

PERSPECTIVES ON CONSTRUCTION REFORM

RIBE SEMINAR: UNIVERSITY OF READING
24 MARCH 2016
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DANISH BUILDING RESEARCH INSTITUTE
AALBORG UNIVERSITY COPENHAGEN

Agenda

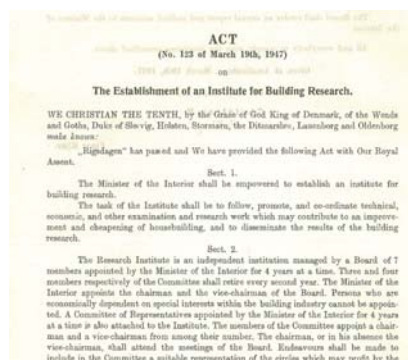
- A bit of background and some general and theoretical considerations
- Setting the scene: A brief overview of construction reform in Denmark
- Three shortcomings of construction policy (and research)
- Perspectives on construction reform



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A bit of background (SBI)

- SBI is the Danish Building Research Institute – founded in 1947
- The task of the institute is
“...to follow, promote and coordinate technical, economic, and other examination and research work which may contribute to an improvement and cheapening of housebuilding, and to disseminate the results of the building research”
- Historically SBI has exercised its activities in close connection with industry and public authorities
- SBI has been involved heavily in the political efforts to develop the sector



SBI – 29.03.2016



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A bit of background (personal)

- Started working at SBI in 2003 on the “downslope” of the policy development curve
- First years: wrapping up and handing over evaluation reports to the government on the ‘results’ of various demonstrations programmes.
- Later: participation in a wide range of governmental policy advisory projects relating to innovation, regulation, internationalisation, etc. in construction
- Spare time: trying to write about the role played by policies, institutions and professional associations in construction reform

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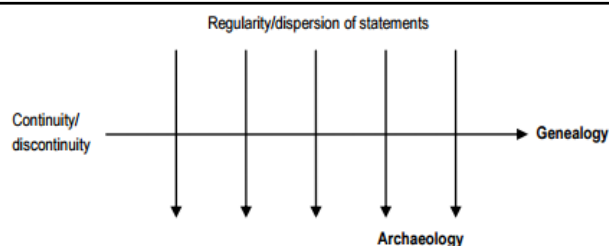
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Some (general) considerations

- Basic research interests:
 - How construction is framed as an object of governance
 - The constitution of policy problems and their codification
 - The social 'functioning' of policies
 - The relationship between macro-strategies and micro-practices
 - The 'great problem solver' and a 'trip down the lake...'
- Theoretical influences:
 - Foucault (all four of them)
 - Discourse theory
 - Institutional theory



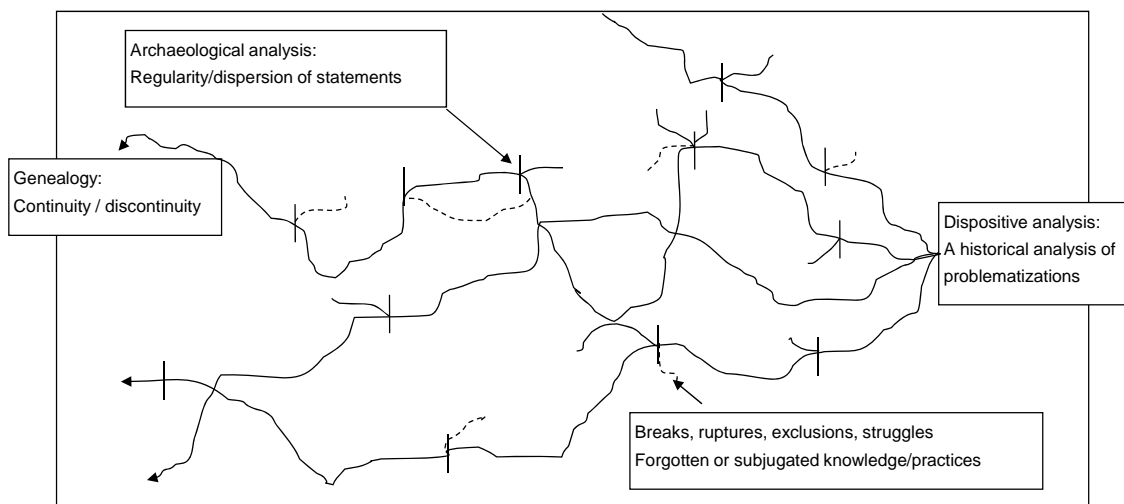
Some (theoretical) considerations



- Foucault's dispositive analysis:
 - A combined archaeological and genealogical analysis
- Archaeology:
 - "...simple disinterested registration and mapping out of the practices as events"
- Genealogy:
 - The problematisation and questioning of contemporary discourses and practices by referring them to the conditions of hegemony and power under which they are established



Foucault's dispositional analysis



Adapted from Villadsen (2002: 29)



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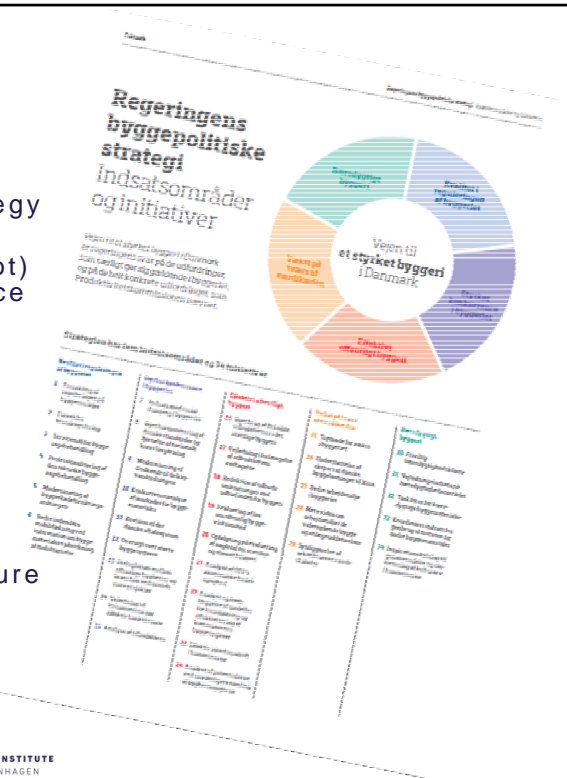
SETTING THE SCENE

A VERY BRIEF OVERVIEW OF CONSTRUCTION REFORM IN DENMARK



Occasion

- Denmark: Construction political strategy
- No attempt (whether on purpose or not) to understand the object of governance
- 34 initiatives within five focus areas
 - “Quality in regulation”
 - “Increased competition”
 - “Efficient public construction”
 - “Growth in the value chain”
 - “Sustainable construction”
- Not a word about past, present or future role played by construction



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Construction reform in Denmark: Highlights of the development

- 1940s – 1950s: Housing shortage and rationalization
- 1960s: Introduction of the phase model
- 1970s: The three turns:
 - From large-scale to low-dense
 - From new built to refurbishment
 - Energy savings
- 1980s: Quality assurance reform
- **1990s – 2000s: Productivity**
- 2000s: Benchmarking
- Early 2010s: Energy, energy, energy, energy...
- Coming years: Internationalisation, marketization, deregulation



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Reform frenzy: 1990s- and the productivity discourse

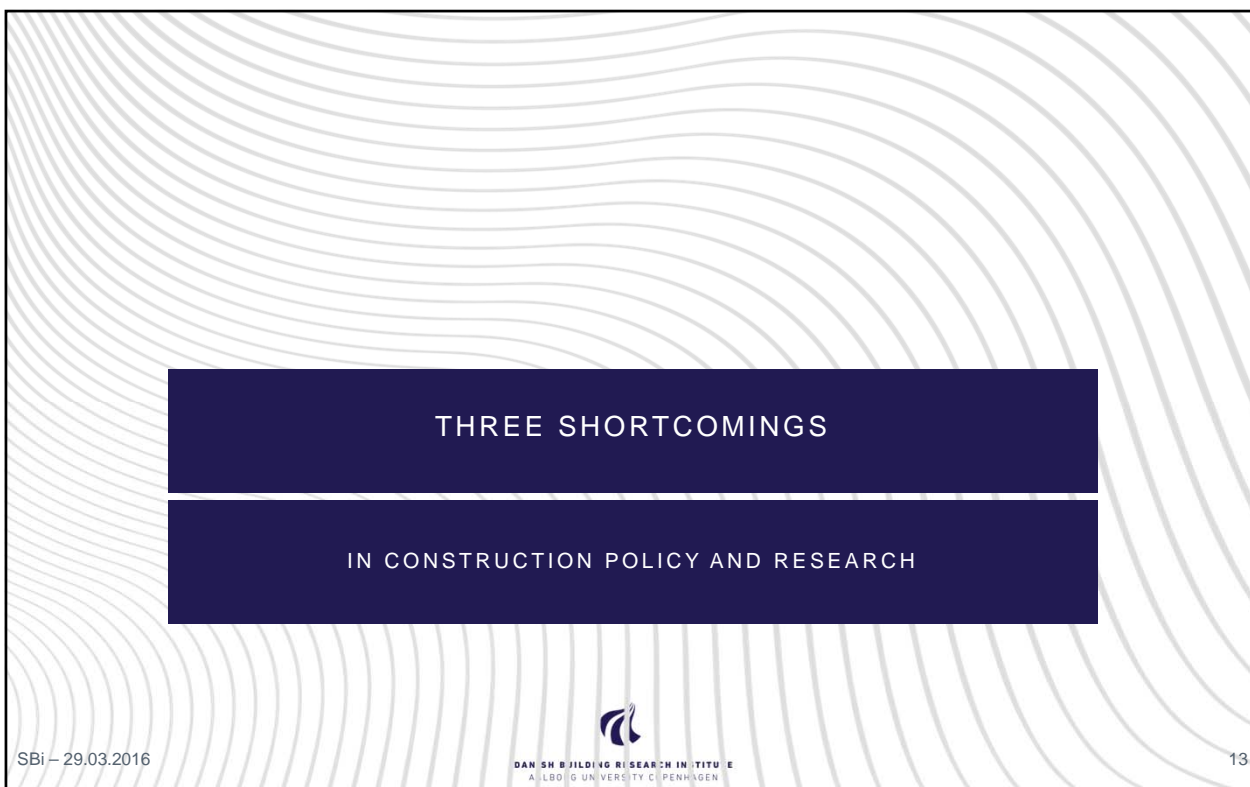
- The resource consumption in construction (1990)
- Double Up (1990)
- The construction/housing resource area: a business economic analysis (1993)
- Construction Political Action Agenda (1998)
- Construction in the 21st century (1999)
- The construction/housing resource area: a business analysis (2000)
- Construction Political Task Force: From tradition to innovation (2000)
- Construction in the knowledge society (2005)



The common denominator

- The inability to understand “construction” as a political construct
- The inability to acknowledge the productive aspects of multiplicity and ambiguity
- The inability to engage with fundamental institutional changes






THREE SHORTCOMINGS

IN CONSTRUCTION POLICY AND RESEARCH

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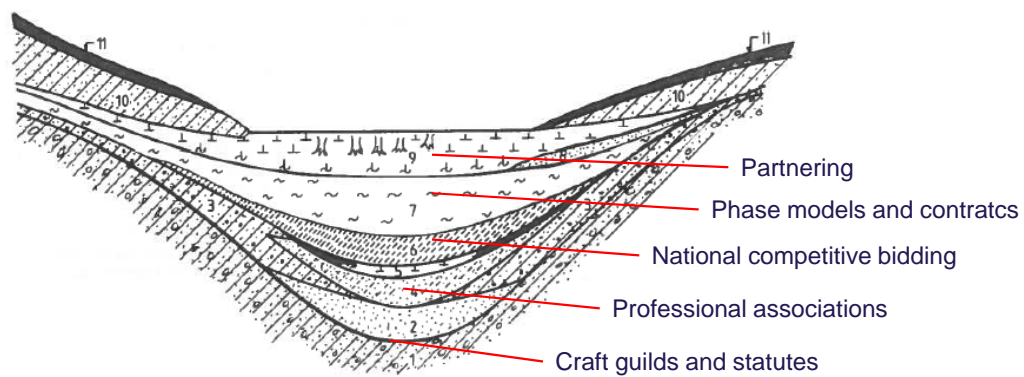
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First shortcoming: The inability to understand “construction” as a political construct

- Most policy reforms have neglected or been blind to the fact “construction” is a political construct – and not a “thing out there”
- Construction *can* attain a status of social objectivity as certain discourses become hegemonic / taken-for-granted
- Politics is the (re-)articulation and propagation of meanings of the social and the ordering of discourses (linguistic and material)
- Policies are developed in incubation rooms – but they are not ‘hopeful monstrosities’ and things do not develop in an institutional vacuum

Sociality as sedimented history

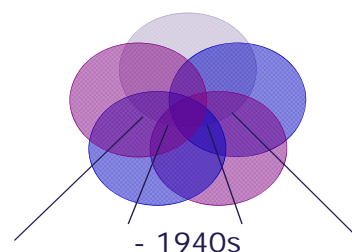


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Politics as a reordering of the social

- An example of reordering and discursive re-articulation
- 1947: The birth of a sector
 - Current sociality as black-box that could not be acted on
 - Age-old technical traditions
 - The irrationality of the “traditional”
- The necessity of opening the black-box
 - Transparency as precondition for collective action
 - The ‘sector’ as a *societal infrastructure*



1940s -

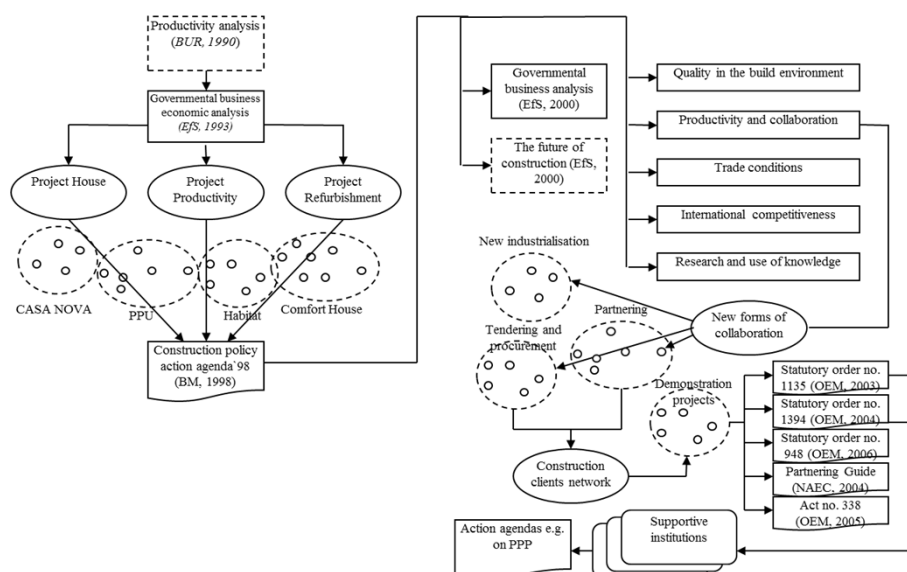
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Second shortcoming: The inability to acknowledge the productive aspects of multiplicity and ambiguity

- An aspect of all (but one or so) policies and reform initiatives is the attempt to homogenise construction
- Instead of purifying different logics, we tend to amalgamate or subsume them into a “super-logic”
- Multiplicity is seen as a threat; as detrimental to change as there is a strong tendency to measure change along a single dimension...
- ...and alter the starting point, if the results do not quite fit anymore

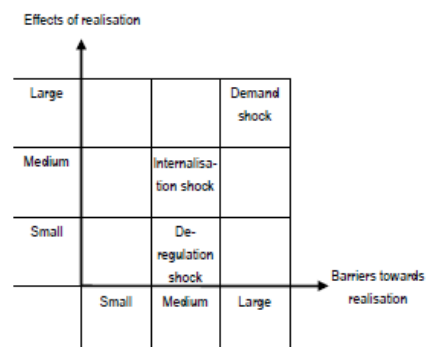


Contextual sensitivity and the ambiguity of concepts

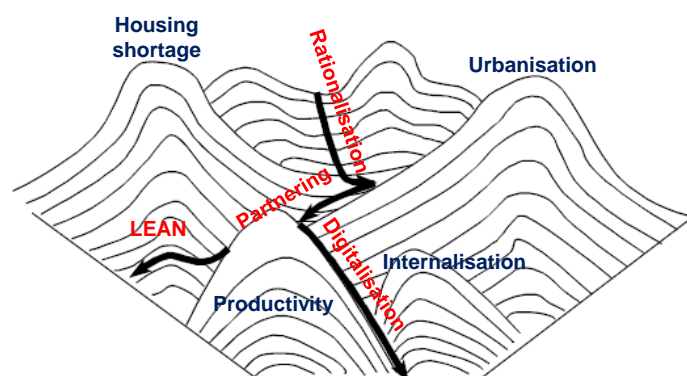


Third shortcoming: The inability to engage with fundamental institutional changes

- Do we lack the courage for fundamental changes?
- Reform initiatives have a strong tendency to focus blame people for the perceived lack of change:
 - Changing mindsets
 - The need for a cultural change
 - The reluctance to change
- The need to engage with also structural aspects
- Sectorial change as navigating a terrain
 - When you're lost, any map will do...



Topography: Construction reform as navigation



Inspired by Geels



Some general observations on construction policies

- Construction is ill-defined, multifaceted, complex and not just one homogenous configuration
- Policies focusses on integration rather than differentiation
- There is a mismatch between aspirations and means: radical vs. incremental
- The understanding of the role played by existing institutions, structures, practices, etc. is underdeveloped
- History matters. We should understand previous developments and learn from the past



Perspectives on construction reform

- Critical analyses of the underlying assumptions upon which much industrial policy is premised, with the aim of developing policies based on alternative assumptions
- The role of existing institutions and institutionalized structures for transition and the possibilities for changing these institutions
- Popularizing basic ideas in heterodox strands of thought that enable us to escape the dichotomy of micro- and macro and inform a discussion about policy making that are based on the diversity of micro-practices rather than being abstracted from it

