Demolition Blues. Resistance Against Demolition Plans in a Danish Disadvantaged Affordable Housing Estate

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Setting the scene: The insecurities of planned demolitions

- ¹ The August day was warm. The sun was baking as I moved down Karen Blixens Boulevard in the Gellerup estate in Western Aarhus, Denmark, along with a fellow anthropologist who had a work assignment in the estate. The Karen Blixens Boulevard, named after the internationally acclaimed Danish author Karen Blixen, is the new main road of the estate, cutting through Gellerup on a north/south line where there had previously been a relatively unkempt park area with only a tarmac path for pedestrians and cyclists snaking through it. Now, we could walk along Blixen in a direct line from the Bazar to the north, where we had had lunch, walking towards the City Vest shopping mall south of the estate. The estate was quiet and there were only a few cars on the boulevard. The landscape was dry as the Danish Summer had been unusually warm and sunny and what was previously a lush and somewhat overgrown and slightly unkempt park area was now concrete, asphalt and gravel, though the newly landscaped city park was visible to our left. We entered a local café. Working at the counter was a local long-term resident, Petra¹, who was very engaged in all matters concerning the estate. We ordered cake and coffees and sat at the counter, chatting with Petra about what was new. Inevitably, the chat turned to the subject of the decision of the municipal council to work towards the demolition of a further nine blocks in the estate

before 2030. At the time, five blocks had already been demolished and a sixth now had a gaping hole with what was to be a new road passing through it, all part of the initial Master Plan that had been adopted by both the municipality, the housing association and the residents in 2010 and 2011. Petra looked at me, and said: «Esben and Julie are moving out. You know that, right?». I shook my head. I had not heard that they would be moving away. Esben and Julie were a young couple with children that I had interviewed who had been staunch advocates of the estate, also in the press. «Jette from Toveshøj is also moving out» Petra continued, naming another engaged resident, before adding a Vietnamese couple I did not know in person, adding that they were all moving as a consequence of the City Council decision to work towards further demolitions. «I don't know what I'm gonna do» she added, shaking her head with an air of frustration.

- 2 While the City Council decision in June 2018 to work towards the demolition of a further nine blocks in Gellerup caused immediate reactions like Petra's and the residents she mentioned, there had been continuous discontent and debates over some of the decisions taken by the municipality and the housing association during the realization of the Master Plan over the years since 2011. Yet, the reactions from some of my resident interlocutors in 2018 were stronger than what I had encountered before. In the following, I will first introduce the national Danish legislation and political decisions that have set, and continues to set, part of the agenda and the national context for the transformation of Gellerup, before moving on to examine some of the criticisms of the lack of resident involvement in the implementation of the Master Plan in the years before 2018, and after that I will examine the situation following the Aarhus City Council decision in June 2018 and the reactions of some of my resident interlocutors.

Introduction. Danish “ghettoes” and anti-ghettoization policies

- 3 Since the Danish center-right government under Anders Fogh Rasmussen in 2004 introduced an “anti-ghettoization strategy”, Danish affordable housing estates have come under increasingly severe political and administrative scrutiny. The Danish affordable housing sector constitutes roughly 20 per cent of the Danish housing mass in estates that are run by the many Danish housing associations. The rent is based on the expenses of running the estate and the affordable housing sector is non-profit. While filling out an important function in the Danish housing market, particularly in the Danish cities, the affordable sector has become the locus point of anti-ghettoization strategies and policies in Denmark in recent years. Indeed, the Danish official governmental definition of “ghetto” only applies to affordable housing estates, and is based on the fulfillment of at least three out of five criteria concerning income levels, education levels, unemployment levels, convicted criminals, and percentage of Non-Western immigrants and descendants (<50%). Under the center-right governments under Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen anti-ghettoization policies and strategies became increasingly intrusive and comprehensive, culminating with a 2018 agreement in the Danish Parliament to “eradicate” the Danish ghettoes by 2030. The negotiations began in the wake of the Prime Minister's New Year's Speech in January 2018, where the Danish ghettoes were singled out as «black holes in the map of Denmark»

(Statsministeriet 2018). David Berliner (2015) describes how the future has invaded the present in contemporary politics: «In contemporary catastrophism the present is already invaded by a terrible future. The worst case scenario is not a fantasy anymore [...]» (Berliner 2015: 18). That seems to be true in the case of Danish ghetto policies. Among the Danish affordable housing estates designated as “hard ghettos” (*hårde ghettoområder*) is Gellerup-Toveshøj, in short often referred to simply as Gellerup, in the Western outskirts of Aarhus, Denmark’s second city. From 2015-2019 I conducted research in Gellerup as part of my Phd-project², examining the Master Plan (*Helhedsplan*) for the estate, which is aiming at transforming Gellerup «from a disadvantaged residential area into an attractive urban district» (*Helhedsplan Gellerup* 2019). I conducted on/off fieldwork from September 2015 to April 2019, conducting around 50 interviews with current residents and additionally 10 interviews with former residents and professionals working in and with the estate. I was also present at both public and closed meetings, and at activities and events in the estate, researched the history of the estate and included statistical data in my research.

- 4 The Master Plan is a complex phenomenon and its aspects intervene substantially in the lives of the residents of Gellerup. The scale of the transformations is unprecedented in recent Danish history and with the recent political developments in mind, the interventions in the lives of the residents from the municipality, the housing association and the state might become even more intrusive in the future. In this article, I will focus on residents’ perceptions of the material transformations of the estate in order to explore how the residents’ perception of “home” was uprooted, their affective attachment to the estate challenged by the disappearance of material entities they felt connected to, and the collapsing of futures they had hoped for. Often the perception of the material transformations was connected to issues of trust/mistrust and the other way around. As the plan also began to mutate and expand without any direct involvement of the residents, several of my interlocutors began reacting in new ways from what I had previously observed. In this article, I will examine some of these reactions in the light of the political developments that facilitated the Aarhus City Council agreement of June 2018 to work towards the demolition of an additional nine blocks in Gellerup and the privatization of a tenth. I will also trace some of the critiques from residents of the development of the estate, that already occurred before the June 2018 decision, and examine some examples of resident resistance against the new plans.

«That is not co-creation». Voicing discontent at estate meetings

- 5 The Gellerup estate actually consists of two separate administrative entities. Estate 4 and 5 of the Brabrand housing association respectively, together consisting Gellerupparken, or in short, Gellerup. The two have each their own operating budget and each their own residential board, elected by the residents. Every year, there are two estate meetings, one in Spring and one in the Autumn in each estate. At the Spring meeting, elections for the residential board are held, whereas the autumn meeting, in September, is mainly about the budget for the coming year – though it is also possible for residents to suggest changes to departmental regulations and ask questions to the board and the administration, whose representatives participate in all estate meetings.

I participated in both the estate 4 and 5 meetings in the Autumn of 2017 as an observer, though I was assigned to count votes at one of the meetings – apart from that I merely listened to the presentations and discussions and engaged in small talk with other participants. There was a week in between the meetings of the two estates, and though following the same regulations, they turned out to be completely different experiences. Here, I will focus on the estate meeting in Gellerupparken, the larger of the two estates.

- 6 The estate meeting in Gellerupparken took place in the grand hall of *Foreningernes Hus* (“The house of associations”). The meeting had drawn out a larger delegation of representatives from the housing association administration, among them the CEO and the administrative executive, as well as the head of the main board of the housing association. Around 150 residents attended the meeting in *Foreningernes Hus*. There were repeated calls for translations to Arabic, and when a residential board member started translating to Arabic, calls to translate to Somali ensued, followed by translations from another residential board member to Somali. This naturally protracted proceedings and some confusion arose from the translations as they were conducted seemingly without prior preparation.
- 7 The head of the executive board of the housing association³ was appointed meeting chairman (*mødedirigent*) which was met with some complaining. He was also booed by some of the attendants a couple of times during the three-hour meeting. This might be due to his role in the initial phases of the Master Plan, where some residents felt that he had promised that a mosque would be built, and they had voted in favor of the Master Plan because of that. Now that the mosque was off the table, some felt deceived by the municipality and housing association. The estate budget for the following year was up for voting. The residential board, it turned out, recommended that the assembly should reject the budget, on the grounds that it would result in a rent increase, mainly caused by increased expenses for inspections of vacated apartments due to a change in procedure, according to the residential board. The discussion about funding for the resident counselling office was also based on the expenses this would mean and their effect on the rent level. A counter proposal was put forth by a residential board member to maintain the current level of funding for the resident counselling office, but this was voted down by a small majority after some debate and a revote. It was unclear whether all the attendees had understood the phrasing of the first vote and might have voted the opposite of what they wanted in the first round. The result of the vote was much to the chagrin of several women seated near me, who had obviously come to the meeting to support the cause of the resident counselling office. A Somali man sitting next to me turned to me, smiled and shook his head during the prolonged discussions, commenting that «many people don’t really understand the issues». My neighbor was soon engaged in discussions and additional translations with other people around us so I did not have the chance to follow up on his statement – yet it seemed clear to me that there generally was some confusion among the residents present as to what the details of the various proposals were and what they actually entailed. The second vote of the meeting, though, on whether to accept or reject the budget, had a much more unequivocal result – only around ten of the approximately 150 resident participants voted in favor of the budget proposed by the administration. Some of the residents in the back celebrated the result of the vote with loud cheering and dancing, while others quietly shook their heads in amazement or regret, and several of the administration representatives observed the proceedings with looks of exasperation, frustration or

incomprehension. Several of the residents seemed to consider the result of the vote as a victory over the administration, though, as an administration representative remarked to me shortly after the meeting, they might come to regret the vote, as it would mean that the municipal oversight would have to decide on the rent level, and they might decide on a higher increase than the one they had just rejected⁴.

- 8 After the meeting ended, I lingered to talk to some of the residents I knew, on the way out chatting to a long time resident who remarked: «I guess it's what happens. It's really their own fault», referring to the administration. «If only they had listened to what we've been saying for a long time, we wouldn't be here now». The point of the comment was that the conflict that had sprung out into the open at the estate meeting was not a new one – and was perhaps not so much about the small increase in rent, but more about the way the budget had been calculated and what expenses the estate should carry. For a long time, there had been disagreements over which decisions the residential board were entitled to be involved in, and at what levels, and over several of the sub-projects of the Master Plan.

- 9 A couple of weeks later, a local newspaper picked up the discontent of the residential board. A residential board member was quoted:

When we in 2014 engaged with the Master Plan we were told, that the changes should also come from the inside. And we, who reside in Gellerup, want to help make it an attractive neighborhood. But the actions we have seen since, do not show co-creation and the will to cooperate. We experience that the administration of the housing association listens to us, nods, and then throws everything we have just said in the trash. We are appointed to be scapegoats and as people who can do nothing (JP Aarhus 2017).

- 10 He then went on to a critique of the employment projects employing outsiders instead of people from the estate: «We don't want people coming to our area talking about creating employment for others but in reality trying to create employment for themselves» (JP Aarhus 2017, translation of the author). According to the residential board member, a main cause of the disagreements between the residential board and the administration of the housing association was the lack of involvement of the residential board in decisions, while the residents saw the jobs generated by the Master Plan go to people who did not live in the estate. Indeed, a very limited number of jobs were made available to residents in the construction projects, and at least one particular subproject, I was told, had around 50% Polish craftsmen, who would return to Poland when the project was finished, among the crew. The housing association and the municipality talked about «co-creation» and «cooperation», but the residential board member did not see it in reality – his experience was that everything they said was thrown «in the trash». The disappointment with the level of resident involvement and participation in Gellerup mirrors criticisms of urban regeneration projects with an emphasis on «participation» of citizens elsewhere (see Abram 1998, Jones 2003), and points to the «range of contradictions underlying “participation”», that Jones (2003: 583) mentions in his article on participation-based policies in regeneration projects. The «co-creation» in Gellerup seemed not to contribute to a sharing of power and a broadening of involved perspectives, but rather served «to reproduce existing dominant rationalities» (*Ibidem*: 585).
- 11 Among the often-quoted causes for discontent among the residents were diverse issues, spanning from rent levels and the related view that to surface aesthetics and architectural prestige was more important to the municipality and housing association

than the improvement of the apartments. Other causes of discontent were the annoyances of construction work and solutions that appeared strange, in the eyes of the residents, as well as issues like trash collection and traffic adjustments, and concern over whether they would be kicked out eventually as new, more attractive residents, in the eyes of the housing association and the municipality, would start to take an interest in moving to the estate. The estate was changing in front of their eyes, not always in ways they had imagined or hoped for. «It is not the Gellerup I know. It is not the Gellerup I love. It is not the Gellerup I want to share with people», Rahman, an interlocutor of Somali origin put it. Another young man likened the transformations to memories being erased, a third considered the changing landscape «worse than a cemetery». The plans sometimes clashed with the residents' expectations and hopes for the future, just as the municipal and housing association administration decisions seemed to overrule the residents' autonomy and control over the place that they felt to be their home.

- 12 When the Aarhus City Council then, in June 2018, drafted an agreement supported by 29 of the 31 councilors (opposed only by the two councilors representing the left-wing party *Enhedslisten*) without the involvement of either the housing association administration or the residential boards or the residents in any broader fashion, this was taken as confirmation by many that the situation was as they had feared: The national parliament and the government seemed intent on going hard on Gellerup and other estates on the ghetto list, but that had been clear for several years. What was new, was that the Aarhus City Council and thereby the municipality of Aarhus seemed to follow suit and come clean as hardliners. The agreement contained a series of efforts and statements of intent focusing on «equal opportunities», particularly for children, through social mixing and a more equal distribution of «problematic» citizens across the neighborhoods of the city (Aarhus Kommune 2018). In addition, it stated the intent of the City Council to work towards the demolition of nine blocks in Gellerup (and three in nearby Bispehaven), in order to redistribute the residents of Gellerup and replace their former dwellings with privately owned housing.

Plans of transformation

- 13 Anthropologists Simone Abram and Gisa Wieszkalnys write of how plans «make promises about the future» (Abram, Wieszkalnys 2013: 9). «Promising is a performance; it has effects and brings about an obligation on the part of the promisor. For example, when council planners (the promisors) present their visions for a material improvement of the built environment to a public of residents and citizens (the promises), they create a strong expectation that this promise will be fulfilled» (*Ibidem*). What promises do is that they produce relations between the promisors – in Gellerup, the Municipality of Aarhus and the Brabrand Housing Association – and the promises – primarily the residents of Gellerup. Understood in this fashion, the Master Plan for Gellerup can be understood as a form of promise. While there were parts of the Master Plan that had been finalized in 2018, and parts that had not, the promise the residents felt was being broken was not so much about what had been or not been finalized in the current Master Plan, as it was about the new plans that had begun to surface without any of the involvement of the residents that have been part of the process leading to the original Master Plan. But just the same, the interpretation of the promise of the

Master Plan as broken hinged on what was being realized being different from what had been promised initially. Abram and Weszkalnys write,

[T]he promise of planning [...] produces a specific type of sociality, involving state and non-state actors, experts and lay people, planners, citizens, and private investors, as well as people who are and who are not party to the decisions and projects involved (*Ibidem*: 15).

- 14 It was that sociality that seemed to change considerably with the decision of the Aarhus City Council in June 2018.
- 15 I did formal interviews with around 50 residents and informally spoke with hundreds more, so the cases presented here do not reflect all aspects of the different reactions to the City Council decision of June 2018. There were people who probably did not care much about decisions affecting the estate perhaps 10 years into the future, as they saw themselves as short term residents, or to whom it did not matter whether they lived in Gellerup or somewhere else in Aarhus. There were people who saw the plans to demolish further as an opportunity for themselves and the estate. There were people who resignedly accepted the decision and waited for the actualization of the plans to see whether they would be among the residents who would have to move somewhere else. And then there were people who decided to protest in different ways.

Protesting demolition plans

- 16 The June 2018 City Council decision seemed to genuinely surprise many of my interlocutors. While the people who were up to date on the developments of the Master Plan were definitely prepared for suggestions of further demolitions, the number of blocks to be demolished that was usually suggested was three or thereabouts, as there were blocks that were “in the way” of some of the already planned developments. When councilor Bünyamin Simsek from the center-right party Venstre suggested the demolition of six tenements in early June as a proposal for the City Council negotiations (Willumsen 2018), many thought he was high-balling; none of the people I talked to in the housing association and among the residents thought it was a realistic outcome. Whereas Simsek and his party had withdrawn from the current Master Plan because they thought it was not far-reaching enough, the majority of the City Council had kept to the original plan so far, though Mayor Jacob Bundsgaard had publicly suggested the need to update the original Master Plan for the estate. When the City Council decision was then published on June 19, 2018, my interlocutors seemed surprised at the severity of the plans. It also seemed to come as a surprise to the Brabrand Housing Association, who did not back the plans. Thereby the combined support of municipality, housing association and residents, that had been the basis for the initial Master Plan (that was still in function), seemed to shatter. A kind of demolition blues, a feeling of sadness and disbelief, seemed to seep into the minds of some of my interlocutors in the estate.
- 17 Fairly soon protests ensued. When I was guiding a group of visitors around the estate a few weeks later in the Summer, we were interrupted by a young man who demanded to know more about the plans to demolish. When I talked to him afterwards, he nodded at the group of visitors, who were predominantly ethnic Danes above 50 years of age, and said: «We know gentrification when we see it». As Summer gave way to autumn, protests were organized outside City Hall at City Council meetings, but to little avail. The decision was finally adopted by the City Council in early September 2018. On

September 29, an official protest rally was organized on the square in front of the granite-clad Aarhus City Hall as part of a nationwide protest against the plans in parliament to pass new ghetto policies enabling demolition and rehousing of residents of the Danish ghettos. In November, a human chain was formed between Gellerup and Bispehaven, organized by the Aarhus branch of the national organization *Almen Modstand*, roughly translating to Affordable Sector Resistance. At the protest rally, several of the people I had gotten to know during my fieldwork were present among the three to four hundred protesters. One of my interlocutors handed me a poster, stating the punchline of the protest: 1000 NO THANKS, in bold letters, and written in Danish, Arabic, Turkish and Somali. The 1000 referred to the City Council plans to demolish 1000 housing units in the estates of Gellerup and Bispehaven. At this time, my interlocutors still had some hopes that the councilors might reconsider, or that the ghetto policies in Parliament would not come to enable the City Council plans, as the policies had not been finalized. When they eventually were, in December 2018, with the support of a relatively broad majority in the Parliament, the policies provided the statutory support the City Council had counted on. The housing associations and municipalities that housed the “hard ghettos”, including Aarhus and Gellerup, were required to hand in a development plan for reducing the percentage of affordable family-sized housing units to a maximum of 40% of the current housing stock by 2030 in June 2019. While the minister responsible for housing, Ole Birk Olesen, several times stressed that demolitions were not a necessity, demolitions certainly were a pivotal part of the development plans that began to be published in the Spring of 2019. In nearby Bispehaven, the housing association Østjysk Bolig and the Aarhus Municipality settled on a development plan that marked out six blocks for demolition. As the negotiations about Gellerup dragged out, it became increasingly clear that the Aarhus municipality did not intend to go easy on Gellerup either. While the Brabrand Housing Association had entered the negotiations in Autumn with an alternative suggestion for the development plan, that only marked out three blocks for demolition, they gradually approached the number of demolitions suggested by the City Council, before finally agreeing to a proposal for a development plan that marked out nine blocks for demolition – a third of the remaining blocks. When the plan was published in early May 2019, Petra posted a poem on her Facebook wall, titled «The Tragedy of the Master Plan», dedicated to former Aarhus mayor Nicolai Wammen, now a prominent member of the national parliament. Wammen had negotiated the original Master Plan and repeatedly advocated dialogue and cooperation. Now, as national spokesman for the Social Democrat Party, he stated support for the new ghetto policies and the development plans for Gellerup and other estates. The first lines of the poem Petra published on her wall were (translated from Danish):

The Master Plan is kaput
 The cooperation is over
 The promises you gave
 They have been broken now
 The dreams we dreamt
 Are gone and forgotten

- 18 Many of the residents who had been involved in the initial Master Plan process felt that the recent decisions were taken over the heads of the residents of the estate. «The promises you gave» had been «broken». They felt that wool had been pulled over their eyes by politicians and planners, they felt steamrolled, and they felt that their sentiments were not properly acknowledged by the politicians. They felt that no matter

how they tried to affect the decisions, they were not listened to or involved. The «cooperation» was «over». In that light, resistance seemed the appropriate, and only possible, response, save apathetic acceptance. By resistance here, I mean resistance both as an emic and an analytical term. The residents involved in and participating in protests in front of City Hall and other manifestations of resistance, considered what they did “resistance” (*modstand* in Danish).

- 19 Resistance has been a contested concept in anthropology. In her 2006 article on the subject of resistance in Anthropology, Susan Seymour critically examines some anthropological texts on resistance, and offers her own definition: «In a context of differential power relationships, resistance refers to intentional, and hence conscious, acts of defiance or opposition by a subordinate individual or group of individuals against a superior individual or set of individuals. Such acts are counter-hegemonic but may not succeed in effecting change» (Seymour 2006: 305). Building on Seymour’s definition, the above examples of protest clearly falls under the definition of resistance, playing out in a «context of differential power relationships», and being intentionally in opposition to a «superior set of individuals» (The majorities of the Aarhus City Council and the majority of the Danish National Parliament).

Moving away – giving up the fight or fighting it differently?

- 20 Esben and Julie were a couple in their early thirties who I had gotten in touch with after I had advertised for informants in an article in a local news media about my research in 2016. Julie contacted me and invited me to visit them in their apartment in one of the seven tall Gudrunsvej blocks that cut the profile of Gellerup, visible from far away, and boasting views of both the Brabrand area and the City of Aarhus. Both had University degrees and while Julie was currently applying for jobs, Esben worked in the creative industry. They had come to Gellerup when their inner-city apartment had become too small for their growing family. At first, they had been skeptical about moving to Gellerup, but upon seeing the apartment, they had decided to give the estate a chance, despite misgivings from their families and friends. They had grown to like the estate, and felt it offered a differed kind of living than the apartments they had been used to in central Aarhus. The neighbors took more of an interest in them, and they met other parents with children at the playgrounds in the estate. They felt welcome in Gellerup, and though Julie recounted a few instances of feeling unsafe, they were generally happy with life in the estate and were looking forward to the improvements that were underway at the time. When I visited them again about six months later, in the Summer of 2017, they were starting to feel more ambivalent about the ongoing transformations. Unfinished subprojects, inadequate information about construction works around their block, and fluid time horizons for completion of construction works had them weighing the inconveniences of the material transformations against the advantages of living in Gellerup and the potential future benefits of the transformations.
- 21 I met Esben coincidentally in August 2018 and we talked at length about the City Council Plan of June 2018 to demolish further tenements in the estate. «We terminated our contract [for the apartment lease] the day it became public», he told me. They had lost faith in the involvement of the residents and did not believe there would be

anything left but a bitter struggle uphill against the municipality, which the residents would eventually lose. While casting the decision as a refusal to fight an uneven battle, Esben and Julie did not, however, completely withdraw from all things Gellerup the moment they terminated their lease. They publicly announced the grounds for their decision and Esben participated in discussions on an alternative plan to that of the City Council. A few months later, I received an email from Julie, summing up the causes of their relocation: it had been «a painful decision», and «the deciding factor» had been «the rising stress levels as a consequence of the Master Plan and the City Council decision to demolish tenements, likely including ours or parts of it». When I asked for permission to use the phrasings in publications, Julie quickly replied that I was more than welcome to quote from it.

- 22 While people moved from Gellerup for all sorts of reasons (distance to work, a desire to own their own housing, having a garden, the condition of the apartments, the social composition of the residents, the inconveniences of construction work), Esben and Julie wanted the particular reasons for their relocation to be communicated through the channels available to them, one of them being through me. In that light, I have chosen to include the story of Esben and Julie as an example of resistance against the demolition plans proposed by the Aarhus City Council in June 2018. Relocation, however, was not necessarily resistance – to most of the residents I knew who moved, it had little to do with general resistance to the plans for the estate, and more to do with practical issues (including inconveniences of the transformations). But at the same time, the relocation of Esben and Julie seemed part of a broader picture in the immediate aftermath of the June 2018 City Council decision – as noted in the conversation with Petra in the Introduction, other residents had been equally unequivocal about their reasons for leaving the estate. They saw the estate they knew and loved disappearing and something else taking its place. Moving away, then, seemed to constitute a choice that, though largely forced by the new demolition plans, yet seemed to also contain an element of a final attempt at resistance against the demolition plans and an attempt to hold forth about the perceived injustices of the planned demolitions, the lack of resident involvement and the exclusion of the residents from important decisions about the estate they inhabited.

The “Make-believe” of development plans and its contestations

- 23 Yael Navaro-Yashin writes about the «make-believe», the simultaneous crafting and imagination of a particular future (Navaro-Yashin 2012: 5-6) in relation to the making of a Turkish Cyprus. Applying the concept of «make-believe» to Gellerup, a similar process is ongoing. The “new”, improved, socially balanced Gellerup, an «attractive neighborhood» with new functions and an altered composition of residents, is continually imagined and conveyed through political statements, architects’ renditions (see Houdart 2008; Yaneva 2016 for more on architects’ imaginings), and vision papers. Simultaneously, it is being crafted through the material transformations, through new roads, new buildings, and demolitions of old buildings.
- 24 But the «make-believe» of the future Gellerup was contested by some of the current residents. The protests and the relocations recounted here I consider examples of contestation of the make-believe of Gellerup as «attractive neighborhood». Whereas

some current residents supported the transformations, including demolitions, or saw personal opportunities in an eventual forced relocation or in staying in a transformed estate, the residents portrayed here had limited faith in the “believe” part of the make-believe. More precisely, they questioned the imagination of the future Gellerup as beneficial to everyone, current and future residents included. They also questioned the «sincerity» of the «promise» (Abram, Weszkalnys 2013: 10) made by the City Council when the initial Master Plan had been adopted eight years earlier, and whether it had been made in good faith – had it always been the plan to demolish the tenements that were now appointed for demolition? And what had then been the point of the involvement of the residents in the first place – had the votes in 2010 and 2011, where the residents had adopted the initial Master Plan, been moot? Would the initial Master Plan have been implemented anyway, had the residents voted no? These were questions several of my interlocutors grappled with as negotiations between the municipality and the housing association seemed to enter a deadlock. The municipality insisted on substantial demolitions and the housing association attempted to talk the number of demolitions down through the Winter of 2018-19 and the Spring of 2019. In the end, as the deadline for the so-called Development Plan to be submitted to the Ministry of Buildings, Transport and Housing on June 1 2019, the two parties published a compromise, where the housing association had had some influence on the tenements pointed out for demolition, but had not managed to substantially affect the number of units to be demolished. The Development Plan was eventually adopted by a small margin of 50 votes against 44 in the general assembly in May 2019, just days before the deadline for submission to the ministry.

- 25 The political turmoil that encompassed the Gellerup estate and the insecurities about future demolitions, the time-frames involved, and the recurrent debates about the rights and duties of the residents did not make for an easily navigable social terrain. As Catherine Fennell has pointed out in relation to the redevelopment of the most troubled public housing estates in Chicago, the residents experienced «uncertainties» about what it took to be considered as equal citizens, what rights and what duties one would have to fulfill (Fennell 2015: 10). Like the residents of the Horner estate, who are the primary interlocutors for Fennell, the residents of Gellerup experienced that «familiar social and material worlds gradually morphed “around” them. They would learn that place encompasses much more than location» (*Ibidem*: 18). Were they expected to embrace their relocation and see it as an opportunity? Rahman, the interlocutor of Somali descent, did not. «I don’t like it», he said when asked about the transformations. «I don’t like it because there is a limit to what should be transformed». Yet, he supported the transformations in general, as he wanted the estate to «go along with the times». But as many other residents, he was unsure of what was expected of him if he remained in the estate. For Rahman and others, it was still difficult to gauge what the decisions would mean for them and their housing situation in the future.
- 26 The social mixing paradigm (see Lees, Bridge, Butler 2012), that seemed to have swept in and set the agenda for the merging of Danish housing and integration policies, meant that the residents who would be relocated from Gellerup would be offered alternative housing units in estates that had lower proportions of immigrants and unemployed residents. But whether that would result in an improved social situation for the individual resident was unclear. The role of social networks was considered primarily as a drawback and something that limited opportunities and the will to

integrate and find employment. The expectation was that they would become part of new, more productive and more helpful networks in new neighborhoods.

- 27 While the potential problematics of the new policies of social distribution of Gellerup residents were pointed out by critics of the Development Plan, it did not seem to gain foothold in the political and public discussions that followed the negotiations and the eventual agreement of a new Development Plan. Much to the frustration of several of my interlocutors.

Conclusions

- 28 The new national ghetto policies, the Aarhus City Council decision to demolish further tenements, and the eventual agreement to a new Development Plan, however forced, by the housing association general assembly, seemed to instill a particular mood in several of my interlocutors. Here I have coined it “the demolition blues”. While the Gellerup residents reacted in many different ways to the new demolition plans (some only with a shrug, some with hopes that it would eventually benefit them), the interlocutors portrayed here reacted with different forms of resistance. I have argued that protests in various forms both analytically and emically made sense as forms of resistance against a decision that seemed unfair and against superior forces. The second form of resistance I analyze here is less straightforwardly resistance, yet I argue that the relocation of Esben and Julie (and several other long-term residents), while seemingly voluntary and possible to ascribe to many other reasons, can also be analyzed as a form of resistance, and emically was also, albeit ambivalently, considered a form of resistance, while also being cast as a form of giving up unfruitful resistance. Yet, building on Seymour’s (2006) definition of resistance, I have identified the relocation of Esben and Julie as a particular form of resistance to the planning ambitions of the City Council (and secondarily of the national parliament). They were the kind of relatively affluent, well-educated, ethnically Danish middle-class citizens the municipality wanted to attract. Instead, they chose to move away because of the transformations, the uncertainty involved, and the political agendas, offering public criticism of the plans on their way out.
- 29 So far, the various forms of resistance have had little impact on the political development and the recent agreement of a new, joint Development Plan that builds on and expands the scope of the initial Master Plan of the estate, building on logics of social mixing. In the final section, I have pointed to the insecurities experienced by the residents of the Gellerup estate, who now find themselves in an uncertain situation. What the future demolitions and developments of the Gellerup estate, and the relocations of some of its residents, will eventually result in is still unclear. The political attention to ghettos in Denmark has put the affordable housing sector under pressure and Gellerup is one of the first of several estates nationwide that will have to work out similar development plans.

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NOTES

1. All interlocutors' names have been changed in order to anonymize them.
2. My Phd-project was funded by Landsbyggefonden, the National Building Fund, and conducted in cooperation with the Brabrand Housing Association. My academical affiliation was with the Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University. The National Building Fund is a fund built on

payments collected through rent in the affordable housing sector in estates where the founding loans have been paid out.

3. The executive board is elected by a constituency of residential board members from the estates run by the housing association.

4. Indeed the municipal oversight eventually decided that the budget proposed by the administration should apply.

ABSTRACTS

The affordable housing estate Gellerup in Aarhus, Denmark, has been under transformation for the past eight years. Since the final adoption in 2011 of a Master Plan, implemented by the housing association running the estate and the Municipality in close cooperation, demolitions, infrastructural projects, and new constructions have been the order of the day. New national political discussions in 2018 opened for local discussions on the future of the estate, resulting in a City Council decision to work towards further demolitions and transformations than initially agreed upon. The City Council decision aims at creating a different social mix in the estate by removing affordable housing units and building owner-occupied and private rental units, attracting affluent citizens. The decision resulted in various responses from current residents. Here I will examine two forms of “resistance” – outright protest and relocation. I relate the two cases to the ongoing development of the estate and issues of planning and the construction of a particular future for the estate. The article is based on ethnographic research conducted from 2015 to 2019.

Il complesso residenziale a prezzi calmierati Gellerup sito ad Aarhus, in Danimarca, ha subito ampie trasformazioni negli ultimi otto anni. Fin dall'adozione di un Master Plan nel 2011, elaborato dall'associazione che gestisce il complesso, in collaborazione con il Comune, sono stati all'ordine del giorno demolizioni, progetti infrastrutturali e nuove costruzioni. Alcuni recenti dibattiti politici condotti a livello nazionale dal 2018 hanno promosso un dibattito locale sul futuro del complesso residenziale, confluiti nella decisione del Consiglio Comunale di incrementare il numero di demolizioni e di trasformazioni inizialmente concordato. La decisione del Consiglio Comunale era intesa a creare un differente mix sociale nel complesso, espropriando le unità abitative a prezzi calmierati e costruendo nuove unità abitative di proprietà e in affitto, nel tentativo di attrarre cittadini benestanti. In questo saggio esamino due forme di resistenza – la protesta frontale e il rialloggiamento. Connetto i due casi allo sviluppo del complesso in corso, alla pianificazione territoriale e alla costruzione di uno specifico futuro. L'articolo si basa su una ricerca etnografica condotta tra il 2015 e il 2019.

INDEX

Keywords: social housing, Denmark, planning, ghetto policies, resistance

Parole chiave: social housing, Danimarca, planning, politiche del ghetto, resistenza

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