

# Ældrebofællesskaber/Oldekoller

YSI - Denmark - Country case 1

## 1. Basic information

Senior co-housing communities, in Danish 'ældrebofællesskaber', was first established in 1987 in Copenhagen by nine elderly single women. Their idea was that a strong close bond with neighbours could reduce loneliness and boredom in old age. By the 1990s the concept had caught wider attention and today there are around 250 senior co-housing communities spread around Denmark (Pedersen). Since no official definition of senior co-housing communities exist in Denmark, Danish Anthropologist Max Pedersen has defined the communities by three factors: there must be a common house or common apartment on the facility, the residents must have a board or residents' committee and constitute an independent social unit, and lastly, there must be a residential minimum age for the residents, or alternative a no children living at home rule (Pedersen 2015:127).

Today around 6000 Danish seniors live in these communities. Most communities have apartments for both singles and couples, but the majority living in these communities are women (62%) while men account for 38% (Pedersen:1). The communities often consist of around 20-30 private apartments equipped with a kitchen, living room and bathroom. In addition there is a common house or room where the seniors can share meals or other activities with each other. The common rooms often include a kitchen, combined living and dining room, and a guest room (Pedersen 2015:133). In other words, the senior co-housing communities try to balance between private housing and social living, setting it apart from collective living where everything is shared.

Senior co-housing communities are often built as row houses or cluster houses, but are also located in apartment buildings and other constructions. Around 60% of these communities are social housing, 35% is cooperative dwelling while the rest are private rental or owner-occupied housing (Pedersen). The big share of social housing can be attributed to the professionalisation of senior co-housing communities in the mid-1990s. The consumer organisation 'Boligtrivsel i centrum' (Focus on Housing)<sup>1</sup> helped this development along by cooperating with several municipalities and social housing organisations on around 70 projects all around Denmark – this made senior co-housing communities assessable for a wider group of elderly (Pedersen 2015:129).

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<sup>1</sup> A now closed consumer organisation which was also supported by the Danish Ministry of Housing

## 2 cases

The size and price of the apartments varies from community to community, especially because some communities are privately owned while others are part of social housing facilities. They share the above mentioned three similarities, everything else is subject to local differences. Therefore, in the following the social housing community “Æbleblomsten” and the privately-owned community “Bofællesskabet Højen” will represent examples of how senior co-housing communities can look like and be organised.

### **Æbleblomsten: a social housing community**

The senior co-housing community “Æbleblomsten” is located in Brøndby in the Greater Copenhagen area, and is a social housing community managed by the organisation Lejerbo<sup>2</sup>. There are 21 apartments - twelve 2-room apartments (69 m<sup>2</sup>) and nine 3-room (89 m<sup>2</sup>) apartments. The monthly rent is between 7500-9700 dkr. (1000-1300 EUR), which is average pricing for social housing in Denmark of that size. To get an apartment in this community, you must be over 50 years old and have no children living at home. If you meet those requirements, you contact the community for a preliminary talk.

Lejerbo calls “Æbleblomsten” an “active co-housing community” where it is expected that the residents actively participate in the activities that are arranged together. That entails eating together once a month, a monthly joint meeting, trips and holiday dinners. For these activities “Æbleblomsten” has a common room. Furthermore, all residents pay 50 kr. (6,7 EUR) a month for common expenses for e.g. maintenance.

On “Æbleblomstens” homepage they write: “You have to be ready to be with other people, you have to want the community and give to the community”. For more information, go to: <http://www.lejerbo.dk/da/boligsoegende/find-bolig/afdeling?tabIndex=0&AfdelingID=8180>

### **Bofællesskabet Højen: a private co-housing community**

“Bofællesskabet Højen” is a private co-housing community located in Roskilde on Zealand. It consists of 26 row houses and a big common house (305 m<sup>2</sup>). Each row house has a size between 105-125 m<sup>2</sup>. The residents must be 50+ years and buy a house if they want to be part of the community. It was established in 2009 and funded by the residents themselves. They emphasise the importance of social activities where they eat together 3-4 times a week, and in teams they prepare dinner and clean up after. They, furthermore, have many different common activities such as sewing club, exercise room, bike club, parties, Friday bar etc.

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<sup>2</sup> Lejerbo is a nonprofit social housing association that rents out approximately 44.000 residences all over Denmark.

They emphasise the importance of balancing private life with social activities and close bonds with neighbours. For more information, go to: <http://www.hte-roskilde.dk/>

### **Growing popularity and demand**

As the Danish population is getting older loneliness is becoming an increasing problem for Danish seniors, which can partly explain the heightened interest in senior co-housing communities. In a 2016 survey 8% of the seniors stated that they wanted to live in co-housing communities - approximately 80.000 people over the next five years (Schulze & Mahncke 2016). And the advantages of living in co-housing communities is noticeable. In 2016 the private association Realdania initiated five analyses on seniors' life quality and living situations. These showed that living in co-housing communities has a positive effect on seniors' quality of life, because their loneliness decreases. Furthermore, senior co-housing communities are less costly for society than other living forms for elders (Schulze & Mahncke 2016). The problem is that there are only 6.992 accommodations in senior co-housing communities in Denmark. In average each senior co-housing community has 28 elders on their waiting list and the number is growing. At the same time only 24 new co-housing communities have been built since 2005 (Realdania). Demands are high but supply is running low, and since the financial crisis in 2008, construction of new senior co-housing communities has slowed down. But, in the later years the living form has caught new attention. One new private initiative is the partnership between Realdania, the pension fund PKA and the private project and estate developer FBgruppen. The objective of the project is to develop new senior co-housing communities that is also payable for elders with a lower income (Realdania). Apart from this new initiative there has been very few privately funded senior co-housing projects in Denmark (Pedersen 2015:130).

## **1.1 Role of the public sector**

The abovementioned consumer organisation 'Boligtrivsel i centrum' played a big role in the development of senior co-housing communities in the 1990s. The organisation received an annual appropriation by the Ministry of Housing, but in addition to that senior co-housing communities has played a very small role in Danish national politics. The local political involvement is more profound as many municipalities has supported building subsidized senior co-housing communities. This, however, has not been the norm and many municipalities has declined supporting such projects because seniors seeking these communities are often socioeconomically advantaged, in good health, and come from privately owned dwellings (Pedersen 2015:130).

## **2. Recommendations**

Right now co-living communities for seniors are for the privileged elders (Pedersen 2015:135), and it is worsened by the fact that there are not enough co-housing communities compared to the demand. Municipalities are obliged to help elders with

senior apartments, but only if the senior needs help or care in their daily life. These facilities require employees and are more expensive in the public budget. Even though Realdania's study shows that the elders living in co-housing communities as a group are older, have weaker health and more often live alone than elders living in their own home, they experience a higher quality of life than other elders, which enhances their prospect of living longer.

In addition, Pedersen's study finds that neighbours in senior co-housing facilities often help each other with practical issues such as driving each other, picking up groceries etc. - help that is often taken care of by the public homecare in other senior living facilities (Pedersen 2015). The productivity in the public homecare is likewise increased because they drive to fewer houses, moreover the senior co-housing communities are designed to make the elders more self-supporting (Schulze & Mahncke 2016). The advantages are many. It would, therefore, be favorable for the municipalities and the public sector in general to support both economically, administratively and otherwise in incorporating these facilities as part of the public offers for elders. It is both economically and societally beneficial, especially because the Danish population in the future will be older.

#### **Sources:**

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Realdania homepage:

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