

## Bringing social sustainability into the mix

### *Framing planning dilemmas in mixed-tenure regeneration*

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*Published in:*  
Building Research and Information

*DOI (link to publication from Publisher):*  
[10.1080/09613218.2022.2081120](https://doi.org/10.1080/09613218.2022.2081120)

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*Publication date:*  
2022

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Kjeldsen, L., & Stender, M. (2022). Bringing social sustainability into the mix: Framing planning dilemmas in mixed-tenure regeneration. *Building Research and Information*, 50(7), 709-721.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09613218.2022.2081120>

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To cite this article: Lasse Kjeldsen & Marie Stender (2022) Bringing social sustainability into the mix: framing planning dilemmas in mixed-tenure regeneration, Building Research & Information, 50:7, 709-721, DOI: [10.1080/09613218.2022.2081120](https://doi.org/10.1080/09613218.2022.2081120)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09613218.2022.2081120>



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Published online: 09 Jun 2022.



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## Bringing social sustainability into the mix: framing planning dilemmas in mixed-tenure regeneration

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### ABSTRACT

While mixed-tenure regeneration has become a favoured strategy to battle concentrated disadvantage in social housing estates across the western world, the scholarly debate on tenure-mixing remains inconclusive. Some studies show that tenure-mixing can increase resident satisfaction, while others find that it may produce new forms of marginalization of low-income tenants. The mixed evidence in terms of outcomes suggests that further research is needed on viable ways forward for mixed-tenure regeneration. This paper argues that more attention should be directed towards the way project trajectories are shaped at the early stages of regeneration. It turns to the concept of social sustainability and examines how applying this concept as an analytical framework may contribute to understanding planning dilemmas embedded in mixed-tenure regeneration. Drawing on qualitative interviews with 33 practitioners involved in the early stages of mixed-tenure projects in Denmark under the so-called Parallel Society Act, it analyses practitioners' perceptions of and approaches to tenure-mixing from a social sustainability perspective. The paper finds that the concept is helpful in framing planning dilemmas by sharpening the focus on equity and inclusion, community cohesion and participation in urban regeneration.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 5 January 2022  
Accepted 14 May 2022

### KEYWORDS

Social sustainability; mixed tenure; social mixing; regeneration; redevelopment; social housing

## Introduction

Redeveloping mono-tenure social or public housing estates into mixed-tenure, mixed-income neighbourhoods has become a favoured regeneration strategy in disadvantaged neighbourhoods across the Western world (Chaskin & Joseph, 2015a, p. 217; Chisholm et al., 2021). Yet the academic literature remains inconclusive as to the benefits of mixed-tenure regeneration (Alves, 2019; Bond et al., 2011; Chaskin & Joseph, 2015a; Thurber et al., 2018). Rather than focusing on project outcomes *post-facto*, however, this paper argues that to improve the chances for successful regeneration, more attention should be directed towards the way project trajectories are shaped at the early stages of regeneration. In particular, it is important to understand how practitioners such as planners, urban strategists, advisors and developers perceive and approach mixed-tenure regeneration. Practitioners play an influential role in shaping regeneration projects, since policy intentions and implementation procedures are often vague and require contextual interpretation and operationalization (Kearns et al., 2013; Pløger, 2004). Examining practitioners' perceptions of and approaches to

regeneration implies identifying what practitioners perceive as desirable project outcomes, how they anticipate that regeneration will affect the targeted estate or neighbourhood, and how they parse perils and dilemmas embedded in the regeneration process. Furthermore, it addresses how they consider approaching the planning process (i.e. devising the design and use of the built environment) as well as the implementation (i.e. the process of moving from plan to reality) (Chisholm et al., 2021; Kearns et al., 2013; Lawton, 2013; Perrin & Grant, 2014).

To analyse this, the paper applies the concept of urban social sustainability to the study of mixed-tenure regeneration planning. Urban social sustainability is defined as urban development that is compatible with a harmonious evolution of diverse, equitable, and cohesive civil society (Polese & Stren, 2000). The argument for applying the concept of social sustainability is three-fold: First, social sustainability links the social and physical dimensions of urban development, drawing attention to the interplay between the built environment and social interactions. This aligns well with mixed-tenure regeneration that implicitly builds on the

assumption that transforming the built environment also leads to social transformation. Second, social sustainability adds to the theoretical understanding of mixed-tenure regeneration by providing a comprehensive framework for assessing urban planning processes (Shirazi & Keivani, 2019a). It offers a holistic conceptualization of planning practices that – at least in theory – produce well-functioning, equitable and inclusive communities (Woodcraft et al., 2012), which is exactly the opposite of what mixed-tenure regeneration is often accused of by its critics (August, 2014; Cheshire, 2012; Hyra, 2015). Third, although it is notoriously difficult to predict the outcomes of urban development, the social sustainability framework does offer some overall prescriptive guidance for *ex-ante* assessment of planning processes. Thus, while much social mix and mixed-tenure research focuses on regeneration projects *post facto* to assess outcomes, social sustainability may aid practitioners in assessing and adjusting mixed-tenure planning processes while they are still in progress.

The aim of the paper, then, is two-sided. First, to examine urban practitioners' perceptions of and approaches to the regeneration of disadvantaged non-profit housing estates into mixed-tenure neighbourhoods at the early stages of regeneration. And second, to examine how applying social sustainability as an analytical framework may contribute to understanding the planning dilemmas embedded in mixed-tenure regeneration, thus bridging the gap between mixed-

tenure research and the urban social sustainability literature.

The paper draws on interviews with 33 urban practitioners involved in mixed-tenure regeneration projects in Denmark under the so-called Parallel Society Act (PSA). The PSA is a state-led, mandatory regeneration programme targeting a number of socio-economically disadvantaged non-profit housing estates. The term 'non-profit housing' is used here to designate the Danish equivalent to social or public housing which is owned and managed by non-profit housing associations (Risager, 2022). While the sector is in principle meant to provide quality housing for all, regardless of income, some non-profit housing estates have over time experienced a concentration of low-income and ethnic-minority residents – something that has frequently been problematized in the political discourse (Bech-Danielsen, 2022; Frandsen & Hansen, 2020; Nielsen & Haagerup, 2017). In 2018, a number of these estates were targeted by the PSA for regeneration (Noring et al., 2020). The contents of the PSA are described in Table 1.

### Social sustainability and mixed-tenure regeneration

The ideal of the 'socially mixed city' dominates the approach to redeveloping disadvantaged social and public housing in many western countries. While urban segregation has been a growing concern in many western cities, social mix policies have been justified by promises of counteracting segregation and reverting the negative effects of concentrated disadvantage (Arthurson et al., 2015b). In disadvantaged housing estates often exclusively consisting of social or public housing, introducing a mix of tenures has been justified with promises of driving investment, erasing territorial stigma, promoting livability and social interaction and strengthening social capital (Bridge et al., 2012; Chaskin & Joseph, 2011; Chaskin & Joseph, 2015a; Pinkster, 2007; Perrin & Grant, 2014). Yet in practice, planners and practitioners still struggle to translate social mixing policies into well-functioning urban planning. On the one hand, mixed-tenure regeneration projects have been successful in improving neighbourhood satisfaction as well as service provision (Bond et al., 2011), reducing crime (Chaskin & Joseph, 2015a; Shamsuddin & Vale, 2017), improving neighbourhood image, increasing property values and supporting cross-tenure social interactions (Sautkina et al., 2012). On the other hand, studies describing mixed-tenure projects failing to deliver the anticipated social outcomes are abundant (Arthurson et al., 2015a; August, 2014; Chaskin & Joseph, 2015a; Tersteeg & Pinkster, 2016). A general finding is that

**Table 1.** Summary of regeneration requirements under the Parallel Society Act (PSA).

- Launched in 2018 by the Danish Parliament, the PSA targets non-profit housing estates on the so-called 'ghetto-list': a ministerial shortlist of the most disadvantaged non-profit housing estates in Denmark based on five socio-economic statistical indicators including employment, education, income levels, crime levels and the share of 1st and 2nd generation immigrants among the tenants. Only estates housing 1,000 tenants or more appear on the list (Noring et al., 2020; TBST, 2019).
- After appearing on the list for a number of consecutive years, housing estates are required to put forward regeneration plans to reduce the share of so-called non-profit family housing units – in most cases comprising about 95 per cent (pct.) of the housing stock – to a maximum of 40 pct. The instruments made available include (Indenrigs- & Boligministeriet, 2021; Regeringen, 2018a; 2018b):
  - Densifying estates with new-build private housing,
  - Demolishing or selling non-profit family housing to private owners,
  - Converting non-profit family housing into youth or senior housing,
  - And/or densifying with other types of facilities such as retail, office buildings, public facilities etc.
  - Regeneration plans must be approved by the Housing and Planning Authority (HPA). Should housing associations fail to submit approvable plans, city councils or (ultimately) the HPA are authorized to design and pass alternative regeneration plans (Regeringen, 2018b). Thus the PSA interferes with the self-governing nature of the Danish non-profit housing sector, which has traditionally been governed to a large extent by tenants through the so-called tenants' democracy (Noring et al., 2020).

tenure-mixing tends to be countered by micro-level segregation processes. While spatially integrated, many mixed-income developments have remained socially segregated along fault lines of tenure, class and culture (Cheshire, 2012; Thurber et al., 2018). Furthermore, studies have demonstrated how mixed-tenure regeneration in some cases produces new forms of marginalization of low-income groups (Arthurson et al., 2015a; August, 2016; Chaskin & Joseph, 2015b; Hyra, 2015; Lel  vri  r, 2013; Tersteeg & Pinkster, 2016). This may entail physical displacement (Lees, 2008), exclusion from decision-making processes (August, 2016), stigmatization (Chaskin & Joseph, 2015a; Lel  vri  r, 2013; Tersteeg & Pinkster, 2016) and the loss of culture and sense of belonging (Hyra, 2015). Chaskin and Joseph (2015a, p. 20f, 190f) term these mechanisms ‘incorporated exclusion’, i.e. physical integration that reproduces marginalization and leads to withdrawal and alienation.

The mixed outcomes suggest a need for further research on viable ways forward for mixed-tenure regeneration. Studies have demonstrated that practitioners remain ambiguous about how to approach tenure mixing and social mixing in urban planning (Alves, 2019). Strategies to plan and design mixed-tenure neighbourhoods have been frequently debated (Chaskin & Joseph, 2015b; Roberts, 2007; Talen, 2006; Tersteeg & Pinkster, 2016), as has the impact of different governance constellations (Vale, 2019) and governance processes (Joseph et al., 2019) at work in mixed-tenure regeneration. Even the question of what constitutes social mixing remains contested (Chisholm et al., 2021; Vale & Shamsuddin, 2017). This paper contributes to the research literature on mixed-tenure planning practice by focusing on urban practitioners to examine how they perceive and approach mixed-tenure regeneration.

For a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding practitioners’ perceptions and approaches, the paper turns to the concept of social sustainability. The term emanates from the 1970s sustainability debate and was popularized with the UN Brundtland report of 1987 that paved the way for a broader understanding of the ‘three pillars of sustainability’ – the economic, the environmental and the social (Shirazi & Keivani, 2019a; WCED, 1987). In an urban planning context, social sustainability focuses on the processes and building blocks of urban planning and development and addresses how they contribute to making cities ‘good places to live’ (Ancell & Thompson-Fawcett, 2008). In that respect, social sustainability can be seen as an inherently normative concept. While it partially overlaps with related concepts such as ‘neighbourhood resilience’ (Stollmann, 2016) and

‘sustainable communities’ (Bailey et al., 2006; Congreve, 2012), urban social sustainability provides a more holistic perspective on the social dimensions of urban planning and development. It combines the *tangible* elements of planning such as the physical environment and urban design with the *intangible* elements such as social inclusiveness, community cohesion and sense of place (Dempsey et al., 2011; Janssen et al., 2021). Furthermore, social sustainability can be seen as a *prescriptive* concept that from a normative standpoint provides guidance in viable and sustainable planning practices.

Urban social sustainability has been defined and operationalized in multiple ways (Shirazi and Keivani (2019a) provide an excellent overview). This paper draws on Pol  se and Stren (2000) definition of socially sustainable urban development as

development (and/or growth) that is compatible with harmonious evolution of civil society, fostering an environment conducive to the compatible cohabitation of culturally and socially diverse groups while at the same time encouraging social integration, with improvements in the quality of life for all segments of the population. (Pol  se & Stren, 2000, p. 15f)

The paper adopts this definition as it stresses the relationship between urban development, social and cultural diversity and equity and inclusiveness, thus addressing some of the main challenges in mixed-tenure regeneration described above. The paper operationalizes urban social sustainability under three headings: (1) Equity and social inclusion, (2) community cohesion and (3) participation (Ancell & Thompson-Fawcett, 2008; Dempsey et al., 2011; Stender & Walter, 2019). *Equity and social inclusion* refer to the spatial distribution of goods and services that shape peoples’ life chances and quality of life (Dempsey et al., 2011). From a social sustainability perspective, people should have the same life chances regardless of where they live. Urban planning and development, then, should contribute to promoting equal access to goods such as quality housing at different price ranges, welfare services, job opportunities and a safe, healthy and stimulating living environment (Bramley & Power, 2009; Murphy, 2012). Furthermore, institutional practices, rules and regulations that affect urban life should be socially inclusive and non-discriminatory (Dempsey et al., 2011).

*Community cohesion* refers to the way urban planning and development supports and promotes social engagement, community stability, pride and sense of place. To promote community cohesion, socially sustainable development should provide shared spaces and platforms for social interaction to take place,



including platforms that facilitate interaction between different socio-economic and cultural groups (Dempsey et al., 2011). Furthermore, socially sustainable development should also actively promote inclusive social practices (Woodcraft et al., 2012).

Finally, *participation* refers to the opportunities for residents to contribute to shaping the urban environment, including the opportunities to participate in urban development processes (Lind & Mjörnell, 2015; Murphy, 2012; Woodcraft et al., 2012; Woodcraft, 2015). Davidson (2019) argues that due to the inherent normativity of the concept, participation is in fact the most essential element of social sustainability. Thus, claiming to make a society more socially sustainable implicitly entails defining what is considered a desirable state of sociality (Davidson, 2019, p. 31). The only legitimate way to define this is by democratic means, i.e. by adhering to egalitarian democratic logic. Following this line of argument, determining whether something is socially sustainable first and foremost depends on how urban development is exposed to democratic evaluation and to what extent democratic norms of participation are upheld. Urban planning and development, then, should involve democratic participatory mechanisms that grant people real influence on planning decisions and processes (Shirazi & Keivani, 2019b).

### **Criticisms of the social sustainability framework**

Urban social sustainability has been criticized for being too ‘fuzzy’, vague and elusive (Davidson, 2019). Most notably, there is no commonly accepted definition and different scholars and practitioners appear to use the term in different ways (Janssen et al., 2021; Shirazi & Keivani, 2019a; Stender & Walter, 2019). Furthermore, critics argue that the concept is too stretchy and is often misused to legitimize other aims rather than promoting social sustainability as an end in itself – something Stender and Walter (2019) term ‘social washing’. However, as Janssen et al. (2021) argue, conceptual rigorism may be more harmful than helpful. Social sustainability may in fact prove more useful as an inherently pluralistic concept that allows policymakers, practitioners and researchers to analyse, assess and discuss urban development in many different contextual settings rather than providing one commonly agreed-upon standard. While attempts have been made to pin down assessment criteria for social sustainability (Stender & Walter, 2019), the concept does not come with a fact sheet with which we can determine ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’ planning practice. It does, however, help determine some core standards when analysing and assessing concrete planning processes.

## **Data and research methods**

### **Case descriptions**

The study draws on case studies carried out in five non-profit housing estates in Denmark: Tingbjerg in Copenhagen, Ringparken in Slagelse, Vollsmose in Odense, and Gellerupparken and Bispehaven in Aarhus. The five estates were all targeted by the PSA to undergo regeneration, along with a number of other estates. Study sites were selected that represent different sets of preconditions for regeneration. Thus, the sites vary in terms of size, design and layout, urban setting and market conditions. To examine the implications of tenure-mixing, however, only estates planning to introduce private housing as an integral element in regeneration were selected (as opposed to estates focusing on other regeneration instruments, cf. Table 1). Site characteristics and key regeneration targets are summarized in Table 2. Qualitative descriptions of the five estates are listed in Table 3.

### **Data collection and data analysis**

An initial document study of regeneration plans for all selected cases was carried out. Informed by the document study, 27 semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with 33 urban practitioners operating in the five estates. Following Lawton (2013), the term ‘urban practitioners’ is adopted to denote stakeholders that are practically engaged in one or more of the main phases of designing, planning and implementing regeneration. In each case, urban practitioners were identified through snowball sampling. Though snowball sampling carries a risk of bias, regeneration projects were relatively small operations which allowed for all relevant actors to be included in the sample.

Interviewees fell into five categories: (1) Municipality urban strategists and planners overseeing and contributing to regeneration plans; (2) strategists and planners from housing associations devising and implementing regeneration plans; (3) private investors and developers involved in regeneration projects; (4) external advisors and experts engaged by the municipality, housing associations, or developers; and (5) managers of ‘community work’ programmes (‘boligsociale helhedsplaner’) – a particular Danish type of area-based social work programme co-funded by the non-profit housing sector and the municipality (Birk, 2017; Thor Andersen et al., 2014, p. 5). Table 4 summarizes the interviewees’ positions:

Data were collected in the period February–June 2020. Interviews were primarily conducted as individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews at the interviewee’s place of work, or – after COVID-19 struck Denmark in

**Table 2.** Case-study site characteristics and regeneration targets.

Characteristics	Tingbjerg	Ringparken	Vollsmose	Gellerup-parken	Bispehaven
Constructed	1958–1972	1967–1972	1967–1981	1963–1969	1969–1973
Market conditions*	Favourable	Unfavourable	Unfavourable	Medium	Medium
Population, 2020	6290	1963	7259	4965	2216
No. of non-profit family housing units, 2010**	2404	868	2872	2400	871
Non-profit family housing units demolished or merged by 2030***	54	149	1,000	945	318
(Percentage of total units, 2030)	(1 pct.)	(11 pct.)	(19 pct.)	(21 pct.)	(23 pct.)
Non-profit family housing units retained by 2030***	2234	520	1872	1455	553
(Percentage of total units, 2030)	(38 pct.)	(40 pct.)	(35 pct.)	(32 pct.)	(40 pct.)
Private housing units by 2030***	2196	364	1600	1344	230
(Percentage of total units, 2030)	(38 pct.)	(28 pct.)	(30 pct.)	(29 pct.)	(16 pct.)
Other types of units (youth, senior, commercial) by 2030***	1360	267	923	825	295
(Percentage of total units, 2030)	(23 pct.)	(21 pct.)	(17 pct.)	(18 pct.)	(21 pct.)

\*Assessment based on estimated value of current non-profit housing stock (Copenhagen Economics, 2019).

\*\* 2010 constitutes the PSA baseline year for tracking the share of non-profit family housing units. Source: Plans for regeneration, 2019. <https://tbst.dk/da/Bolig/Lister/Publikationslisteside?type=Udviklingsplan> (accessed September 2021).

\*\*\* According to PSA regeneration plans.

March 2020 – as telephone interviews. Due to practical circumstances, four interviews had to be conducted as group interviews of two – and in one case four – interviewees. In group interviews, each interviewee was encouraged to answer each question individually. Group interviews may have prompted more consensus-oriented answers, though interviewees generally appeared willing to express individual opinions. Interviews were guided by an interview guide structured around seven themes: Current status of the regeneration process; perceptions of regeneration objectives; perceptions of tenure mixing as an element in regeneration; approaches to tenure mixing; the role of private investment in regeneration; the role of social and community work in the regeneration process; and the need to incorporate community involvement in regeneration. Interview length ranged from half an hour to one hour. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded using Nvivo11.

The study is limited to a relatively modest sample of 33 practitioners covering five different regeneration projects that were all following market-based strategies for regeneration. Further research will be needed before more generally applicable conclusions can be made about regeneration in other contextual settings. Furthermore, data were collected while regeneration projects were still in the start-up phase. Therefore, the study does not cover project outcomes or the actual implementation process. Neither is it able to describe residents' perspectives on regeneration, as residents were not included in the study. While these factors limit the conclusions that can be drawn from the study, the aim of the study is not to assess project implementation or outcomes, but to examine how applying social sustainability as an analytical framework may contribute to understanding the planning dilemmas that practitioners experience at the early stages of mixed-tenure regeneration.

## Findings

### *Equity and social inclusion*

Looking at regeneration projects from a social sustainability perspective calls attention to the social equity of planning, i.e. practitioners' approaches to the spatial distribution of goods and services as well as the institutional practices, rules and regulations that shape community life, residents' life chances and quality of life (Dempsey et al., 2011). Beginning with practitioners' perceptions of the estates targeted for regeneration, it was notable that almost all interviewed practitioners described the way estates were planned and designed as impediments to the promotion of social equity. The tenure composition was criticized for creating non-profit housing enclaves and the physical isolation produced by traffic-intensive roads and other physical barriers was perceived only to aggravate this by creating a parallel city within the city. Practitioners described these problems as leading to concentration and isolation of residents with few options on the housing market, primarily low-income and ethnic-minority groups. The concentration of social problems created by these circumstances were in turn seen as producing a dysfunctional community negatively affecting residents' life-chances and quality of life. In particular, practitioners perceived the social environments' impact on children and youth as rendering them less equipped to make it in mainstream society:

When we believe in radical solutions, it is because of the children. The children are doing so incredibly badly and there are many kids out there. There are simply some parallel society tendencies that constrain them and make it difficult for them to make it in Danish mainstream society in the long run.

(Strategic planner, municipality)

**Table 3.** Descriptions of case-study sites.**Tingbjerg, Copenhagen**

Situated in the northwestern outskirts of the city, Tingbjerg is the largest non-profit housing estate in Copenhagen. It mainly consists of three-storey, yellow-brick blocks. The estate is secluded from the surrounding cityscape by preserved green areas and a motorway. The regeneration plan for Tingbjerg includes doubling the number of housing units by adding 2,200 private units while largely avoiding demolitions. Private units are to be spatially integrated with existing non-profit housing blocks around shared courtyards and green spaces. Public investments in i.a. a culture centre, a school, day care facilities and infrastructural connections are supposed to support the transformation of the estate into an attractive neighbourhood.

**Ringparken, Slagelse**

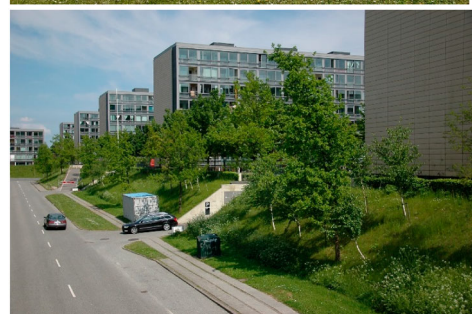
Ringparken, situated in the small provincial town of Slagelse, consists of 24 four-storey concrete blocks. When the PSA was launched in 2018, four blocks were immediately sold and converted into private rentals. The remaining housing stock will – according to plans – be transformed into mixed-tenure with new-build private units, retail, and retained non-profit housing units. Furthermore, regeneration plans aim to improve infrastructure and divide the estate into three smaller neighbourhoods.

**Vollsmose, Odense**

Situated in Denmark's third largest city, Odense, Vollsmose is Denmark's largest non-profit housing estate. A section comprising about 80 pct. of the estate – mainly consisting of tower blocks and low-rises – was targeted by the PSA for regeneration. Plans include demolishing 1,000 non-profit housing units while adding 1,600 new-build private units as well as public workplaces. Furthermore, regeneration plans address the physical isolation of the estate by introducing a new light-rail train connection as well as downgrading some of the large roads that seclude the estate from the surrounding cityscape.

**Bispehaven, Aarhus**

Comprising 19 concrete blocks of seven and four storeys, Bispehaven is located in the northwestern part of Aarhus, Denmark's second largest city. The housing estate is bordered on two sides by large roads. On the south side, it borders a neighbourhood of single-family houses. The PSA regeneration plan targets a third of the non-profit housing units for demolition. In their place, new-build private units as well as cultural and sports facilities are to be constructed.

**Gellerupparken, Aarhus**

Gellerupparken in the western outskirts of Aarhus originally consisted of 2,400 dwellings in eight and four storey concrete blocks. Regeneration plans predating the PSA were launched as early as 2010 but revised when the PSA was passed in 2018. Plans include demolishing more than 900 dwellings while adding 900 new-build private units clustered on three separate sites. Furthermore, the regeneration plans include new office buildings, a large park and sports facility, and new infrastructure including a six-storey golden gate cutting through one of the non-profit housing blocks and opening the estate up towards the city of Aarhus.



Note: All photos by Claus Bech-Danielsen.

Thus, while most practitioners were sceptical towards what they considered an overly centralistic and rigorous approach taken by the PSA, they generally supported the rationale behind it: That regeneration was necessary

to turn the situation around and transform the estates 'from disadvantaged housing estates into attractive neighbourhoods', as one housing association representative put it. This was primarily perceived as a question



**Table 4.** Participants in the study (N = 33).

Interviewees	Tingbjerg	Gellerup	Ringparken	Vollsmose	Bispehaven
Municipality urban strategists and planners	3	1	1	2	1
Housing association urban strategists and planners	1	2	1	3	3
Private investors / developers	1	1	1	N/A*	N/A*
External advisors (architects, landscape architects, urban planners)	1	2	2	1	1
Managers of 'community work' programmes	1	1	1	1	1

\*At the time of data collection, no private investors or developers were in place in Vollsmose and Bispehaven.

of physical transformation, supplemented (in most cases) by investments in welfare services and amenities that would in turn attract new residents as well as outside visitors. In all cases selected for this study, market-based solutions in the form of new-build private housing were central instruments in terms of changing the resident base. Practitioners assessed that new-build units should preferably be owner-occupied as opposed to e.g. private rentals, as owner-occupied dwellings were expected to attract the most stable and locally committed residents – a notion also reported in other studies (Kearns et al., 2013). Yet some practitioners questioned the feasibility of actually attracting potential buyers, with Tingbjerg a notable exception due to the high demand for owner-occupied housing on the Copenhagen housing market.

Changing the social mix by attracting more socio-economically advantaged newcomers, then, was described by almost all practitioners as contributing to social equity. In addition, practitioners in most cases perceived improving public schools, day-care centres and other welfare institutions to be an integral part of equitable regeneration. This was perceived to serve at least two purposes: First, to attract prospective newcomers within favoured target groups such as white, urban, middle-class families with small children; and second, to benefit existing non-profit housing tenants, many of whom were ethnic-minority residents who 'would also prefer a school where Danes go', as one practitioner put it. Thus, practitioners envisioned public schools that would integrate pupils from different socio-economic and ethnic groups and function as a motor for social mixing:

The key point for us is saying: Can we make the public institutions so attractive that everyone will use them? The worst-case scenario for us would be that a whole lot of 'respectable', middle-class residents move in and that we would then experience a boom in the private school sector and maybe even the private kindergarten sector.

(Strategic planner, municipality)

To this municipality planner, public investment in welfare infrastructure was perceived as just as important as tenure-mixing in order to create socially mixed and equitable urban development. In this way, socially

sustainable regeneration was framed as a shared commitment for housing associations, municipalities and market actors. However, there were also cases where municipalities were less willing or capable of delivering public investments. In these cases, non-profit housing associations were to a larger extent left to carry the regeneration project on their own.

While stressing that public and private investments would benefit low-income tenants and newcomers alike, there was also an underlying notion among practitioners that challenges to social equity could be attributed to the spatial concentration of socio-economically disadvantaged and ethnic-minority residents. Consequently, low-income and minority non-profit housing tenants were simultaneously perceived as beneficiaries of regeneration as well as the underlying problem that regeneration was intended to 'fix'. This double-role meant that tenants often assumed a precarious position in practitioners' accounts, particularly when serving the interests of tenants and newcomers equally was not perceived as feasible. E.g. while tenure-mixing was perceived to promote social equity, demolishing non-profit housing to make room for private new-build was in most cases considered necessary, thus limiting housing opportunities for the least affluent. Furthermore, the introduction of private rentals also entailed delegating some control over renting practices to private developers that would not necessarily act in tenants' best interests. In one private developer's perception, for instance, social sustainability entailed prioritizing 'Danish' newcomers over ethnic-minority tenants:

A keyword is getting ethnic Danes to move in. They are the ones that can break up the parallel society. ... So, if a couple with minority background come down here to look at one of the townhouses and they don't speak Danish, so they have their kids come along to translate, and we get a feeling that they're just moving from one of the apartments in the estate to something else within the estate, then we're not too crazy about that. And ... we don't reject them every time, but 9 out of 10 times we do. ... Because we feel an obligation to make it sustainable.

(Private developer)

This quote hints at the underlying significance of ethnicity in PSA regeneration projects (Frandsen & Hansen,

2020; Risager, 2022). Though expressed more crudely than other practitioners in this study, the developers' statement merely echoes the PSA's stated intentions to 'break down parallel societies' dominated by non-western immigrants. The example illustrates that some practitioners perceived non-profit housing tenants, particularly non-westerners, as part of the 'problem'. Thus, while arguing that regeneration would benefit all residents, non-profit housing tenants' interests were frequently disregarded. The fact that many practitioners perceived newcomers as difficult to attract only reinforced the imperative that efforts to attract newcomers had to be prioritized.

### **Community cohesion**

To most practitioners, transforming the estates into attractive, socially mixed neighbourhoods implied that the local community should be relatively well-integrated and socially cohesive. Thus, social interaction between current non-profit housing tenants and newcomers was considered crucial to creating a well-functioning and attractive neighbourhood. One housing association representative put it this way: 'What's important to us, is ... that we don't get to a point where it's "them" and "us", right? You know, the posh people living in the private units, and then the ones living in non-profit housing' (Strategic planner, housing association).

The approaches to fostering social cohesion outlined by practitioners mainly relied on creating physical and spatial platforms for social interaction. For instance, community rooms, cultural centres and sports facilities should be made equally accessible to all residents, regardless of tenure. This, practitioners suggested, could generate social encounters and provide a shared resource that would necessitate (and thus promote) cooperation between different tenure groups. Still, some practitioners worried that social segregation and compartmentalization might undermine the integrating effects that shared facilities and amenities could have. Drawing on experience from one estate where new sports facilities had relatively recently been introduced, one advisor working for the housing association and municipality pondered:

They've built a football facility. And there's a bouldering club. But the bouldering club is only for people from downtown. The creative class. No one with brown skin comes there. ... Likewise, there's a challenge with the football club, because if Danish isn't the main language, then you won't get anyone from the 'white picket fence neighbourhood' to send their kids over there. Because it's not attractive.

(External advisor)

Thus, while perceiving community cohesion as an integral part of successful mixed-tenure regeneration, practitioners were generally ambivalent as to the feasibility of genuine social integration across tenure, socio-economic and cultural divides. Some practitioners were even concerned that tenure-mixing would induce conflict over community norms and the use of shared space. In particular, crime and delinquency were seen as a threat to attracting newcomers and fostering harmonious coexistence and integration. But concerns were also raised in relation to everyday norms in terms of e.g. littering or traffic behaviour:

Personally, one of the things I'm concerned about is that ... heck, there are some cultural differences in the way people act and behave – both positive and negative – in this estate compared to the average 'white potato' [i.e. white person] who lives downtown or in some other residential area. No doubt, residents out here are by default more open-minded because they are used to living with many different cultures closely together. People have a higher tolerance level. ... But people also often behave in ways that clash with 'the norm'. For instance, how you park or drive ... some people drive as they please. People don't always take that good care of the common good. Littering is also something we're really struggling with because people just toss stuff.

(Urban planner, housing association)

Drawing on his experience of everyday life in the estate, this practitioner raises concerns that the local norms and culture might come into conflict with newcomers' expectations and thus generate conflicts. While reckless driving or littering in this practitioners' perception had become the order of the day within the estate, he expected that newcomers might suffer a 'culture shock'. Yet, practitioners had no clear answer as to how some degree of shared norms could be established. Some found that community cohesion needed to be addressed but were uncertain about what could be done. Others merely expected social interaction and cohesion to emerge 'naturally' as newcomers would begin to arrive.

While practitioners' approaches to fostering community cohesion relied primarily on urban design and shared spaces, literature indicates that socially mixed developments require intentional efforts to facilitate social integration (Fraser et al., 2013; Thurber et al., 2018). Providing shared spaces cannot stand alone; interaction, integration and social inclusion need to be facilitated. This relates to what social sustainability literature describes as 'the intangible' element of urban planning and development: establishing the social and cultural infrastructure that is necessary for fostering a sense of community, identity and belonging (Woodcraft

et al., 2012, p. 31ff). In all five estates, so-called community work programmes were in place and had been operating within the estates for roughly a decade: area-based social programmes focusing on outreach, social work and community development. But despite the knowledge of – and relations to – the community nested in these organizations, none of the ‘community work’ programmes were organizationally integrated or coupled with the physical regeneration programmes. On the contrary, the physical regeneration and the ‘community work’ programmes constituted parallel organizational silos only connected on an ad-hoc basis mainly relying on personal relations. Though many practitioners asserted that coupling social and physical transformation would be crucial, initiatives towards developing a coherent social and physical approach were absent.

### Participation

Social sustainability literature highlights the importance of citizen participation in urban regeneration (Lind & Mjörnell, 2015). Keeping in mind that the projects included in this study were still in their early days, evidence suggests that participatory processes played a very limited role in practitioners’ perceptions and approaches to regeneration. Instead, practitioners’ approaches focused heavily on top-down strategic planning, centralized decision-making and professional expertise. To practitioners, this was prompted by the PSA imposing a framework that had simultaneously shifted authority from tenants to the city council while laying down short-term deadlines on regeneration planning. Furthermore, some practitioners found strategic planning ill-suited for resident involvement: ‘We need to take some relatively large measures that aren’t very suitable for democratic decision-making, to put it that way’, one external advisor stated. Practitioners highlighted two major impediments to community involvement. First, the strategic planning embedded in mixed-tenure regeneration was seen as a protracted and technically complex process that did not lend itself to community involvement. Bridging bottom-up participation and lengthy, top-down, strategic urban planning processes was perceived as a major obstacle. Second, practitioners perceived the tenants as difficult to mobilize and engage. Some argued that the residents in the targeted estates generally tended to feel disconnected and disengaged from political decision making at large and that many had difficulties taking charge of the circumstances affecting their own lives. Several interviewees had experiences with low turnout at public meetings about the regeneration projects and the general feeling was that

the tenants attending were not representative of the wider resident population. Participants were mainly ‘the usual suspects’ representing their own private interests. As one ‘community work’ programme manager put it:

If you came here as an outsider, you wouldn’t believe that the resident demographic is 80 pct. with ethnic minority background cause the people attending these meetings ... are typically ‘white potatoes’ [white people] who are 60+ years old and have some very strong opinions about what’s going to happen – because they might lose their parking places or at least that’s what they’ve heard.  
(Manager of ‘community work’ program)

Thus, on the one hand, practitioners were disillusioned about residents’ ability and will to engage in dialogue. On the other hand, the ones that did mobilize were described as unconstructive backbenchers driven by narrow self-interests. The perceived obstacles to mobilizing and engaging the ‘silent majority’ were used by practitioners as a justification for de-emphasizing community involvement altogether.

Finally, some practitioners worried that excessive resident participation would pave the way for ‘bad’ and unaesthetic planning and design decisions that would render it difficult to shed the ‘ghetto’ stigma of the housing estates and would make them less attractive to newcomers. In Gellerup, for instance, tenants’ requests to establish closed balconies after refurbishment was overruled, as municipality planners feared that tenants would then block the balcony windows, thus adding to a ‘ghetto-like’ appearance:

The tenants wanted the balconies to be closed, but the municipality said ‘no’. ... Behind that lay a sentiment that ‘they’re just going to put up blinders and old tarps and headscarves and what-have-you in the windows so you can’t look in and then it will look like a ghetto’.  
(Strategic planner, housing association)

According to non-profit housing association representatives, this led to resentment, resignation and a sense of dis-entitlement among social tenants. This was not an issue unique to Gellerup. Practitioners from multiple projects perceived residents as resigned and demotivated by the feeling that the main decisions relating to regeneration had already been taken by others and that participation would be merely tokenistic: ‘Some of the tenants found out ... that if they turned down [the regeneration plan] they would just be overruled. So, they felt that they had their arms twisted’ (planner, housing association). It is worth noting that while the PSA as a guiding framework did in fact prompt practitioners to lock in major decisions before real community involvement would have been feasible, it also left considerable leeway to determine how regeneration should be planned, designed and

implemented locally. Yet plans to involve the local community in the planning process were almost entirely absent.

## Discussion

Tunström (2019) argues that mixed-tenure redevelopment may strengthen social sustainability if it centres around improving life conditions and opportunities for those with fewer resources, or it may do the opposite if it centres around gentrifying an area to attract more affluent newcomers (Tunström, 2019). As the findings of this study demonstrate, practitioners frequently found themselves in planning dilemmas, trying to balance conflicting interests. In these situations, practitioners generally tended to favour attracting investors and newcomers rather than pursuing more equitable and socially inclusive trajectories for low-income non-profit housing tenants. Tenure mixing is one example. 'We believe in the mixed city', several informants proclaimed. But in most cases, mixing tenure meant selling or demolishing non-profit housing units to free up space. Thus, shifting the resident base towards more social mixing entailed limiting access for the socio-economically disadvantaged.

Furthermore, resident participation was downplayed by practitioners. From a social sustainability perspective, this participatory deficit is problematic, not only because urban development tends to benefit from inhabitants' actively engaging and shaping their living environments (Agger, 2012; Woodcraft et al., 2012), but also because squeezing out participation obscures the underlying conflicts of interest and the intrinsically political nature of regeneration. Taste, lifestyle, habits and preferences permeate planning choices (Healey, 2009; Howe & Langdon, 2002; Sandercock, 2000). They obviously differ from one person to the next and tend to follow patterns of class and socio-economic status (Bourdieu, 1984). For instance, amenities and public facilities may well improve a neighbourhood's attractiveness to outsiders, but users tend to divide themselves by taste and economic capabilities. Some segments prefer organic farmers' markets, others are more interested in discount stores (Chaskin & Joseph, 2015a). For some, a new bike lane or a culture house represents valuable amenities – for others, they become symbols of the cultural displacement produced by a regeneration targeting other segments (Hyra, 2015). Participatory mechanisms are instruments for allowing these different opinions, perspectives and preferences to access the planning process and for differences and conflicts of interest to be deliberated democratically.

Furthermore, the concept of social sustainability draws attention to the 'intangible' social elements of

urban planning (Janssen et al., 2021). These elements are often overlooked in mixed-tenure regeneration (Fraser et al., 2013), though they may be crucial when it comes to fostering social cohesion and inclusive community dynamics. The findings presented in this paper show that efforts to address and handle intangible aspects of regeneration were largely absent from practitioners' perceptions and approaches to mixed-tenure planning. Coupling physical regeneration with social work and community building was consistently neglected as social and physical initiatives were divided into separate organizational silos. While many factors may challenge organizational integration, including vocational differences and the absence of organizational platforms for cross-disciplinary collaboration (Joseph et al., 2019), a notable division relates to organizational objectives and perceived target groups: While 'community work' programmes exclusively targeted low-income non-profit housing tenants, physical regeneration efforts were primarily focused on attracting more affluent newcomers. The division between physical regeneration and community work, then, may not only be a missed opportunity to integrate social processes and community building into the physical regeneration process, but also a reproduction of the division between non-profit housing tenants and newcomers.

By pinpointing how mixed-tenure regeneration projects already at the early stages favour newcomers' interests over current tenants', how participatory mechanisms are short-circuited and how the social dynamics of tenure-mixing are neglected, the social sustainability framework may help practitioners and other stakeholders to 'raise a red flag' while there is still time to change the trajectories of regeneration projects. Yet the concept of social sustainability does not offer a panacea to remedy these problems. Urban redevelopment, like other urban planning processes, is confined by scarcity of resources (Healey, 2009). Funds, manpower and attention are limited and strategic planning is therefore essentially about making choices between different possible pathways. Thus, social sustainability must inevitably compete with other strategic priorities. As Davidson (2019) argues, social sustainability has often been subservient to economic and environmental sustainability because there is no clear image of the consequences of its absence. Yet, while the effects of social sustainability may be difficult to assess and the concept difficult to measure, it can – as this paper has argued – serve as a productive framework for understanding the inevitable dilemmas in mixed-tenure regeneration, thereby increasing urban practitioners' awareness of potentials and pitfalls in



relation to strengthening equity, community cohesion and participation.

## Conclusion

The research indicates that practitioners were fundamentally motivated by correcting what was seen as a socially unsustainable situation resulting from past planning failures and mistakes. Disadvantaged non-profit housing estates were perceived as hampering life chances for youth and children and reducing the quality of life for residents at large. Creating a more socially mixed resident base was perceived as the most viable cure to this condition and tenure-mixing in combination with efforts to make estates more attractive to socio-economically advantaged newcomers was considered as an instrument fit for the purpose. However, in striving to create socially mixed neighbourhoods, practitioners faced difficult dilemmas between serving the interests of non-profit housing tenants and attracting investors and newcomers. Looking at these dilemmas from a social sustainability perspective, frames them as fundamental questions of equity, community cohesion and participation in regeneration. Setting social sustainability on the agenda of mixed-tenure regeneration thus may imply an increased awareness among urban practitioners and policymakers of which options and limitations they have in terms of strengthening equity and participation in urban communities. The study also demonstrated that attempts to address community cohesion through regeneration were crippled, as regeneration projects tended to miss the 'intangible' elements of sustainable urban development. Thus, the organizational divide between social and physical transformation could be challenged in order to develop more coherent social and physical approaches to regeneration. Furthermore, focusing on social sustainability in social mix regeneration serves to stress that even if mixed-tenure policies may give urban practitioners a set assignment, there is still room for and need for local involvement in how to best apply measures in the specific local context.

The research also has implications for research. Rather than concentrating exclusively on the effects of mixed-tenure policies, there is a need to consider the people and processes that turn policies into local realities. Addressing practitioners' perceptions and planning dilemmas can be a means to developing viable ways of improving mixed-tenure planning. As this study has demonstrated, bridging the gap between mixed-tenure research and the urban social sustainability literature could be a way forward in further research on the processes and outcomes of mixed tenure regeneration.

## Acknowledgements

The content of this paper is based on the report 'Socially sustainable regeneration in disadvantaged non-profit housing estates' (Kjeldsen, 2021). The authors acknowledge all the participants who have contributed to the study. Furthermore, the authors would like to thank Claus Bech-Danielsen, Jesper Ole Jensen and colleagues at Aalborg University as well as Annika Agger and colleagues at Roskilde University for valuable comments and guidance on earlier versions of this paper. The authors would also like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for their helpful and pertinent comments.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

This work was supported by the philanthropic association Realdania under Grant Number PRJ-2016-00107.

## Statement of ethical approval

Written, informed consent was obtained from all participants in the study and data were handled in accordance with The Danish Data Protection Agency regulations. The research is exempted from ethics committee approval according to Danish legislation as per consolidation Act LBK Nr. 1083 of 15/09/2017.

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