Re-evaluating Egalitarian Design in Contemporary Danish Society

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Re-evaluating Egalitarian Design in Contemporary Danish Society

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the discourses and practices of egalitarian architecture in contemporary Denmark. Denmark’s long standing comprehensive welfare system promotes, for all citizens, equal access to education, healthcare, and public services, and other opportunities. Similarly, its own brand of socially progressive, egalitarian architecture encourages spatial designs intended for use by all people regardless of social disparities. Drawing on a range of sources from government documents to architectural magazines to design projects themselves, this study defines the historical development of this discourse going back to Modernist and Functionalist movements in the 1930s. By revealing the cultural and demographic assumptions on which socially responsive design projects are based, it reevaluates egalitarian architectural discourse. The projects examined in this study suggest the design field is evolving to include growing groups like the aging generation more effectively than the immigrant population. Ultimately, the study argues that the challenges Danish design practitioners and policymakers face in addressing the needs of their increasingly multicultural population stem from a residual cultural inclination that favors sameness and equality over the recognition of differences.
INTRODUCTION

“It’s very important there’s public life in public spaces. That means people from all walks of life will naturally meet in the streets, squares and parks of the city. So you can see what society you belong to. You can see your fellow citizens eye to eye going about daily life.”

– Jan Gehl (contemporary Danish architect and urbanist), 2020

Superkilen, a now Internet-famous park in Copenhagen, Denmark – a country with a design culture grounded in egalitarian values – is a striking work of public architecture that foregrounds cultural sensitivity and inclusion of underrepresented groups in design. Winner of the 2016 Aga Khan Award for Architecture, arguably the most prestigious international design award for projects that “successfully address the needs and aspirations of societies in which Muslims have a significant presence,” this wedge-shaped park was designed by Bjarke Ingels Group between 2010 and 2012 for the RealDania Foundation and the City of Copenhagen.¹

Strolling through outer Nørrebro, reputedly the most ethnically diverse population in Copenhagen, pedestrians might encounter the park first in any of its three zones linked by a winding bike path: a sports-centered red square, a green recreational park, and a black space for community gatherings (Fig. 1, 2).² Particularly striking are the decorative symbols and objects – which range from “a Portuguese tiled bench” to “a small collection of palm trees from China” – aimed at expressing the diversity of the area (Fig. 3).³ This global collection reveals the inclusive intentions of the design process behind the park. Project collaborators BIG (architects), Topotek1 (landscape architects), and Superflex (artist collective) solicited public suggestions of symbols and objects to incorporate into the overall park design. The resulting eclectic selection of 108

structures and symbols from across the world, each labeled with a metal plaque in Danish and the language(s) of its original location, is an effort to represent the population of Nørrebro (Fig. 4). More broadly, this global display aims to counter the image of a homogenous Denmark and instead celebrate the country’s cultural diversity.

Praise for the project in professional publications and awards – such as an AIA Honor Award for Regional and Urban Design in 2013 and a Citation in the Play Category of ARCHITECT’s 2012 Annual Design Review – have further compounded its perceived success in this dimension. Martin-Rein Cano, a landscape architect on the project’s team, hopes that “rather than perpetuating an idea of Denmark as a mono-ethnic people,” the park can represent the range of residents’ identities.4 A recent book treating case studies from across the world on urban liveability through the perspective of user experience declares that instead of “a petrified image of homogeneous Denmark, [the park] serves as a surrealist collection of global urban diversity that reflects the true nature of the local neighborhood.”5 This praise directly addresses the stereotypical view of an ethnically and religiously homogeneous Denmark. It suggests that Superkilen, as “a hybrid space between foreign and native and belonging to the local,” supports a new understanding of Denmark as a home for people of all backgrounds.6 Acknowledging the heightened consciousness of immigration and multiculturalism in Denmark and Europe more broadly in recent decades, Superkilen’s admirers say the project “weaves a rich tapestry of symbols into a paradigm of a diverse yet inclusive society.”7 Ideally, Italian architectural

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5 Ibid., 107.
6 Ibid., 112.
journalist Valentina Ciuffi writes, Superkilen would make visible the “harmony” among residents and “[ensure] that people truly experience it.”

Superkilen’s program and layout grew out of a desire to use spatial design to facilitate human connection between residents with different backgrounds. With the Green Park for sports and recreation, the Black Square with the flow of the bike path and places to sit and gather informally, and the Red Square directly next to the community center, library, and sports facility (Nørrebroadhallen), the architects evidence their goals of everyday encounters and interactions. They also designed the pedestrian and cycling paths to connect the park with the rest of Nørrebro and the city beyond.

While the park received many praises, it also received criticism. Some describe its methods of representation as superficial, criticizing the array of international objects which do not necessarily add value to the space aside from their intrigue as artistic items in a scattered collection. One urbanism blogger suggests an aesthetic use of cultural symbols may have taken priority over accurate representations of the local residents and a thoughtful design to help make people feel more at home in their neighborhood. The blog questions the success of cultural representation in the park, describing how the number of monuments representing the United States is out of proportion to the number of American immigrants in Nørrebro, “particularly as compared to immigrants from the Middle East.” The eleven items sourced from the United States are eye-catching, such as the two neon signs and the dancing pavilion inspired by one in

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9 Sepe, Designing Healthy and Liveable, 108.
10 Ibid., 112.
12 The People City, “Illusory Inclusion.”
St. Louis, MI, but do not proportionally represent the Nørrebro population, nor do they contribute to an impression of a less western-centric urban atmosphere (Fig. 5). The five pieces of gymnastic equipment from Santa Monica, CA, including a rope, parallel bar, and rings, serve a practical recreational purpose in the park, but they also create a concentration of objects from one particular city, and reinforce stereotypes about California’s “Muscle Beach” rather than using cultural symbols to add nuance and diversity to Superkilen (Fig. 6-10).13

The criticism of an overly aestheticized diversity is somewhat widespread in conversations about Superkilen’s efforts at cultural inclusion following its awards and journey to Internet celebrity. One study based on the park’s use and encounters notes that procedural challenges “compromised [the objects’] ethnocultural meaning and quality.”14 Difficult-to-procure items were either “reproduced locally” or replaced by objects unrepresentative of Nørrebro’s residents: the study cites that “while local residents from western backgrounds accounted for just 19.6% of the total non-Danish population, they were represented by 57.9% (no = 62) of all objects.”15

While the researchers learned from interviewing “residents from minority ethnic backgrounds” that objects like the Iraqi swings and Moroccan fountain “were strongly valued for their ethnocultural meaning,” they also found those objects to be popular more generally due to their locations and recreational and seating functions (Fig. 11, 12).16 Additionally, contrary to those who praised the participatory design process, at least one local resident involved with the project expressed reservations about the nature and scope of this participation. In a 2015 interview, this participant commented that “many of the final objects were already chosen before

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
the open call for ideas,” saying, “Please don’t believe that it was the local people who chose these objects; they had an influence, yes, but as you can see many of the objects sitting in the square today were already there in the invitation [to suggest objects].” 17 While this is a single perspective of the design process, her comment serves as a reminder that participatory design processes can be framed to allow varying levels of public input, from idea generation to discussion and approval of designer-proposed options.

Research also indicates that Nørrebro has actually long been home to many immigrants but that the project is a recent response to contemporary discourse about “migration and ethnic diversity” which is “characterized by hypervisibility and hyper-problematization”. 18 Superkilen’s contribution to a highly charged social debate about immigration and culture may position it to have some inevitable failures or missteps along with its successes. Another of Superkilen’s shortcomings which will be explored in less detail in this study is the insufficient consideration for the sustainability of objects sourced from different climates across the globe. Consequently, some corners of the park suffer from the potentially grim symbolism of deteriorating, under-maintained symbolic installations. The aforementioned palm trees from China, notably, have visibly suffered in the Danish climate, and the Portuguese tiled bench became significantly damaged from the extreme cold, wind, and rain common for Danish winters (Fig. 13, 14). 19

As a celebrated instance of public urban landscape architecture, Superkilen epitomizes some of the egalitarian efforts of Danish design culture that this thesis explores. In the following pages, I ask how Denmark’s long held reputation of “progressive” design politics and human-centered design affects the ability of critics and designers themselves to recognize

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18 Ibid, 119.
19 The People City, “Illusory Inclusion.”
exclusionary qualities in contemporary projects. I begin by entering Danish design at multiple scales, tracing the shared principles which guide the design of everything from household objects to urban spaces. I aim to identify common social threads which inform the otherwise apparently disparate types of Danish design. While the definition of egalitarian Danish design is multidimensional, its complexity means that it is still evolving. Recognizing the dynamic nature of this concept, I assess how egalitarian Danish design practices which have long been a strength may need further adaptation to meet the contemporary social needs through architecture.

Although Danish design has egalitarian roots, its principles were developed in the context of a relatively homogenous society. Changing demographics, however, are producing unprecedented challenges and may benefit from a different way of understanding egalitarianism. Overall, this study argues that despite the best efforts of Danish design practitioners and policymakers, they are currently better equipped to address certain demographic challenges within a more homogeneous cultural context than others which require inclusion of more diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural identities.

As an established welfare state with a long history of egalitarian cultural values, Denmark presents a unique environment in which to study this architectural dialogue. It is home to many award-winning and publicized projects, admired for their work towards accessibility, diverse representation, and more. Nevertheless, there remains a gap between intent and practical impact. Common Danish social values emphasize people’s similarities over their differences, with the belief that similarity is what equalizes people.\(^\text{20}\) While the tendency to universalize aims to create fairness and social comfort, ignorance of individual differences or acknowledgement without an attempt to understand and value them has the potential to create more isolation and

\(^{20}\) Anne Knudsen, “Pretend you are at home – and stay there!” in Her går det godt, send flere penge (Things are going well here, send more money), trans. unknown, (Gyldendal, December 21, 2016), 58.
division among people who do not feel seen. In this social context, Danish architectural projects provide a rich scope of design work with which to examine questions of inclusion and exclusion.

This study consists of two main parts, each with two chapters. Part one defines Danish egalitarian design while tracing it back to preceding design movements and government policy. It characterizes Danish egalitarian design as a practice that grew out of international design traditions, which Danish practitioners enmeshed into a characteristically Danish style of egalitarianism. While this term has not previously been firmly linked to the field of Danish design, the qualities of functionality, shared aesthetic traditions, equal opportunity and access have been points of pride for Danish designers since at least the 1950s. In the first chapter I explore the history of three main design traditions in which Danish egalitarian design finds its roots: Modernism; holistic, multi-scaled design; and utopian aspirations. I trace Danish engagement with these ideas to a number of mid-century, field-shaping practitioners who represent how international discourse influenced Danish-specific design, including Arne Jacobsen, Poul Henningsen, and C.F. Møller. Not only did such figures discuss modernist ideas, wrestling with aesthetics and universalism versus specificity, but they were also invested in the holistic design of spaces and the experiences within them. I therefore investigate an egalitarian design ethos that permeates multiple scales of Danish design, from product design to architecture to public space. Additionally, I examine the link between utopian ideals and egalitarianism as a potentially more radical expression of Danish social values in design. Thus, the final section of the chapter turns to how egalitarian design approaches are presently shifting to take on new roles and practical ethics, such as human wellbeing and environmental transparency.

Concurrently, Denmark’s egalitarian design discourse was shaped by a series of government programs beginning in the 1970s, with a special focus on accessibility and equal
opportunity. Chapter two examines how such policies contributed to the national image of a forward-looking Danish architectural field which is creating space for all. Specifically, this includes the changes made by the Danish government since the country’s fairly late adoption of physical accessibility building requirements (relative to the United States’s implementation of ADA regulations) and the more recent declaration of a movement towards “Design For All.” A survey of several government-sponsored projects, recognized for their consideration of marginalized populations and their user-participation processes, will solidify the official contemporary discourse about egalitarian design in Denmark. Together, the first two chapters of this study establish why Denmark is known for egalitarian architectural practice, and how the Danish government, individual practitioners, and international media contribute to that reputation.

The second part of the study turns to current demographic changes in Danish society and the difficulty in applying the traditional egalitarian design logic to a more diverse, changing population. It begins with an introduction to two of the most significant demographic changes Denmark is facing: an aging population and an increasingly multicultural society with rising numbers of immigrants and their descendants. In keeping with the tradition of egalitarian design and social welfare practices, Danish architects are increasingly focusing design competitions and public space developments on integrating groups such as elderly citizens and ethnic minorities into the rest of Danish society. In chapter three, looking first at aging through representative case studies, I explore active efforts on the part of Danish architects to adjust to the changing needs of the country, seeking more hospitable, friendly housing and care solutions for the aging population. These cases demonstrate attention to contemporary challenges and a desire to provide elderly residents with equal consideration as other generations.
The fourth chapter examines Danish architectural responses to immigration and multiculturalism, especially in relation to the tenets of egalitarianism fundamental to the Danish welfare values and everyday social customs. While case studies of public architecture projects reveal significant efforts to include and integrate, they also provide instances of exclusionary practices, albeit often inadvertently, as well as misguided strategies for cultural representation. A careful analysis of the successes and shortcomings of implemented projects indicate that ambitions of equal treatment and universalized design solutions – that previously offered an equal playing field to culturally homogenous groups – are, in some cases, struggling to serve the increasingly culturally and socially diverse population.
PART I

Egalitarian Danish Design
CHAPTER I: Defining Egalitarian Danish Design

Modernist Aesthetics and ‘Danish Functionalism’

The desire to define a distinctive Danish design tradition has its roots in Danish architects’ encounter with the international movements of Modernism and Functionalism starting in the late 1920s and ensuing debates about how to simplify, standardize, and make architecture more efficient. In the context of this study, the modernist aesthetic is understood to be characterized by sleek, cubic architectural forms, typically made of some combination of glass, steel, and concrete, driven by functional needs and the hope of achieving a kind of universalized efficiency. While functionalism, too, has universal connotations, the Danish contribution to this movement is the social content that privileges accessibility, inclusivity, and affordability. These values contribute to the egalitarian ethos on which Danish designers have built their brand. It is these shared goals of equal opportunity that permit a conversation on Danish design to relate urban scale projects, utopian schemes, buildings, and product designs despite their formal differences. Therefore, though modern Danish design is frequently discussed in terms of its formal characteristics – and while these are important – this study will focus more on the social principles of accessibility and equal opportunity that are embedded in Danish design practices.21

Although Danish designers collaborated with non-Danes in formulating a modern universalist architectural discourse, many, like Poul Henningsen (1894-1967), also insisted on differentiating the trajectory of Danish architecture from their non-Dane counterparts. The work of architect and furniture designer Kaare Klint (1888-1954), a contemporary of Henningsen, represents the characteristics said to set Danish Functionalist design apart from International

21 The “Danish Modern” tradition and its formal characteristics are well-studied in academic circles and by more popular design media outlets. Examples of such discussions of formal traits and the history of the style can be found in books such as Mark Mussari’s Danish Modern: Between Art and Design (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016) and Andrew Hollingsworth’s Danish Modern (Gibbs Smith, 2009).
Modernism: Klint prioritized use and practicality over aesthetic concerns, and his furniture incorporated Danish craftsmanship traditions and regionally specific woods and other materials. This attention to crafts and local materials cultivated among Danish practitioners is a key part of Danish architecture’s distinctive reputation for innovation.

The value placed on local production traditions and materials is inherent to Danish pride in their shared cultural heritage, contributing to a sense of national unity and a point of distinction from other countries. Following the loss of imperial power in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Danish nation was built on community-based egalitarian values in which similarities shaped the national identity. This egalitarian perspective has roots in agrarian communities where it was important for peace and productivity that no individual was elevated above others in power or status, and its inheritance in the more recent Danish context assisted in unifying the country. Even today, many Danes refer to the satirized early 20th century concept of Jante’s Law that scorns individuality in favor of community identity. In the 1950s, with the rise of Denmark’s current social welfare system and the corresponding emphasis on offering equal opportunities, Danish architecture began to be studied more consistently through an egalitarian lens, both nationally and internationally.

While the rise of Danish egalitarian design must be understood as part of a modernist discourse, influenced by values of universal application and simplified functionality, it was also part of an anti-modernist discourse. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ own narrative about

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23 Patrick Kingsley, How to be Danish: A Journey to the Cultural Heart of Denmark, (Atria Books/Marble Arch Press, 2014), 116-117.
24 This phenomenon was satirized to the extremity of suppressing individual identities in favor of the community identity as a whole in the concept of “Jante’s Law,” originated by author Aksel Sandemose in a 1933 novel, A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks. Though such a stereotype about Danish culture is in many ways problematic, it can also provide a useful critique of how forced equality has also resulted in subduing diversity. ; Michael Booth, “The Law of Jante”, in The Almost Nearly Perfect People: Behind the Myth of Scandinavian Utopia, Random House, 2014. https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2015/02/11/the-law-of-jante/.
Denmark’s design history uses the term “Functionalism” to refer to Danish designers’ particular utilitarian contributions to the Modern movement. While product design was at the heart of this movement in Denmark – as opposed to the architectural forms central to International Modernism – the functional considerations for human experience underlying the sleek visual qualities provide a link between the disciplines. Danish designers used the modernist principles of simplicity and minimalism in an effort to meet user needs practically while eschewing some of the universalist tendencies of International Modernism in favor of local traditions including regional materials known to withstand the Nordic climate. They balanced modern aesthetics in their sleek lamps and chairs with human-centered considerations. Relatedly, Danish designers also shared characteristics with the earlier Arts and Crafts movement (1880s-1910s) that originated in Britain. While Danish practitioners like Henningsen cared less about decoration than major figures of the Arts and Crafts movement like British designer William Morris, they sought to preserve traditional and useful Danish craftsmanship, and with their pride for this design legacy, fostered a sense of romantic nationalism for a shared cultural legacy which could bring Danes together.

Though Danish architectural practitioners were engaged in the international discussion of Modernism, well-known figures from Poul Henningsen to the later Jan Gehl (1936- ), stood out for their discourse against the Modernist movement, critiquing, for example, an overly-aestheticized style which potentially overlooked certain practicalities of use. While Henningsen agreed with the goals of Modernism, characterized by function, minimalism, and rationality, he wrote in the 1920s about his concern that Modernist aesthetics were trending on a

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25 “Danish architecture in Denmark and around the world,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Denmark, https://denmark.dk/innovation-and-design/architecture.
superficial level and that the intent was being lost.  

He also contributed to the sentiment that Danish design was distinct from the rest of global architecture even with its use of Modernism. As Danish scholar of architecture and design culture Anders Munch wrote, even with Henningsen’s reputation as a Modernist in Denmark in the 1920s, “he nevertheless maintained that Danish conditions and traditions were distinct… that is to say, he advocated a certain Danish exceptionalism.”  

Despite a brief Danish correspondence with CIAM, Danish practitioners often preferred to view their work as more culturally and geographically specific than the style espoused by their international counterparts.

The belief in Danish exceptionalism was not unique to Henningsen. Several architects formed a new group in 1929 called Dansk N. B. (Neues Bauen) to distinguish themselves from international groups, and by 1931, Denmark was no longer involved in CIAM.  

This exceptionalism also permeated some other Nordic countries similarly known for their higher than average levels of social trust and democratic procedures. In fact, in the decades after World War II, Munch suggests that Scandinavian countries were viewed as “small-scale models of harmonious, democratic societies, as the ‘prefects’ of the United Nations.”  

But, perhaps more than the history of any other country, Danish design history – as well as the nation’s egalitarian efforts, its simple, well-executed design and craftsmanship, and its community orientation – has been idealized on the world stage. A New York exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1960 titled *The Art of Denmark* represents this trend of international recognition. The exhibition catalog drew attention to the nation’s design scene by linking the progression of Danish design to

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30 Ibid., 289.
the Bauhaus movement. Internationally, scholars and the public were putting Danish design on display, intending to show the economic accessibility and egalitarian nature of Danish society and everyday life through commonplace design objects. This long-standing idealized, utopian understanding of egalitarian social values in Denmark goes hand in hand with the branding of Danish design as a progressive, forward-looking model.

While Danish design was gaining global attention for innovative and beautiful household objects, within Denmark Munch describes a simultaneous development of “a ‘self-exoticisation’ of Danish design.” The “romanticising expectations of foreign markets” contributed to the Danish design industry’s self-branding, but Munch emphasizes the important role of “Danish designers, critics and promoters all involved in cultivating the very idea of special Danish conditions and traditions;” they wanted to set Denmark apart from other nation’s design practices. Eminent architectural historian Steen Eiler Rasmussen of the Royal Academy School of Architecture wrote his own article in 1960, following what Munch calls “the international breakthrough of ‘Danish Modern’.” In it, he underscored a distinction between the Bauhaus and other influences on Danish art and design. National history narratives tied to Danish design and material arts laud traditional crafts and quality, and promote the theme of “‘Danish Simplicity’, conceived as a modest and user-friendly utilisation of available means, originally determined by a scarcity of raw materials but in the twentieth century raised to a creed in the context of Functionalism and Minimalist aesthetics.” The user-friendly simplicity of Danish-designed objects and their ubiquity in daily life contributed to the development of what French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) conceptualized as habitus and the development of

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32 Ibid., 290.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 305.
35 Ibid., 286.
Danish “tastes” to value such items and view them as a reflection of Denmark’s innovative cultural legacy.\textsuperscript{36}

Although product design and urban design – fields dramatically different in their scale and function – are rarely discussed together, a similar departure from modernist urban design principles can be found in the post WWII redevelopment of central Copenhagen. The pedestrianization of Copenhagen, which began in the 1960s as a reaction to the car-centric development of the city, is a large-scale instance of Danish designers and planners stepping away from international trends to make distinctive, user-centered choices.\textsuperscript{37} Jan Gehl, one of the most well-known Danish architects and urban designers, critiqued Modernism and sought more specifically to design spaces to promote “social equity” through the accessibility of urban space. He was a crucial figure in the pivotal reimagining of Copenhagen’s urban form, making space for pedestrians and bikers and placing an emphasis on human encounter over motorized efficiency.\textsuperscript{38} Gehl views the connection between people as essential to the life of a city, and his emphasis on people and daily experiences has created some egalitarian urban dynamics in Copenhagen which continue to characterize the city today. While some critics may view this concept of a return to the pedestrian city and people’s so-called natural state of connection as a nostalgic ideal, Gehl hoped to improve access and mobility for all people in the city, suggesting his motivations are socially progressive and contain modern ideas of egalitarianism as well as perhaps nostalgia for an older form of society.

Beyond the pedestrianization of Copenhagen, this equality of access and use and the encouragement of encounters between people as equals in a shared space permeates current urban infrastructure choices in Denmark’s capital, as evidenced by the Metro. The Metro is key to Denmark’s vision for an inclusive and accessible urban environment, expanding the popular options beyond walking or biking and making travel in the city more accessible. The government established the system at the turn of the century as part of a decades-long push inspired by Gehl to make the city more pedestrian friendly and move away from a spatial priority on cars. Initially completed in 2002, the Metro has slowly added new lines and stations over the years, expanding its reach to previously less easily reached parts of the metropolitan area. In 2008, the Copenhagen Metro was named “the world’s best metro system” by The International Metrorail Conference. It was touted as a “model of inclusive design,” and the Metro team is proud of its physical accessibility, atmospheric safety measures, and integrated features to assist passengers with disabilities. In particular, they highlight the presence of an elevator, escalator, and staircase in the standard station (Fig. 15-17). The seats in each train are arranged to permit extra floor space to accommodate bikes, wheelchairs, and strollers, and yellow railings, brightly colored seats, and a red and green intercom system for passenger assistance are all intended to improve the experience of visually-impaired passengers. The safety and physical accessibility measures continue: the train and platform height are at the same level, the elevators have glass walls so that occupants are within view of the people on the train platforms below for security, the light prisms and incorporation of natural light when possible increase visibility, and there are glass doors between the platform and the track and rails to prevent injury. While the system receives occasional complaints, the quarterly Metro surveys tend to report high levels of satisfaction, and

40 Ibid.
the popular use by residents and visitors means that, like the pedestrian-friendly streets, the
Copenhagen Metro is a human-centered, egalitarian public space. Recognizing shared design
principles and values in the range of product to urban design reveals Denmark’s egalitarian
design tradition in a way that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Holistic Approaches to Design

In conjunction with the Danish interpretation of modernism, Danish design has become
known for holistic design practices. Arne Jacobsen (1902-1971), Poul Henningsen (1894-1967),
C.F. Møller (1898-1988), and Kay Fisker (1893-1965) are just a few of the well-known Danish
architects who also designed lamps, chairs, pianos, and more (Fig. 18-22). Invested in the
concept of a total work of art (originating from the German gesamtkunstwerk), the Danish design
industry developed a reputation for its presence at all scales. The omnipresence of particular
objects designed to improve daily activities and experiences suggests how carefully these
architects studied user needs and bodily scale as part of a desire to improve all aspects of their
built environments.

The prevalence of product design among architects also sets the stage for later efforts at
inclusivity and accessibility in Danish architecture. With modern industrial production processes
came mass availability and affordability, taking the holistic concept to a new level of egalitarian
access since much of the public could purchase and use quality items. The broader accessibility
of items considered design objects plays a role in the democratization of design in Denmark, and
promotes a generalized conception that items made or inspired by prestigious designers are
available to all. However, there is nuance in the egalitarianism of Danish decor, and the
aesthetics of Danish furnishings and products have increased in importance with the rising
international fame of the Danish design sphere. While industrial manufacturing means plenty of
well-designed, attractive pieces are on the market, “designer” goods belonging to the Danish furniture design canon are still extremely expensive. People across Denmark and in the rest of the world can purchase and use objects inspired by the work of Klint, Jacobsen, and more, but Danes who consider themselves design experts are likely to recognize whether a chair is authentic or simply a lookalike. Consequently, even though the designs are ubiquitous, the objects themselves still hold weight as status symbols. For example, the iconic Hans J. Wegner (1914-2007) Wishbone Chair (1949) inspired pieces that are available from online retailers like Rove Concepts and Event Stable for prices around $100 to $300, but a true Wegner Wishbone Chair produced by Carl Hansen & Son retails for approximately $1,000 from Design Within Reach, Danish Design Store, or the MoMA Design Store.\footnote{The concurrent availability of “authentic designer objects” and “inspired pieces” helps maintain a delicate balance between status objects and accessible objects.}

Public spaces as well as private ones are filled with reminders of these big names in Danish design, showing just how much design endeavors have permeated everyday life. As graphic designer and author Cal Swann remarked, “Civic offices, libraries, freeway cafes, and sports halls even in small rural communities are excellently designed and fitted out with lighting by Poul Henningsen, chairs by Arne Jacobsen and tableware by Erik Magnussen.”\footnote{“The 10 Most Iconic Danish Designs,” The Modern Dane, November 3, 2022. https://www.moderndane.com/blogs/the-modern-dane-blog/the-10-most-iconic-danish-designs.} The attention to detail as well as to the big picture impact of design, and the care for a whole user experience, are now hallmarks of Danish design. The omnipresence of user-oriented design is a point of patriotic pride: one article on Danish “Design Kultur” jokingly suggests that a visitor to an average Danish farm might “be served [coffee] from a Stelton cylinder flask – and be
informed that it won a design award.” The intended uniform access to everyday design and well-made objects fits well with the egalitarian desires of Danish society; just as everyone should have access to healthcare, everyone should be able to choose chairs that have a comfortable curve to the seat or a sleek lamp that softens a lightbulb’s glare just enough to create a cozy glow. The classic Danish designer items and their lookalikes are widely available and dominate the nation’s product design industry.

With this ubiquitouslyness, however, comes an expectation of sameness (in tastes, body types, and needs - such as the expectation that Hans Wegner’s Wishbone Chair would be universally comfortable for all bodies), and perhaps for some a suggestion that everyone can be included, but only if they fit within the mold presented to them. Even the globally popular concept of hygge – which is so widely interpreted within the context of non-Scandinavian cultures – carries connotations of conforming versus not conforming to Danish norms and social expectations. The mass availability and use of Danish design objects does not negate their role as status symbols; in fact, it may increase the pressure for conspicuous consumption. Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital plays a significant role in understanding this phenomenon: he writes about symbolic elements that contribute to an individual’s feeling of group identity and inclusion (or exclusion), and notes that “differences in cultural capital mark the difference between classes.” Instead of universalizing design and placing everyone on equal footing, knowledge of Danish design culture and the names collectively deemed important becomes a way of signaling whether one does or does not belong. While the mass-use of these products contributed to a

sense of universal and homogeneous access to quality goods, it also stifled difference by
dictating what the “best” designs looked like and introduced new social stratifications based on
who uses and consumes these products.

Additionally, the all-encompassing levels of Danish design and the recognizable
streamlined aesthetic can become stifling if the uniformity constrains the individual. When the
entire user experience is subordinated to the aesthetic and vision of the designer who controls
artistic production from the building to the color of the teapot, the user is afforded very little
room for personalization to create a sense of belonging. This controlled aesthetic can impose
ways of life which may, for people with different cultural backgrounds or different abilities,
smother difference and creativity under the guise of egalitarianism.

Utopianism and Radical Egalitarianism

Utopian architecture, which envisions radical progress in the pursuit of equality, is a third
thematic strand which contributed to egalitarian Danish design. In an article considering the
contemporary state of utopianism in architecture, policy and geography scholars Ramiller and
Schmidt identify Denmark as a useful case study of recent architectural idealism. They suggest
that in the last half century the nation has been “inspired by a social democratic vision for a new
and better world that emphasizes values such as egalitarianism, social justice, and
redistribution,” and that, looking at the architectural field in particular, “the language of idealism
and utopianism has… been a thread throughout Denmark’s recent history.”

One preeminent instance of egalitarian architecture in Denmark’s recent history is the
community of Freetown Christiania in Copenhagen. Christiania is presented here as a case study
through which to examine DIY urbanism, civilian claims to the city, and egalitarian community

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values embodied in architecture. Additionally, Christiania is an internationally known urban architecture project, contributing to the global brand of Danish design as progressive, innovative, and experimental.

Christiania contributes to this thematic egalitarian reputation of Danish architecture, even as it stands out visually as a countercultural, rebellious self-established community which felt that mainstream Danish society was too restrictive and homogeneous. It is an expression of radical, utopian egalitarianism within a country that already strives to realize similar values. A semi-autonomous Free Town, created in 1971, Christiania is a reclaimed neighborhood of Christianshavn, Copenhagen, which used to be a munitions site and military base.\textsuperscript{48} The original residents, or \textit{Christianitter}, transformed the former military site (complete with toxic environmental conditions from weapon manufacturing) into a bright, artist-heavy collective space (\textbf{Fig. 24}). Intended as an “alternative society” following the 1960s youth rejection of “modern consumer culture,” the neighborhood was intended to be a creative, communal, unstructured escape from the rigidity of Danish social systems.\textsuperscript{49} Christiania’s centrality in Copenhagen, its aesthetic of difference and acceptance, and its activist roots are all key to its international icon status as one of the most well-known squatter communities in Europe and one of the images that non-Danes associate with the country.

Christiania is determinedly eclectic in style and organic in organization in a way that signals all are welcome to express themselves as they see fit. A non-hierarchical neighborhood without street signs or house numbers to navigate, its colorful buildings and whimsical artworks serve as landmarks.\textsuperscript{50} The graffiti covering the walls is just one of many signs of empowered


\textsuperscript{49} Christa S. Amouroux, “Conflict in Copenhagen: Urban Reconfigurations, Disciplining the Unruly,” eScholarship, University of California, April 12, 2009, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9cb3f8t8, 2.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
resident engagement. Internationally, the neighborhood is known for having its own self-governing process – although Christiania is actually now semi-autonomous, technically renting the land as a collective from the Danish government. While the former military barracks’ transformation into informal housing symbolizes both a rejection of the uniformity and standardization which contribute to the stability and social trust in Danish culture and a more physical deviation from the cohesive neighborhood facades which Christiania inhabitants find restrictive, the freedom of expression is egalitarian in its own right, offering each resident equal power to shape their community. In fact, resident Per Smidl says people created Christiania as a rebellion against the welfare systems that require so much regulation and group cooperation with the government. Christiania’s story embodies an experimental, idealistic form of egalitarianism which relied on complete democratic decision making and gave each resident an equal voice in the consensus-centered decision-making structure.

The creative functions of the buildings – workshops, theaters, and more – contrast sharply with the “functional austerity of the military barracks,” and anthropology scholar Christa Amouroux describes the resultant aesthetic of Christiania as “a pastiche; hodge-podge, auto-constructed homes mix with brightly colored wagons that sit dispersed among three-story, massive grey barracks parodying the uniformity of the surrounding cityspace.” The lack of aesthetic restriction means each resident is equally valued for their creative contributions (Fig. 25, 26).

The current state of Christiania is complex as residents strive to maintain their utopian efforts: the neighborhood exists in a continual contradiction between the desire for autonomy and

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51 Coppola and Vanolo, “Normalising Autonomous Spaces,” 1153.
the need for government acceptance in order to keep occupying the space. In 2011, Christiania came to a compromise with the Danish government. One article summarizes the difficulty following the agreement as such: “If on the one hand the agreement apparently guarantees the survival of Christiania, on the other hand it regulates various domains that used to be self-regulated by the community, and therefore limits Christiania’s autonomy.”\textsuperscript{54} Christiania collectively owns a portion of the land but is dependent on the government by renting the rest.\textsuperscript{55} The dynamic between the government and the neighborhood is particularly complicated given the tourist attraction the Free Town has become (for the artwork, the novelty, the culture, and the marijuana). Alessandro Coppola and Alberto Vanolo attempted to unravel the contradictions of Christiania and the mutual dependency of the Danish government and the so-called Free Town, concluding that the Copenhagen government benefits from the touristic economy of Christiania and wants to take advantage of it, but also attempts to control and homogenize it, which is counter to the founding principles of the inhabitants.\textsuperscript{56}

The relationship between the collective and the government is progressive in that it was allowed to exist for so many decades and that Christiania came to an agreement with the authorities. It is a curiosity, a novelty, to many foreign visitors, and its existence represents the opportunity within Denmark to experiment with utopian ideas. However, the government’s increasing financial interest in Christiania means policymakers want a stronger sense of control over what goes on there. All parties are compromising and giving up some of their power, which leaves many unhappy. A recent CNN article about Christiania reports that the tourism and the rising “rents” following the normalization of the neighborhood according to the 2011 government agreement have corresponded with gentrification in the neighborhood and, for many

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{54} Coppola and Vanolo, “Normalising Autonomous Spaces,” 1152.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 1153.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 1154.
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residents, a feeling that the area has lost the reality of the utopian values which instigated its creation.

The article narrates some of the inherent contradictions of Christiania’s present state: while Freetown Christiania was envisioned as “a hippie ‘utopia’”, mass tourism and gentrification have changed certain egalitarian dynamics of the commune, with rising costs of living making Christiania unaffordable for many residents.57 Other financial changes in Christiania have more formal operational impacts, including how Christiania’s finances are now managed by the Christiania Foundation.58 The changes in the systems which maintain Christiania suggest that the neighborhood is perhaps no longer quite as “do-it-yourself” as it once was. Though still governed by community decisions, the board of directors makes financial decisions on behalf of the inhabitants, so the management of Christiania is becoming increasingly similar to Copenhagen’s representative government. The increased regulatory presence and feelings of surveillance, the gentrification and financial complications of the “normalized” Free Town, and more all contribute to the opinion of many residents that Christiania is not what it used to be (Fig. 27). However, the egalitarian ideals on which it was founded are still prized by inhabitants, and admired by curious visitors from around the world.

Idealistically, Christiania represents a utopian vision for modern Danish society. The founding principles of the Free Town were based on inclusion, DIY urbanism, and the ability of people to make the space work for themselves.59 This self-reliance was intended to provide a place of belonging where inhabitants could shape their living and working spaces to suit their needs. As described by Spatial Agency, a database of progressive and justice-oriented architecture projects around the world, “The context of the commune thus became a breeding

58 Ibid.
ground for new social and political movements as well as functioning as a support system for those struggling in regular society such as the homeless, the unemployed and drug addicts, whom Christiania welcomed and supported.”⁶⁰ It was a place which welcomed people who identified as outcasts or had not found other spaces of belonging.

The vision for Christiania, regardless of the extent to which the principles ring true for its current inhabitants, is what holds the most power internationally in the discourse about Denmark and its values and inclusivity. On one hand, Christiania is a symbol of rebellion against the aspects of Danish society viewed as overly homogeneous and prescriptive (though these same social norms are meant to promote equality among people), while on the other hand, the very fact of its long existence, even in tension with the government, suggests to the rest of the world that Denmark is a place which allows discourse and conversation about different ways to live. Authors Ramiller and Schmidt even propose a link between Christiania and Gehl’s urbanism, bringing them together under the umbrella of Danish goals of inclusivity and a progressive society. They write, “Together, Christiania’s continuing example and the tradition inspired by Gehl’s comparatively modest prescriptions highlight a common understanding regarding the desirability of a socially and environmentally harmonious society that, while not universal, exists as a prominent discourse in Denmark.”⁶¹ The discourse about Christiania, and the vibrant, car-free, unregimented image so commonly presented of it in the media contributes to the idea of a radical, provocative, progressive Danish design scene, where people can make the urban environment work for them. While the future of Christiania remains to be seen, its status stands as part of the canon of Danish history and egalitarian design.

⁶¹ Ramiller and Schmidt, “Making Radical Change Real,” 286.
Intriguingly, the founders of the community were seeking such a way of life in a country which was already thought to be relatively successfully democratized in terms of representation, egalitarian social benefits, rights, and so on. However, something about the egalitarianism of the social welfare tendencies of Denmark were too homogeneous for some, leading the original Christianitter to break away and assemble this new community. The international reputation of Christiania is a major contributor to the reputation of Denmark’s egalitarian design scene, and represents a dimension of Danish architecture that strives towards egalitarianism through unregulated, autonomous creativity rather than the dominant pattern of using uniformity to promote egalitarianism.

**Bringing Egalitarian Design to the Present**

The evolving definition of egalitarian design continually leads to new considerations of what equality, equity, and inclusion mean in architecture. A more recently apparent component in egalitarian Danish design is the ethics of practice. Transparency and environmental considerations are two particularly pertinent ways that Danish architectural practitioners can demonstrate respect for their clients, project users, and other parts of the population who might be impacted by building projects. Bjarke Ingels and his firm BIG are an example of the reputation for ethical and environmental considerations in architectural practice among several contemporary “big names” in Danish architecture. An internationally recognized symbol of innovative Danish design, Bjarke Ingels Group describes their own work as “pragmatic utopian” and leans heavily into ideals of socially progressive public and private architecture.\(^6^2\) One of their landmark projects is CopenHill, or Amager Bakke, a new waste-to-energy plant in Amager, Copenhagen (2011-2019). A replacement for an older waste-to-energy plant designed for utility

company Amager Resource Center, CopenHill seeks to establish a link between public infrastructure and the social life of the city around it. The plant converts waste into “clean energy” to provide much of the region’s electricity and heating (Fig. 28-30). Aiming to underscore the importance of environmental ethics in contemporary architectural practice while demonstrating the variety of ways infrastructural architecture can serve the general public, the architects aspire for the work to “[embody] the notion of hedonistic sustainability while aligning with Copenhagen’s goal of becoming the world’s first carbon-neutral city by 2025.” With a climbing wall, hiking trail, and most notably for the very flat topography of Denmark, a ski slope, BIG sought to create an exciting, experimental, exotic experience, highlighting the possibilities for pleasure and recreation that are afforded by sustainable technology. They suggest to the Danish public – and the world beyond – that environmental considerations do not necessarily mean self denial and minimalism, and build on Copenhagen’s carbon-neutral goals to gain credibility as part of a wider, environmentally progressive movement.

Additionally, the visibility in the design of the project aligns with the progressive practical ethics of transparency in “green” projects. Visitors can tour the facilities, and the use of glass all over the project intentionally symbolizes an openness and trustworthiness on the part of ARC while also actually providing peeks at the technology used by the plant. The project, named World Building of the Year at the World Architecture Festival in 2021 and nominated for a Mies van der Rohe Award in 2022, makes the Danish architectural scene a global point of pride and discussion and significantly contributes to the contemporary Danish reputation for ethical

65 Ibid.
design ideals and progressive architectural values.\textsuperscript{66} The climate focus, accessibility and transparency to the public, and innovative idealism promote the user-driven design ethos and demonstrate a more contemporary kind of egalitarianism which addresses current concerns and seeks to leave future generations a world in the same or better condition than it is today.

\textbf{CHAPTER II:}

\textbf{Government Engagement with Egalitarian Architecture}

\textbf{Policy, Pedagogy, and Design for All}

Equal opportunity is at the core of Danish design, with its origins deeply rooted in the principle of physical accessibility for all. While the physical accessibility measures eventually became established in Denmark and contributed to Danish egalitarian design practices, the concept initially developed in the 1950s in the United States and the United Kingdom – countries that had a large proportion of disabled veterans after World War II.\textsuperscript{67} Since the 1950s, architects and accessibility advocates have continued developing and refining the language and standards in light of changing perceptions of disability. The American National Standards Institute’s “Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities” was the first national standard for accessible design.\textsuperscript{68} In the following years, architectural institutions and organizations promoting accessibility made further legislative progress with the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, and more. In 1997, architect Ron Mace and nine others wrote the seven “Principles of Universal Design” at North Carolina State University. Design


practitioners and accessibility advocates had grown concerned that the label “accessible” design created a barrier between people with and without disabilities. In an effort to emphasize that design should include considerations for people with mobility challenges and other disabilities but not single them out or separate them from everyone else, architects and advocates began searching for “universal” design principles that would serve all users. These principles were created to facilitate the “design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.”69 The evolution from accessible design to universal design marks a recognition of how important it is not to marginalize or ‘other’ people with disabilities and not to force separation into buildings based on personal identifiers. More recently, many designers have shifted their terminology again, from “universal” to “inclusive,” to maintain the nuance between making every user’s experience the same versus giving every user the same quality of experience while acknowledging and valuing individuals’ different abilities, preferences, backgrounds, and so on.

Denmark’s history of legislation for physically accessible design began several years after the American Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 but has been a relatively constant theme in architectural policy since then. Mobility directives were first introduced to construction policy with the Danish Building Act of 1972 and the Danish Building Regulations of 1977, and the idea of accessibility officially appeared in the Danish Building Regulations of 1995, five years after the United States signed the ADA into effect. About a decade later, Denmark ratified the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), affirming a national intent to consider “all kinds of citizens, regardless of age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, culture or...”

disability” in “the day-to-day environment”. Consequently, the Danish Parliament appointed the Danish Institute for Human Rights to “promote and monitor the implementation of the CRPD in Denmark.” In keeping with these responsibilities, in 2013 the Danish Institute for Human Rights published a report highlighting the gaps between Danish accessibility legislation and practice. Danish accessibility legislation requires newly built public buildings to have zero-step entrances, parking spots for people with disabilities, accessible restrooms and elevators, and “signage and assistive listening systems (room loops)” for people with hearing impairments.

However, implementation of such accessibility features is limited to new construction (so many historic buildings are inaccessible for people with disabilities), and even in such cases, some required features are missing. A possible reason for this gap, the authors suggested, is that sometimes not all parties involved in the building process know that it is their responsibility to make sure that accessibility regulations are observed, perhaps because, as of 2013, accessibility considerations were not required curricular components in architecture and engineering schools. Additionally, the report points out that builders may receive permits for construction—and therefore assume they have met all accessibility requirements—too early in the design process for the requirements to have been verified. The following year, the Danish government addressed the recommendations for improving implementation of accessibility standards.

The government addressed these recommendations and advanced the Danish Design for All architectural policy by publishing a strategic document in 2014 entitled “Danish architectural

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73 Stensgaard Sørensen and Justesen, “Come on in…,” 21.

74 Ibid., 22, 23.
policy - Putting people first”. In the document, the government outlined goals to promote democratic participation in architecture as well as other aspects of social and environmental responsibility. The broader, decades-long Design for All initiative builds on the foundation of Danish social values such as balanced opportunity, social trust, and shared cultural heritage to encourage physically accessible designs and other considerations of inclusion. Several other Scandinavian countries have similar welfare systems and goals to include people with disabilities, which assist in Denmark’s pursuit of these aims. The founder and president of the Danish Design for All network, architectural consultant Karin Bendixen, shared her thoughts on the progress of mainstreaming inclusive policies and designs in Denmark and the broader region in a lecture at the 2010 International Conference for Universal Design in Hamamatsu, Japan. She suggests, “Scandinavia’s common socio-political background has provided a common platform and led to a change in direction – from a purely social dimension, focused on solutions and design for people with disabilities, to a design topic that is associated with business potentials, sustainability, innovation and Corporate Social Responsibility.”

While the scope of inclusive design in Denmark has certainly developed since Bendixen’s 2010 lecture, she alludes to an important but easily overlooked point about the cultural context of the nation: inclusive architecture projects have moved beyond the social dimension as businesses and government bodies recognized the economic implications and benefits of progressive, responsible architecture.

On a smaller scale, the City of Copenhagen has also outlined goals of bringing all Copenhageners together to improve the city, and especially to come up with ways to incorporate

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the significant population increase they anticipate by 2025. The language the city’s webpage uses about “co-creation” suggests that the city is looking to promote an image of inclusivity as a “city with a rich and diverse urban life, where everyone can participate, regardless of age, social status, ethnicity, income level or disability.” Overall, Danish government policies increasingly emphasize both physical accessibility and social inclusion as essential principles for the design of equitable built-environments.

In architectural and design education, many Danes are also working to establish a more egalitarian, inclusive curriculum. Masahi Kajita, an Associate Professor at the Royal Danish Academy, writes about the growing prevalence of the topic of universal design in Danish design education. For instance, Aalborg University in Copenhagen now offers a Masters Degree in Universal Design (UD), while other design education programs offer specific UD courses. Masahi writes that debate remains about whether UD should be taught as a distinct area of expertise that future practitioners must “opt-in” to learning, or whether the consideration of universal design should be integrated into any design curriculum, making it a standard of practice. As of 2019, the Royal Danish Academy was working on integrating discussions of universal design into their existing courses so that students would consider these types of user needs and comfort throughout the design process rather than tacking on required accessibility measures at the end of a project. The Royal Danish Academy’s curriculum also seeks to provide students with practice engaging with a range of users and actively learning from their experiences. These examples illustrate the growing importance of universal design and inclusivity education in the leading educational institutions for architecture in Denmark.

that universality is especially emphasized as a method of inclusion, which corresponds with the Danish values of equality and similarity across all people.

**Model projects for an egalitarian society**

With the concept of “Design for All” established, this chapter concludes with a look at government-subsidized architecture projects which exemplify the inclusive design that the Danish government promotes. Four such projects, examined here as models of inclusive development, are the redesign of the Kofoed’s School (first school established in 1928, peak international adoption of the concept in the 1990s, renovated 2014-2018), Vandhalla Pool at Egmont Folkehøjskole (2013), the Musholm Holiday Center (2015), and Mediaspace in Aarhus (2015).79 These projects represent consideration of socially vulnerable populations, physical accessibility, and participatory design. The different types of egalitarian architecture illustrate the range of ways in which the Danish architectural field is working to fulfill the intent of Design for All.

The redesign of Kofoed’s School in Copenhagen contributes to Denmark’s social welfare goals and displays support for community members who need it. This inclusive, service-minded project is one that helps promote the welcoming image of Danish public design which the government seeks to advance with the Design for All initiative. Initially a small workshop school in a parish house in Copenhagen founded by Astrid and Hans Christian Kofoed in 1928, Kofoed’s School’s mission was to provide assistance and skills to unemployed men in the city.80 While the school has expanded and developed to meet changing needs and more diverse populations over the decades, it proudly states, “Men formålet er stadig det samme: At yde hjælp

80 Ibid.
The foreign influence of Kofoed’s School is also an important aspect of its legacy in the context of Danish egalitarianism. International visitors became frequent in the 1990s, and school staff shared their work by traveling abroad to professional conferences. A partner project was established in the 1990s in Dublin.\textsuperscript{82} In the 1980s and 1990s, a strong connection formed between the Kofoeds School in Copenhagen and educators in Poland, leading to the opening of a Kofoed’s School branch in Siedlce in 1998, similarly to provide assistance “for people with social problems like unemployment, homelessness, abuse, previous prisoners and young criminals.”\textsuperscript{83} Services included “therapy for abusers, consultation for women exposed to violence, legal consultation, telephone consultation, computer courses, English classes, courses in everyday law, and a clothes depot.”\textsuperscript{84} In fact, the programs were so popular that the Danish foreign office provided funding to move the initial Polish branch to a more spacious building only a few months after opening. That same summer, two more Kofoed’s Schools were created in Poland, solidifying the original Copenhagen program’s role as “example and inspiration”.\textsuperscript{85} Beyond Poland, the Kofoed’s School structure has been used (with adaptations for local needs) in other countries including Lithuania, Estonia, the Czech Republic, and Armenia. This Danish model for social assistance through educational facilities is now an international phenomenon,

\textsuperscript{81} “Vores Historie,” Kofoeds Skole.  
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 193.
and a key symbol of Denmark’s reputation for trying to provide equal opportunities for its residents in spite of different circumstances.

The redesign of Copenhagen’s Kofoed’s School (2014-2018) has recently renewed their international reputation. In particular, the renovations of the school emphasize programmatic flow and the division of spaces to foster a sense of security in students and allow individuals varying levels of public interface. The school, which has always provided skills and educational opportunities for “unemployed and socially marginalized citizens,” was previously more sheltered and isolated from the rest of the city, as seen in the formerly fenced and gated street-level facade (Fig. 31). While the first Kofoed’s School was established in 1928 and was intended to teach unemployed men practical skills to assist in getting a job, the most recent redesign of the school has been tailored to the twenty-first century student body and their more expansive skills- and community-based curriculum. This shift in curriculum corresponds with the new facilities; though the older Kofoed’s School shielded the student body from the public eye, the new street-facing facilities and glazed storefronts invite the students who have otherwise been disadvantaged or excluded from society to engage with their fellow Copenhagen residents. One of the school’s primary goals is to promote engagement between the city and the students. These goals are manifested in the renovation’s designated spaces ranging from open and public to sheltered and comfortable, a distinction which provides a retreat for students in moments of overwhelm. In pursuit of increased public interaction between the students and other locals, the facade of the school now features glass-walled shops, inviting people to shop and support the school’s mission rather than separating the already marginalized students further

from their peers (Fig. 32-34). The other key parts of the school’s renovated facilities are updated workshops to develop technical skills like carpentry or electrics, counseling and support spaces, and the new secondhand shops and café which are open to the public and provide the grounds for developing social and workforce skills.

To balance out the newer public aspect of the school, the architects provided shelter in the form of adjoining student-only rooms in certain departments and workshops, which have varying levels of public interface (Fig. 35, 36). The architects for the renovations had received early feedback from concerned staff and students who worried that there would not be enough secure refuge space for the students. In response, they developed the concept of having areas considered part of the “Base” (the private area where students can retreat), which broadens to the “School” (classrooms and workshops), which broadens to the “City” (the most public area which includes the shops and café). This means the students can retreat as needed in moments of stress or tension to adjacent spaces from the secondhand clothing shop, furniture shop, and bike repair workshop which are open to the public. The school is set up so each shop (“Furniture,” “Clothes,” “Bike,” “Café”) is suited to different students with various levels of patience and comfort with the public. The Furniture department, for instance, lacks a “clear distinction between workspace and public area,” which means the students working there must be more aware of the presentation of the entire space and of their presence within it to the public eye.88

Researchers Emma Nielsen and Sofie Pedersen studied the renovation process, proposing that this type of inclusive architecture – which facilitates skill acquisition and helps marginalized individuals rejoin the urban community – has “great potential for social work efforts for people experiencing complex social vulnerability.”89 Because of the shops’ adjacencies to private areas

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89 Ibid., 1.
and the levels of space for student and community member interactions, the researchers call the newly renovated school “not only a safe space for the students but also a place for the public to enter, shop, and browse.”\textsuperscript{90} They note the challenge of inviting the public into the school environment: while it can build community among the students and other city residents, it also means that these spaces may be less of a haven or refuge for the students.

Looking to gauge the practical success of the project, Nielsen and Pedersen spoke with students in 2022 to learn about their physical and emotional reactions to the renovated spaces. The resultant study includes thoughtful commentary about feelings of belonging versus alienation and the perception of ‘normal’ versus ‘wrong’. The authors concluded that the “liminal space created by the School-City integration—being both-and—contributes to overcoming the marginalization often experienced by students in other settings.”\textsuperscript{91} The students compared “feeling alienated and ‘wrong’ when entering commercial cafés or shops” to feeling at ease and knowing they have a right to belong in Kofoed’s School.\textsuperscript{92}

Two students’ reflections highlight the impact of knowing they can slip away for a moment as needed from tense social interactions with shop customers or sensory overstimulation. Erik said the newly bright and airy Clothes shop gives the impression of being “wrapped in a warm blanket,” presumably as a result of the atmospheric lightness from increased daylight as well as the convenience of the break room in the Base next door. Marc, who experienced the previous Clothes location as well as the new one, reported liking the new space because of its openness, and because “if everything gets a bit too much, it is easy to just sneak next door and take a break.”\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{90} Nielsen and Pedersen, “Enabling Spaces,” 11.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 13.
The physical and emotional user-experience is top of mind at Kofoed’s School. By having the Base area as a “subsetting of Clothes and only partially secluded,” students can momentarily withdraw from public interaction with customers and then return when they are ready.\textsuperscript{94} Previously, they would have needed to leave the Clothes section, which “would have meant a sharper demarcation line between participating and not-participating that, for John [a student], would make it more difficult to participate, as [he reported] it would feel riskier to him, or he would feel more exposed.”\textsuperscript{95} The authors noted the effects of being able to shift back and forth between spaces within Clothes and described the new layout as “supportive” in the way that “it contributes to develop John’s sense of mastery of new skills and otherwise challenging situations.”\textsuperscript{96}

Staff reports also recognize the overall feeling of belonging and normalcy in the renovated Kofoed’s School. While providing a safe and welcoming space was always part of Kofoed’s School’s mission, the new facilities affirm that students belong in a public-facing context that is more closely linked with the rest of the city. One staff member described how “here, the ‘normal’ enters the special, so to speak. And there is a big difference... in how exposed you feel, by entering a room where you basically do not feel like you belong.”\textsuperscript{97} Perhaps most crucially, the students can feel a sense of ownership and belonging in their space, where in other parts of the city they may feel out of place or wrong. The Kofoed’s School redesign exemplifies the benefits of recognizing the emotional experiences of users as a means of inclusivity.

Two contemporary projects which model Denmark’s egalitarian design efforts through their physical accessibility are the Vandhalla pool (2013) at a \textit{folkehøjskole} in Egmont, Jutland...

\textsuperscript{94} Nielsen and Pedersen, “Enabling Spaces,” 14.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 20.
and the Musholm Holiday Center (2015) in Korsør, Zealand. Both sites were designed to be non-isolating physical experiences for people with many different mobility needs.

Egmont Højskolen, home to the Vandhalla swimming center, is part of the broader Danish egalitarian tradition of *folkehøjskoler* (folk high schools), which are residential, “non-formal adult education” programs typically for students around ages 18 to 24. The schools emphasize equality between teachers and students and a cooperative, open-ended discourse as the basis of the curriculum. The Vandhalla pool represents, then, a physically accessible architectural project within the context of the established system of progressive public folk high schools. Singled out for its inclusion, the project is celebrated by the Danish Ministries of Culture and Foreign Affairs on a web page titled “Denmark on a journey to build a society for everybody.” Linking the physically inclusive pool to the *folkehøjskole* concept as a whole, the article asserts that the accessibility of this pool and the diversity of the school overall represent “the common principles of Danish folk high schools” including a “focus on ethics, enlightenment and democracy.” It is designed with ramps and railings descending into the water so students in wheelchairs and with other mobility assistance devices are fully incorporated into the use of the facilities, rather than being required to stay apart or seek permission for special accommodations (Fig. 37, 38). The promotion of this project and the discussion of Danish folk high school values are clear indicators that equal access is the architectural and social brand that the government is trying to shape for the whole country. The national identity of Denmark, as

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98 A Danish *folkehøjskole*, or folk high school, is a residential school typically attended by students aged 18-24, founded on pedagogical principles of the famous Danish philosopher and clergyman N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872). These programs are “non-formal adult education,” and emphasize cooperation and egalitarianism. The central website highlights the core ideas of “equality and mutual learning between teachers and students” and explains that “the classes are characterized by the free word, dialogue and an open curriculum which can be changed during the course.”; “What is a folk high school?” Højskolerne (The Association of Folk High Schools in Denmark). [https://danishfolkhighschools.com/about-folk-high-schools/what-is-a-folk-high-school](https://danishfolkhighschools.com/about-folk-high-schools/what-is-a-folk-high-school).


100 Ibid.
reflected in institutions such as the *folkehøjskole*, claims egalitarianism and equal consideration as fundamental tenets.

Similarly, the architecture firm behind the Musholm Center, AART, proudly states that the project “has received recognition as the world’s most socially inclusive building.”

This sport, conference, and holiday retreat is centered around non-stigmatized, fully inclusive facilities for recreation and wellness (Fig. 39-42). Their website emphasizes that Musholm is a place with “room for differences” so that every visitor may “feel a sense of freedom.” To this end, the resort has plenty of centrally located ramps, smooth thresholds, and amenities like an accessible climbing wall. The client, Danish Muscular Dystrophy Foundation, expanded Musholm so that the new resort’s “design embraces diversity by increased participation, interaction, collectivism, learning and social interaction, thereby helping to create a more diverse society.” With the resort’s efforts to embrace people of all abilities and backgrounds, Musholm supports Denmark’s Design for All agenda and provides imagery of people with different abilities engaging in physical recreation, portraying an environment where all people can interact and feel comfortable.

Finally, DOKK1 or the Urban Mediaspace in Aarhus (2014), designed by Schmidt Hammer Lassen Architects for Danish architecture and planning association Realdania, is a popular, well-known project promoted as the largest public library in Scandinavia and an innovative technological hub. The design process for this public library is what makes it inclusive; it was designed with user input from citizen meetings and online forums, and includes all kinds of public spaces such as cafes, exhibition rooms, media centers, and public offices (Fig.

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43). It is meant to be a community gathering space, where all are welcome and can access the resources they need, whether print, digital, or service-based. When DOKK1 was awarded Public Library of the Year in 2016 by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, it was especially exalted for its openness and the possibilities it presented for intergenerational and intercultural encounters. Industry announcements about the project all quote the architects themselves rather than providing new critiques, and the primary design strategy used to promote multicultural interactions seems to be the open plan and program that requires a progression through the open space to reach different activities, increasing the likelihood of chance encounters among visitors. Though media reviews are vague in commentary about how exactly the library’s design promotes multiculturalism and facilitates a feeling of belonging for a diverse population, these concepts are clearly top of mind in the Danish architectural sphere (and in the international conversation about Danish architecture), potentially skewing public opinion toward reading more progressive elements into a structure than are really there. Additionally, Mediaspace Aarhus is a center for continuing community involvement and participation. They actively solicit feedback from employees and locals about the state of the design of the Mediaspace and the continued development of the city of Aarhus, contributing to a conversation about ongoing progress and an open-mindedness to change that creates a more inclusive environment.

Kofoed’s School, Vandhalla Pool, the Musholm Center, and DOKK1 each include a dimension of egalitarian design which the Danish government wishes to hold up as models for

105 Ibid.
future architectural developments. They demonstrate consideration for marginalized individuals, mobility impairments, and community participation, and serve as physical reminders of the “Design for All” egalitarian ethos which the Danish design field (and architecture in particular) has come to represent over the better part of the past century.
PART II

Changing Demographics
Two notable trends in Denmark’s population over the last three decades – aging and immigration – have not only created new opportunities for egalitarian design practices, but also challenges. In the architecture field, this means practitioners are tackling challenges like diversifying housing for a generationally diverse population and creating welcoming public spaces that promote both integration and multiculturalism. While other efforts toward accessibility and inclusion are prevalent in the country, these two issues provide a useful lens through which to examine Denmark’s efforts at meeting demographic challenges through architecture. For instance, egalitarian ways of thinking that have long been considered strengths may end up limiting designers’ ability to recognize and respond to cultural differences among individual users. The next two chapters probe who benefits from Denmark’s brand of progressiveness and who might be overlooked, especially as the population of Denmark changes with aging citizens and increasing numbers of immigrants.

Aging is perhaps the more popular subject for design competitions and architecture student workshops, so the subject receives significant media traction. The topic has received attention from the Danish national research project on “Well-being and housing” in the early 2000s to a complete agenda for “Healthy Ageing” by Copenhagen-based NORD Architects.108 Immigration, however, tends to be a politically heated discussion in Denmark, so projects about multiculturalism, immigration, and diversity provoke a broader mix of reactions. In some cases, as illustrated through the aforementioned example of Superkilen, architectural attempts to recognize the growing immigrant population in Denmark are celebrated to such an extent that no room is left for assessing the project for its own merits and shortcomings. In other circumstances, there may be a lack of designs altogether that address the need to foster a sense of belonging and

welcome in a country with simmering tensions about immigration and the national concept of “Danishness”. Both the increasing proportion of elderly residents and the growing number of immigrants in Denmark demand design considerations like what kind of housing to build, how to include people of diverse ages and cultural backgrounds in public spaces, and what kinds of systems and expectations are inconvenient, exclusive or unappealing to these two groups and how to change them. Given architects’ inclination to respond to demographic challenges through interventions in the built environment, and Danish design history’s emphasis on the social values of inclusion, equality, and access, adaptations for aging and immigration become valuable ways of assessing Denmark’s socially progressive architecture efforts.

CHAPTER III: Designing for Generational Inclusion

With a strong healthcare system and active lifestyle values, the Danish population is living longer than before, and 19% of the country is over the age of 66 (compared to 13% in 1980), creating needs for housing that may differ from those of young families. Using case studies of elderly care residences and nursing homes for persons with severe dementia, this chapter looks at Denmark’s priority to make human-driven, inviting spaces to reduce isolation among older residents. Though age-conscious architecture is a newer concept, it draws on the egalitarian Danish design principles that emphasizes inclusion and equal access.

This chapter explores four examples of Danish built environment design to improve quality of life for aging residents. Three architectural examples of residential facilities – FutureSølund in Copenhagen (2015-2026, estimated), Solgaven Senior Housing in Valby (2019),

and a nursing home for residents with dementia in Aalborg (2015 competition) – represent a range of approaches to meet the needs of the older demographic through multigenerational integrated housing, accommodations to increase independence and mobility, and attention to familiarity and memory. The fourth project examined here is a landscape design project at a nursing home that represents attempts to include Persons with Dementia (PwD) in participatory design processes (2006-2020). Questions raised in the discussion of these case studies include: How can designing multigenerational housing foster community among people with different life experiences? How impactful are projects co-created with people who have dementia? Are these projects inclusive because they are centrally located to reduce isolation among older people or because they recognize the importance of caring for the older generation with respect and genuine interest (recognition justice)? This discussion of the aging demographic landscape of Denmark establishes care for and recognition of elderly people as a main design priority in the Danish architectural field.

The question of aging has been part of the Danish design conversation since the 1960s, and corresponded with the development of the welfare system. In the contemporary period, practitioners have facilitated a move from originally more institutional facilities to residential buildings with more homelike environments. Architecture professor Jonas E. Andersson of Malmö University researched Danish architecture competitions from 1899 to 2012 focused on serving an aging population. In particular, he points out a correlation between the “development of the Danish welfare state” and increased numbers of design competitions for elderly users. The welfare systems Denmark established in the second half of the twentieth century are essential to the nation’s global reputation for liberally providing essential benefits and services to its residents. Many of these systemic changes overlapped with the increasing proportion of

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110 Andersson, “Architectural Competitions on Aging,” 76.
elderly residents in Denmark in the 1960s and 70s, when “the ratio of older people aged 65 years and older increased from about 10.6% of a 4.6 million population in 1960 to about 14.2% of a 5.1 million population”. With the precedent established of caring for its citizens and the specific needs of the aging population, more recent architectural solutions show an effort to move away from institutional architecture for the elderly and toward an increased quality of “homelikeness”, emphasizing care, comfort, and the humanity and dignity of the users. These projects demonstrate attempts to provide older residents with equal consideration and opportunities for increased quality of life as any other segment of the population. Practitioners are striving to break away from the modernist trend of spaces for the elderly and the sick that were industrial and institutional, rather than human-driven. Architect and researcher Terri Peters describes how the country, along with neighbors such as Finland and Sweden, is viewed as progressive in this type of architecture, “in contrast to the European and North American examples” which she cites.

The prevalence of the theme of aging in Danish design competitions illustrates how architects and students have been re-examining best practices for caring for the elderly population. The sheer volume of competitions (Andersson’s research identified 76 between 1899 and 2012 which “generated spatial prototypes for architecture for aging that placed increasingly greater attention on the older person”) and the dedication to experimentation and finding new solutions, implies that this is an area where Danish architects, government bodies, and private clients are committed to progress and continual improvement. In fact, nearly every major Danish institutional architecture firm seems to have a home for residents with dementia or an

111 Andersson, “Architectural Competitions on Aging,” 82.
112 Ibid., 73.
114 Andersson, “Architectural Competitions on Aging,” 73, 76.
elderly healthcare facility either in their portfolio or in the proposal, planning, or construction phases. Standout examples of Denmark’s movement for better designed places for aging are represented in the proposals submitted for the Sølund Retirement Community (2012-) in Copenhagen for client Samvirkende Boligselskaber (KAB), a cooperative housing company. Renowned firm Henning Larsen’s proposal, for instance, was hailed in Peters’ 2014 article on “Socially Inclusive Design” as an example of architectural design that was intended “to decrease the feeling of social isolation that so often comes with ageing and facilities for ageing.” Most entries, including the winning scheme by C.F. Møller Architects, sought to combine the diversity, social opportunity, and sense of community of an urban environment with the comfort of home (Fig. 44-47). Additionally, the proposals intended to destigmatize healthcare and make the building aesthetically appealing to signal that the residents are valued members of society who deserve a well-designed place to live.

Generational integration was top of mind in the winning proposal designed by C.F. Møller Architects; their residential scheme centered on a carefully arranged program that included a daycare, youth apartments, and residences for senior citizens. A lakefront development in Nørrebro, just across the bridge from central Copenhagen and its botanical gardens, museums, and Rosenborg Palace, C.F. Møller’s FutureSølund (currently under development) aspires to bring generations together in their urban housing and living spaces, increasing connection for populations that might otherwise become isolated. The project, a care center interwoven with the life of the city, designed with landscape firm Tredje Nature, engineering firms Bascon and Transsolar, and consultant Smith Innovation, is set to be completed in 2026, and will include the following ambitious residential and commercial programs: “360 nursing home units, 150 homes for young people and 20 homes for senior

citizens, a daycare centre, shops and car parking”.¹¹⁶ Labeled a “House of Generations”, the new neighborhood will prioritize integration and community (Fig. 48-50).¹¹⁷ Press releases proudly suggest, “It will set new standards for welfare, well-being, security and functionality, and be a place where senior citizens, young people and children not only live close together, but also supplement and benefit from each other”.¹¹⁸ For accessibility, the senior residences will be placed on the ground level with individual gardens, while functions expected to be busier and noisier will have other points of access. A semi-public courtyard titled the “Generation’s Square” is anticipated to serve as a point of encounter and community-building for all types of individuals (Fig. 51).¹¹⁹ The hopeful message of the project is that “Sølund creates its own green cityscape inviting children, young people, seniors and elderly to be involved in shared activities, inspire each other in the workshops and kitchens, or simply meet across age-divides in the numerous green spaces – and creates an environment where people in need of care are no longer excluded from urban life and distanced from their fellow humans.”¹²⁰ The project foregrounds environmental health and positive social engagement for children and the elderly, and people of all ages in between.

The emphasis on integration of elderly residents and citizens with varying care needs indicates a progressive attempt to address the social and emotional needs of the users in addition to their physical and logistical needs. The mixed generational spaces promote the equality that is so valued in Denmark while the diversified spaces and mobility considerations suggest a care for the individual user experience which has sometimes been overlooked in egalitarian Danish

¹¹⁷ Ibid.
¹¹⁸ Ibid.
¹¹⁹ Ibid.
¹²⁰ Ibid.
design. While Denmark is known for providing care services to its residents, the architectural
domain’s recent progress recognizes the importance of including diverse communities
(particularly in terms of age and ability) and seeks to take advantage of the contributions
different groups can make to community life rather than isolating and institutionalizing the aging
population.

Although the site for this new project is in the same location as the previous Sølund care
homes, the length of time needed for construction of FutureSølund is increasing tensions among
residents worried about the impact of the project. KAB’s CEO described it in a statement as “an
extraordinary and difficult project”. Construction began at the beginning of 2021, and while it
was initially projected to be finished by April of 2026, construction was paused due to logistical
challenges, creating indefinite delays in the final product. Additionally, residents have raised
concerns about the condition of the lakefront being affected by construction and redevelopment.
The Indre By (Inner City) Local Committee published a statement of meeting notes which
expressed apprehension about the construction destroying the lakefront environment; this is
especially relevant criticism because the development is in Nørrebro and will serve that
population, while the Indre By residents are the ones who will see the facade and the
construction from across the water. Additionally, the 2023 meeting statement expresses the
local committee’s request that the facade and roof meet the stylistic precedent of the surrounding
buildings in Nørrebro. Overall, residents seem to have aesthetic and logistical concerns about the
project. However, the primary issue is the stalled construction. The city needs places to refer
aging residents, and the lack of elderly homes in the area during the project is exacerbating the

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https://www.kk.dk/dagsordener-og-referater/Indre%20By%20Lokaludvalg/m%C3%B8de-09112023/referat/punkt-4.
need, rather than meeting it. Architectural designs to serve the aging population are important, but need to be put into practice. Ideally, the construction will restart soon and put into practice the designs which were so thoroughly planned to integrate elderly residents and other vulnerable and higher need populations into the city’s housing.

Accessibility for senior living communities has multiple dimensions. One type of accessibility physically allows residents (the users) freedom to move around the community. Another is accessibility to other people and to spaces beyond the residence. Because of its centralized urban location and mixed generational housing, FutureSølund is a prime example of this type of relative accessibility to other resources and spaces as well as to younger people for more diverse social engagement opportunities.

By contrast, the Solgaven Senior Housing project (2019) in Valby (a western area of Copenhagen) represents design strength in the physical autonomy it enables for elderly residents. Decreasing mobility, sight, and memory often mean aging people are more restricted in their movements so that they may feel overly dependent on family members or professional caretakers. For many, being limited by external forces or systems after so many years of independence can feel dehumanizing, infantilizing, or frustrating. Copenhagen-based engineering consulting firm KI recently completed the Solgaven Senior Housing project for AKB / KAB – the same cooperative non-profit affordable housing organization which is developing FutureSølund. With 26 housing units for seniors and 93 nursing home units, the residential community is affiliated with the Danish Society for the Blind and aims to facilitate the independence of senior residents and improve their quality of life. Specifically, the housing

125 “Om Solgaven Valby (About Solgaven Valby),” Boliger til ældre i København (Housing for the elderly in Copenhagen), Københavns Kommune. https://boligertilaeldre.kk.dk/plejehjem/find-plejehjem/solgaven-valby/om-os.
complex was designed to improve accessibility and mobility for visually impaired residents (Fig. 52-54). In practice, many design details contributed to this goal, implementing widely used accessibility measures such as handrails and sensory navigation to allow people to move freely. The site is also within close proximity to Copenhagen’s public transportation options, so the residents are well-connected to the rest of the city, adding another dimension of accessibility. The Solgaven Senior Housing represents an increasing awareness and priority of not only the needs of aging residents, but also their desires and experiences.

Practitioners are also exploring design strategies specific to people suffering from dementia, intentionally recognizing the dignity and worth of Denmark’s growing aging population. Projects like “Aalborg’s Dementia Nursing Home of the Future” (2015 competition) by architecture firm Friis & Moltke, foreground the safety and comfort of these individuals by paying particular attention to memory and familiarity. Among several projects for nursing homes in the firm’s portfolio at various phases of completion, this design belongs to the broader trend of attempting to construct spaces with a warm atmosphere that recognize and value the individual experiences of the elderly population. The firm states that “the goal… was to create a safe environment for sensorily and socially frail individuals, creating value in the lives of the people suffering from severe dementia and their close networks”. The emphasis on familiarity is crucial to those with memory or decline in cognitive processing, both for practical reasons and to improve the emotional experiences of daily life (Fig. 55). The progressive theme in the development of the Aalborg Dementia Nursing Home and other contemporary projects of this nature is compassion. While previous solutions may have been functional, current expectations

steer architecture for the elderly away from institutional or infantilizing designs and toward comfort and connection.

The recognition of aging individuals as valuable community members led a team of Danish researchers to investigate best practices for including persons with dementia in participatory design processes. The six researchers studied the case of “an interdisciplinary and participatory nature-based palliative rehabilitation intervention in a Danish nursing home for people with severe dementia” in their efforts to understand what participation strategies are most successful in dementia care communities.128 Previous studies indicated that nursing home gardens, including facilities for people with dementia, have not been used as frequently as intended. Reported factors in their underuse include physical inaccessibility, safety and risk concerns, and minimal training on proper use from the institutions for their staff. The interdisciplinary team involved in this project aimed to use participation as a way of creating spaces residents and their caregivers would actually use. The planning and design team included a physician specializing in patients with dementia, landscape architects, a physiotherapist, a public health researcher, and a former nurse who now works as a consultant in the health sector.129 While the senior residents with dementia were not in a condition to lead the design team, their participation and reactions were utilized as feedback mechanisms throughout the process. Their participation exemplifies an effort at inclusion within this specific set of circumstances.

The researchers worked to establish a method of participatory design with persons with dementia in the course of the study between April 2022 and September 2023.130 The phases of

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129 Ibid., 3.
130 Ibid.
pre-intervention, co-design, implementation, and post-intervention were used as evaluative points with interviews and other data collection to observe use of the garden, caregiver experiences with the design process and the final product, and overall use of the garden. The site, a nursing home in southern Denmark, sits on a social housing estate, and had recently undergone significant updates, including in the outdoor spaces, between 2006 and 2020 under C.F. Møller Architects. In preparation for their engagement with the nursing home, the researchers performed literature reviews on co-designing with persons with dementia and the effects of gardening on persons with dementia (Fig. 56). The design strategy invited participation by staff, residents, volunteers, and family members starting in the early phases “to ensure a successful implementation and anchoring of the project.” As crucial stakeholders whose buy-in is an important factor in the success and use of the gardens, staff were given the opportunity to share their thoughts, ideas, and experiences of working with the residents. Residents and their specific caregivers, other staff, and the design team all voiced their goals for the project. Specifically, during the co-design process, residents and their contact people participated in a set of several garden activities (including sensory and educational experiences) to help the research team understand their reactions and how the activities felt to them. This hands-on participation was facilitated based on the planning team’s takeaways from their literature reviews on participatory design and garden therapy for persons with dementia.

From their preparation, the researchers had some insights into how to involve persons with dementia in participatory design. Firstly, the “Persons with Dementia” (PwD) participated in activities alongside their contact-people or companions to promote comfort and security. Additionally, they hoped to evoke familiar experiences for the residents in the garden, as regular

131 Schmidt et al., “Study Design,” 5.
132 Ibid., 7.
133 Ibid., 9.
“tasks, hobbies, play, and other activities that have been a part of a PwW’s life, frequently affirm their identity.” Finally, PwD have a range of cognitive abilities, so researchers must “be adaptable, patient, and to provide different forms of participation”; the different activities varied in cognitive and physical requirements for participation so that residents with different circumstances could engage in the process. Given that, in this case, participants had ranging degrees of severe dementia (unlike many previous studies of co-design which included persons with mild to moderate dementia), the variety in ability and experience increased the unknowns in the design and evaluation of the garden. From their research on dementia care facilities, the team recognized the importance of staff engagement and investment in garden activities and skills. In practice, this meant that they ended up reducing the number of PwD who participated in design workshops, and increased the number of staff, with the intent that staff who felt connected to and excited about the space and activities would be more likely to create a positive, active experience for the PwD. Collaborating with staff to design a better environment for working with patients and, ideally, reducing caregiver burnout became a crucial learning from this experimental process. Pre- and post-intervention interviews gathered feedback from relatives, caregivers, and volunteers. This is a moment of recognition and inclusion for caregivers of aging individuals, too – a population which may sometimes get overlooked. While the goal of aging-centered design in Denmark is to recognize, validate, and improve the experiences of the elderly population, those who live and work with senior residents are essential to these communities and should not be undervalued as potential design contributors. The severity of a person’s dementia may limit them from providing the expected clarity of verbal feedback and suggestions, which the designers accounted for in their participation structure. Perhaps future studies might try to

135 Ibid.
136 Ibid., 11.
understand other ways to give the residents of dementia care homes more agency and ownership over the design of facilities and services meant for themselves, but this is already an area of strength in Danish design.

Overall, this new research on co-designing with persons with dementia contributes to the national conversation about how best to include and support Denmark’s aging population through architecture and the built environment, in keeping with egalitarian design values. In particular, co-design practices are increasingly popular as a way of treating users as contributors with valuable design input, balancing out some of the hierarchical dynamic between architect and user. Danish practitioners are invested in improving their research on designing for and with elderly people, and it shows in the conscientiousness of the new residential and care projects across the country. It is worth noting, though, that the elderly population served by these buildings is ethnically and culturally pretty homogeneous. Efforts to design for an increasingly multicultural Denmark represent an aspect of design with increased complexity.

CHAPTER IV:

Designing for a Multicultural Denmark

Denmark's population has historically reflected the country’s ethnically and religiously homogeneous roots. Recently, however, the global refugee crisis, climate concerns, and political instability in many countries brought waves of immigrants to Denmark, and the immigrant population has quintupled over roughly 40 years, from 3.1% in 1984 to 15.4% in 2023.137

Danish reactions to immigration have been mixed. A particularly vocal anti-immigrant segment of the population has gained power in the political far-right through the Danish People’s

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Party. The Washington Post suggests that this group capitalized on the popularity of the welfare state by saying “that Denmark’s success was a result of its homogeneity – that protecting the welfare state required protecting ‘Danishness’.”\textsuperscript{138} Recent decades of strict asylum policies and deportation laws represent one aspect of the range of reactions, and can trace roots back to ideas of nationalism, insularity, and an effort to preserve Danishness as established in an earlier chapter. In contrast to the fear and criticism that permeates the discourse around immigrants and refugees in Denmark, many design practitioners are trying to build spaces that promote a more integrated sense of community, such as affordable housing in Copenhagen for refugees.\textsuperscript{139} The Danish architectural field represents the efforts at inclusion of new members of the population as well as the complexities of these mixed responses to immigrants and an increasingly multicultural Denmark.

The idea of belonging is intimately intertwined with Danish egalitarian principles. Egalitarian buildings and spaces are intended to be not only physically but also socially inclusive; the Danish Design for All architectural agenda supports this design philosophy and considers belonging as integral to inclusion. Social inclusion has many possible forms, but generally means fostering a sense of equal participation and ownership among users and inviting them to feel welcomed, represented, and comfortable. Neighborhood divisions and urban geography provide key context for the inclusive potential of an architectural project. Biases, emotional associations, and rhetoric not only influence the metaphorical image of a physical area, but also impact how users are conditioned to experience a space before they even enter it. To that end, it is useful to explore how the concept of belonging has been used in the design of urban settings in Denmark to understand the circumstances surrounding contemporary public


architecture projects. Additionally, a focus on belonging automatically introduces the possibility of exclusivity or separation, based on who is included and who is not. Studies on belonging and inclusion in Denmark and architectural projects that prioritize these concepts exhibit the tension between appreciating difference and exacerbating exclusive stereotypes.

The recent Urban Belonging Project in Copenhagen exemplifies the conversation around neighborhood stigmas in Danish cities, especially in neighborhoods with large immigrant populations. It was developed as a collaboration with Aalborg University Copenhagen, Gehl Architects, IT University Copenhagen, Techno-Anthropology Lab, and Visual Methodologies Collective. The collaboration invited participants of different ethnic backgrounds, socio-economic statuses and physical and intellectual abilities to share their perception of the city. Participants were asked to walk through the city, take photos, and make notes as a method of storytelling. This way of understanding the urban environment through individuals’ experiences is a variation on the concept of mental mapping popularized by Kevin Lynch in the 1960s with his book *The Image of the City*. According to Visual Methodologies Collective “the result is a unique catalogue of photos, maps, and data visualizations of Copenhagen” which expresses individual stories but also reveals patterns of shared experiences, highlighting instances of belonging alongside moments of exclusion and discomfort. This innovative combination of storytelling and data representation links collective understandings of the city with the unique, individual nature of the urban experience. The existence of such an initiative indicates the growing popularity of professional and scholarly dialogue about inclusivity and belonging in urban spaces. However, although it offers insights on prioritized and overlooked

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140 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press (1960); Mental maps of places link geography with perception, memory, and behavior - people use visual cues and spaces in the city as landmarks for physical navigation, but these spaces and sights are also tied to emotional experiences.

groups of people in the city’s current design, the data gathered from the Urban Belonging Project has not yet been directly used for urban design or architecture projects in Copenhagen.

Two similar studies, also reliant on community participation and reflection, sought to identify types of belonging and map experiences of residents from different ethnic backgrounds in Aalborg, Jutland. One group’s 2016 study on “Zones of Belonging” presents mental mapping as a tool to gauge belonging. Using ethnographic interviews in conjunction with demographic and survey data, the researchers looked to characterize different areas of the municipality of Aalborg (as stable or turbulent, increasing or decreasing in population and in wealth, strong communities or isolated pockets, and so on), relying heavily on resident reports of attachment or lack thereof to their neighborhoods and of experiences relating to belonging or exclusion. The researchers note Aalborg’s transformation “from being a heavy industrial town to an economy based around knowledge, high technology and research within a very short span of time” and its closeness to “the rural hinterland.” Notably, their results indicated that neighborhood dynamics were “reported as less important... in the inner city, where we find a demographic zone in transition, the lowest socioeconomic status, the youngest segment of the population, and in the localities where we find alienated forms of belonging.” Their goal was to understand feelings of belonging and ownership of places in the city as generated by social interactions. The researchers cite past studies which suggest that while cities tend to be holistically diverse, urban segmentation creates subgroups and neighborhoods that are more homogeneous, leading to stereotypes and isolation between different areas. The same research team recalls how they defined belonging in a 2013 study as “more than just a question of psychological processes of

143 Ibid., 24.
144 Ibid., 2.
145 Ibid., 4.
place attachment, symbolic associations with home, or the existence of a local community” but rather as “a product of the relations between the dimensions of people, place, and mobility.”

Through the demographic analysis and ethnographic interviews with residents of Aalborg, researchers found that while many residents did feel belonging in terms of a connection to their community, residents of neighborhoods with social housing also felt the negative impacts of territorial stigma.

Similarly to the 2016 study, a pair of Danish sociologists, Jensen and Christiansen, conducted interviews with Aalborg residents about their associations with their surroundings, culminating in their 2012 publication which focused specifically on stereotyping and belonging in the Aalborg East neighborhood. This other Aalborg study presents the challenges territorial stigmatization (in the case of Denmark, rooted in cultural racism) poses to egalitarian and inclusive built environments. The theory of territorial stigmatization was created by Loïc Wacquant, who used his theory to compare neighborhoods in Chicago and Paris. Within Wacquant’s framework, territorial stigmatization “is primarily driven by negative and stereotypical media representation and results in a ‘symbolic demonization’ of such areas;” as a result, residents “deny belonging” and “distance themselves from the area and their neighbors.” Applying the concept of territorial stigmatization to Denmark has its drawbacks, as it did not originate within Denmark’s cultural context. Scholars like Janet Abu-Lughod have questioned the wisdom of using Wacquant’s perspective uniformly in different countries and cities with their own historical contexts and social dynamics, while others, like Swedish scholar Ove Sernhede, suggest that this framework can indeed be applied to Scandinavian contexts.

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148 Ibid., 76, 77.
Jensen and Christiansen also push back a bit on Wacquant’s perspective, questioning the implication that residents of underprivileged neighborhoods lack agency and simply absorb the messaging about them. Instead, they say that the residents of Aalborg East internalize “not the discrediting [of their neighborhood] itself, but rather the awareness of being discredited.”

Though they are interested in the stigmas associated with space and residents, they note that ideas of territorial stigmatization have the potential to underestimate people’s autonomy and sense of self.

The 2012 Aalborg East study starts with a striking moment of conversation with a potential interviewee, Paul, whose immediate response when they asked about his neighborhood was “Is it about how negative it is?” The researchers note that Paul’s instinctive suspicion represents residents’ awareness of how outsiders perceive their neighborhood. Anecdotally, community members are well aware of the stigmas associated with their communities, though the researchers note that “Empirically, no clear-cut internalization of territorial stigma can be identified in our data, although some interviewees appear ambivalent towards their area of residence.”

Aalborg East, in northern Jutland, has an immigrant and immigrant-descended population of 18%, with residents of Somali, Palestinian, Kurdish, and Turkish heritage, among others. Surveys of Aalborg residents found that many people who do not live in the neighborhood have a low opinion of it, while a majority of people actually living in the neighborhood list it as one of the top two places they would like to live. Local media frequently publishes stories about crime in Aalborg East or about problems that need to be “fixed.” Notably, the crime, the

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150 Ibid., 74.
151 Ibid., 75.
152 Ibid., 78.
misbehavior, and the negative stigmas reported about the neighborhood are very frequently
associated with immigrant men, contributing to a cycle of stereotyping and blaming marginalized
groups in society. Jensen and Christiansen write, “The process of territorial stigmatization of
Aalborg East draws much of its power from the intersectional working of age, gender and
ethnicity, in the sense that it relies on discourses about the stereotypical criminal, young, black,
ethnic minority man.”¹⁵³ The authors unpack the idea of “cultural racism” in Denmark which
accompanied an increase in the immigration population – many white Danes still view
Danish-born descendants of immigrants in ethnic minorities as ‘foreigners’.¹⁵⁴ This cultural
racism is linked with different attitudes about Danish religious and cultural unity, and necessarily
undercuts efforts to promote egalitarian multiculturalism. These two attitudes – an attempt to
integrate and appreciate a society comprised of individuals with different backgrounds and an
unwillingness to include anyone who seems not to fit traditional ideas of “Danishness” – are in
constant tension, and while many design projects aim to advance the former, people who identify
more with the latter sometimes limit the success of projects for multicultural inclusion.

Ironically, as the authors point out, Aalborg East still has an 82% “ethnic Danish”
population, so the immigrant narrative is often exaggerated. Interviewers found that while
residents were aware of the prejudices about their neighborhood, their experienced realities were
often quite different. Some residents even had misgivings about moving to the neighborhood, but
once they settled in felt safe and at home. A 22-year-old ethnic Dane reported, “‘My perception
has changed really much by living here. Before I moved out here, I had a lot of prejudices about
the area, because of all the problems and stuff that’s out here, and they steal. There are a lot of
immigrants and I had a lot of prejudices about that. But they have disappeared.’ (Interview, April

¹⁵³ Jensen and Christensen, “Territorial Stigmatization,” 82.
¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 83.
The association of immigrants with a particular space in the city and the negative connotations this young resident held until he actually lived there serve as a reminder that prejudices are more easily held in the abstract of the unknown. When people of different cultural backgrounds live in close physical proximity, the “othering” lessens because what was previously unfamiliar is no longer. It seems that in practical matters, such as getting reviewed by banks for credit, Aalborg East residents face more negative effects of the stigma when interacting with people outside the neighborhood. It affects their relationships with non-residents who make judgments.

There are internal tensions created by the territorial stigmas, too, though. Some ethnic minority groups make judgments about others, and some residents appear to buy into the “model minority” myth, trying to distance themselves from the perceived bad behaviors or qualities of their neighbors. The authors suggest the ambivalence of residents toward their neighborhood might be attributed to the higher numbers of people with ethnic minority backgrounds, so people feel less like they stand out in an uncomfortable way. Jensen and Christensen conclude with the hope that because they found residents to not have internalized the stigmas, there remains opportunity for increased “collective solidarity or local empowerment.” This study helps illustrate the struggles with cultural racism in urban areas of Denmark with ethnically diverse populations. As demonstrated, the concepts of belonging and inclusion are part of the national scholarly discourse in Denmark, particularly at an urban scale. Where the disconnect seems to lie, however, is between findings at the urban scale and architectural practice. The latter remains

156 Ibid., 88.
157 Ibid., 89.
158 Ibid., 90.
largely focused on physical accessibility and generational integration, while the needs of marginalized cultural groups (ethnic minorities, for example) are seldom addressed.

While Danish researchers have been identifying urban dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, solutions to these social divisions are less prominent. However, there are several highly publicized exceptions to this rule, in which public urban spaces are proposed as socio-spatial interventions. Even award-winning projects targeting the needs of immigrant groups are susceptible to stereotyping, though. Two particular interventions examined here – Superkilen (2010-2012) and Mimersparken (2012) – are parks which represent well-intentioned efforts to integrate disparate cultural groups but which have been unable to change the overall culture of Copenhagen and the rest of Denmark. These projects are worth comparing as two different efforts at inclusivity through public parks.

Superkilen, the park introduced at the beginning of this study that stretches through Copenhagen’s Nørrebro neighborhood as a swath of colors and patterns, was created with the intention of encouraging active play, community gatherings and meals, and a friendly transportation zone (Fig. 57, 58). Beyond its playful atmosphere, Superkilen’s strengths and weaknesses are directly linked to the national discourse about belonging, immigration, and multiculturalism. Admirers view it “as an exercise in extreme public participation” with representative symbols of the residents of more than 60 nationalities living in the surrounding area.159

The question that follows, though, is how much do representative symbols create a sense of belonging in a space, and when are they alluding to representational justice and inclusion without actually changing the dynamics of a space? In some ways, the critiques that Superkilen

meets its aesthetic goals more successfully than its social ones relate to the tensions already present in Danish egalitarian design. Superkilen is branded (through visual design, press releases, and social media) and marketed to world and popular media as inclusive and diverse. The park is an easily digestible approach to multicultural representation, where different cultural identities are portrayed by recognizable symbols and objects. This, too, illustrates a tension in egalitarian design: in order to accommodate people’s differences, a diverse range of identities have been reduced to symbols that may perpetuate cultural stereotypes rather than dispel them. On one hand, Superkilen moves away from the Danish social precedent of needing the population to be culturally homogeneous in order to create inclusion. The selection of objects symbolizes an understanding of the different people and experiences that make up the Danish population. On the other hand, the stereotypical symbols may make Danes with different backgrounds feel othered or like they are forced to fit in with a generalization about their heritage.

Superkilen shows the strengths of Danish egalitarian design in its geographically accessible, open, visually appealing design. However, the critiques of the park represent some of egalitarian Danish design’s limits as well. For instance, designers are still experimenting with depth of representation and appreciation as the architectural field in Denmark transitions from inclusive design for a largely culturally homogeneous population to design for a population with different religious beliefs, ethnic backgrounds, and cultural heritage. Critics have suggested that while the park achieves breadth of representation with its wide array of symbols, its shortcomings are in the depth of their incorporation. Danish Design Review touts the previously mentioned solicited participation in the park’s design, from which suggestions the designers selected over 100 features to “reflect the ethnic diversity with designs inspired by things in home
countries or physically sought out and imported to be set up here." The features range widely “from manhole covers from Zanzibar to a Donut sign from Rochester, Pennsylvania and a Monkey-puzzle tree from Chile.” For Copenhagen, a city whose five most common groups of immigrants as of 2004 were from Turkey, Pakistan, Iraq, the former Yugoslavia, and Sweden, some critics have questioned how representative these benches, lampposts, and more objects are of the real neighborhood residents’ identities. Ethnographers Bettina Werner and Hilde Evensmo unpack the mixed response to Superkilen, looking at its marketed goal of celebrating Norrebro’s diverse population and the popular media response to it as innovative and appealing. Thoughtfully noting the nuance of such a space, they acknowledge that the park receives a lot of daily traffic and use while suggesting that perhaps reviews of the park are too quick to attribute this impact to “its citizen participation and use of cultural artifacts.” Indeed, it is important to recognize that it can be simultaneously true that the park is valuable and useful in the space and that the designers and media reviewers may overestimate the connection between the space’s use and the arguably limited community participation in the planning process. Rather than considering the specific group of users and their national origins, the designers relied on generic ethnic design artifacts, many of which do not represent the demographics of the neighborhood.

Additionally, it could be enlightening to do a kind of post-occupancy evaluation of the park with the kind of mental mapping data collection used in the Urban Belonging Project. The designers and city planning team involved might gain insights about the success of their participatory design efforts, and learn more about whether the neighborhood residents feel the

161 Ibid.
park represents them in a balanced way that makes them seen and valued as community members. Studies of the park in its current state would provide a look at whether the cultural symbols are a kind of representational justice and inclusion, or whether they change the social dynamics of Nørrebro. In particular, as Nørrebro is a neighborhood known for its immigrant population and sometimes viewed as carrying negative stigma, it is unclear if the park makes the area a more appreciated part of the city (due to its popularity and touristic status) or whether it marks Nørrebro further as the neighborhood of “otherness.”

The branding of inclusivity, too, which has long been a strength in national and global perspectives of egalitarian Danish design, raises potential issues for Superkilen as certain shortcomings were overlooked in the design process. Artist and author Brett Bloom, a famous critic of Superkilen, posits that “Copenhagen wants to brand itself as a place where the government and its people go hand in hand in making the city” but cautions readers to “consider how branding shapes our experience of public space.”\textsuperscript{164} Along with his criticisms of the closed participation process where residents suggested cultural artifacts for use in the park’s design, Bloom writes that “hubris” and financial motivations took priority over functionality for the users of the park.\textsuperscript{165} The design is, indeed, striking. However, paving almost all of a nominally green space appears counterproductive in the goals of providing space for outdoor recreation and community gathering to an urban audience. In fact, the residents specifically requested green space as part of their input on the park’s design.\textsuperscript{166} The description of the project in its nomination for a Mies Award proudly states that 45% of the park “is made up of hard surface while 55% is made up of soft surface such as plants, grass, and trees.”\textsuperscript{167} Though the residents


\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{167} “Superkilen,” EU Mies Award.
expressed a clear desire for increased nature through the park’s design, this press article praising the project seems to suggest that covering roughly half of the park’s surface in vegetation is above and beyond what could have been hoped for. Notably, spaces like the Red Square are completely covered in a material manufactured for indoor use that is extremely difficult to maintain, and dangerously slippery when wet (Fig. 59). Even many of the plants and structures imported from countries with different climates were not adapted properly to the environment, and became difficult to maintain. The colorful aesthetic of the space is memorable and impressive in many ways, but questions remain about whether the residents of Nørrebro really cared more about having an iconic, symbolic landmark or a user-friendly, physically and visually hospitable space. Urban design professional Dr. Jonathan Daly suggests that, “despite the global publicity and numerous awards, as an urban design scheme, Superkilen has largely failed to enable intercultural encounter in support of social cohesion in Nørrebro” as “a result of the divorcing of the design concept from the everyday life of Nørrebro’s multi-ethnic community. Put simply, Superkilen focuses too much on spatial representation and too little on spatial practice.”

While Daly concludes by emphasizing the shortcomings of the project, Superkilen is more complex in its contributions to egalitarian Danish design in a multicultural context than being a “success” or a “failure.” As a public project responding to the city’s need to represent an increasing range of ethnicities and cultures, Superkilen represents a more multicultural strand of egalitarianism – representing a range of identities rather than requiring a singular conception of Danishness for people to be valued equally – within Denmark’s branding and institutional framing of inclusivity-driven projects. The project also demonstrates how such efforts, while

successful in expanding the conception of the Danish population and what it means to be part of the Danish community, may fall short in terms of changing users’ everyday feelings of belonging or isolation.

In contrast to Superkilen’s focus on ionic cultural symbols from around the world, the nearby Mimersparken draws on the immediate neighborhood and local community to create a sense of place. Constructed in Nørrebro in 2012, Mimersparken, like Superkilen, was part of the local government’s urban renewal efforts and goal of increasing outdoor community recreation space. It was designed by Thing Brandt Landscape and Peter Holst Architecture & Landscape on land previously used by DSB, the Danish train company, and the site remains in close proximity to a train station and railway tracks (Fig. 60-62). Critic Claire Griffith juxtaposes Superkilen’s international selection of design elements with Mimersparken’s visual references to local neighborhood sites. Its five primary sculptures, shaped like hands, connect the various play and climbing equipment on the playground, and each displays maps of the neighborhood streets, grounding the park in its locale and welcoming community members to a place that represents the city they share (Fig. 63, 64). This play equipment alludes to the area’s significance as a transportation hub, which symbolically marks Mimersparken as a point of connection and interaction.

The two parks serve as valuable points of comparison in their attempts to bring the multicultural local Nørrebro community closer together. Both projects incorporate a variety of functions and furniture (sports areas, playgrounds, tables and benches, and so on), and have bold, recognizably colorful sculptural elements. However, Mimersparken is, overall, more muted in

172 Ibid.
color, blending into the surroundings and incorporating more permeable surfaces as pathways, such as dirt paths through green areas. Superkilen’s famous striped pavement and bright furnishings are signs of its overall focus on visual symbolism and BIG’s vision of representing the vast array of backgrounds and traditions which make up the daily lives of the people of Nørrebro, while Mimersparken’s more uniform, cohesive appearance illustrates an emphasis on inclusion through integration and identifying commonalities among the people who live there now. Copenhagen’s urban architecture addressing rising immigration levels questions the differences between representation and belonging. From one perspective, the variety of representation in Superkilen may be more inclusive, but it seems that perhaps Mimersparken may be more unifying to the varied residents of the neighborhood. Each approach to incorporating community residents has its intricacies, and their differences represent Danish architects’ attempts to seek new ways of understanding and including users through the built environment.

Recent Danish legislation regarding ethnically “integrative” urban planning adds another component to changing neighborhood dynamics and the built environment in Copenhagen. Since the construction of these two noteworthy parks which use design elements to celebrate the multicultural face of some Danish communities like Nørrebro, the government has created housing redevelopment policies apparently targeting neighborhoods with concentrated immigrant populations. A new law in Denmark from 2019 involves the dissolution of many housing estates; one CNN article suggests the law “aims to change the social and ethnic make-up of low-income projects.” Many of the residents being forced to move attribute this legal action to the government’s discomfort with so-called ethnic enclaves and housing estates with majority

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immigrant populations, especially as some of the housing estates which will remain have higher populations of White residents. Ostensibly a component of a plan to remove “ghettos” from the country and create a more ethnically mixed society, this redevelopment plan is highly controversial, and disruptive for residents who will be displaced (and if they refuse to move, they will be evicted). The language used by the Danish government in the policy and in demographic statistics in general defines a “ghetto area” as “one where the proportion of immigrants, and non-western descendents, exceed 50%” and a “ghetto” as one of these areas which also has “two of the following indicators: high unemployment, a conviction rate three times the national average, low income levels, or low education levels.”

Aside from the troubling use of charged language like ghetto, the housing estates targeted in this 2019 policy fall into these categories, meaning that a large proportion of the people displaced by this policy are immigrants. The concern is that the government does not want immigrant communities to be concentrated in specific areas; the stated reason is to improve intercultural interactions and avoid “parallel societies” within the country. This housing estate policy can indeed be interpreted as an attempt to integrate immigrants into other parts of Danish society – a housing-based alternative to public park interventions like Superkilen and Mimersparken. However, it also contributes to the stigma of areas with high numbers of immigrants as “ghettos,” places that are othered. From a critical perspective, the desire for cultural homogeneity as a facilitator of national unity is leading to the displacement of multicultural populations and an expectation that immigrants and their descendents will conform to pre-existing standards of Danishness. Overall, the recent housing policies in conjunction with urban park projects create a social strain, leaving residents wondering how the egalitarian values of Danish society fit in a society that is no longer ethnically and culturally homogenous.

175 John and Gargiulo, “Denmark Is a Liberal Paradise.”
The goals in contemporary Danish architecture of meeting the challenges posed by an aging population and the assimilation of multicultural communities intersect in the consideration of senior care for immigrants living in Denmark. A 2013 study citing data from the Municipality of Copenhagen about home care and residential nursing home care in 2007 and from Statistics Denmark suggests that aging immigrants were less likely than other elderly residents in Denmark to use care services.\textsuperscript{176} Municipality statistics indicate that a smaller proportion of immigrants use in-home carers or live in nursing homes than the proportion of older Danes who do.\textsuperscript{177} This may suggest these residents are relying more on family based care; author Eigil Boll Hansen questions, however, what accounts for this difference in welfare service use. One potential factor he proposed was a lack of information provided to non-Danes, or a disconnect about available services because of language barriers. A qualitative study in 2007 of immigrants living in Copenhagen suggested that “older immigrants and their relatives have limited knowledge of the availability of assistance from municipal elder care services;” more specifically, “They know that residential care and home care are available, but they do not know what the services consist of and how to obtain access to them.”\textsuperscript{178} Other factors the researchers suggested were that many immigrants are cared for by their relatives, or that they faced discrimination from case workers, or that the nursing homes are not familiar in terms of languages and customs – making adjustment especially challenging for people who are aging and may have memory difficulties.\textsuperscript{179} The overall trend of aging immigrants not using the care services available to them as much as older “ethnic Danes” is likely influenced by several compounding factors. From an architectural and design standpoint, however, it raises the question of whether nursing homes in Denmark are

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 50.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 42.
meeting the cultural needs and expectations of residents born outside of Denmark. In other words, is architecture for the aging creating equal opportunities for all elderly residents of Denmark, or are individuals with different cultural backgrounds being overlooked?

Based on several contemporary egalitarian architectural projects, it appears that the design fields have prioritized generational inclusion over multiculturalism. A crucial component to this disparity may be that challenges of “ageism” have been more easily addressed than those of cultural racism, because the elderly populations prioritized by new housing projects are largely from the same ethnic and cultural background. It is still ambiguous what design for an aging population of immigrants would look like; gauging by the small proportion of elderly immigrants who use Danish residential care facilities, it seems that Danish officials have not yet focused on dedicating resources to differentiating solutions to meet these needs. In this regard, the Danish government appears to be focusing on assimilation of migrants rather than adapting existing systems. Questions of integration and multiculturalism of course apply to other countries with growing numbers of migrants as well as those nations like the U.S. and Canada which are known to be based on immigrant populations. However, Denmark presents an interesting case through which to examine the intersecting design challenges of caring for an aging generation and promoting the inclusion of residents of different cultural backgrounds because of its unique design heritage, welfare systems, and tense national discourse surrounding religion, race, and immigration.
CONCLUSION

The Danish efforts at egalitarian design may be considered early experimentations representing how the architectural field has grappled with the question of inclusion as first a physical, then a social, interpersonal, and cultural issue. In this sense, Denmark offers a window into the redefinition of inclusive architectural practices worldwide. And yet, the Danish case is also distinctive in its origins and development within a broader social context of egalitarianism.

As outlined in the previous pages, egalitarianism in design can be elusive and multifaceted, and even contradictory. It can be associated with physical accessibility, or with objects and spaces meant to fit a “universal” body type and set of human needs, but can also mean design that creates a sense of belonging for users with different identities. The concept can be traced back to disparate discourses which began to intersect in Denmark in the 1960s. Among these are values of physical and financial accessibility, cultural norms surrounding taste and aesthetics, inclusion and belonging in the government’s Design for All policy, and utopian attempts at radical egalitarianism. These discourses affected design practices at scales ranging from individual products to public urban spaces. Despite the apparent disconnects between them, they stem from a commitment to the human experience of design.

The contradictions in Danish egalitarianism can be particularly challenging to reconcile. Denmark has a reputation for providing equal access to opportunities, welfare benefits, and infrastructure like public transportation and well-designed parks and public spaces. As the population and its needs have changed, architectural practitioners (supported by government funding and policies) have adjusted design processes to be more participatory and changed design outcomes to respond to the needs of different identity groups. They have effectively improved built environments for aging residents and integrated them into communities with other generations. They have not shied away from engaging with projects for their increasingly
multicultural society through a human-centered design approach. However, because their expertise in creating egalitarian environmental conditions grew out of a more homogeneous national context, their experimentation with multicultural inclusion reflects the broader national tension surrounding assimilation versus multiculturalism. Egalitarian design within Denmark has long been successful because practitioners had intimate cultural knowledge of Danish attitudes, needs, and values. With a shared value system, Danes designing within the Danish public context were more able to predict user reactions to their projects. However, as the national context becomes more varied by religion and other aspects of identity, Danish practitioners are experimenting with responses to changing needs in the built environment. This is not to blame designers or to claim that Danish designers have not successfully produced buildings of cultural and contextual sensitivity; among other examples, perhaps the most notable is Jørn Utzon’s design of the Sydney Opera House in Australia (1959-1973). Rather, the current challenge is within designs targeted for a national audience that can no longer be regarded as homogeneous. Anthropologist Tina Gudrun Jensen highlights the friction between positions of multiculturalism and assimilation in Denmark with the example of controversial cartoons in the media. While the arguments provoked by the cartoons are an apparently extreme example of the debate about equality versus difference in Denmark, public architectural projects like Superkilen and Mimersparken physically manifest the national discourse by representing different efforts at immigrant inclusion in the built environment.

The challenge in adapting Danish egalitarian design principles to fit a culturally diverse nation is particularly evident in the different levels of success between design projects addressing

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aging and those addressing immigration and multiculturalism. Recent demographic changes drove design practitioners to refine and reevaluate their approach to egalitarian design. However, despite designers’ propensity for innovation and reassessment, the multicultural belonging projects challenged them to treat egalitarianism in a way that recognized and valued differences rather than long-established principles of unity, sameness, and equality. Adjusting the elusive definition of egalitarianism to meet Denmark’s current and future needs will take more time and entail further investigation than permitted by the scope of this study. While such a development would require a willingness to adapt some of the design traditions that are deeply ingrained in the Danish national design legacy and international reputation, a new commitment to equity and to the recognition of difference has the power to compel this mindset shift.
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Image Credits

https://www.archdaily.com/286223/superkilen-topotek-1-big-architects-superflex. Photo Courtesy of BIG, Topotek1, and SUPERFLEX.

Figure 2  “Superkilen.” Aga Khan Award for Architecture. 

Figure 3  Ibid. AKTC / Kristian Skeie.

Figure 4  “Superkilen.” EU Mies Award: European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture. Accessed January 8, 2024. https://www.miesarch.com/work/2780. © BIG.


Figure 10  Ibid. Photo © Jens Lindhe.

Figure 11  Ibid. Photo © Torben Eskerod.

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Figure 13  Ibid. Photo © Torben Eskerod.

Figure 14  The People City. “Illusory Inclusion in Copenhagen’s Superkilen Park.” Medium, October 14, 2018. 

Figure 15  Daniel Rasmussen, Visit Copenhagen, “Public transport” 

Figure 16  Rådhuspladsen Station, September 15, 2019. Wikimedia Commons Creator: Orf3us. 
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Figure 20  Stjernegaard Fotografi. Arne Jacobsen. https://arnejacobsen.com/works/the-ant/.

Figure 21  Arne Jacobsen. Original is found at the Royal Danish Library - Danish National Art Library. https://arnejacobsen.com/works/the-egg-2/.

Figure 22  Norm Architects. Arne Jacobsen. https://arnejacobsen.com/works/the-swan/.


Figure 24  New York Times: “After 50 Years, a Danish Commune is Shaken From Its Utopian Dream.” December 5, 2023. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/05/realestate/christiania-denmark.html.


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