal points for societal development. Against this background and with the end of the Cold War and the subsequent rise of globalization, from around 1990 *neoliberalism* emerged as a dominant ideological and political concept, which started to influence *realpolitik* and urban development of the Danish welfare city.[24]

Neoliberalism's core idea, "the minimal state," which was coined by American philosopher Robert Nozick[25] in the 1970s, was thus introduced and flagged as an alternative to the Danish welfare state.[26] Based largely on market forces and an extensive degree of individual responsibility, the minimal state stands in direct opposition to the welfare state. In the new situation of global competition which emerged in the 1990s, whereby both capital and labor moved much more easily than before and were no longer bound by national borders, Denmark was understood to no longer be able to raise taxes to finance increased welfare or new needs. On the contrary, demands for tax cuts were made, based on the argument that to be globally competitive, jobs, export earnings, and international investment would have to be contended for. The individual—not the collective—was seen as being most capable of making rational and just choices and as a result, individual consumer intelligence was seen as more fair than mediated markets.

In relation to urban development, neoliberalism pointed to deregulation and the easing of planning requirements as a way to transform cities in a new, post-industrial reality where financial sectors, experience economics, and service jobs would become central.[27] Emphasis was placed on what the market, understood as investment capital, wanted. In 2001, with the shift of power to a

23 See Kim Dirkinck-Holmfeld, "Den menneskelige dimension," [The human dimension] in *Den menneskelige dimension*, Ingrid Gehl et al. *(*Copenhagen: Danish Architectural Press, 2021), 425–66.

24 When these issues were raised in the 1990s and resonated also with the social democratic party, Denmark embarked on the same path—the third path between hard liberalism and socialism, which also characterized politics in other European countries like the UK and The Netherlands in the 1990s. Third-way politics were formulated as a practical opportunity for political reform after the crisis of the welfare state in the 1970s. This was taken up, among others, by the sociologist Anthony Giddens, who was an adviser to New Labor and Tony Blair in the 1990s. It was perceived as an option to operate between two poles: the great social democratic welfare state and the liberal minimalist state.

25 Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

26 Most prominently, this was taken up in the 1990s by the later (2001–2009) Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen of the Liberal Party (Venstre) in Anders Fogh Rasmussen, *Fra socialstat til minimalstat: en liberal strategi* [From welfare state to minimal state: a liberal strategy] (Copenhagen: Samleren, 1993).

27 The London Docklands project (from 1981 onwards), with its partial deregulation and deliberately created state of exception, provided a model that was later used and developed in many other parts of the world.

Aerial view of Blangstedgård, 1988. Dense-low settlements carried ideas of urban reconstruction and the village community into greenfield developments. They supplemented the single-family house with smaller and more compact dwelling types.

liberal, right-wing government in Denmark, the old social democratic and welfare state bastion of the Ministry for Housing was shut down. Housing policy was placed under *Erhvervsministeriet* (Ministry for Industry and Business), signaling that housing was now seen as a matter of business, rather than welfare provision. Following this move, urban and landscape planning was also moved to the Ministry of Industry and Business.[28] Political ambitions were no longer, as in the decades following the Second World War, directed toward goals like "housing for all," "jobs for all," "education for all," or the provision of built infrastructure to support those goals. Instead, politics attended to the task of raising enough money to maintain the welfare state and the welfare cities that already existed and making them economically sustainable. Whilst this seems to be a conservative project, it resulted in a restructuring process that had a very direct physical impact on Danish cities of a magnitude that resembled the construction of the early welfare city. The Danish professor of political economy Ove Kaj Pedersen has used the term "competition state" to describe the new understanding of the state's role in relation to citizens and the surrounding world which emerged in the period following the end of the 1980s.[29] The "competition state" was not the "minimal state" of neoliberalism. It was the result of a forced marriage between neoliberalism and the welfare state.[30] The welfare state thus survived, but with a new ideological extension. As the original twentieth-century reasoning behind the welfare state moved toward the ideals of a society driven by liberalism and was marked by the unplanned consequences of this move, this forced marriage became a contradictory, complex, and conflict-filled pairing.

Global integration created a new framework for understanding Denmark as part of the world. Initially, this meant that from the beginning of the 1990s, investments were made in rebuilding Copenhagen as Denmark's only bid for a major city in Europe that could attract investment and labor in the new knowledge-driven economy.[31] It was no longer agriculture or industry alone that made money: research and development became increasingly central to industry as well as agriculture. Workplaces became more knowledge intensive. People with a university education tended to stay around the cities where their social life and professional networks had formed and the university cities developed into gravitational points in the transforming landscape of welfare cities, with Copenhagen as by far the largest and strongest node. Accessibility through infrastructure, attractive living environments, and exciting cultural experiences (leisure) became important competitive parameters globally. In Denmark, these parameters could be built on the foundations of good welfare services, a high degree of trust, and commensurate high degree of security—all of which had been established through the postwar welfare state. The welfare state was thus a precondition for the success of the competition state. When, after the turn of the millennium, the strategic investment in Copenhagen began to prove its worth, such planning spread to market towns and other aspiring big cities, which sought to develop and grow according to the same template.

The built heritage of the period from 1850 to 1950, constructed during the first wave of industrialization—which in the 1970s and 1980s was seen as polluted and a problem for both property owners

28 Kaare Dybvad, "Boligområdet er vigtig værdipolitik," August 15, 2019, https://www.altinget.dk/by/artikel/kaare-dybvad-boligomraadet-skal-igen-vaere-vaerdipolitik.
29 Ove Kaj Petersen, *Reaktionens tid. Konkurrencestaten mellem reform og reaktion* [The age of reactions. The competitive state between reform and reaction] (Copenhagen: Informations forlag, 2018).
30 Petersen, *Reaktionens tid*, 11.
31 See Holger Bisgaard, *Københavns genrejsning* [Copenhagen's rebuilding] (Nykøbing: Bogværket, 2010).

and municipalities—slowly, from 1990 onwards, became viewed as an asset for urban development. Port areas, railway areas, and larger industrial areas, which had been completely or partially abandoned as part of the deindustrialization and the outsourcing of manual labor first to eastern Europe and later to southeastern Asia, rose like phoenixes from the ashes. Seaside locations became a top priority for urbanites and thus a value to be priced and marketed. The more it cost, the more attractive it became, both as a place to settle and as an investment. The formerly polluted and abandoned backsides of the city became new enclaves for the better-off.

The 1990s witnessed the emergence of growing class divides, which after a period of time began to become visible in Danish cities. The middle class were those who were firmly attached to the labor market, and the new underclass formed amongst those who were not.[32] The latter also included many of the immigrants who had arrived, or were arriving, in the country as refugees or job-seeking migrants. Cultural and educational differences made it difficult for many of these people to enter and maintain attachment to the labor market. The same was true for many without a medium or higher level of education. This led to increasing differences that ultimately resulted in more unequal or polarized cities than a few decades earlier. The polarization became evident both in the larger cities[33] and in the smaller cities around the country. The differences between the opportunities for owners and renters, and those with stable savings for the pension and those without, had become greater.[34] This meant that, for example, the large housing estates built by housing associations—the crown jewels of the welfare city—which had already started to become poverty enclaves in the 1980s maintained that role, as economic incentives for home ownership, along with the value of property, steadily increased.[35] It is also important to note that as a result of a political agreement made at the end of the 1980s, an obligatory private pension fund for workers had been established, which was integrated into salaries (labor market pensions); these funds gradually grew, positioning fund managers as strong investors in Denmark.[36] As the pension funds, and thus the workers, became influential players in urban development, the *pension-fund building* emerged as a concept (oftentimes comprising of housing, but also institutions and commercial buildings). In this way, this new incarnation of the welfare state was still influenced by the trade union movement and a working-class majority, but on a liberal and market-oriented ideological basis. They were now investors.

With a focus on competitiveness both at the national level and in the municipalities, it became important for cities to stand out. This was in contrast to the early postwar phase of the welfare state and the welfare city, where the goal was rather that cities would become as similar as possible (even across significant differences in size), providing the same services and thus a comparable and compatible framework for the opportunity to live a "good life." With competitiveness as a somewhat vaguely defined goal, "benchmarking" and "best practice" as well as the ranking of strong, attractive, and popular cities also became important.[37] Politicians had to know what unique competitive advantages their city had in a field of—in many ways very similar—Danish cities. Differences,

32 Danish author Lars Olsen has in numerous books and articles cast light on the inequality and new version of the class society that has developed in Denmark after 1990. See, for example, Lars Olsen et al., *Rige børn leger bedst* [Rich kids play best] (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2021).

33 Hans Skifter Andersen, Hans Thor Andersen, and Thorkild Ærø, "Social Polarisation in a Segmented Housing Market. Social Segregation in Greater Copenhagen," *Danish Journal of Geography* 100, no. 1 (2000): 71–83.

34 Petersen, *Reaktionens tid.*

35 The large modernist housing estate of Gellerup is an example. See Sidse Martens Gudmand-Høyer, Karen Olesen, Tom Nielsen, Inge Vestergaard, Kari Moseng, Birgitte Geert Jensen and Rune Chr. Bach, *Gellerup* (Copenhagen: Danish Architectural Press, 2021).

36 The agreement was called Fællese-rklæringen af 8 december 1987 (The Joint Declaration of 8 December 1987), https://danmarkshistorien.dk/vis/materiale/faelleserklaeringen-af-8-december-1987. The first obligatory payments from the salaries of the workers into the pension funds began in 1991 and were originally modest (0.9 percent) but are today (2024) typically 12 percent, or even higher.

37 Deane Simpson, "Copenhagen under the Metric Regimes of the Competetive and Attractive City," in *Atlas of the Copenhagens*, ed. Deane Simpson et al. (Berlin: Ruby Press, 2018).

not equality, were now emphasized. Special parts of the city (often the leftovers from industrialization that had begun development earlier, as mentioned above) were now seen as important pieces, as *assets*, in a greater game. Not only attractive residential areas or business clusters, but also new institutions could deliver what came to be called "core welfare" at the highest level: schools, hospitals, educational institutions, libraries, and cultural centers.

This core welfare was not only evaluated and understood *quantitatively* (as welfare had been treated in the original early welfare state) but also *qualitatively*. It was now possible to not only see if there was a school or a hospital available, but also how those institutions performed. In line with this new understanding of welfare, a new role was allocated to the built environment and architecture. Rather than the "correctness" of the functionalist tradition of the 1950s, a no-less-important representative and iconic role was accorded to architecture in the competitive welfare city. As a result, clearly differentiated versions of the welfare city emerged, which could be distinguished not only in terms of their size, but also their growth potential and relative attractiveness. Not all cities came out on top in this process. The cities, towns, and villages furthest away from the university cities, which in the initial phases of the welfare policies had grown and were equipped to be able to offer the same basic opportunities as the large cities, were plunged into crisis, losing population, investment, and jobs to the larger cities.

While planners and architects after the millennium were busy designing new homes for new "mixed" urban neighborhoods in former industrial areas and engaging in the renewal of the major modernist housing projects, urban growth begun to emerge again in the fields surrounding the "winning" cities. New neighborhoods of detached houses, new dense-low enclaves, and new industrial areas for large, "big-box" production and storage facilities began to be constructed, continuing to follow modernist dogmas about the zoned city, which remained more or less unchallenged regulatory tools to be used to organize life in the welfare city.

THE FUTURE OF THE WELFARE CITY: SUSTAINABILITY

The latest phase of the welfare city is, like its predecessors, just as much characterized by what did *not* happen there as what it achieved. The sustainable transition promised in recent decades—and in particular its subsequent failure to materialize—is, at the end of the present period of city development, i.e., the 2020s, an elephant in the room (and in the welfare city at large). In the 30 years between 1990 and 2020, the sustainability agenda failed to exert a significant influence on urban development or thinking, even though it was clearly present from the end of the 1980s onwards.[38] The Danish welfare city is unsustainable because it is based on a model that demands continuous growth to be economically stable, and because of the relative prosperity of the society which means that Danes consume much more than the planet and their territory can offer them on a long term.

Sustainability has to some degree been part of the implementation of many changes in Denmark's cities in recent decades—primarily through certifications and minimum standards in relation

38 The UN report *Our Common Future* (1987), also known as "the Brundtland report," marked a point where the sustainability discussion was put upfront in the international development debate.

The Iceberg housing development (SeARCH, Louis Paillard, JDS Architects, CEBRA). was built on the former container terminal in the port of Aarhus, which since the late 1990s has been undergoing transformation into a new district: Aarhus Ø. The Iceberg is an example of an iconic building that, in its form and architectural expression, communicates a clear identity. The investor was a pension fund owned by over half a million Danish workers. It was completed in 2013 and was already sold to a property fund in 2014. Housing became an investment and a commodity.

Dokk1 (Aarhus, 2015, SHL architects) is an example of a welfare institution of the competition state. It is built on a prime waterfront location and houses the public library and other amenities and facilities, for example "Citizen Service," the main point of contact between the administration and the residents.

to new buildings. On an urban level, sustainability was primarily translated into "densification" with reference to the in-principle lower CO_2 emissions per capita of people living in large, dense cities. Sustainability thus became an argument for the replacement of older parts of cities through massive construction projects and in some cases for the overutilization of building plots in the largest cities—development that would have happened in any case as the result of the dominant market thinking that characterized the period. The sustainability argument that "the higher the density, the better" was used to make (always) unpopular urban densification easier to swallow.

The difficult discussion about how to rearrange and develop cities on the basis of the natural resources that exist beneath, above, and around them is yet to be had. The future of the welfare city will involve questions about how people can live directly from local food and energy production. This challenge will probably lead to a different way of addressing issues of urban densification and urban growth. Dealing with the basic questions of creating space for water and space for species other than humans and livestock, for instance, would mean drastically reduce the area reserved and planned for industrial agriculture (today around two thirds of the Danish territory). If food production, further, is converted from animal-based to plant-based sources due to changes in demand, and furthermore becomes an urban industry with production of vegetables in vertical production sites close to consumers, this will not only transform the cities but also the territory they are embedded in, possibly leaving space for natural processes. Such transformations will potentially open up for a new version of the welfare city, which is more entangled and metabolistically integrated in the whole territory.

THE FUTURE OF THE WELFARE CITY: SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Danish welfare city developed as an equalizing, homogenizing, and uniform habitat, which took a range of different forms, from the capital city Copenhagen to smaller metropolitan centers, merchant cities, stations towns, and villages. Modernist planning principles, building technologies and formal architectural expressions made it uniform, but also in many ways distinct. Adjustments to a more competitive economy and new technologies, which created links between the welfare city and the world, made the differences between its parts clearer.

It can be discussed whether the welfare state succeeded in providing equal opportunities for all through planning. In some ways and areas, such as the healthcare and education sectors, the welfare state and welfare supply, which are still universal and free to all citizens today, are bigger and stronger now than they ever have been. Denmark is one of the countries with the highest "quality of life" when measured and benchmarked in international studies in the spirit of the times.[39] The country is very close to being ruled by principles of democracy and meritocracy. This could be an answer to the goal of "the good life" that is embedded in the idea of welfare.

On the other hand, as the result of increasing mobility, the network structure, and the real possibility that everything can take place everywhere, greater differences and greater inequality develop within

39 Political scientist Francis Fukuyama introduced the concept of "getting to Denmark" to describe how Denmark, as a societal construction, was used as an icon for certain principles of state building which was seen as not ultimately but relatively successful and attractive. It might as well have been called the "Nordic welfare state." The concept and discourse surrounding it became an important part of the political discussion in the USA. See Francis Fukuyama, *Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011)

the welfare state.[40] Children born on Lolland, the southernmost part of Denmark and a municipality that ranked as "low income" in 2020, have four times as high a risk of dying as children born in the high-income municipality of Frederiksberg.[41] Money and education level still matter. This is a sign of how specific urban qualities and the attractiveness of places mean more than they did earlier and how the welfare city has become geared to producing differences. One of the most significant and controversial attempts to counter segregation has been the so-called "Ghetto-law" (the full name of the political agreement being a little more true to its goal: *One Denmark without parallel societies. No ghettoes in 2030*) from 2018 addressing the issue of developing poverty islands and what politically was addressed as "parallel societies" of the underclass.[42] This specifically addressed the "poverty islands" that some of the large housing estates of the early welfare city had developed into. From around 2010 onwards, fundamental structural transformations began with demolitions and construction of new types of housing for a diversified economic and social class between the concrete blocks. The "Ghetto-law" has the goal of reducing the amount of *almene boliger* (affordable housing) in these areas from often 100 to 40 percent in order to thwart social segregation.

In early 2021, when appointed as the new Minister for Domestic Affairs and Housing, social democrat Kaare Dybvad referred heavily to classic welfare state planning. By bridging the two ministries, moving planning back from the Ministry of Industry and Business, and further reviving the Danish Housing and Planning Authority (which was dissolved in 1993), Kaare Dybvad retrieved a series of tools and a line of rhetoric from before neoliberalism, with its policies of slowly dismantling regulations and its "competition state" (and concomitant impacts on the distribution of tax-financed welfare institutions and services). Housing policy should again become important in securing social mobility and the public sector should again support the construction of thousands of new affordable housing units in the country's larger cities.[43] In the cities, high land values were seen as incompatible with the provision of affordable housing, the construction of which was almost totally halted as a result. This turned out to be a brief flashback, and a political parenthesis. From late 2022 on, a new social-liberal government once again went back to the combination of a total reassertion of the welfare state as the guiding political narrative, but in the version known from the last 30 years of competition state and marked-driven development.

PERSPECTIVE: THE TRANSFORMING WELFARE CITY

In the field of urban studies, with its focus on the relation between political ideology and urban development, the concept of the (Danish) welfare city offers insights into how over almost a century, the continuing evolution of an ideological foundation for the development of society has had an impact on the development of that society's physical territory.

The above description offers only a glimpse into the interplay between shifting political paradigms and shifting urban paradigms. The general characteristics that I describe here also apply

40 This process was described by Graham and Marvin using the concept of "splintering urbanism." See Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001). The segregational processes and level of splintering and polarization to be fund in Denmark are generally less dramatic than what was described here, but the trends following liberalization and market developments are similar.

41 Emilie Aagaard, "Se kortet: Børn fra Lolland har fire gange større risiko for at dø end børn fra Frederiksberg, "4 May 2020, https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/viden/kroppen/se-kortet-boern-fra-lolland-har-fire-gange-stoerre-risiko-doe-end-boern-fra. Accessed January 2024.

42 The controversy was primarily related to the use of the word "ghetto," which was removed later. From 2021 on, the areas affected by the policy were referred to as accommodating "parallel societies" and the concentration of ethnic minorities in these areas was used as one of the criteria for definition. "Regeringen vil gøre op med parallelsamfund," 1 March 2018, https://www.regeringen.dk/nyheder/2018/ghettoudspil/. Accessed January 2024.

43 *Almene boliger* in Danish means "housing for all" echoing the universalistic character of the Danish welfare state. This is quite different than the English "social housing" which is for the socially disadvantaged and belongs to another idea of welfare.

to aspects of other Nordic countries. Acknowledging these similarities, it would be interesting to compare the development of welfare cities in other Scandinavian countries with corresponding cultural spheres and a similar pursuit of universal welfare state models from the mid-twentieth century onwards.

The welfare city transformed the industrial city into a hybrid, which was between industrial urban forms, the preindustrial fragments embedded in those, and the modernist architecture of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. The adjustments and renewal of both industrial and modernist parts of the city, which has been a driving force in the latest phase has further transformed the Danish welfare cities into something new but maybe also increasingly specific in international comparison. Every transformation, despite being a local version of developments taking place in many places in the world, has local qualities. Multiplying these over many years gives some kind of depth to what is here called "the Danish welfare city." A further study of the issue of specificity, and links between these increasingly hybridized urban forms and international examples, would also help cast light on not only the Danish welfare city but also on the relation between politics and architecture that lies at its core.