Interpreting 'the social'
Exploring processes of social sustainability in Danish non-profit housing

Langergaard, Luise Li

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Abstract

The article addresses the 11th UN sustainable development goal about sustainable cities and communities. It analyses how notions of 'the social' come across in relation to social sustainability in a case study of a renovation project in the non-profit housing sector in Denmark – a project which has social sustainability as a core concern. The process is analysed by distilling various understandings of 'the social' appearing in the project and herein the different types of participation that these understandings relate to. The analysis demonstrates that working with social sustainability and the aims and ideals associated with it is not straight forward, since 'social sustainability' is not a tangible target, but rather something which is reinterpreted and subject to changing perceptions along the process. The dynamic and changing character of 'sociality' suggests that social sustainability requires a focus on the conditions and on-going processes and interactions, which continuously constitute the social life and relations between residents in a neighborhood. Thus, a careful attention to context is suggested. In this manner, the article adds to empirical knowledge about processes organised to strengthen social sustainability in urban environments and contributes theoretically with a nuanced understanding of what the 'social' denotes in the context of sustainable development.

Key words: Social sustainability, participation, non-profit housing, urban planning, resident democracy

Introduction

Sustainable development is an influential conceptual framework for planning, housing and urban policy (Dempsey et al, 2011) and the 11th UNs Sustainable Development Goal from 2015 is about Sustainable Cities and Communities, with the aim to make 'cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' (UN.org, 2018). Although, the challenges of reaching such a goal may vary substantially depending on where we are in the world, sustainable places and cities are relevant concerns to urban planners across the board. Measures for sustainability in relation to building and renovation are well integrated in policy, architecture and urban planning practice; but

mainly in terms of economic and environmental sustainability. Social sustainability, even though the concept receives vast attention in planning and urban development studies, is still an underdeveloped, ambiguous and often vague concept (Woodcraft, 2012; Vallance et al, 2011; Manzi et al, 2010, Boström, 2012; Parra, 2013). Thus, there is a need for more rigorous approaches to defining and theorizing social sustainability, but also for research paying closer attention to discourses of social sustainability and how the concept is deployed in planning practice (Woodcraft, 2012). Several studies attempt to develop indicators of social sustainability (e.g. Magee et al, 2012) or aim to create an overview of contributory factors, both physical and non-physical. Amongst the latter are for example social capital, social interaction, sense of community and belonging, social interaction, participation and local democracy (Dempsey et al, 2011; Woodcraft, 2012). This article, rather than looking at indicators, focuses on the processes of working with social sustainability and zooms in on the participatory aspects of these – as these processes are underpinned by certain ideas of what constitutes the social dimension of social sustainability. This article hereby illustrates ways that the concept becomes part of practice in a housing context. Hence, the aim is to contribute to discussions of social sustainability by clarifying possible understandings of the social dimension and to elucidate the challenges that might appear in attempts to manage these social dimensions.

The project studied for the article represents an effort to systematically integrate concerns for social sustainability throughout a planning and building process. The case study researches participation and collaboration processes in relation to the renovation of a non-profit housing dwelling in the Copenhagen area. Since the beginning of the renovation project it has been an aim to give priority to the social characteristics of the dwelling and to develop a method for how to deliberately include the social dimensions in renovation (and building) of dwellings and outdoor areas. The dwelling was up until the renovation inhabited by people with physical disabilities, whereas the renovated building is inhabited by three types of residents: young people without disabilities; elderly people without disabilities; and a people with physical disabilities. The specific aims of the project and the participation processes have taken different forms and been subject to different interpretations over the five years course of the project. The case exemplifies practices 'around' social sustainability that have the aim of promoting community, inclusion and joint responsibility through the built and the social environment. The study hereby adds to empirical knowledge about how social sustainability is interpreted and guiding practices in local settings in which there are well-established democratic platforms for decision making; in particular how these platforms can support

processes as well as the challenges that may appear when working with an ambiguous concept, such as social sustainability.

In the following sections, I first present the article's theoretical background in social sustainability in urban studies and the ideas of participation and the social, which will be employed in the analysis. Then, I present the Danish non-profit housing sector as a context for the case, and subsequently the case and case study method are presented. This is followed by the analysis of the case, and a discussion of the implications of the research.

Theoretical framework

Social sustainability and the urban environment

In planning studies and studies of sustainability of the built environment, we often find a distinction between economic, environmental and social sustainability. That sustainability is not merely considered to be an environmental concern, but also includes a social dimension, is often articulated by the use of the term 'social sustainability' (Dillard et al, 2009; Griessler and Littig, 2004; Magis and Shinn, 2009; Langergaard, forthcoming). As a distinct concept, social sustainability is a relatively recent addition to policy discourse as well as academic literature about sustainability. Even as part of the concept of sustainability as a tripartite of environmental, economic and social sustainability which was introduced with the Brundtland report (WCED, 1987), the social dimension has been receiving considerably less attention than the other two (Woodcraft, 2012; Murphy, 2012). Over the latest decades a field of research has emerged, which focuses explicitly on social sustainability, not merely as a precondition to or as part of economic or environmental development, but also as a category in its own right.

What this social dimension more precisely encompasses is, however, not always clear, and the concept is sometimes characterised as "in chaos" and "undertheorized" (Woodcraft, 2012: 29; Vallance et al, 2011; Boström, 2012). Certain dimensions do, nevertheless, appear across the various definitions of social sustainability in urban planning and housing studies. Often, they include social equity, including access to key services and facilities (Chan and Lee, 2008; Dempsey et al, 2011; Murphy, 2012; Parra, 2013), the sustainability of community itself (Dempsey et al, 2011), social inclusion, and social cohesion (Novy et al, 2012; Murphy, 2012), and finally participation and local democracy (Dempsey et al, 2011; Murphy, 2012; McKenzie, 2004; Woodcraft, 2012). This article focuses in particular on participation and on the processes of work

with social sustainability. Rather than viewing social sustainability as a static end goal, the aim is to understand how platforms, institutions and practices continuously can contribute to strengthening and maintaining community and how the non-profit housing sector provides a specific participatory context. Thus, the participatory processes are considered to be crucial for the attempt to promote social sustainability in the specific case.

Participation and the 'social'

In order to understand the 'social' dimension of social sustainability it is useful to include conceptions of the social developed elsewhere, for example in sociology and philosophy. Along the same vein, participation and local democracy has been addressed in a number of other disciplines, such as political philosophy (Young, 2000), sustainability studies (Agger, 2010) and housing studies (Jensen, 1997, 2006; Millward, 2005), which could be useful to include. Despite being a key dimension of social sustainability, participation is rarely unfolded theoretically, or empirically, in the research literature of the field. Thus, concepts of democracy from e.g. civil society studies, concepts of social capital or social cohesion, or about local democracy might be helpful for analysing the case.

In the literature on social capital, Somers (2008) addresses the notion of the 'social' by distinguishing between two understandings; a relational one, which she associates with sociology, and an aggregative one associated with utilitarianism. The sociological notion she describes as irreducibly social, one in which social relations are external to the individual mind, as a "social fact", and in which individual mentalities are social and relational. The aggregative utilitarian view, on the other hand, is methodologically individualistic, and views the social as constituted of individuals who relate to each other as pre-social and autonomous entities. The social is represented as an "aggregate of pre-social intentionalities", a view which has manifested itself in rational-choice theory and social exchange theory (Somers, 2008: 222). Social exchange theory lies between micro-economics, psychology (Emerson, 1976) and sociology. In short, "Social exchange theory assumes self-interested actors who transact with other self- interested actors to accomplish individual goals that they cannot achieve alone. *Self-interest* and *interdependence* are central properties of social exchange" (Lawler and Thye, 1999:3). This can be said to be an economic analysis of non-economic situations (Emerson, 1976).

A distinction between aggregative and integrative is also found in democracy theory, where integrative is also sometimes referred to as deliberative. The distinction between aggregative and deliberative indicate different understandings on how public opinion or political preferences are formed. Deliberative understandings of democracy see public opinion formed through deliberation as the central democratic activity, whereas aggregative democracy theory relies on political mechanisms, which aggregates individual preferences or interests, similar to an aggregation of preferences in the market. Here the voting act itself is a central act of democracy, rather than the processes of opinion formation (Habermas, 1996). In this model, democracy is viewed as a competitive process where politicians pursue their own interests, adopt policies that buy them votes and act strategically in order to stay in office (Young, 2000). Aggregative democracy models see citizens' private preferences as the main input to democracy and no particular democratic engagement or civic virtues are required of the citizens (Habermas, 1996). Where the political, or public will, in the deliberative model is seen to be constituted through the political process, the aggregative model relies and already formed, pre-political interests.

A last understanding of the 'social' to be included here is that of the social model of disability studies. The social model "emphasizes that although individuals may suffer from functional impairments, disability is caused by the way society exposes individuals to unresponsive or hostile environments" (Jönson and Harnett, 2015:1). The model uses the term disability not to refer to the impairment of the person, but to the disabling barriers of prejudice, discrimination and social exclusion, and thus to the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by society with physical or cultural barriers (Morris, 2001:2). This understanding is developed with a different starting point than the other notions of the social mentioned above. It is developed by the disabled movement as a way to understand and fight oppression and thus to demonstrate how social and physical environments inhibit and exclude certain people. The understanding of 'social' thus also include physical barriers to equal interaction and inclusion and is therefore relevant when we try to understand the relationship between the social and the built environment.

Case study in the Danish non-profit housing sector

Before presenting the methodology and the case, the non-profit housing sector in Denmark will briefly be presented to demonstrate the relevance of this sector for studying processes of social sustainability.

Approximately, 20 per cent of the Danish housing mass is constituted by non-profit housing, but it is unevenly distributed across different municipalities with a tendency to a larger concentration around big cities (Landsbyggefonden, 2015). The term *non-profit* housing seems more accurate in a Danish context than *social* housing, because only part of the sector functions as social housing (Hansen and Langergaard, 2017). Still, the sector does have an important societal role as the municipalities dispose over approximately 20% of the apartments, which can be used as social housing for citizens with social needs, elderly people or people with disabilities.

Danish non-profit housing has a strongly institutionalized resident democracy, which is unique from an international perspective in regards to the extent of the residents' influence on decisions about the housing area as well as on financial decisions about the departments (Jensen et al., 1999). Resident democracy is legislatively regulated and the latest law of 1996 widened the scope of democratic decision-making by opening up for new modes of participation and by making it possible to delegate competences and tasks to subgroups of residents (Jensen et al., 1999). The aim was to enhance responsibility and engagement towards physical maintenance, communal estate affairs and social integration (Jensen, 1998). In this sense, the change in legislation represented a renewed emphasis on self-organization and participatory democracy and participation both inside and outside the established democratic organs and activities of the sector (Hansen and Langergaard, 2017). The main official democratic platform is the residents' board. In the departments, residents elect members of the "residents' board", who cooperate with the employees of the housing association and act as spokesmen on behalf of the entire department, especially concerning the budget. Thus, the housing associations are administrative institutions that provide services to a number of autonomous departments functioning as independent economic entities each running their own budget. They manage, rent, build and maintain the dwellings as administrative bodies (Jensen, 1998, 2006; KAB, 2016). Tenants in each department exert collective ownership of the department. Therefore, the constellation of a democracy of residents is a key brick in understanding the role of residents within the sector, and the budget is ideally composed as a collaborative act among residents and associations. Studies of resident democracy in Denmark indicate that a prime motivation for residents for participating is to take responsibility for the area in which they live and to develop the departments (BL, 2016).

Methods and data collection

The article builds on a qualitative case study of a renovation project in the Danish non-profit housing sector. The project was initiated in 2013 and had from the beginning an explicit aim to improve social life, sense of community belonging and liveability in the dwelling itself as well as in the local area. The idea was to create homes and a place that was more than 'just a place to live'. It had an experimental approach from the beginning and aimed to develop methods and tools that can be used to strengthen social sustainability also in other renovation and building cases. One aim of the project was to transform the dwelling and the local neighbourhood around it into a platform for social interaction and to decrease social isolation of the residents. Certain key words were initially formulated as orientation points of the project, namely: equality, accessibility, sustainability, health and physical activity (TI, 2013a). Thus, throughout the process there has been a consistent focus on the relationship between the built environment and social life, but also on the challenges of developing well-functioning social support functions to ensure the sustainment of social life over time. The hope has been to develop a place that residents can enthusiastic about and where they wish to contribute to an inclusive social life and community after the renovation.

The case study is based on interviews, documents and observations collected between 2013-2018. In terms of case selection strategies, the housing association and its resident democracy are illustrative of resident democracy as a participatory platform in Danish non-profit housing. The specific department has a strong and active board of residents, making it a critical case "having strategic importance in relation to the general problem" (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 229). Moreover, the Danish non-profit housing sector can in itself be considered a critical case due to the conditions for strong participatory processes (Hansen and Langergaard, 2017). With the strong and active resident board, the case also serves to illustrate the potentials and challenges of the non-profit housing sector as a partner in developing socially sustainable cities and neighborhoods.

The author has followed the project since its beginning in 2013 and has attended regular meetings in the role of follow researcher of the project. The data collection covers the following phases of the project:

- An initial pre-phase organized around a 'steering group' led by the housing association and a group of consultants, with participation of the municipality and ad hoc participation of 'experts' e.g. in relation to architecture and design for people with disabilities. The aim of this phase was to develop a concept for social innovation in building and renovation projects

and to formulate a list of recommendations for the specific building to be renovated. It lasted from 2013 to 2015.

- A planning phase with the aim of developing the construction programme for the building and outdoor areas. This process involved a 'follow group' comprised of employees from the housing association, employees from the municipality, architects, the board of residents of the housing department, the elected chairman of the housing association, a follow researcher (the author of this article) and ad hoc experts and visitors. This phase lasted from 2015 to 2016.

- The building process – in this period of time the 'follow group' had regular meetings. From 2016 to 2018.

- A phase of welcoming the new residents. This involved a process of selecting new residents to move in and facilitating events as preparation. This was initiated in spring 2018. In August/September 2018 all residents moved into the building and the housing association appointed employees dedicated to supporting the social life in the building and interaction between the residents.

The data collection covers the process up until just after the inauguration of the dwelling and what has happened in the time immediately after the residents have moved into the building. A total of nine formal semi-structured interviews (Alvesson, 2011; Justesen and Mik-Meyer, 2011) have been conducted with employees of the housing association, an employee at the municipality, consultants involved in the project, and architects. The analysis is furthermore based on various field notes from meetings and events related to the project over the course of the five years. The longitudinal character of the engagement has made it possible to follow how ideas have developed throughout the course of the project. Besides, documents about the project, such as strategies, plans, publications and minutes from meetings have been included. These documents give an insight into the development of the project and the way key terms have played a role in the process. This combination of sources provides a solid foundation for understanding various dimensions of the project and the way certain ideas and processes of participation constitute certain notions of the 'social'.

The analysis elucidates developments in the project by going through three different phases with a specific focus on the following aspects: who participates and how, what are the main foci, and what does it imply for the notion of the "social" in the project? The first phase is the initial pre-phase organized around the 'steering group', the second is the planning phase in which a follow-group held frequent meetings about the details of the building, and the third phase included here is the phase around selecting residents and moving into the building. Over the studied period of time, the course of the project has on the one hand followed a certain set of key orientation points, while on the other hand it has been characterised by learning, experimentation and a variety of interpretations of how to understand participation and inclusion in particular. In this sense, the division between these phases is in some respects artificial, as there are also several overlaps and continuity between them. The analysis shall attempt to point out a number of themes and underlying understandings that co-exist and take on different shapes throughout the process. The analytical purpose is to distil and unfold certain understandings of the social in order to better discuss their implications.

Analysis

Pre-phase: Identifying needs and resources to unfold the 'social'

The pre-phase to the actual renovation project had the aim to develop a model for how to integrate social aims and visions into building and renovation projects more generally. It was based on the premise that too often building and renovation projects did not systematically integrate concerns for the social life of the future building, but instead tended to focus more on the technical and economic aspects. Thus, there was an experienced need for a systematic approach to including such concerns from the beginning. The ambition was that a renovation project with a focus on the social life in the future dwelling could be a way of addressing broader societal and welfare challenges, such as social isolation and unemployment (TI, 2013a). This broader aim has been adjusted throughout the project, and other concerns have come to be more central. It indicates that the project from the beginning was characterized by an explorative approach to understanding the social dimension in relation to the specific project and to building and renovation in general.

This explorative approach was also reflected in ideas about participation, interaction and the notion of the 'social' characterizing this phase. Several ideas were in play at the same time, but one in particular will be scrutinized here. From the beginning of the project, a vision was to mix residents

in order to ensure new types of interaction between them. As the building was planned to inhabit people with disabilities and young people without disabilities, a focus point was how to make these two groups integrate and interact in their everyday life. This vision remained throughout the process but have been understood in slightly different ways, as have the ways to achieve it.

Central to this first phase was a belief that it was essential to uncover needs and resources of the resident groups who were to live together, in order to understand how they would interact. The idea was that interaction between the residents would take place as a kind of exchange of resources in terms of favors and tasks. This was based on an American model, introduced by the consultants, building on examples of families with small children living door by door with senior residents. The idea was that the two groups have different resources and needs and thus can be helpful to one another and fulfil each other's needs, for example through help with homework or household tasks. The model was meant to apply generally to managing processes where interactions was the aim, and even though it was stressed that the model is a simplification, it played a key role in the early phases of the project. Taking the model as point of departure the consultants carried out interviews with residents focusing on needs and resources, some of which the residents might not themselves be fully aware of. In a publication they state:

> *It is often difficult to use classic interviews, surveys or workshops to uncover the unmet needs and resources of the residents. Sometimes they will overestimate or underestimate their own capabilities for contributing* (TI 2013a, 11).

Thus, by the application of a model where needs and resources were at the center the residents were approached as informants rather than as participants, since the assumption was that experts were needed to interpret and translate needs and resources of resident groups into potentials for interaction. Such an understanding of the social rests on an individualistic methodology and an idea of the social as constituted as an exchange situation between individuals who meet on the basis of expecting certain benefits from the social interaction along the lines of a cost-benefit or utilitarian analysis. This idea of interaction was – even if it did play a role and also was the basis for the first interviews with residents – by some participants of the project considered to be too simplistic. Since the model was based on an individualistic, social exchange thinking, which does not explain social integration very well, it clashed with basic ideas of the social housing sector. The sector already has a strong social component in the resident democracy, and is in that sense already built on a notion

of residents as constituting some kind of community. For the same reason, when moving into the next phases of the project where the board of residents had a more active participating role, this idea faded away. However, certain dimensions of it came up in a different shape in later phases.

Throughout the project a key theme related to interaction is the perception of 'resources'. This is probably because the apartments are designed for people with special needs in relation to accessibility and thus for a group of people who in certain ways experience marginalization based on the assumption that they do not have many resources. Before the renovation, the outdoor areas surrounding the building were inaccessible to inhabitants in wheelchairs, and in general there were not many common areas in or around the building that residents could use. Accessibility, equality, sustainability, health and activity were to be key characteristics for the building, which were formulated in the beginning of the project. The chair of the board stresses that:

> *It is important we are not looked upon as disabled. It must be for everyone, who wants to live here. The point is to break down the barriers that disadvantage disabled people. And here sports are important. And perhaps a café where people with disabilities work.*

This view of the social reflects that resources are constituted in interaction with the social and physical environment. And moreover, that disability is not so much about the capabilities of the individual in an isolated sense, but rather something which is constituted in relation to the social and physical environment in accordance with the social model of disability. This approach is also about breaking down barriers as a first condition for integration.

Planning phase: Deliberation as basis for participation (in the 'follow group')
In the planning phase, meetings in the so-called 'follow group' constituted the main platform for participation in the project. As one aim of this phase was to develop the building program and make decisions about the design and architecture of the building, the themes discussed in this phase related to both technical, functional and aesthetic dimensions of the dwelling. What is interesting about this part of the project is not so much the actual themes and issues taken up, but rather the forms of participation and dialogue between the parties in the follow group. In the beginning of this phase there was a study trip to other dwellings, both private apartments and public nursing homes, which were built to be accessible for people in wheelchairs. The board of residents, the architects

and representatives from the housing association participated in this. This gave a starting point for the discussions about the building. It also denoted a beginning of a phase with many meetings and intense debates about the features and requirements for the building in order for it to provide the frame for a good home and neighborhood for the residents. There were regular meetings and sometimes also email exchanges in-between the meetings.

> *Comparing the course of this project to others, it has been very different due to the focus on social sustainability. The way the users have been involved has been very different from other building projects. This broad involvement of the whole resident board and a follow group is not the norm in projects like this. There hasn't been the same broad anchorage and ownership* [in other projects, ed.] (Employee from the housing association, interviewed in 2016).

As the quote underscores, the residents, especially the board, had a very active role in the second phase. One interesting characteristic of the way that the resident board participated was their interest in finding solutions, which were not only relevant to themselves but also to other residents with potentially other life conditions or requirements for accessibility than themselves. In this sense, this part of the project displayed strong deliberative democratic features in continuous dialogue between residents, architects, and representatives from the municipality and the housing association. At one of the meetings the chair of the resident board explicitly said that they have an obligation to work towards ensuring solutions to meet common requirements, or the common good, in a democratic spirit. In an interview a representative from the housing association expressed that she was especially taken by the openness and respect in the dialogue between residents and architects, which she considered to be unusual compared to other building projects. The resident board played a central role, and in this sense the democratic platform already present in the non-profit housing sector has been important and has been utilised especially in the planning phase. From the beginning of the project this platform has been considered a potential central anchoring point also for the social life in the renovated building. An idea about how interaction in the renovated building could take place was exposed at a workshop in the beginning of the project; representatives of the housing association mention the idea that the board of residents could play a core role as anchoring point of the social life in the building and that this could be an opportunity to revitalize the resident democracy. One idea connected to this is to use the department meetings to constitute sub-groups to work with different events and activities in the building.

One point to be drawn from this in relation to participation, is the civic virtues and democratic engagement, which were central and important to the process. Compared to the notion of 'social' as exchange in the pre-phase, the deliberative democratic processes can be seen to constitute an integrated view on social community. Furthermore, the residents got the role of experts in their own life when explaining to the architects what was important to make their everyday life work well in the apartments when disability helpers and assistive technologies also had to be incorporated. The board of residents took on ownership of, and engagement in, the project and thus with their knowledge and expertise of both the building and the democratic platforms and processes got to be a strong anchoring point in the project. One question that came up at the end of this phase was how to meet and include the new residents moving in and what kind of communities and interaction could emerge after inauguration.

Inauguration phase: events as entrance to social integration
The residents moved into the building in August and September 2018. Key participants in this phase, in addition to the new residents, were representatives of the housing association who monitored as strongly facilitated process for the new residents as well as some of the representatives of the resident board, who also took on a role in meeting the new residents and preparing them for moving in.

Some of the former residents moved back in, but the majority was new residents. Amongst the new ones were young people, who should live in the 'student' apartments, and some elderly people who had been referred by the municipality. In the inauguration phase there was a strong focus on the young residents as they were meant to play a key role in the social integration of residents. The process of selecting the young people to move in was carefully planned and facilitated by the housing association. The plan was to choose some so-called 'first movers' amongst the newcomers in this group and give to them a certain role and responsibility for creating a social environment. When applying to get an apartment in the dwelling the young people had to write a motivated letter stating why they would be interested in living there. It was made clear that this was not just any place to live, but that it was a place with ambitions and visions for a good social life and interaction. A number of young people were selected to take part in a draw for the apartments, and the ones who got an apartment then participated in facilitated workshops with the aim of preparing them for life in the building and to start developing ideas for the social life and

interaction between residents. The aim was to facilitate ideas for community creating activities. In an interview one of the facilitators explained that he had especially two things in mind:

> *My first and foremost task was to get them to talk with each other*, [and secondly to] *prepare them for what they could expect out there* [when they were to meet their new neighbors who could be elderly people or people with disabilities, who might be in wheelchairs] (Employee of the housing association interviewed in 2018).

These aims focused the events at the workshop, facilitated by employees of the housing association. The young people were grouped together and asked to come up with ideas for activities and events which could include all types of residents in the dwelling. One of the residents, who was in wheelchair and who was an active participant on the board of residents was also present. The hope was to open their minds and break down possible prejudices and hence prepare them for living side by side with older people and people with disabilities.

In an interview with an employee of the housing association some of the challenges of this process became apparent. The hopes and expectations to what the new young residents could achieve through organized events had been high, and thus, it came as a surprise that the new residents found it difficult to organize these events, not least to find the best ways to invite their new neighbors. They found it intimidating to go and knock on doors, and just putting up a note in the stairwell or lift did not seem to get anyone to come to the events. Also, the practicalities of organizing events turned out to be more challenging than anticipated. As it was stated in an interview:

> *This idea about being first movers in respect to 'the social', maybe I underestimated that.*

The notion of resources came up again in this phase as the young people were chosen to have a special responsibility in the process based on the idea that they had certain resources. It turned out that the young newcomers did not behave quite as expected and did not have the same experience with organizing and communicating with other residents in the context of the department as the residents of the board. To some of the young people this was the first time that they were living on their own. This again underscores that resources are contextual rather than absolute to the individual. The board of residents are perceived by the employees of the housing association to be

very resourceful in relation to the project and its aims. The idea of the social and of participation in this phase is thus that social interaction and coherence might emerge out of a facilitated process focusing on events for the residents, with a number of designated first movers who have a certain role and responsibility, and that this hopefully will pay off. There are, however, also concerns about *facilitating something to death*, as one of the facilitators states. This indicates the limitations to managing and facilitating sociality *per se*, and indicates that paying attention to the conditions for letting interactions and social life thrive might be a fruitful approach.

Discussion

The analysis pins out the diverse ideas about the social, which have each been contained in the project, sometimes simultaneously, and which have functioned as drivers for learning about the challenges of facilitating a social life in and around the building. In this discussion section these ideas about the 'social' will be related to social sustainability to highlight how the case study adds insights to current research. Notions of the 'social' in literature on social sustainability, as mentioned, range from social cohesion (Murphy, 2012), social interaction (Dempsey et al, 2011), social justice, or equity (Chan and Lee, 2008; Dempsey et al, 2011; Murphy, 2012; Parra, 2013), 'sustainability of community' (Dempsey et al, 2011; Murphy, 2012) and participation and local democracy (Dempsey et al, 2011; Woodcraft, 2012). Amongst these, particularly three key terms are central in the case study, namely social interaction, social equity (understood as absence of exclusionary and discriminatory practices (Dempsey et al, 2011)) and participation. But the case also highlights the importance of the built environment for social life and equity. The case thus seems to touch on a number of these interrelated dimensions of social sustainability, which I shall attempt to separate out.

Social cohesion can be understood either at broader societal level, or more locally at neighbourhood level (Forrest and Kearns, 2001) and social interaction is often seen as related to interaction and places on a local and spatial scale (Dempsey et al, 2011). In the case interaction is seen as key to social cohesion and a sense of community amongst the residents, or one could use the term social capital in the sense of "strengthening civic participation and localized empowerment via social interaction and sense of community amongst all members/residents" (Dempsey et al, 2011: 289). What is interesting about the case it the different notions of social interaction and ideas about how to support or facilitate it in play. From a planning perspective, the interest in not only in defining

social sustainability, but also to understand what constitutes good conditions for it in an urban environment. However, notions of the social imply certain understandings about the ontological status of community, namely whether it for example is seen as reducible to the sum of its parts or as an integrated object beyond its parts (Magee et al, 2012), something which have implications for the activities and platforms for engagement organised to strengthen the local community through facilitating interaction amongst the residents.

The project had a focus on sustainability from the beginning, in the sense of creating a place with a good social life, not only to present residents but also for future residents. The concept of sustainability itself encompasses concerns for present as well as future aspects of social, economic or environmental life (WCED, 1987; Magee el at, 2012). In the term 'sustainability' itself, the idea of sustaining, or passing something on, is already implied. This, according to Böström (2012), is however a dimension of the concept of sustainability, which leads to some challenges in relation to social sustainability. Because, even if this dimension of preservation of sustaining is often assumed to be desirable when it comes to environmental sustainability it is not always the case when it comes to social sustainability. In terms of the social it is not always desirable to sustain the current conditions, for example in relation to justice (Boström, 2012). These reflections point to the question about what social sustainability then refers to – what is its object as well as its objectives? In the case, social sustainability is interpreted as the objective of creating, and passing on, a place with a good social life, environment and opportunities for present and future residents to have a good place to live. And the way to create this is seen as facilitating community or social cohesion as an object or entity. But, the dynamic character of the community (as well as the contextual dimensions of resources and conditions for individual to participate) leads to challenges. From the beginning it has been seen as a challenge that the specific future residents were not known, and thus to some extent the process was aimed at creating a space for residents that could not all be involved in the process. This challenge is not unique to this case, and must be considered a general condition in building and urban development (not all citizen and future users of the spaces can be involved in the development processes). This is also what led to the segmentation of resident groups in the pre-phase with the aim of uncovering needs and resources of the groups in order to develop platforms for interaction based on exchange. This, however built on the idea of basing interaction on stereotyping certain groups in terms of needs and resources, something which is based on a static

view on the characteristics of certain resident groups and something which overlooks the social and contextual dimension of resources – as well as of capability and disability (social and physical).

The focus on resources of the different resident groups in the pre-phase and the phase after inauguration turned out to lead to certain challenges in relation to participation. The challenges to get the process going and to have the young residents successfully plan community creating events is an indication that resources are contextual rather than absolute. What resources an individual or a group have in a specific situation depends on the context – and in this project the board of residents with their vast experience with democratic and organizational processes represented a resourceful group. The newcomers had something to learn before they could participate in the ways that were expected of them. This understanding of resources as contextual also plays a central role in the project in a different sense, namely in relation to the physical space. Linked to participation and resources the case also elucidates the role of the built environment for inclusion and equal access – here in a concrete sense of accessibility for all to areas in and around the building. The role of the built environment has been studied on architectural research (Gehl, 2001; Hegmon, 1989), and the understanding of the social and of inclusiveness in the social model of disability also elucidates the relation between the built environment and social opportunities – thus, linking this to equity and inclusiveness, which are central terms in social sustainability research. It indicates that an individualistic view on resources (as something that individuals possess) might not be a very helpful focus point in a general sense as they are dependent of the social, organizational and spatial platforms and conditions. So rather than seeing resources as a starting point, it might be more useful to see it as something that emerges under certain conditions and then focus more on these conditions (social, organizational, institutional and spatial). Borrowing a quote from Iris Marion Young about rights can elucidate this point: "*rights are relationships, not things; they are institutionally defined rules specifying what people can do to one another. Rights refer to doing more than having, to social relationships that enable or constrain action*" (Young, 1990: 25). Along those lines, we can see resources as relation and contextual, something that relates to doing more than to having.

Equity and inclusiveness are also central terms related to social sustainability, and they are also part of the idea of the social in the project. In particular, in relation to the built environment and design of the building, accessibility has been a key concern throughout the project, in particular in the

planning phase where decisions about the dwelling were made. The focus is here on creating spaces for being together, and not necessarily on determining on beforehand what types of interaction could take place. The board of residents and the chair see inclusive and accessible spaces as important for breaking down barriers and as constituting possibilities and resources of the individual. In line with the idea of the social connected to the social model of disability the focus is on what is around the individual in terms of social and physical conditions for this individual to participate. Similarly, the organizational, historical and spatial surroundings constitute conditions for how the social life unfolds, which are not included directly in the attempts to facilitate the 'social'.

In terms of participation, the institutionalized resident democracy and the elected board have been an important anchoring point in the project, and have represented an integrative, deliberative form of participation, which in itself have constituted a sense of community around the renovation project. This indicates that the setting of the non-profit housing sector already includes platforms that are available for potential interaction and socializing among the residents – they do however, as mentioned in the analyses need to be rethought beyond the current focus on practical and budgeting matters. In this sense, several ideas of the social and participation and platforms have been in play at the same time in the case. This points to the question about the importance of platforms. The processes of interaction and participation seem to work more smoothly when there are already organisational or institutional platforms for interaction and when regular meetings are planned. This cannot be transferred to social life in the dwelling in a broader sense as everyday life and the potential interactions taking place in a more informal sense to a greater extent is on the border between the sphere of private life in the apartments and some social community about which there is a lot of uncertainty.

In terms of the implications for policy makers and practitioners, a key learning from the case is to focus on context as well as processes. Sometimes the social dimension of sustainability is expressed through a selection of indicators, (Murphy, 2012). But the analysis indicates that social sustainability is not an end state which can be reached, but something which is negotiated and transformed in interaction not only with individuals and groups of people, but also with organisational and spatial conditions. The social community is a dynamic and changeable entity, which is not easily pinned down and sustained. This indicates a more general paradox inherent in

the concept of social sustainability. It requires an on-going interacting and open discussion about what residents want with the place they live and with each other, especially as new residents will come and others will move out. Thus, making the social interaction or social community too dependent on certain persons might prove difficult for the sustainability, both in terms of stability and development, of it. This indicates that the platforms for continuous deliberative, or integrative, interaction and debate are important and that they are important to focus on.

Participation in social sustainability literature is often included as a rather general goal (Griessler and Littig, 2005), but the case sheds light on some specific dimensions of participation. By zooming in on the process itself, on forms of participation, as well as on the underlying ideas of the 'social', we learn something practices organized around social sustainability. However, we also learn something about the importance of the setting for such processes, for examples how the democratic platforms of the Danish non-profit housing sector might play a role. One question for future research is what role the housing association can play in the particular case and how non-profit housing associations can support social sustainability and community feeling constituted outside of the democratic platforms and in-between the private life of the residents. With the institutionalized democratic setup, the non-profit housing sector in Denmark has some unique features, which makes it particularly interesting in relation to social sustainability in housing and urban planning.

Conclusion

The article has analysed a case study of a renovation project in the Danish non-profit housing sector, which had social sustainability as an explicit aim. In the specific case, the social dimension of sustainability was interpreted as sense of community, accessibility and interaction between the residents in the dwelling as a well as the local neighbourhood surrounding the building. The case demonstrates that working with social sustainability is not a linear and straight forward rational process, and that key dimensions of social sustainability such as the idea of participation and the idea of sociality implied in and shaping practices can be conflicting and ambiguous even within the frames of the same project. This is so even in this case with its otherwise good conditions in terms of experts in the field, a very experienced housing association, and a strong and dedicated resident board and furthermore with a structured process to which a lot of resources have been dedicated. This indicates that it is likely to be equally ambiguous and iterative in other cases with less favorable conditions. A main conclusion to be drawn from the study is that social sustainability

requires a focus on the platforms and on-going processes and interactions which continuously constitute the social life in a neighborhood and the relations between the residents. However, organizational setups like an instituted resident democracy with regular meetings and a specific purpose can be a helpful platform and support good conditions for residents' interaction and experience of ownership to a place. Social sustainability, based on this analysis, is not end state which can be created to then be present once and for all, but rather an indicator of the living sociality of a certain time and place.

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