Assembling Welfare Landscapes

Lessons from Danish Post-war Social Housing

Jessen, Asbjørn; Tietjen, Anne

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Asbjørn Jessen[a] and Anne Tietjen[a]

[a] *Section for Landscape Architecture and Planning, Department of Geosciences and Natural Resource Management, University of Copenhagen, Rolighedsvej 23, 1958 Frederiksberg C, Denmark*

Abstract

Post-war social housing estates are commonly problematised as socially and spatially segregated places in European cities. Physical transformations – often framed as 'upgrading' – are considered to stimulate better social and spatial integration: many estates are being 'opened up' by converting open spaces into public spaces, other estates are being densified to achieve a better social mix. In these transformations, social housing's designed landscapes play a central role, but often with no awareness of their inherited socio-material qualities. This paper makes a case for reappraising the heritage of open spaces in post-war social housing as *welfare landscapes* to inform current debates, policies and practices regarding social housing and future heritage making in its renewal. We look back at the development processes of three paradigmatic Danish estates which literally materialised the emerging welfare state by concrete, asphalt, plantings and earthworks. Guided by actor-network theory we recount how their welfare landscapes materialised as socio-material assemblages. We show that non-human things played a crucial role in the development of welfare landscapes which focused on child welfare and community development, offered architectural and ecological diversity, and co-shaped the urban landscape beyond the individual estates. Understanding welfare landscapes as socio-material assemblages does not only acknowledge the role of non-human things in their historical production. Ultimately it also calls for the inclusion of the welfare of non-human species and may offer inspiration for developing future welfare landscapes for more than humans.

Contact Details:
Asbjørn Jessen
asj@ign.ku.dk, +45 28 26 49 05

Anne Tietjen (Corresponding author)
atie@ign.ku.dk