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## Danish Downtown Redevelopment and Transformation Strategies

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# Bo Vagnby Danish Downtown Redevelopment and Transformation Strategies



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Danish Downtown Redevelopment and Transformation Strategies

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**COVER PHOTO & BACK PAGE**

Traffic Art in Karolinelund Urban Garden, Aalborg. Painted in August 2013 by day care and school children under guidance of Bangladeshi born Danish artist, Rahul Amin Kajol.

Regatta, Aalborg Harbour Front, July 2013.

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

Photos by the author unless otherwise stated

**LAYOUT**

Thomas Varn Mortensen

The paper is part of TRG's research focus field:  
Strategies for the planning of town centres and  
the revitalisation of long-established urban areas

September 2013



**AALBORG UNIVERSITET**

Bo Vagnby  
**Danish Downtown Redevelopment  
and Transformation Strategies**



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## PREFACE

This paper presents an assessment and a long view of how Danish town centres have been planned and redeveloped from the time when spaces of capital and consumption established themselves in Danish towns after the Second World War. At a juncture, when the former market and trading centres had to adapt to a new reality characterized by economic growth, increased mobility and a 'rolling out' of the welfare society.

The paper describes the most significant approaches to tackle the challenges. From accommodation of new warehouses and cars, to the transformation of city centres to places of personal and cultural consumption. The transformation implied that focus has shifted from application of conventional, technical and functional means to the introduction of process-oriented marketing and branding efforts. Or, as it has been expressed, a restructuring "From subdued provincial towns to creative metropolises"<sup>1</sup>.

I got the inspiration to produce a retrospective view of Danish experiences when I read Kent A. Robertson's article, *Downtown Development Strategies in the United States* (Robertson 1995: 429-437) in 1995. This resulted in a paper in Danish in 1998 where I looked back at fifty years of Danish experiences, which conformed quite well to American experience.

Some years later, a postgraduate programme in Urban Management and Planning was introduced at Aalborg University, and it became obvious to make an English version (2005), to allow overseas students an opportunity to learn how urban downtown planning has been practised in Denmark. Subsequently, the paper has been used in a course called *Urban Development and*

*Liveability of Cities*, where students from different countries have used it as an analytical framework for the study of the *Complex City* as part of their academic assignments.

The changes in urban development and transformation strategies during the last years have, however, deviated so much from the conventional approaches applied in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that I have felt it necessary to bring the paper up to date.

I am indebted to my colleagues, professors Lars Bolet and Daniel Galland from the Department of Planning because they took the time to discuss the paper with me. Research assistant Thomas Varn Mortensen helped me with the editing of the paper.

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<sup>1</sup> The title of Hjørdis Brandrup Kortbek's Ph.D thesis from 2012 (Kortbæk 2012).



*Randers Town Center viewed from Gudenå 1935. Gaardmand 1993.*

## THE DECLINING DANISH DOWNTOWN

Many Danish town centres owe their qualities of diversity, identity and urban environment to their deep historical roots. What we in this paper call 'downtown' coincides with the oldest quarter, the medieval town centre, though extensions from the 19<sup>th</sup> century towards the railway station or the harbour often are considered part of the centre. However, the downtown should be understood as a product of the formation of the modern city and its functional division.

Historically, downtowns are important and are often considered definitive of overall city identity. Hence, cities of all sizes and in all regions feel committed to successful downtown redevelopment.

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the typical Danish town centre was living in harmonious balance with the adjacent 'cobblestone neighbourhoods' and the suburban areas along the main roads leading to and from the surrounding hinterland<sup>2</sup>. The downtown area was home for the most important social and political functions. It was also here the majority of the inhabitants lived, it was here most shops and amusements were located, and the most important economic functions were concentrated here. The town centre mainly accommodated pedestrians, as most traffic goals were within walking distance, and it was only the largest towns, which had public transport systems.

Later on changes set in, as the city changed gradually in response to new challenges regarding function, content and city life. These gathered speed after World War II, when incipient overcrowding led to relocation of a number of city centre functions. Partly due to poor

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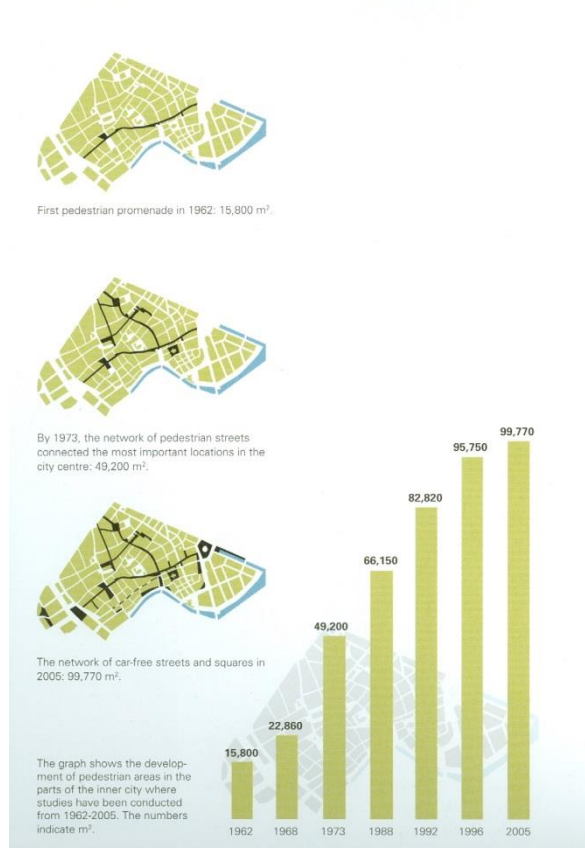
<sup>2</sup> Originally, these old roads were called *Chaussées* (grand routes). The roads were surfaced with chaussé-stones (Bolet 2011).



accessibility for smaller industries and production enterprises, partly because general improvements in incomes and welfare made it possible for people to acquire cars. Concurrent with this, construction of new housing gathered speed and we saw the beginning of a functional division of the cities. Simultaneous, removal of unhealthy housing picked-up, so, gradually, the total thinning-out process created town centres, which were quite different from those of the pre-war period. It might be that building densities fell, understood as overutilization of the single site, but in many places, new business properties and department stores, serving a larger geographic hinterland and customers, with greater spending power, replaced the poor buildings. These functions demanded street and parking facilities, so gradually, the downtown became less pedestrian-friendly, and the number of inhabitants fell.

Simultaneously with the increase of the distance between the different urban activities, sidewalks were narrowed to extend the roadway. Slowly, the town centre became characterised by "dead spaces" in the form of uninteresting parking lots, access ramps to multi-storey parking garages and large bus terminals. A process that has been termed 'traffic slum development' set in. Add to this, the new and larger buildings with offices, but also flats and shops, whose proportions and exteriors were out of scale with the original environment.

The gradual development of pedestrian areas in the heart of Copenhagen from 1962-2005.



The pedestrian areas in the heart of Copenhagen have developed gradually from 1962-2005. Gehl et al. 2006.

## MAJOR DOWNTOWN REDEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

In their downtown planning efforts local authorities have largely based their interventions on a number of single standing, albeit associated strategies. By and large, they dealt with technical aspects such as land use, functionality and design, and – only indirectly – did they reflect an integrated and complementary economic, social and development-oriented approach.

### Creation of Pedestrian Areas

Cities are places where people meet in order to interact, trade and shop – or just to relax and enjoy. In this context, streets and squares designed exclusively for walking can catalyse such activities.

Most city planners agree that a more pedestrian-friendly shaping of the town centre will enhance traffic management, contribute to improvement of the environment and development of trade and business. The greatest benefit from an improvement of the conditions for the pedestrians is, however, that the town centre gets a more attractive image.

Usually we do not measure the life and appearance of the town centre by means of economic indicators, but from patterns of use, volume of pedestrians or intensity of pedestrians. Town centres without pedestrians seem lifeless and dull irrespective of the quality of the built-up environment. In the course of time, different means have been used to attract pedestrians to the downtown area, ranging from extension of pavements and increasing the safety, to establishment of more and better places, where people can sit and enjoy the urban life. The most visible and useful means has, however, consisted in separating the pedestrians from vehicles by establishing pedestrian streets or other types of streets, where the motorized traffic moves on condition of the pedestrians.

As early as in 1991, 58 Danish towns had 135 pedestrian streets. To these come a large number of flex pedestrian streets (pedestrian streets during shop's opening hours), season pedestrian streets or percolation streets (Gehl et al. 1991). Since then the area reserved for pedestrians has continued to grow. Inspiration for the creation of pedestrian streets was sought from abroad. In England, they formed part of some of the new towns built after the Second World War. In Denmark, planners and politicians were particularly inspired by Farsta Centrum, in a new Stockholm suburb (1960). By re-constructing "Strøget" in Copenhagen, Scandinavia's first pedestrian street was established in 1962, soon to be followed by Randers, Aalborg and Holstebro. In all these cities, it only happened after an intense and hectic debate, and in most cases, it implied a preceding trial and pilot period.

Pedestrian areas have been divided into three main groups: (i) regular *pedestrian streets* exclusively reserved for pedestrians, (ii) *flex pedestrian streets*, which are pedestrian streets in the shop opening hours, but open for car traffic in the night, and (iii) *combination streets* like pedestrian-bicycle streets or pedestrian-bicycle-bus streets that aim at interaction between the different road-user groups. All these street types have implied more urban life, while they have not always increased the quality of the town centre's spaces. Generally, they have stimulated trade and business. Nevertheless, they have at the same time contributed to a monofunctional development of the town, where comparison chain shops or speciality shops have replaced the small retail-shopping units. Previously, this development was combined with the establishment of bank outlets, but business service and property trade has since displaced them.

Pedestrian streets can also be classified in three generations (Gehl 1993: 394-399). The first streets were paved with coloured flagstones laid down in imagina-

tive patterns, where the primary purpose was to attract customers. The second generation had more gentle surfaces, and more was made of the matching furnishing. After a period with strong criticism of the quality of the urban spaces, the third generation pedestrian streets were identified as an important public urban infrastructure. Nowadays, many streets and squares are designed as public edifices in order to stimulate the downtowns' branding value.

Even though planners and some politicians have recognised the problems with visual pollution of the pedestrian streets, it is more difficult to change the attitudes of the shop owners. The tradesmen increasingly move their stock out in the street, where dress rails press together the pedestrians into smaller space. Moreover, where the pedestrians can pass, street furniture, plant cribs, benches and dog toilets often obstruct their sauntering. The result has been that many streets reserved for pedestrians, display capacity problems. Besides, there are still street associations who think that plastic flag festoons and banners contribute to increase the attractiveness of the street. In some places, the problem has become so pronounced that other street associations and merchant guilds develop counter-strategies. One of their means is a subdued, nearly exclusive tending of the urban and building qualities, where colours, signs and reversal of the frontages to their original appearance signal class and quality.

### **Department Stores, Warehouses and Shopping Yards**

In our part of the world, the climate occasionally makes outdoor shopping and urban life a doubtful pleasure. With the advent of the department store, with its internal street system between counters and stalls, the pedestrians and open market activities were literally moved indoors, while the street outside served traffic purposes. The development began before the war in the largest towns and reached its hey



*Before the market stalls moved indoors! Today, the old Grønttorv in Copenhagen Downtown has been reinvented as Torvehallerne. Torvehallerne Website.*

days during the 1960's. In the climate-regulated shopping environments the flow of customers was efficiently led past the tempting sales departments and via escalators – escalators were advertised as a contemporary attraction – between the different floors. In the last half of the 60's new centres started to spring up in the suburbs and experienced an enormous growth during the subsequent years. They were planned as covered pedestrian areas with goods delivery in the basement, and with large parking places around them. To attract additional customers, fête areas were often attached to the glass roofed street system to be used for exhibitions, fashion shows and other organised

entertainment. Among the most typical of the period were Rødovre Centrum, Lyngby Storcenter and Hørsholm Midtpunkt in the Copenhagen metropolitan area, and Rosengård Centret in Odense. About that time, retail planning of the overall centre structure of the towns was introduced as a new professional discipline, as congestion of the town centres led to a need for establishment of a number of so-called “relief” shopping centres. Here, large one-floor cut-price shops were located, which did not offer special adventures except for the good accessibility for the car owners.



During recent years, we have witnessed the establishment of department stores in connection with the cut-price shopping centres, and efforts are consciously made to create eventful roofed shopping environments, which share common characteristics: centralized management and marketing, a carefully planned mixture of shop types, dominance of nationwide shopping chains and a clean, and not least, safe and protected shopping environment.

Many downtowns fear – quite rightly – the competition from the upgraded, relief centres in external locations. Recently, we have therefore seen a new phenomenon appearing in the downtown: glass roofed passages, galleries and arcades, which are typically arranged in an international shopping arcade style. Among the most distinctive are Hillerød Slotsarkader and the Scandinavian Center in Aarhus. Variants of the type exist in Odense, Copenhagen and Hjørring, where shopping yards have been established occupying an entire urban block. Common to them all is that they represent the first sign of a privatization of the urban space with security guards in shopping centres and downtown areas. The conversion of the former ANVA department store in downtown Copenhagen (opposite Tivoli) into the Scala Shopping Centre was an extreme example of this, when it was made into a commercial event centre. The objective was that modern town-dwellers should be able to move easily from one commercial activity to the other. However, this indoor environment also attracted large groups of young immigrants, who found the new indoor environment attractive, because here they could meet rival groups on ‘neutral’ ground. Ultimately, the conflicts resulted in closure of the centre.

In an economic perspective, many indoor shopping centres are a success, but from an urban planning point of view, they raise many questions. Firstly, they stimulate a “refinement process” (commercial gentrifi-

cation), where nationwide convenience shops and chain shops, that appeal to customers with great purchasing power, lead to displacement and eviction of small shop keepers who offer more basic types of goods and outputs. Secondly, they generate – like their adversaries in the external relief centres – a pronounced increased amount of traffic. This directly clashes with the promotion of policies of “sustainable” development that attempt to reduce the energy consumption and pollution of the environment (emission and noise). Finally, they can be criticized for their social effect, by attracting young people, who lack haunts in their local environment, to an artificial, commercial and orchestrated urban life, which is the antithesis to the spontaneous street life of the old town centre.

One of the most essential strategic problems urban planners and retail planners have to address during the next years will therefore be: How can the ambience and characteristics of the town centre be maintained vis-à-vis the supply of shopping experiences and free parking possibilities of the external relief and shopping centres? Should the town centre stake on continued creation of upscale shopping environments, or should it be recognised, that downtown life and shopping represents a significant and valuable contrast to the more profane environment outside the town.

### **Preservation of Historical Features**

In contrast to the roofed glass streets, which try to compete with the externally located relief centre, by creating an environment in the downtown as an imitation of the suburban shopping centre, preservation of the historical features demonstrates urban planning’s comparative advantage. Used as an urban renewal tool, preservation profits by the fact that most town centres contain a variety of architecturally interesting buildings, which most people find attractive. At the

same time, many restored buildings can often be utilized more optimal than the present use.

If we study preservation closer as a means, it can be divided into three categories: (i) *restoration and renovation* of single houses (possibly combined with protection), (ii) elaboration of *preservation plans* embracing entire quarters or neighbourhoods, and (iii) *transformation and recycling* of buildings or building facilities for new purposes. The two first approaches have been practised for decades, while the 'reuse' concept did not penetrate as a real strategy until in the 1980's under the designation urban transformation.

Many cities and towns have implemented comprehensive plans for their historical centres. Early examples are Ribe and Sæby, which had proper preservation plans elaborated in a close co-operation with the national preservation authorities. The downtown plans for Nyborg (1967) and Elsinore (1971) are fine examples of a strategy, which has been described as 'comprehensive town centre planning' (Gaardmand 1993: 101 ff.). In these plans, an overarching, preserving and holistic view has not only been the ruling principle for the implementation of housing-oriented town planning byelaws (and later local plans), but also for specific action plans for the centre and the traffic infrastructure. Among the more curious preservation plans can be mentioned the Fjordgade clearance project in Aalborg, where a number of fine medieval houses, after having spent several years in the moth bag, were rebuilt at another downtown location as an attractive and picturesque, mixed residential and business development. A deterrent example of false idyll as regards town planning is the restaurant and pub street Jomfru Anegade – in the same town – where street profile, outdoor serving places and building fronts stand as a Tivoli-like pastiche, forming the frame of one of the highest pub concentrations in Northern Scandinavia.



The housing-oriented plan for Nyborg medieval town centre was the first plan of its kind. It was prepared by Gjerding, Jorgensen & Larsen in 1967. Gaardmand 1993.



*The Square and Brandt's Klædefabrik in Odense – a very popular urban space. Gruppen for By & Landskabsplanlægning.*

Transformation and reuse of houses and buildings has always taken place. Either as consequence of fires or other calamities, or because a more up-to-date use proved to be expedient and profitable. In a Danish context, the projects for the transformation of the former Brandt's Klædefabrik and Kvægtorvet in Odense do, however, stand as early paradigmatic examples of a renewal strategy, which has set a fashion in other towns (e.g. "Værket" in Randers). The main purpose of the structure and arrangement of Brandt's Klædefabrik has been to facilitate and encourage an intense urban atmosphere with basis in cultural events and an intense café life. The outcome has become an exciting youth square, which is one of the most used urban spaces in Denmark. The buildings and the open spaces are organised in private ownerships, but it is the local authority, who hire the area and the premises for cultural purposes (Gehl et al. 1991: 29, 45). The good location near one of the pedestrian streets has contributed to the fact that Odense now possesses a cultural centre of gravity just on the edge of the downtown area.

The transformation of Odense's old cattle market for studios and headquarters for TV2 has also had a catalysing effect for the revitalisation of an entire urban district. The Glasvej Quarter (of about 50 ha) is situated at the edge of the historical town centre of Odense. It is characterised by many large and old industrial buildings, of which several are worth preserving. The enterprises in these buildings have had great economic and cultural significance for the town and its development.

In the first years after the establishment of TV2, only a sporadic transformation took place in the district, but from 1992, Odense Municipality and the Ministry of the Environment undertook a pilot project on 'preserving urban transformation'. The project was a part of EU's programme on Studies of Preservation of European Towns. The basic idea was to develop and test new methods and tools as part of a "market-oriented" urban transformation process.

The major tool was a three-tiered strategy: *The trade strategy* aimed at development of a so-called 'developer environment'; *a network strategy* focused on cooperation between existing and new enterprises and establishment of a stakeholder network; and *a tourism strategy* building on the assumption that new commercial forms of culture, leisure and tourism would have a potential in Odense.

At the time, the desire to promote urban transformation through intensification of the interplay between urban planning, local authority employment of the unemployed and cultural activities was quite new. Previously, a combined effort, with 'hardware' activities (physical improvement) and 'software' activities (training and education) in focus, had been tried out in England, but the Glasvej project represents one of the first thoroughly prepared Danish tests.

The combination of the wishes of the urban planning administration to start the urban transformation by getting preservation-worthy buildings renovated; the training and education of jobless persons by the employment department; and the wish of the cultural secretariat to extend the culture concept to comprise *culture production*, represented a new innovative approach.

An evaluation carried out in 1991 (Lumholt 1995), mentions particularly: (i) Formulation of a comprehensive urban policy across sector boundaries is a necessary prerequisite; (ii) the local authorities have to play an active and offensive role in the transformation process; (iii) it may be necessary to establish 'partnerships' between the public and private sector; (iv) traditional (passive) regulative planning has to be supplemented with an overall action plan with encapsulated implementation potential.



In summary, it was concluded that a plan-led and market-driven planning process easily becomes special interest and expert-dominated. To deal with this, planners need to develop new democratic and inclusive forms of participatory planning.

### Waterfronts

The sight, the sound, the smell and the feeling of water have an alluring effect on most people and contribute to the fact that the utilization of waterfronts stands as an attractive strategy. Like preservation, this strategy has advantages that you usually do not find outside the town centre, as many old town centres owe their origin and earlier prosperity to the water.

Until 30-40 years ago, inhabitants and downtowns were cut off from the water by factories, railway tracks or storage yards, and public traffic was forbidden or limited. The shift from conveyance of goods to container carriage implied that the economy of the harbour areas changed so that they became under- or unexploited. This development made it necessary for the cities to evolve new strategies for utilization of the waterfronts.

One of the main questions arising in connection with waterfront planning is the competition between possible uses that are often incompatible: Industry, trade service and commerce, habitation, entertainment, stay and recreation as well as tourism. To counter this, planners can for instance consider three kinds of American experience to lay down a prioritization (McBee in Robertson, 1995). Firstly, *water-dependent use*, which totally depends on the waterfront (like marinas, ferry terminals and shipbuilding). Secondly, *water-connected use*, which truly utilises the location near the water, but which for that matter could flourish in other places (meeting places, aquaria, restaurants, fish finishing trade). The third category, *water-attracted use* (like hotels and owner-occupied residenc-



*Water attracted land uses in Copenhagen Harbour. Sluseholmen Canal Quarter, and the Wave, in front of Nykredit's office domicile and Marriott Hotel, Kalvebod Brygge.*





Private housing, Bølgen, Vejle, Henning Larsen Architects. Only two blocks have been built so far. Bertel Nielsen.

es) can flourish in other places, but have greater attraction power and attraction value because of the waterfront facilities.

Another inevitable question is the choice between utilizing the waterfront for private or public purposes. Private utilization like hotel and restaurant activities and luxury residences may block the access by the public to the water, and thus it increases the extent of the 'privatised' urban public spaces.

Many downtowns lack open spaces and should utilize waterfront planning to rectify this problem. Taking care of the 'public or common good' was for many years a leading principle in Danish urban planning. However, there are now many signs of utilization of waterfronts, where the construction of spectacular business domiciles and exclusive residences takes place at the expense of public access. For example, in the Sydhavn area of Copenhagen, the self-grown and informal residential area, 'Nokken' has been threat-

ened by demolition, or the Tuborg Nord plan near Hellerup, which is one of the most distinctive Danish examples of 'urban transformation' of a large dilapidated and abandoned industrial area. An extreme and controversial example is Kalvebod Brygge in Copenhagen where an entire urban district has been sealed off from the waterfront to allow for offices and a huge shopping centre, Fisketorvet.

However, urban waterfront redevelopment has become a well-established phenomenon since the decline of the old industrial harbours, and since the 1960's, the evolution of this transformation can be seen in light of four different generations of urban waterfront redevelopment<sup>3</sup> (Galland and Hansen, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> First generation: North American revitalization projects from 1960's and 1970's (e.g. Baltimore); second generation: projects from the 1980's where specific planning and implementation organisations were established (e.g. Boston, London); third generation: assumed measures from 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> generation also in the 1980's (e.g. Vancouver, Liverpool); fourth generation started after the 1990's economic recession (e.g. Bilbao)

One Danish example of a so-called fourth wave waterfront project is the plan for the transformation of the former naval base, Holmen in Copenhagen, where a former naval facility has been transformed in to a cultural hub accommodating an Opera, the Royal Theatre School, the Film School and the School of Architecture. In the opposite end of Copenhagen Harbour, we find a new residential high-income area, Sluseholmen, planned as a replica of a Dutch canal quarter.

### Concentration of Offices

The office sector has increasingly constituted a critical component for the vitality and sustainability of the town centre. While most downtown centre functions were decentralized in the second half of the 20th century (industry, production activities and residences), the office sector has developed to be a dominating use in several town centres. This development is of course closely connected with the general trend in employment, where the number of jobs in the tertiary sector has constantly increased simultaneously with the reduction and dramatic rationalisation of primary and secondary trades.

From the late 1960's, office development was regarded as a separate urban planning challenge. The development of trade along the pedestrian streets attracted many customers and visitors to the town centre. Especially banks, were quick to notice this, and within a few years they had all (it was before the great company fusions) established branches at the best shopping centre localities. This development had two adverse consequences. Rents and property values increased, and many street frontages appeared inactive. In many towns, this led either to enactment of town planning byelaws that prohibited the establishment of banks along the most important shopping precincts, or to regulation of the appearance of the building frontages through sign and façade regulations.



In the 1980's another trend arose. The rapid growth in administrative, financial and professional services, for a period created a violent demand for image-promoting office buildings, which could signal a so-called 'corporate' or 'international' identity. Either – and in most cases – such buildings were situated in external, car accessible localities. Alternatively, active project developers tried to convince the politicians and planners that exactly *their* town deserved a new tower block building with offices on a very centrally situated site right in – or on the edge of – the downtown. During this period, many large urban local authorities passed plans for such projects through a process, which has been described as 'negotiated planning' through networks.

In a typical negotiated planning process, the project developer contacts the top politician(s) and top officer(s) of the city, and the concept for a prominent building is presented<sup>4</sup>. Among the arguments used are that implementation will result in new jobs (which have a high political priority). On this basis, a pledge of principle was usually given, promising political support for the project. Therefore, it often became a foregone conclusion that the building would be implemented, and the subsequent planning process appeared often as a purely legitimizing exercise. Often, attempts were also made to avoid hearing of the citizens.

However, many of the projects were never implemented. Literally, they strut in borrowed plumes. It was rare that the developer himself contributed appreciably to the financing. On the contrary, he charged a good price for the very idea of the concept, and the building usually had to be financed by loan capital from institutional investors. One can say that before "project development" became an independent 'indus-



*New headquarters for the East Asiatic Company, Midtermolen, Copenhagen Harbour. Second generation revitalization project. Arkitekten.*

<sup>4</sup> New hotel in Kildeparken, Aalborg; Scandinavian Centre, Aarhus (this was implemented later).



try', new building projects were only initiated when felt needs justified them. Unlike project development, where it became a question of 'producing' new square metres, and offering those as any other commodity. In other words, a supply-driven rather than a demand-driven approach.

Office construction activities of the 1980's often resulted in the establishment of a tremendous overcapacity (see i.a. Planstyrelsen 1992), but this trend has diminished during recent years. Due to the speculative aspects of this trade, in several places a need arose for the local authority to step in and subsidize projects through entering into municipal long-term lease agreements for parts of the building. Taught by experience, many local authorities now demand a guarantee for the hiring out and operation of the building before they permit the start of such projects.

In the United States, the office sector has played a central role in an urban renewal process that has been termed as "corporate centre development". In this, it is the goal to transform the downtown to a centre for finance and producer service, which can attract well-educated young professionals, conference participants and visiting business people and customers to the hotels, shops and restaurants of the town centre<sup>5</sup>. The role of the office sector in this development appears from the fact that in the 30 largest cities of the USA more office areas were erected from 1960-84 than had altogether been erected before 1960 (Robertson 1995: 433). London, Paris and several German cities have experienced a corresponding development. Some Danish planners (a few) and politicians (several) believe in a similar development of our largest towns. However, American experience indicates that overbuilding with offices leads to a drop in the property values of old buildings and excessive investments in

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<sup>5</sup> For an elaborate discussion of the notion 'producer service', see for example Saskia Sassen's important book from 1991, *The Global City*.

infrastructure that cannot be optimally utilised. In addition, experience suggests that non-occupied or underutilised buildings have a negative impact on adjacent areas. Together with a general decrease in the service economy, this has resulted in scepticism and reduced focus on the corporative centre strategy in the USA during recent years (ibid: 433). New York professor Sharon Zukin has expressed similar scepticism and caution in her book, *Naked City* (Zukin, 2010).

### **Meetings, Music and Sports as Driving Forces**

Congress centres, music houses and multi-sport arenas attract participants and visitors from a large hinterland. One is tempted to argue that most Danish towns with respect for themselves are building, or contemplating to build, culture and conference centres, as these buildings are believed to strengthen their competitive advantages and the image of the town ('branding'). During recent years, some cities have also planned to build large indoor commercial sports centres, but most have abandoned the plans again. However, since the privatisation of Københavns Idrætspark (Parken) and concurrent with the professionalization of the sports, there have regularly been plans about modernisation or new construction of football stadiums. The professional clubs and project makers here see a possible market by combining sports activities with office and service functions.

As a rule, the application of this strategy (usually limited to one of the above-mentioned concepts) normally builds on three arguments. Localization in or near the town centre may create an economic percolation effect, because the participants will stimulate the volume of trade in hotels, restaurants, shops and the number of visits in the tourist attractions. Secondly, it is argued that the project will stimulate the construction sector, as the proponents claim that derived needs such as increased hotel demand will arise. Finally, it is claimed that a new sports ground or a house of music may

have a catalysing effect in the transformation of a derelict urban area.

Viewed in isolation, these arguments may be all right, but there are several signs indicating that the 'culture market' is approaching a saturation point in many places<sup>6</sup>. It is therefore an illusion to imagine that all these types of urban entertainment facilities can exclusively be operated on market conditions. For example, the competition about exhibitions and conferences may drive down the prices with the result that the need for public subsidies increases or the quality of delivery is reduced. Another consequence may be that the liberal 'marketization' of the culture and music life implies that importance increasingly is attached to "safe" arrangements, which can attract many spectators at the expense of activities, which appeal to a narrower target group (for example youths). The use of this strategy should therefore be accompanied by thorough investigations, which partly analyse the local conditions, but also reach beyond the boundaries of the district, analysing regional or even national circumstances.



*The House of Music, Aalborg. An important element of the city's branding strategy. Coop Himmelb(l)au.*

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<sup>6</sup> For example, this is the case of Copenhagen's music and theatre setting where the old Royal Theatre Scene, *Stærekassen*, and the beautiful concert hall of *Danmarks Radiohus* have been abolished or sold.



The 1960's demand from motorized traffic led to significant interventions in the town centres. Compare with the view from Randers in 1935. Erik W. Olsson

## Enhancement of Traffic and Transport Conditions

### *The urban centre and city rings*

From the mid-1950's, significant technical-economic progress of the post-war period gained momentum. Car imports rose, and the Danish vehicle fleet grew significantly. From the 1960's, the development really gathered speed. Migration from the rural areas, increased standards of living and many years of accumulated housing shortage resulted in a violent housing demand. Around the town centres, new suburbs shot ahead with thousands of detached houses, large residential blocks and mono-functional industrial areas. Until the winter 1973-74, when we had the first oil crisis, the explosive growth in the number of cars continued. During the period 1962-1972 car ownership increased by 80.000 cars a year. The streets were filled with cars, the squares with parking, and trams and parts of the cycle track network were abolished (Gehl 1993).

Room had to be made for the many cars – and the rapidly growing retail trade. Most frequently, the means comprised closure of the main street for car traffic and insertion and alignment of roads from the hinterland to a new effective and efficient ring road circumventing the town centre combined with a hollowing-out of the back areas of the centre blocks for parking. Or, as Jan Gehl has expressed it: "The town centre became like an elf girl – it has got a hole in the back" (1993: 395).

The urban development plans for Nakskov (the end of the 1950's), Holstebro and Aabenraa (1962) came to set precedence for this strategy with their weight on the interplay between road planning and the use of the central urban areas (Gaardmand 1993: 89-101). The strategy was driven into the extreme in Hillerød (1983), where the downtown plan suggested clearing of most of the town centre to make room for new road



systems and 5000 parking places in connection with a new “city ring road”. In the late 1960’s, Copenhagen presented two grandiose schemes where the construction of urban motor ways should pave way for urban renewal of more than 40.000 dwellings. After massive protests, the two bulldozer-projects, *Søringen* and *Forumlinien* were abolished in the 1970’s.

The greater part of the local authorities of the day prepared plans portraying this view on the function of the town centre. The ideas were anchored through town planning by-laws or partial master plans specifying the future urban conditions. Upon approval of the plan, the area was not to be developed or to be used in defiance of the town planning by-laws. Literally, the plans for the circulation streets created large wounds in the town centre. Either because the streets were built as large structure-breaking elements, or because – ironically – the plan itself started an attrition process. Obviously, affected landowners did not want to invest in the maintenance of property that was to be demolished later. The result was that in many towns, belts of dilapidated properties cropped up along the envisioned new street alignments. In many towns, and years later, the continued criticism of this kind of downtown planning, the establishment of external relief centres, the process of attrition, and a changed view on the town centre implied that such regulatory planning by-laws were cancelled. Instead, demolition of obsolete properties was considered a realistic alternative, and new structures were built to restore the residents’ trust in the future of the area.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> A typical example of this can be found in Aalborg Downtown where a planned major street thoroughfare (Dag Hammarsköldsgade) after popular protests against it, was sealed off in both ends by locating a library at one end and an old people’s home at the other. Once the decision was made, owners started renovating their properties, and an attractive urban quarter was created.

Somehow, it appears ironic that the 1960’s focus on building new ring roads around the towns in order to increase access capacity (in terms of distance and time) in many larger provincial towns has now been replaced by a downsizing of the ring road capacity, mainly for environmental reasons (e.g. *Nyhavnsgade* in Aalborg, *Thomas B. Thrigesgade* in Odense).

As an alternative to the building of thoroughfares or new ring roads, some cities have introduced *environment-friendly roads* where the streets maintain their alignment, but road profiles and intersections are redesigned in order to reduce speeds and increase safety. A more recent measure to reduce the negative impact of motor vehicles in urban environments has been the introduction of *environment zones* where diesel trucks and other vehicles believed to cause pollution are banned during certain hours of the day.

### ***Traffic calming and cyclists***

The unexpected and sudden oil crisis in 1973-74 that resulted in prohibition of motoring on Sundays, and violent rises in prices of petrol – with a subsequent fall in car sales – gave cause to critical reflection on the cocktail: *downtown-cars-citizens*. With inspiration from the Netherlands (*wohnerfs*), the urban planners started to talk about traffic calming. In Denmark, so-called § 40 streets were introduced<sup>8</sup>, where vehicles should now move on the condition of pedestrians; also, the concept of percolation street was launched. Simultaneously, the bicycle was dug up again, the few bicycle tracks were extended, and cycle stripes introduced. These innovations were also inspired from the Netherlands, where the City of Tilburg had built an extensive, integrated and separately controlled cycle track system.

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<sup>8</sup> Named after the specific paragraph in the Traffic Act.

A recent phenomenon, specifically meant to promote increased use of bicycles, are the so-called *super bicycle tracks* whose intention it is to create cohesive commuter-friendly bicycle routes embracing larger bicycle hinterlands than the existing tracks do. On such tracks, the cyclist can gauge her speed and the number of bicycle colleagues. One design criterion is a smooth and pleasant surface.

### ***Bus planning***

The abolition of trams, the energy crisis with its subsequent critical energy debate, the functionalistic suburban orientation with its massive construction of new mono-functional residential quarters, and the general debate on the physical environment were the stimuli of comprehensive bus planning in the 1970's. Now it was about developing public and collective transport systems, where passengers from the suburbs and the rural villages, could be effectively transported to and from the downtown. One of the results was the construction of bus and motor coach terminals with good transfer possibilities. Located either near the railway station, or at the central square of the town. Most counties (regions) were now required to establish public transport companies, and public bus route schedule planning became a new professional discipline.

### ***Parking policy and parking strategies***

In tune with the swelling of the downtown's shopping facilities, land occupied by parked cars increasingly became contested urban spaces. The answer to this was the introduction of parking norms and parking funds. The former stipulates the number of parking spaces private and public actors shall provide; the latter requires the developer to pay a certain amount to a public fund obligating the local authority to arrange alternative parking space in designated building facilities. On the anecdotal end, it is curious that the introduction of parking meters has required an exemp-

tion in the Danish Traffic Act as roads are considered a public good for the use of everybody.

### ***Traffic system planning***

The 1980's were signified by slow economic development. Construction activities were modest, and the car traffic did not start to grow significantly again until the second half of the decade. The bias for suburban development was replaced by a clear orientation towards towns and downtowns, and the opportunities and challenges represented by their denser environments.

Among other things, the renewals of the 1980's entailed a more differentiated use of the traffic calming tools, where season pedestrian streets, daytime pedestrian streets as well as bus and cycle pedestrian streets appeared as supplements to the increasing car-free areas in the town centre (Gehl 1993: 397). Add to this, the introduction of active parking policies like regulation, or abolishment of parking places in the central urban quarters combined with parking fees (Copenhagen was the first Danish city to introduce this).

At the end of the 1980's and during the 90's, IT-development facilitated a 'systems-oriented' approach, where, i.a., regulation of traffic through the introduction of toll arrangements was debated<sup>9</sup>. At the time, it came to nothing, but many cities are now introducing 'intelligent parking systems' that attempt to disperse the parking-seeking traffic more effectively in and around the entire downtown area. In parallel with this development, we also see a focused effort directed towards accident prevention and the elaboration of comprehensive traffic and environmental action plans, where especially the air and noise pollution problems

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<sup>9</sup> An attempt by the new Danish Government to introduce a toll ring around Copenhagen failed, however, in 2012 after a hectic public debate. Later in the year, the Government established a *Congestion Commission*. Its report was published September 2013.

are addressed<sup>10</sup>. On-going monitoring and evaluation of urban traffic and transport flows now becomes part of the everyday of the planner.

### **Sanitation, Slum Clearance and Urban Renewal**

In Denmark, the most debated and controversial strategy has probably been slum clearance and urban renewal. The explanation has nearly always been the schism between consideration of hygienic-housing needs and social-housing needs versus the choice of technical means and methods. Frequently, the balancing of these concerns was marked by political settlement and conciliation opportunities based on attention to and representation of the interests of the construction and housing sectors – rather than just a concern for those living in sub-standard dwellings.<sup>11</sup>

The underlying reason for this controversy should be sought in the fact that until the late 1960's, Danish legislation and policy on the improvement of housing and slum areas was focused on improving the condition of dwellings and their immediate environment. The public and professional discourse was greatly influenced and dominated by a genuine concern for the insanitary conditions prevailing in the poorest sections of the housing stock (Vagnby & Jensen 2002: 4).

#### *The slum clearance laws*

The background for the first Housing Sanitation Act of 1939 was the need for increased employment after the crisis of the 1930's. It was believed that this could be achieved by increasing housing demand, through the demolition of existing dwellings. An additional 'benefit' (sic) would be that in this way, the concentration of

poor and socially "undesirable" residents would be dispersed.

Limited new construction during the 1940's and 1950's, combined with high birth rates and immigration to the large towns did, however, create a long lasting housing shortage. Therefore, the revised Housing Sanitation Act from 1959 emphasised the retention of housing units instead of demolishing them. Up to the end of the 1960's only about 2000 unhealthy and obsolete units were removed until the Act was replaced in 1969 (SBI 1980).

The 1960's massive focus on new housing construction, which – in fairness – alleviated the most acute housing need, and the preceding period's modest clearance results did, however, imply that large neighbourhoods became so dilapidated and obsolete that something had to be done. In 1969, the Sanitation Act was revised and it was made compulsory for towns with more than 25.000 inhabitants to prepare total overviews of the total need for urban renewal. The act empowered the public authority to intervene in slums and degraded areas, where the market forces had been unable to change the conditions. The means were compulsory acquisition and expropriation of condemned buildings, public financing of open spaces and provision of rent support, which made it possible, to partly indemnify the residents (Møller 1994: 63).

During the 1960's, around 5.000 dwellings were subjects of improvement, of which approximately 3.000 were removed. From 1969 to 1979, 20.000 units were covered of which more than 9.000 were demolished. Of these, the majority were located in Copenhagen where the need was greatest (Finansministeriet 1999).

Copenhagen's discriminate use of the Sanitation Act, where the renewal of Sorte Firkant at Nørrebro removed nearly half of the buildings, making the area

looking like a ruin-town, led to violent street fights between the police and demonstrators, when the *struggle for removal of unsanitary and unhealthy dwellings* became a *fight against* urban renewal.

#### *Urban renewal*

Two circumstances were decisive for the enactment of a new Urban Renewal Act in 1982. Firstly, it was an admission of the fact that urban renewal cannot be undertaken by means of compulsion and confrontation. Secondly, the country was hit by economic recession from the middle of the 1970's, which soon placed the construction sector in a crisis. The act emphasised a 'conservative' approach to the renewal of urban districts<sup>12</sup>; residents got a right of veto; and great importance was attached to making urban renewal works contribute to the solution of the building crisis, as it was labour-intensive and did not strain the balance of payments to the same extent as new construction.

In tune with the demolition of the poorest dwellings, focus shifted from securing basic health standards of housing towards greater attention aimed at ensuring adequate technical installations such as separate toilets and baths, removal of maintenance backlogs and a qualitative effort regarding upgrading of open space in deteriorated urban areas.

With the new Act from 1982, it became clear that urban renewal activities constitute an important instrument in the implementation of a national urban policy, though already the 1969-Act implied a significant increase in government budget allocations. Viewed over the entire period, sanitation and urban renewal activities have had an important role for the building

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<sup>10</sup> The Municipality of Aalborg presented its first *Traffic Noise Action Plan* in spring 2013

<sup>11</sup> For a full discussion of urban renewal and political interests, see, i.a., Vagnby (1986), Smith (1993) or Vagnby & Jensen (2002).

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<sup>12</sup> This approach is described in Jacqueline Tyrwhitt's book, *Patrick Geddes in India* (1947), where Geddes recommended that 'diagnostic surveys' be carried out before 'conservative surgery' is undertaken in slums and spontaneous settlements.





*Urban renewal at Nørrebro, Copenhagen. This type of redevelopment led to serious protests from residents, activists and professionals, and ultimately resulted in a modification of the urban renewal legislation. Bo Vagnby.*

and construction market<sup>13</sup>, and it is beyond doubt that urban renewal has contributed to the Danish housing stock being of a quite high standard.

As indicated above, urban renewal has been a contested field of urban redevelopment. Mainly for two reasons: (i) repair and upgrading of sub-standard dwellings to meet high(er) technical specifications have led to eviction and displacement of some residents who have lived on the premises for long periods, and who – in many cases – belonged to the weak or vulnerable sections of society; (ii) in tune with the removal of the most obsolete housing, the cost of upgrading and rehabilitation continued to rise, and, in several cities, a situation prevailed where it became more expensive to renovate existing buildings than to construct new housing. In the first decade of the present century, these and other factors motivated the new Danish liberal government to abolish public subsidies for urban renewal<sup>14</sup>. This decision was quite surprising as an official government report as late as in 1999 estimated that around 170.000 households were living in dwellings lacking installations like central heating, bath or toilet (Finansministeriet 1999: 8).

### *Urban renewal and housing policy*

During the greater part of the period in question, renewal efforts aimed at the obsolete part of the housing stock were directed towards demolitions in the oldest urban areas. Either in order to create better room for the traffic, or to alleviate social segregation by removing the worst slum buildings. In the 1980's and 90's,

when urban growth calmed down, a shift took place in the construction and housing policy, where endeavours to raise the standard in the existing mass of housing were upgraded at the expense of new construction (Møller 1994: 9). It should be noted, however, that urban renewal does not only affect the physical structures. It also contributes to a complicated social process, where the population is renewed through exclusion and attraction<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, it is closely connected with the social segregation and ascent or descent on the housing ladder.

The urban planning writer Jonas Møller points out that urban renewal is associated with a kind of “promotion theory”, which assumes that by constructing new and better dwellings, the result will be that the worst part of the stock of housing is abandoned, redeveloped and improved. The outcome is social segregation that emerges through “moving chains”, where new housing construction results in better-off residents settling in the best and most attractive areas, while those with limited means are directed to dwellings of a lower quality in low-priced areas. The new construction then acts back on existing urban areas, where the cheaper properties attract the most well-to-do residents from the inferior areas. The ‘moving chains’ have two effects. In tune with the growth of the town, there will be longer distances between the different social groups, and prosperity and poverty will change localisation. The social segregation means that the single urban area is constantly experiencing an up- or downgrading process, which respectively take the shape of the upgrading and improvement of the quality of the buildings, or an attrition process, which may herald the beginning of an actual slum process (Møller 1994: 8-9).

Danish urban renewal policies, as well as the housing policy, have traditionally been characterized by strong regulation, where the emphasis has been on raising the quality of the existing housing stock and increasing the number of new dwelling units. Concurrent with the drop in new construction, focus has gradually shifted from building improvements towards area and urban district improvements. The means to advance the promotion of the most unfortunate residents up on the ‘housing ladder’ have been based on urban renewal coupled with housing legislation. During the first phase, backed by the 1969 Sanitation Act, the strategy aimed at ‘pushing’ the residents in the heaviest part of the housing stock up on the housing ladder through new construction facilitated by removal of the worst dwellings. During the second phase, the idea was that promotion would take place by improving the existing dwellings with public support and subsidies. The intricate interplay between renewal and housing legislation is actually how urban renewal becomes part of urban policy.

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<sup>13</sup> The magnitude and economic importance of sanitation and urban renewal, can be illustrated by the following figures: 1969: 51 mio; 1974: 70 mio; 1979: 136 mio; 1984: 764 mio; 1989: 1.600 mio; 1995: 2.900 mio. DKK. (public expenditures, yearly allocations)

<sup>14</sup> For example, in 1970, the City of Aalborg had 10.000 sub-standard dwellings. In 2000, the number was reduced to around 2.000, but with effect from 2006, the Council has stopped funding urban renewal. This means, that the number of sub-standard dwellings will rise again due to attrition and because the backlog was never removed.

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<sup>15</sup> This process was already analysed and described by members of the so-called ‘Chicago School’ back in the 1930's.

## REFLECTIONS, PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

The title of the first section of this paper – *The Decline of the Danish Downtown* – and the criticisms raised in the various sub-sections, do not imply that the strategies for revitalisation of downtowns have been useless. On the contrary, it can be argued that without these interventions many downtowns would have even fewer activities and amenities than they now do. Some might even have died altogether.

Over the period in question, most of the strategies mentioned have been used separately or in different combinations, especially during the last twenty to thirty years of the 20th Century. Even if the results vary from town to town, it is, however, possible to make certain generalisations. The critical considerations do not so much imply whether each strategy has been – or is – expedient, but rather demonstrate some weaknesses of the different forms of sub-optimization, which both planners and politicians have used. Among those, the following are noteworthy:

- The advent of the pedestrian street entailed that some sections of the downtown became mono-functional, minor shopping units were displaced and a certain degree of ‘visual pollution’ replaced the original appearance of the streetscape.
- The roofed shopping arcades may imply a privatization of the urban space and may lead to increased traffic work, which jeopardizes the environmental action plans many city governments have passed.
- The market-oriented urban transformation process easily becomes special interest and expert dominated and citizen involvement becomes much more difficult and exclusive.

- The waterfront development, with a bias on construction of spectacular residential buildings and exclusive office domiciles, may hamper the public’s access to the water.
- The concentration of offices may imply a corporate centre style development and may lead to excessive infrastructure investments.
- The erection of symbolic and spectacular culture and music houses may result in ‘marketization’ of parts of the music and entertainment environment.
- The abandonment of public subsidies to urban renewal works is leaving pockets of low-income housing that are not maintained and upgraded. This contributes to urban segregation and exclusion of vulnerable groups.

### The Reorientation of Danish Urban Planning

One reason it is important to be aware of the above-mentioned uneven effects of downtown planning, is, inter alia, because the reorientation from urban growth to renewal and regeneration, which set in in the 1980’s, led to increased interest for investing in existing urban areas and to limitation of building investments outside the towns. This focus was promoted by national initiatives, when the Building Research Institute (SBI) introduced the concept of “better town” instead of “more towns” into the planning debate in 1981. In the mid-1980’s the Ministries of Housing and Environment launched the concept of urban transformation, to be followed by an urban policy statement in which the Minister for the Environment urged the local authorities to initiate “comprehensive urban transformation plans” on ‘brown field’ land rather than ‘green field’ development on virgin land. However, the new national policy objectives were not followed as many larger municipalities allowed the development of new market driven housing projects at attractive locations near forests or water to satisfy a rising demand for new and posh middle and high-income housing.

The element of urban competition was exacerbated by a National Planning Guidance in 1990 that indicated that time had run from the national planning objective of “equal and balanced development”, and that this should be replaced by “diversity”. The new policy direction was consolidated in 1992 when the National Planning Report, *Denmark on its Way Towards Year 2018*, advocated that the larger cities should strengthen their position in the regional, national and international division of cities. In other words, it now became legitimate that the individual town could brand itself instead of sharing its ‘market’ with the surrounding hinterland and the rural districts.

It is in this context the question of isolated and detached planning strategies appears. The overall message of the national planning report from 1992 was Denmark’s integration in the European Community and – in a wider perspective – its absorption into the global economy. The promotion of Danish towns’ competitiveness in Europe has been – and is – stimulated through national and EU financed single project funding. The projects may range from urban ecological best practice projects, over the introduction of electronic traffic control systems, to the development of new institutional urban networking arrangements or new implementation institutions for urban transformation.

This has contributed to a ‘projectization’ of urban planning and transformation policy that in many cases focus on ‘hard’ components like buildings and infrastructure and introduction of new technology. Just like the circulation street around the historic town centre did forty to fifty years ago. The sustainability of many of these new projects can be questioned, as funding from national or international sources is dependent on rather short implementation horizons in order to fit into political programme objectives. The focus on implementation of ‘fundable’ projects permeates the



municipal planning departments where more and more staff is involved in project formulation and networking projects.

Another consequence of the turn in urban planning policy is that the local authorities, who traditionally paid much attention to the social dimension of urban planning, have turned their attention to the larger lines in property-based development. With this 'choice by rejection of the social reality', downtown planning is increasingly becoming an activity influenced by investors and *their* priorities rather than long-termed municipal, crosscutting and holistic concerns.

### **The Emerging New Agenda for Downtown Development**

In 2012, two Danish historians published dissertations, which describe in depth the cultural dynamics, and economic forces that have shaped the downtowns of Odense, Aarhus and Aalborg (Kortbæk 2012; Toftgaard 2012). The changes are analysed in the context of the 'economy of experience' and the concept of 'urban space'. The two narratives tell how Western cities have undergone significant changes, and how these changes have affected Danish towns. Industrial production has moved to low income countries in Asia, and the new global division of labour has challenged Western cities to search for new commercial opportunities in order to secure economic growth and to maintain an appropriate level of social welfare.

Toftgaard notes that the city centre is subject for renewed interest in a search for urban density, heterogeneity and authenticity. A downtown dwelling is attractive for many, and large investments are made in public as well as private prestigious buildings with the right, central location. In line with David Harvey



*The city of Sonderborg has hired the renowned architect, Frank Gehry, to revitalize its harbour front with spectacular buildings at the 'right location'.*

(2006), but more subdued, he describes the roles of professionals in the transformation of cities, where, increasingly, architects and urban planners are preoccupied with the creation of physical frames for a contemporary, creative urban life style with attractive urban spaces and new cultural 'hot spots', while the business community offers consumption in a popular

mix of events and urban culture. Local politicians who believe that the event economy can replace former manufacturing and industrial jobs spur the development.



*The city is increasingly becoming a catalyst for meetings, relaxation, enjoyment and performance. Bo Vagnby*

The city's original role as a centre for trade and production of goods has changed to one of production of financial services (see Sassen 1991), and to production and orchestration of experiences and events and adventures. All in an effort to attract new taxpayers, people from the creative class, more students to the universities, and to promote tourism that increasingly constitute an economic stimulus for downtowns.

In line with its changing role, the city – and particularly the downtown – is becoming a centre of, and for, personal experience. It is no longer just a place where people trade, but a stage and a catalyst for meetings,

relaxation, enjoyment and performance. It has changed from an industrial and commercial centre to a consumer and leisure landscape where the users can stage-manage themselves. Or expressed with a grain of cynicism: *The city is becoming a manicured outdoor 'conversation kitchen'*.

In the experience society, "culture is something people do, and culture is becoming a question of performance. We see that in the city, where shopping areas are supplemented by experience spaces, pedestrian precincts and numerous street cafés. Experience and entertainment is becoming a main priority in urban

planning and design" (Kultur & Klasse 2010: 6; author's translation). Or, as one of my students formulated it in her master's thesis, "A new virus, called *creative and cultural city fever*, is affecting politicians and planners all over the world" (Strle 2012). Based on a thorough literature analysis and case interviews, she finds that cities are competing against each other by the same means, and that the physical results, in the form of spectacular buildings, are based on so called 'travelling ideas' moving from city to city or country to country.

This development does not worry politicians, companies, property owners, technical experts and customers very much, but several planning observers and theorists are expressing concern over the direction urban planning and urban redevelopment is taking. A significant voice in this discourse is Brooklyn College professor Sharon Zukin, who describes how New York lost its soul long ago, and explains what she means by '*the death and life of authentic urban places*' (Zukin 2010).

Zukin asks if we can continue to consume the city without destroying it; she argues that the diversity of the city is threatened through gentrification, invasion of chain stores and upscale development that make all places look alike; and she questions the use of *authenticity* as a means in the struggle for urban space.

### ***Features of the new agenda***

As indicated elsewhere in this paper, cities and their planners seek inspiration from each other, and from other cultural settings. It also tells how cities and larger towns played vital roles as centres of commerce and production for their hinterlands, and their working population, until their importance faded out in the 1980's and 1990's.

Ironically, the larger cities (e.g. Copenhagen, Aarhus, Odense, and Aalborg) are now experiencing signifi-

cant population growth, while smaller towns fight with stagnation or decline. One reason is that the cities are drivers of the economy – that is where the jobs are.

Anthropologist and urban planning consultant Søren Møller Christensen explains it this way: “It is the cities that accommodate the dream about the future; agriculture and production does not suffice, and though the detached single dwellings are popular, the suburbs do not contain that dream to any significant degree. It is the older, dense urban areas that experience growth, that accommodate ideas about the life one wants to live, about creativity and culture and the exciting jobs. It is also in the city that it is easier for the spouse to find a job” (Christensen 2013, authors translation).

At present, urban planners and designers use a palette containing the following ‘colours’ in order to fulfil the ‘dream’:

*Parks and city gardens* are becoming potent public urban spaces. During the period of urban modernity, town planners did not talk about ‘parks’, they were just called ‘open space’. A conspicuous example is Amager Strandpark in Copenhagen where you can meet a plethora of all kinds of people. Other examples are the new *harbour baths*, which are being implemented in all sizes of towns – just there is water. It is planned that Copenhagen’s three harbour baths in a few years will be supplemented by a new – privately financed – urban sand beach near ‘Nokken’<sup>16</sup> in the Southern part of Islands Brygge (Politiken 2013). An implemented fine example of a potent public urban space is the redesigned Aalborg Harbour Front adjacent to the downtown. Here we find a band of urban spaces – like ‘pearls on a string’: one for mothers with small children, one for young skaters and basketballers, an urban garden for youths, the harbour bath and

a promenade section for mid-aged and elderly strollers. It all culminates in a contemporary exhibition centre and a music house.

Another ironic trend is the renewed interest for establishing *open air markets* (Thomas B. Thrigesgade, Odense) and *market halls* at market squares where the stalls were previously ‘moved indoors’<sup>17</sup>. The competition on the retail market is leading to constant closure of convenience shops and comparison or speciality shops (in former railway station towns and downtowns) where the number of shops have fallen to under half of what it was forty years ago (Realdania 2013). A nostalgic reaction to the emptying of urban functions, and possibly also a compensation for e-trade, is the staging of shopping as a luxury and romantic activity, which again paves the way for the market hall. Examples are ‘Torvehallerne’ in Copenhagen, Valby Torvehal and Supergastro in Odense. Plans are also under way in Ringsted, Rødovre and Sorø.

Signs are emerging, suggesting that the interest for construction of *spectacular music houses*, designed by ‘Starchitects’, is beginning to wane out. Partly due to some of the consequences described above (p. 18), and because the operating and recurrent costs constitute a large share of municipal or institutional budgets.

Vacant buildings and brownfields are lying dormant in many places, and has led to a new wave of artistic and commercial initiatives in attempts to find a new lease of life for abandoned sites and structures. *The (temporary) use of second hand spaces* draw on the atmosphere, the traces, the remains, and the history of their previous uses. Early Danish examples of recycling of buildings are discussed in the section on preservation of historical features (pp. 11-14), while the use of second hand spaces evolve against the back-

ground of different demands on urban spaces and provide opportunities for interaction, participation, and start-ups. In this way, they open up new courses of action for urban planning and at the same time contribute to the sustainable design of urban change.

A prominent example of use of second hand space is the High Line on Manhattans West Side. It is an elevated freight rail line transformed into a public park. It was founded in 1999 by community residents, it is owned by the City of New York, and maintained and operated by Friends of the High Line, who fought for its preservation and transformation at a time when the historic structure was under threat of demolition. Another successful case is the conversion of a former power plant in Aalborg, *Nordkraft* into a fascinating environment and centre of excellence for culture and leisure. Nordkraft was inaugurated in 2011, and is located near the harbour front in close proximity to the House of Music and a dead amusement park, *Karolinelund*.

In Karolinelund, we find some of Aalborg’s first urban gardens. *Urban gardening* is a ‘movement’, which takes as its starting point the recognition of environmental degradation within cities through the relocation of resources to serve urban populations. Apart from the idea of supplemental food production beyond rural farming, urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) can have overall positive impact on community health. Community gardens can lead to improved social relationships, increased community pride, and overall community improvement and mobilization. Often, urban gardens are places that facilitate positive social interaction and emotional well-being, and thus they provide a “symbolic focus” which can facilitate ‘ownership’ to urban redevelopment.

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<sup>16</sup> See p. 15

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<sup>17</sup> See p. 10





*Manhattan's High Line Park is a very successful example of use of second hand space. The community organization, the Friends of High Line participates actively in the maintenance and upkeep of the attractive urban garden. Bo Vagnby.*

## SUMMING UP

The strategies described in the first part of this paper are to a large degree outlining the reactions by planners to the downtowns' challenges when spaces of capital and consumption established themselves in the city centre. This led to extensive alterations of the physical environment in order to promote the downtown as a centre in a large hinterland. Many of the changes and interventions were influenced by attempts to secure that the downtown could continue to function as a motorized centre, and in the 1950's and 1960's demolitions in favour of wide roads and parking space became the order of the day.

During the first years encompassed by this paper, urban planning was borne by functional considerations, probably because those days' town planners were architects and engineers. However, around the 1970's the car-focused urban planning was challenged, and social movements as well as new generations of planners and local politicians called for a change of policy.

The impact of professional education on urban planning and redevelopment has been further unfolded during the present decade as urban planning is no longer the prerogative of planners with a physical planning background, because new professionals like sociologists, anthropologists, geographers and economists are increasingly finding employment in public planning agencies or as consultants and advisers to municipalities and urban developers.

As the pedestrian streets were classified in three generations, and the water front redevelopment projects in four, it is also possible to categorise the downtown redevelopment and transformation strategies in three distinctive types.

The *first wave* of redevelopment comprised changes and alterations with the objective of adapting and converting the old centre to effective centres of commerce and business based on motorized accessibility combined with removal or improvement of unhealthy housing. Except for urban housing renewal objectives and functional and aesthetic considerations, overall strategic growth policy deliberations were rarely articulated.

The *second stage* was dominated by an increased focus on the redevelopment of brown field sites along harbours and at former railway land, and private developers and investors began increasingly to influence the sequence and direction of urban land transformation. The strategic approach was urban competitiveness and branding of the city's image.

A curious mix of economic and community and experience economy- based initiatives and values characterizes the *third phase*, and we can glimpse a trend of property-design concerns in the transformation of existing buildings and in the redevelopment of urban land, that combines public, private and institutional interests. Strategically, this phase is focusing on growth through the creation of new urban spaces and fulfilment of creative capital needs.

Many of the urban development and transformation projects we see these years, like removal of grain silos to make room for luxury flats and offices or creation of urban squares with market atmosphere are full of good intentions, but they suffer from one erroneous calculation. Frequently, they focus on the creative elite who do not tolerate disturbing elements like homeless people, beer drinkers or social idlers. The new urbanites consume their café latte at a hot spot or they challenge a climbing wall. By focusing urban redevelopment and transformation planning in this direction, decision makers and urban planners contribute to the

exclusion of local 'indigenous' population groups, who grew up under more ordinary and unassuming social circumstances.





*An exhausted urbanite after his morning run. Bo Vagnby.*

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