

## RIGHT KINDS OF MIXING?

### *Promoting Cohesion in a Copenhagen Neighbourhood*

#### Abstract

This article investigates how urban policies are meant to promote cohesion of a certain kind through neighbourhood-based urban regeneration programmes. The regeneration programme in focus aims at promoting socio-cultural encounters and ethnic minority participation, through particular notions of 'mixing'. The authors argue that the particular notion of mixing at play in this context 'blind spots' questions of ethnic majority participation and culturalises broader structural issues, which often transgress local and national boundaries. Through two case studies, the authors illustrate how certain challenges in what is known as 'ghettos areas' become *ethnicised* and *culturalised* through a focus on the ethnicity and culture of ethnic minority residents as problematic.

#### Keywords

Mixing • integration • urban regeneration • ghettoisation • social cohesion

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## Introduction

On August 20, 2012, the Muslim celebration of Eid al-Fitr in the Danish residential area of Vollsmose,<sup>1</sup> also known in Denmark as a 'ghetto', culminated in 60–80 men of immigrant background storming the local emergency ward. They attempted to get hold of another man of immigrant background who had been wounded by shots earlier that evening. The group of men, who carried clubs and iron pipes, threatened nurses and doctors to hand over the wounded man, making the police draw their weapons on them. No one was further injured, but the incident sparked an intense public and political debate about ghettoisation, integration and self-segregation of ethnic minorities in Denmark. Themes that have been at the centre stage of Danish urban policy debates for the past two decades.

In this article, we explore how public debates and urban policies have come to frame social cohesion in a particular way. The article relates to the overall theme of this special issue through its focus on the intersection between urban policy discourses and practices that aim at promoting social cohesion on the one hand, and a focus on ethnicity on the other. The article looks into the specific way in which an agenda of socio-cultural encounters and mixing, based on, for example, urban planning research, is put into practice. We argue that the particular notion of mixing developed in the urban regeneration projects and practices, which are the focus of this article, are tightly linked to the assumptions that ethnic minority residents in exposed housing areas (known as ghettos) constitute culturally (self-)segregated parallel societies. This is an assumption that has become increasingly prevalent in Danish public and political

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discourse. Although the explicit purpose of urban and housing policies in Denmark is to promote social cohesion in Danish society in general, the discourses and the practices show that it is cohesion of a certain kind that is promoted.

The first theme of the article is an analysis of the public and political debates following the intrusion of a group of men in a Danish hospital, the so-called *Vollsmose-case* in August 2012 [undertaken by Freiesleben (MF)]. This case illustrates how assumptions of ethnic minority self-segregation and lack of integration are played out in the public debate. By contrasting this case to an earlier incident at another Danish hospital, we show how two almost similar incidents are framed differently depending on their location and the ethnicity of the people involved. This case paves the way for the second theme of this article: the study of ethnicity as a particular focal point in urban regeneration programmes. This study is based on ethnographic fieldwork in the Copenhagen district of Hamlet [undertaken by Grünenberg (KG)], in the period from November 2010 to September 2011. The study consists of interviews with project participants, project managers as well as urban regeneration staff, participant observation in three regeneration projects, in regeneration social group meetings, as well as observation of other regeneration activities in the district of Hamlet. The study shows how regeneration programmes apply 'cultural encounters' and notions of 'mixing' as a tool in order to promote cohesion. Finally, we discuss how these particular notions of 'mixing' and the focus on ethnicity - as played out in the Vollsmose-case and the urban regeneration programmes

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- potentially blind spot, ethnicise and culturalise broader structural issues that often transgress local and national boundaries. Before turning to the first case study, the incident in Vollsmose, we will provide a brief account of the historical background of Danish urban policies as they are shaped by, and continue to shape, particular understandings of the relationship between 'ethnic cultural others', spatial location and ideas about social cohesion.<sup>2</sup>

## Danish urban politics - ethnicity on the agenda

Up until the 1990s, urban politics in Denmark had not been given much attention as a coherent policy area, but had focussed mostly on physical improvements as a way of inducing social improvements (cfbu.dk 2012). During the 1990s, however, Danish urban politics took on a specific shape and became a policy area in its own right, particularly as a result of the protests of a group of Social Democratic mayors from the suburbs of Copenhagen. The mayors were concerned with the potential ghettoisation in the exposed housing areas in their municipalities due to the recent increase of refugees, particularly from the former Yugoslavia and Iraq. In the first instance, these protests led to the establishment of the Urban Committee (*Byudvalget*) in 1993, and in the second instance, to the first coherent political body dealing with urban policy, namely the Ministry for Housing and Urban Affairs, in 1998 (Fallov 2006: 130). Many of the projects emerging out of the Urban Committee emphasised problems of integration and concentration of ethnic minorities in exposed housing areas, and since then, the focus of urban politics in Denmark has increasingly been directed towards issues of ethnicity (Fallov 2006: 131). This development was pushed even further when the 2001-elected Liberal-Conservative government closed the Ministry for Housing and Urban Affairs and placed parts of urban politics under the Ministry for Refugees, Immigrants and Integration.<sup>3</sup> From then on, urban policy was primarily positioned as an instrument to ensure integration of what was defined as *non-Western immigrants*,<sup>4</sup> and preserve or promote social cohesion (cf. Andersen 2007).

On January 1, 2004, prime minister at the time, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, from the Liberal Party (*Venstre*), initiated the New Year by proclaiming that the unfortunate ghettoisation had to be stopped. In Rasmussen's view, the ghettos were places where children grew up without learning proper Danish, where some of them came under the influence of hardened criminals and where they would look upon Danish values and society with contempt. 'Ghettoisation leads to violence and crime and confrontation. We know this from abroad. We neither can nor will we accept this in Denmark' (Rasmussen 2004, our translation). The New Year speech set the stage for the launching of the government's 'Strategy to Fight Ghettoisation' (*Regeringens strategi mod ghettoisering*) from May 2004. Although the discourse of ghettoisation had taken its beginning in the 1990s, this strategy against ghettoisation offered the first official definition of a 'ghetto', pinpointing eight social housing estates in Denmark as *potential ghettos* (Vagnby 2011: 15). According to the strategy, a ghetto is:

...typically characterised by being physically segregated from the surrounding society. And if at the same time main part of the residents are unemployed immigrants, refugees and descendents, the areas can evolve into actual ethnic enclaves or parallel societies without significant economic, social, and cultural ties to the surrounding society. (The Government 2004: 12, our translation).

The strategy to fight ghettoisation thus created an image of the ghetto as physically *cut off* from the *rest of society* leading to the perception that behind these (imagined) walls, the ghetto would evolve into a parallel society undermining the Danish nation state. A nation state, which in the dominant Danish discourse on integration is often articulated as historically homogeneous.<sup>5</sup> The explicit main focus of the strategy was the integration of ethnic minorities into the nation state, as stated: 'The strategy *against* ghettoisation is therefore part of the strategy *for* better integration' (The Government 2004: 11, our translation). The government hereby connected an urban space, the *ghetto*, with issues of integration. This image was further emphasised when the government in October 2010, introduced an official list of the ghettos in Denmark as part of a new so-called Ghetto Plan entitled: 'The Ghetto Back to Society. Dealing With Parallel Societies in Denmark' (*Ghettoen tilbage til samfundet. Et opgør med parallelsamfund i Danmark*). This Ghetto Plan now pinpointed 29 residential housing areas in Denmark as *in fact* official ghettos (The Government 2010: 5). A ghetto was - according to the 2010 ghetto plan - defined as a physical coherent council housing area with at least 1000 residents, who met with at least two of the following three criteria: (1) more than 50% of the inhabitants are refugees, immigrants or descendants of immigrants from non-Western countries. (2) more than 40% of the inhabitants, between the age of 18 and 64, are neither employed nor under education (average over the last 4 years). (3) more than 270 convicted felons, over the age of 18, per 10,000 inhabitants (average over the last 4 years) (The Government 2010: 37). Non-Western immigrants were now established as an independent variable in the definition of ghettos, thus positioning ethnicity as one of the main focus points in strategies against ghettoisation.<sup>6</sup> This ethnic twist to the definition of ghettos has had implications for the political and instrumental tools that have been applied in the struggle to counter ghettoisation and potential fragmentation and - we would argue - has also shaped ideas about possible solutions. Hence, one consequence of marking certain housing estates as ghettos is that it blinds us to the fact that these housing estates are ethnically, religiously and culturally highly heterogeneous areas with a large proportion of ethnic Danes. In fact, they constitute some of the most heterogeneous residential areas in Denmark (Andersen 2007: 5). In spite of this fact, ghettos are discursively constructed as homogenous entities in terms of inhabitants of equal social standing and non-Western ethnic background and as more or less stable entities *outside* society where Danish norms, values and ways of life have difficulties gaining foothold. They are, to quote Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, 'stony deserts without linkage to the surrounding society' (Rasmussen 2010a, our translation), and 'holes on the Danish map' (Rasmussen 2010b, our translation).

## Vollsmose, August 2012

One of these supposed 'stony deserts' and 'holes on the map' became the attention of the entire nation, when a group of immigrant men, allegedly from the 'ghetto' of Vollsmose, threatened their way into the emergency room of Odense University Hospital as described in the initial empirical excerpt. In spite of the lack of clarity as to the actual origins of the intruders or where they lived, the debate following the incident nonetheless portrayed the ghetto of Vollsmose as the very cause of these men's hostile behaviour, and the outbreak of violence as a sign of poor integration. As expressed by Editor-in-Chief, Tom Jensen of the Danish national newspaper *Berlingske Tidende* after the incident:

Don't these completely unacceptable events show that there is a fundamental problem of integration, and that parallel societies centered especially on certain Muslim migrant milieux threaten to undermine the community and the values which uphold Danish society? (Jensen 2012, our translation).

In a radio debate with a social worker from the Vollsmose-area, who called for the incident to be understood as a result of social problems and gang-related criminality, the legal policy spokesperson for the Liberal Party, Kristian Lauritzen, responded:

When this many people dare to break into an emergency room in this way, then it is because they think they're in power, and I think that comes from living in a place [the ghetto of Vollsmose] where, unfortunately, there isn't much respect for authorities and for the police, and that is what constitutes a parallel society in my universe, and hence that is a problem of integration. (Lauritzen in: Møller 2012, our translation).

Appeals to understand the Vollsmose-incident in terms of broader social issues rather than merely problems of ethnicity or culture, such as that of the social worker above, were either ignored or refuted in the public debate. However, 4 months earlier - ethnic Danish - bikers had stormed another Danish hospital, resulting in the paediatrics' ward being shut down and acutely ill children directed to other hospitals.<sup>7</sup> This particular incident was articulated entirely in terms of gang-related crime and not in terms of (or as lack of) integration; Furthermore this incident did not draw many headlines.<sup>8</sup> Maybe the lack of media coverage of the biker's incident was the reason why it had apparently been forgotten about by politicians and commentators at the time of the Vollsmose-incident. In the days following the incident in Vollsmose, MP Trine Bramsen from the Social Democratic Party (S) announced to several media:

In S we greatly distance ourselves from these men [from Vollsmose], who apparently haven't understood how to behave in Denmark. To attack a hospital is completely insane and a violation of Danish values.' (Bramsen in: Bergman 2012, our translation). And: 'If you don't want to comply with Danish values and norms, you ought to consider whether you should live in Denmark at all or whether you should live in another country. (Bramsen in: Østergaard 2012, our translation).

However, to our knowledge, the bikers in the previous hospital incident were not accused of not adhering to Danish values or asked to consider their future in Denmark.

Two very similar incidents, such as the intrusion of immigrants and bikers at two hospitals, were thus framed differently, that is, as either a problem of integration, self-segregation and a 'ghetto-problem' or as a problem of crime depending on the ethnicity of the intruding group. The ethnic minority ghetto residents were in this process positioned as cultural Others in an us-versus-them dichotomy. These Others had - supposedly voluntarily - withdrawn into opposing parallel societies with norms and values irreconcilable with 'Danish' values and were thus perceived to pose a threat to the social cohesion and stability of the Danish liberal democracy. Social research, however, suggests that the link between residential segregation and integration is much more complex (Bolt *et al.* 2010; Andersen 2006a). Empirical evidence, such as studies of patterns of movement and settlement and questionnaire surveys simply do not support the claim that ethnic minorities wish to live separately from

mainstream society (Phillips 2006: 26; cf. Andersen 2006b; Andersen 2007, Børresen 2002, 2006). Phillips, Andersen, and Børresen all point to the fact that the reasons ethnic minorities live in certain areas are many and complex. They include, but are not limited to, issues of structure (such as easy and cheap access to apartments) and relational issues (such as desires to live in the proximity of friends and family). Host societies furthermore frequently limit the residential choices of migrants through discrimination and structural inequality (Børresen 2002: 2; Phillips 2006: 32). Research has also shown that immigrants tend to move out of the social housing estates as soon as they have the means to do so, implying that so-called ghetto areas are far from static, homogenous ethnic enclaves but rather as already mentioned highly diverse and dynamic neighbourhoods (Andersen 2006a, 2006b; Christensen 2013).

Urban development could have been addressed in a variety of ways. It could have had its main focus on the social problems in the housing estates, such as poverty, deprivation, unemployment and criminality. Or it could have maintained a prime focus on physical issues such as improvements of buildings and infrastructure. Urban policies have, in fact, also addressed these issues, but the main public and political focus since the 1990s was sparked by the fears of ghettoisation and the assumptions that self-segregation into culturally different parallel societies was taking place. Hence, urban development prioritised a particular form of cohesion exemplified by the creation of a (discursive) link between integration, ethnic segregation and ghettoisation, and by articulating the main worries in the ghettoisation strategies from 2004 to 2010 as the mere presence of a large percentage of non-Western immigrants (Andersen 2007: 2). This emphasis was maintained by the 2011-elected centre-left government in their government plan 'Renewed effort for exposed housing areas' (mbbl.dk 2013).<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, in spite of a competing municipal discourse in Copenhagen, focussing on multiculturalism and inclusion as an issue for all the citizens in the capital, the perception of the ghetto as a place where the residents are *cut off* from contact to the *surrounding* Danish society seems to have had direct implications on urban policy. This has led to political initiatives towards 'mixing' of ethnic Danes and ethnic minorities, which potentially fit both an assimilationist and a multicultural discourse: on the one hand, mixing seems to accommodate ideas about 'one entity' that has to mix with 'another' and on the other hand, ideas about blending two entities into a third and hybrid version. Both discourses in this case operate with ideas about cultures as essential entities. In the following we will describe a specific urban regeneration programme in the Copenhagen district of *Hamlet*. This programme was initiated - among other things- to promote social cohesion and counter ghettoisation through specific notions of mixing.

## A district regeneration programme in Hamlet

The Copenhagen district (*bydel*) of Hamlet,<sup>10</sup> which several residents describe as 'a village in the city', has approximately 51,230 inhabitants, out of a total of 572,452 inhabitants in the municipality (Municipality of Copenhagen 2014). It is characterised by a mix of single family housing, affluent country-style villas, cooperative flats and council housing, situated in different parts of the district. In 2010, part of the district was granted money for what in Danish is known as 'area enhancement' (*områdeløft*), an urban neighbourhood regeneration programme, directed at a specific part of the district. Districts are generally granted a regeneration programme if they are considered to be in actual or potential decay, implying high crime

rates, physical wear and in this particular case, the presence of two social housing estates, one of which figured on the government's official ghetto list during the period 2010–2012.<sup>11</sup>

The particular urban regeneration programme in Hamlet was structured around three partly overlapping thematic groups conformed by urban regeneration staff employed by the municipality, social workers and other professionals working in the area, as well as local volunteers. The three groups were known as: the Culture Group (mainly focussing on arts and cultural events and community), the Physical-Environment Group (focussing on buildings, squares and infrastructure connecting the district) and the Social Group (ensuring alternatives for youngsters that prevents them from 'hanging around on the streets'; build 'mental bridges', and undertake activities that encourage people to leave their own residential areas).<sup>12</sup> All three thematic groups had meetings on a regular basis, and were open to anyone living in and interested in the development of the district.<sup>13</sup> Hence, individuals and groups of local residents were encouraged to send in project proposals to be evaluated and then granted funding, or not. In praxis, the proposals were often sent in by professionals, for example, social workers working in the area. Whether or not the projects received funding depended on the extent to which the proposals lived up to the criteria stated by the particular thematic group. The projects engaged with, in the context of this article, were part of the dynamics, discussions and meetings in the social group. In the beginning of KG's fieldwork, she was very puzzled as to why projects were exclusively directed towards ethnic minority residents in the district, since this priority was not explicit in any of the documents about the regeneration programme. However, after studying urban policy documents and repeatedly asking questions - such as 'why not include other parts of the district?', 'why the sole focus on 'ethnic minority' youngsters?', 'how about ethnic majority Danish youngsters?' - it became clear that particular ethnic markers were very much an implicit focus of the programme. In order for a district to become appointed for an urban regeneration programme altogether, certain aspects such as 'ethnicity', 'non-Western immigrants' and 'ghettos' were considered pragmatic to include in the programme application.<sup>14</sup> So, even though the staff in the particular regeneration programme was quite clear about the necessity of a broader focus than ethnicity, they were simultaneously aware that their task was defined by the previously described political and public focus on ethnic minority residents in the social housing estates, and on getting them *out of* the so-called ghettos. When asked during an interview, why many of the projects of the Social Group chose to prioritise projects for the two social housing estates with a high proportion of non-Western immigrants, the project leader, Jens, answered:

Jens: Well this is simply because this is the assignment. To see to it that people who live here [in the housing estates] do not keep to themselves...that they get out. Well, what is generally said about people who come from other societies, or a different culture, is that the reason that they have a hard time integrating is simply because they do not leave the places where they live. So that's a big part of our task.

This focus was translated into an agenda of 'mixing' or encounters across social, ethnic and residential divides. Hence, together with actual physical regeneration, the aim was, as the Hamlet regeneration programme manager Michael expressed it: 'to implement activities that enable people to meet across social and cultural differences, and find out that the others aren't dangerous.' These aspirations were among other things premised upon the popular saying that 'familiarity

leads to friendship' (*Kendskab giver venskab*). Implicit in this saying is the notion that by mixing with 'strangers', mutual understanding will increase, stereotypes will decrease and this will ultimately lead to friendship. However, mixing is not merely an objective and generalisable tool of urban regeneration. Instead, we argue that particular understandings of the routes to social cohesion underpin the 'mixing agenda'. These assumptions and understandings of mixing are questioned in the following, as we turn to a further investigation of a particular project named 'The Project-Elaboration Course' that formed part of the urban regeneration programme in Hamlet.

## The Project-Elaboration Course

One of the projects granted money by the Social Group in the regeneration programme was the so-called 'Project-Elaboration Course' (*Projekt-magerkurset*). This project recruited 19 local residents through different local gatekeepers. The participants were from different parts of the district and of different ages, gender (mostly women, however) and with different occupational/educational and ethnic background. The aim of the project was threefold: First, it was meant to provide participants with basic project management skills. Second, it was meant to facilitate networks between the participants, and third, the participants' projects were meant to facilitate cross-cultural and cross-district encounters and enhance the social development of the district.<sup>15</sup>

Approximately 6 months later, the day arose when the individual projects, elaborated by local residents as part of the project elaboration course, were to be implemented. KG participated in the elaboration and implementation of a project involving the urban physical discipline 'parkour' together with two young men, Hasim and Qusay, and a middle-aged woman, Somaya. The project aimed at presenting youngsters from different parts of the district to 'parkour', a fun, positive and physically demanding leisure-time activity.<sup>16</sup>

*The parkour project, Hamlet. Day of the project launch: Both Somaya and I are a bit nervous and Hasim, the third participant in our project team, hasn't even arrived yet. Will there be any participants attending our one day 'parkour event'? The sports centre seems immense with such few people, and most of them are actually the parkour trainers. Only a couple of participants have arrived so far. Suddenly Henrik, from the 'sports festival project', gets there with a group of 14 boys from his neighbourhood, all with ethnic minority background. Somaya draws a sigh of relief. The event will be carried through after all. (Excerpt from KG's field diary).*

Similar to the other projects elaborated from the Project-Elaboration Course, the parkour project also aimed at facilitating contact between youngsters from different areas of Hamlet. This would generally mean different ethnic backgrounds. The project was attended by approximately 20 youngsters and they all seemed quite satisfied by the end of the day. From this perspective, the project was a success. However, in spite of a substantial amount of advertising in local papers and on posters and the increasing popularity of parkour, only one boy from a majority Danish residential area joined the parkour event. KG would have thought nothing much of it, had it not been for the fact that this tendency seemed to repeat itself in several of the projects developed as part of the Project-Elaboration Course. For instance, a project aimed at coordinating networks of women's associations across the Hamlet district. The event was attended

by about 20 women from different parts of Hamlet, all with different ethnic minority backgrounds, mainly Turkish and Arabic. In contrast, the only participants with ethnic majority Danish background were representatives of different official institutions, who either specifically wanted contact with - or wanted to provide information to - ethnic minority women. What was intended as an activity of establishing cross-neighbourhood networks between different minority and majority women's associations culminated in a dancing party among the minority women, several of whom ripped their headscarves off and flung them to one side when throwing their bodies into the dance of Turkish and Arabic rhythms. Given the official focus on cross-cultural and cross-neighbourhood mixing and particularly, on getting the ethnic minority residents *out of the ghetto and into majority Danish society*, this fact seemed rather paradoxical. Who were the ethnic minority residents of the social housing estates supposed to meet and mix with, when the activities intended for mixing were mainly attended by integration officials and ethnic minority residents from other social housing estates? Clearly, this type of mixing, if indeed officially considered mixing at all, was not the aim of any of the regeneration projects. It was, however, the way that these projects turned out. The projects thus inadvertently established networks across ethnic and other differences, which seen from an official standpoint, were of the wrong kind. As Bolt *et al.* (2010: 171) and other researchers have argued: 'integration and segregation [is] a two-way relationship involving the minority ethnic groups *and* the host society', however, 'there is a lack of attention to the role played by the individuals and institutions of the host society in creating segregated cities'. An enhanced attention to 'host society' - majority Danish - participation and co-constitutive role in social dynamics thus seems timely in light of the events described above. Hence, contrary to the political rhetoric and assumptions of self-segregating immigrants and refugees not wanting to mix, it seemed, at least in the case of these projects, that it was the other way around.

## Right kinds of mixing?

Let us now turn the gaze toward the political emphasis on 'mixing' and some of the ideas, norms and values that seem to be attached to it. The agenda of mixing in the Danish context, as we have seen above, is related to particular ideas about immigrants living in cultural ghettos and not wanting to - or being able to - mix with majority Danes. The notion of mixing in urban policies furthermore seems to be understood as a general model of and for cohesive social interaction across what is understood as differences (cf. Fortier 2007). This understanding is partially tied to research-based models such as, for example, the 'contact hypothesis', which argues that under *appropriate conditions*, the best way to overcome prejudice between majority and minority groups is through social encounters (Allport 1954: 281). More recent research has also focussed on the importance of socio-cultural encounters in public space, influencing among other things, architectural and urban planning visions (cf. Fincher 2003, Amin 2002, Valentine 2008). The emphasis on cross-ethnic/cross-cultural encounters also echoes Robert Putnam's (2002, 2007) argument in favour of what he calls 'bridging capital' (i.e., networks between heterogeneous social actors). Putnam argues that social encounters or connections that are formed across diverse social/ethnic groups are potentially more beneficial to social cohesion than what he calls 'bonding capital', that is, networks among what is defined as 'homogenous social actors', since bridging capital serves to bind citizens together across differences (cf. Putnam 2000).

Both Putnam's definitions of 'bridging capital' and 'bonding capital' have, according to Amin (2007), been influential in shaping urban policy agendas and approaches, such as the focus on 'community mobilization and cohesion', and on bridging social and ethnic differences through 'interethnic proximity and mixing' (Fortier 2007: 107) and 'mixed housing and ethnic encounters' (Amin 2007: 105; cf. Fortier 2010). These approaches to mixing seem to fit with the political debates and general aspirations of social cohesion in Denmark. Hence, prerogatives of mixing constitute one of the key elements in the former Liberal-Conservative government's ghettoisation policies. As the strategy against ghettoisation from 2004 states:

It is the government's goal that the housing estates where immigrants, refugees and their descendants live, should be places, where they meet with Danes, where networks across personal and cultural differences are established, where Danish is heard and learned, where prejudice is put to a test and debunked. (The Government 2004: 11, our translation).

The strategy from 2004 as well as the Ghetto Plan from 2010, offered specific urban policy instruments to ensure this mix. One tool was an extended authority to housing companies and municipalities in the assignment of housing in so-called ghetto areas in order to reduce the number of socio-economic disadvantaged (ethnic) minority residents in the ghettos. It now became legal for municipalities to assign council apartments to certain (socio-economic advantaged) applicants, and reject other (socio-economic disadvantaged) applicants.

The projects developed under the project elaboration course of the Social Group were also meant to support a community cohesion agenda (see Amin above), since they aimed at facilitating social and cultural/ethnic encounters and create networks between hitherto strangers. Seen from the overall perspective of the political agenda of social cohesion, the importance thus attributed to projects of 'mixing' was an attempt to counter potential threats of fragmentation by facilitating a sense of community. However, inherent in the prioritisation of cultural encounters, there is a potential danger of ignoring and individualising larger structural issues of inequality. In this context, Amin argues that urban social inequality, at least in the UK, has come to be

re-cast as a *defect of place*, and a *deficiency of the capacity of local residents to [naturally] participate and connect*, which has left very little attention to 'systemic and trans-local sources of injustice' and that this is furthermore seen as resulting in social breakdown, de-motivation and isolation. (Amin 2007: 105, our emphasis; cf. Chatterton and Bradley 2000; Phillips 2006).

Amin's argument is also relevant in the Danish case as exemplified with the case of Vollsmose. In this case, the outbreak of violence was interpreted and discussed as a 'defect of place' (more specifically of 'the ghetto') and a result of poor integration and incapacity of the local residents rather than a result of crime, social problems and inequalities. The case illustrates how a certain population group and a certain place become attributed with particular meanings through the news coverage and the dominant political ghetto discourse. These perceptions are nurtured by already existing discourses representing Vollsmose and other immigrant neighbourhoods as ghettos and as 'spoiled spaces' (cf. Cottle 1994: 252). In this context, Danish norms and values are simultaneously constructed as the norm, positioning ethnic minority ghetto residents as a culturally and morally 'deviant' (cf. Cottle 1994). In the Danish cohesion agenda, it seems that what

might have been framed as structural issues are thus often translated into problems of culture and ethnicity (particularly of non-Western immigrants and their descendants) rather than seen as a result of individual incapacities as argued by Amin for the British case. This was so, even though Jens, the Social Group project leader, and Michael, the programme leader, were both aware that many of the problems in the district were rooted in structural issues, but as Michael argued, such structural issues had to be addressed on a different political level and with different economic means than what was available in the regeneration project. Hence, what was known on the ground did not change the political agenda of mixing nor the local focus on ethnicity. The previous quote by Jens also underlines that the regeneration efforts, particularly of the Social Group, were aimed at non-Western ethnic minority residents of the social housing estates, and on what was perceived as the a priori need to *get them out of their neighbourhoods and connect to and participate in* Danish society. This, again, points to some of the assumptions underpinning the agenda of mixing. But mixing is not simply a tool that can be applied disregarding the contexts within which its use is inscribed (cf. Khan 2007). On the contrary, Khan's (2007) study serves to pinpoint that notions of 'mixing' and the concomitant ideas of (what counts as) encounters across differences (in our case in urban policy practices), far from being objective tools, are inscribed in the particular social, cultural and historical developments, which are carved out as politically important at any given moment and place in time.

If 'mixing' is considered an objective tool, then the particular processes whereby 'the constituents of the mix' come into being are obscured, as are the individualisation of larger structural, political issues. Since the notion of mixing implies the existence of separate cultural entities that mix, the idea of mixing and cross-cultural encounters, although unintentionally, implies the reification of 'ethnic cultures'. We might even say that this process enabled the emergence of particular versions of ethnic minorities and Danes while it simultaneously 'cut off' these figures from the social and material conditions of their coming into being. Such processes, as Ahmed (2000) has argued, provide the perception that rather than being relationally constituted, these supposed entities have a 'life of their own' (Ahmed 2000: 5). These processes furthermore imply a homogenisation of what might just as reasonably be described as (culturally, nationally, religiously, socially, gendered, generational, etc.) diverse groups of non-Western immigrants, with the one common trait that they all live in social housing estates. By the same token 'Danishness' is constituted a homogenous and well-defined entity (cf. Grünenberg 2006: 200/206). This way, the cohesion agenda runs the risk of essentialising further what might otherwise be framed as, for example, political claims issues, expressing, for example, the need for employment, better housing possibilities and so on.

The definition of encounters and mixing in the Danish context, as we have seen, also seems to imply the mixing of particularly one of the two 'entities' and furthermore defines and devises the *right forms* of mixing, as encounters crossing what is perceived as cultural boundaries in order to dissolve or dilute them into a homogeneous Danishness. The constituents of the 'mix' in the Danish context seem to be what is perceived of as ethnic Danes and particularly, Muslim non-Western immigrants, regardless of other immigrants living in the housing estates, regardless of the fact that residents move in and out of the estates, and regardless of the differences that might actually make *more* of a difference in diverse everyday life contexts, such as social position, generation, migration status and so on (cf. Vertovec 2007). These objections to the particular ways in which the agenda of mixing is played out in a Danish context do not mean that we should

disregard the importance of social relations and networks between people. Instead, we need to continuously investigate how social networks and relations across all types of supposed differences shape - and are shaped by - policies and practices, and which role they come to play in everyday interactions.

## Conclusive remarks: cohesive communities, conflict and diversity in Denmark

In this article, we have argued that the particular ways in which notions of ethnic minority self-segregation and ghettos have become entwined in public and political discourse, have had implications for the ways in which social cohesion is conceived of and promoted in urban policies and urban regeneration practices in a particular district of Copenhagen. We have argued that implicit in the ways in which segregation and ghettos are conceptualised, there is an idea of ethnic minority others as located *outside* society. We illustrated this point by calling attention to the spatial tropes used in political discourse and documents such as: 'get the ghetto *back* to society' and the ghettos as 'holes on the Danish map', as well as the ideas of immigrants needing to come *out of* and *into* Danish society. These ways of conceptualising and talking about certain social housing estates have furthermore separated the emergence of the phenomena from its specific historical developments such as former housing policies and practices, as well as from trans-local and more general socio-political and structural developments. Cities, as well as city policies of any European city, are shaped by the particular cities' place in interwoven global, European and national networks of politics and policies, economy, marketing strategies as well as socio-cultural and historical specificities. By conceptualising ghettos as well as their ethnic minority residents as spatially segregated, localised and isolated self-reproducing entities, the roots of potential social problems are viewed as located in the areas and residents themselves as well as in what is understood as their culture/ethnicity. The prevalence of this view in the Danish case was exemplified by the debate following the incident in Vollsmose. Here, socio-economic factors as well as the ways in which culture, ethnicity and social practice is relationally constituted were ignored and replaced with culturalist explanations. Hence, the understanding of the outbreak of violence, the intruders' ethnicity and the place where they lived as causally connected, was enabled by the lack of attention to other possible explanations. A causal understanding that was sustained and reproduced (partly) by the dominating discourses of politicians and the media.

In the case of Hamlet this fear of ethnic minority segregation was translated into particular notions of 'mixing' as *cross-cultural* encounters and *ethnic minority participation*. Social cohesion seen from this perspective thus becomes a question of making those defined as 'others' cohere with 'us'. In the case of Hamlet, cohesion was meant to be produced through two projects focussing on the *coming together* of residents with ethnic minority and majority backgrounds; that is, a youth sports event and a meeting of cross-neighbourhood women's associations. These cultural encounters, however, paradoxically served to bring together ethnic minority residents of different nationalities from different areas of the district rather than facilitate majority/minority encounters, since Danish majority residents did not participate. We might therefore do well in questioning the general hypothesis of ethnic minority segregation on the background of empirical studies as well as the assumptions

inherent in perceiving 'mixing' as an objective tool of integration. Mixing and ideas of cultural encounters are too often premised upon unhelpful essentialist notions of culture, which may contribute to their crystallisation rather than an encounter of common ground. Hence, such notions are no guarantee for 'successful integration', particularly not if the parameter of 'successful integration' is a homogeneous, conflict-free society. It might therefore be more fruitful to conceive of societies as intensive sites of negotiation of difference. Negotiations that continuously and ideally take part through public debates and conflicting visions, and that might not only be problematic but perhaps may even form the background for potential innovation and positive change.

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## Notes

1. Vollsmose is a residential area in the city of Odense, the third largest city in Denmark. Vollsmose has 10,000 inhabitants of 78 nationalities and was officially named a 'ghetto' in 2010. (Source: *Netværk Vollsmose*).
2. Although we maintain a critical perspective on what we argue is the tendency to a priori culturalisation, we are not blind to the fact that there *are* challenges that have to be dealt with in some of the exposed urban areas. Furthermore, we do not dispute that urban regeneration projects also have positive impacts in the local area. What we question and find unhelpful, however, is how these challenges are interpreted in terms of essentialist cultural and spatial understandings.
3. Urban policies as well as other policy areas have been placed in different Ministries depending on the government in power. In 2011, urban politics were moved to resort under the Ministry for Housing, Urban and Rural Affairs, while immigrant and integration politics were placed in the Ministry of Children, Gender Equality, Integration and Social Affairs (2014). When the Liberal Party (*Venstre*) regained power in the 2015-election, housing policies and integration has once again been placed in the same Ministry, Ministry for Foreigners, Integration and Housing (*Udlændinge-, Integrations-, og Boligministeriet*).
4. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (Statistics Denmark), Western countries encompass: The EU, Andorra, Australia, Canada, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, New Zealand, Norway, San Marino, Switzerland, USA and The Vatican. Remaining countries in the world are defined as non-Western. Immigrants in a Danish context are defined as: 'Persons whose parents do not hold Danish passports, and are not born in Denmark. 'Descendants' are defined as the offspring of immigrants, who are born in Denmark (from Statistics Denmark's web page, our translation). Several words such as 'New Danes', 'ethnic minorities', 'immigrants', '1., 2., and 3. generation immigrants' flourish, however, both in research, in public debates and in everyday practices.
5. Up until the beginning/mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, Denmark was a centralised and multicultural kingdom, encompassing among others the Northern German duchy Schleswig-Holstein, Norway, Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands as well as several colonial bridgeheads. Historically, there has also been a steady immigration into Denmark, such as the Dutch in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Huguenots in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, unskilled workers from, particularly Germany, Poland and Sweden (Schmidt and Parby 2011).
6. The 2011-elected centre-left government expressed in their governmental platform their wish to eradicate all official usages of the word ghetto and to establish new criteria for a definition of 'especially exposed housing areas'. They also advocated the removal of the so-called 'ethnic criteria' from the definition entirely. In May 2013, the government offered its new definition of 'especially exposed housing areas' that had expanded from three to five criteria; the two new criteria being education and income. The proportion of non-Western immigrants, and thereby ethnicity, thus still figures as a separate criteria in the definition (Ministry for Housing, Urban and Rural Affairs, official website, 2014).
7. On April 24, 2012, members of the bikers gang of Bandidos rushed into the paediatric's ward at Hvidovre Hospital where a child of one of the members was hospitalised. The Bandidos members, wearing masks, allegedly believed bikers from Hells Angels had entered the hospital and threatened the child. The intrusion at the hospital was a result of an escalating conflict between Hells Angels and Bandidos and came only 5 days after there had been a violent confrontation between the two biker gangs (Hede and Hjort 2012).
8. In the month following the incident with the Danish bikers (April 25, 2012 to May 25, 2012), there were a total of 40 articles in Danish newspapers and/or different Danish news media. In the month following the incident in Vollsmose (August 20, 2012 to September 20, 2012), there were more than 2500 articles and comments in the Danish news media about this case.
9. 'Exposed housing areas - The next steps' (*Udsatte boligområder – De næste skridt*), see also endnote 6.
10. *Hamlet* is the anonymised name for the Copenhagen district in question. There are 10 administrative, statistical and tax districts in Copenhagen.
11. The classification of a neighbourhood as a ghetto can be stigmatising, but also advantageous. A spokesperson for one of the other council estates in Hamlet stated that he partially wished it would be defined as a ghetto because of the ensuing funding and the possibilities inherent in this.
12. According to documents from the social group of the regeneration programme in Hamlet.
13. In practice, however, it would have been difficult for less-educated residents of Hamlet to participate in these meetings on account of, for example, the level and types of language skills needed. This is a problem confronted by many civil-society

participatory projects, which some of the regeneration workers were also aware of.

14. In order to get funding, it is the condition of not only social projects, but also to a large extent research projects, to follow the political agenda and 'hot topics'. This is potentially problematic as it may lead to the actual perpetuation of what becomes constituted as 'problems'. An example could be the inflation of numbers of minority youngsters 'hanging on the street' (cf. Rogers and Coaffee 2005), set off to acquire funding for other relevant, but less 'hot' topics. Such a scenario, in turn, contributes to stereotypical images of young ethnic minority (men) as potentially criminal. It furthermore makes actual changes of practice (e.g., fall in the actual number

of youngsters on the street) invisible. This last fact is worthy of a separate methodological article, also reflecting upon researchers contributions to the particular emergence, use of, and perpetuation of terms such as 'ethnicity', 'ethnic minorities', 'immigrant cultures' and 'ghettos' (cf. Diken 1998).

15. The project leaders of the Project-Elaboration Course were quite critical towards the focus on ethnicity and attempted to expand the notion of culture beyond ethnicity. However, they also had to conform to the funding criteria of the Social Group, and to the fact that part of their funding was provided by the Ministry of Integration as well as to participant's own conceptions of culture.
16. See: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parkour>

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