

Bilfinger Berger Award 2009

**Participation of local
residents key to success:
Copenhagen's exemplary urban
development project**

Initial situation

For many years, regeneration projects for disadvantaged areas in Denmark were restricted to structural improvement of individual buildings or building complexes. For a long time, urban development ignored the strong correlation between structural, social, economic and political problems. In comparison to other European countries, Denmark was known to be the country to have achieved the lowest yield from money invested in urban development. It was against this backdrop that urban development policy in Denmark was completely overhauled in the mid 90s.



The result of this reform process was the Kvarterloft (urban regeneration) program. The first task of this development program was to consider in full the complexity and interdependency of the varied urban problems. Social, economic, political and ecological aspects of urban development were given the same consideration as structural aspects. The most important aspect of this new comprehensive approach was mobilizing residents to actively participate in the district. The initial priority was to initiate, promote and maintain a comprehensive public participation process. The initiative also aimed to improve contact between residents in affected areas and to enable them to influence how their district should develop (empowerment). The main focus of the project was on local residents but also included all other relevant stakeholders, such as companies and local organizations and different administrative levels and districts. The people making decisions on the form of the regeneration process were to

be those who best knew the individual circumstances and needs.



Holmbladsgade was one of seven projects selected for the new program's first round of funding in 1997. At this time, Holmbladsgade was a district characterized by poor quality buildings. Most of them were built as apartments for laborers at the beginning of the 20th century and their condition had since become critical. At the beginning of the project for example, a third of the apartments did not have their own toilet.

A range of social problems had also developed in Holmbladsgade. Its number of unemployed, social welfare recipients and migrants was considerably higher than the Copenhagen average. Alcohol and drug dependency were problems that were highly visible, with the few public spaces often occupied by alcohol and drug addicts. At this time, Holmbladsgade's reputation in Copenhagen was poor and many residents were ashamed of where they came from.

Mobilization through active participation

The Kvarterloft program in Holmbladsgade focussed on fully integrating the local population and interest groups into the planning and implementation phases of the regeneration. The aim was to achieve integration and participation not by renovating houses and apartments or finding people new jobs, but instead by mobilizing local people and promoting ownership. This essentially meant that residents should be encouraged to take responsibility for their district by first taking responsibility for themselves and their environment. The goal was for all decisions to be made at the lowest possible decision-making level, i.e. the residents themselves, wherever possible.

The Kvarterloft program in Holmbladsgade was characterized by efficient implementation in a defined timeframe with a pre-determined budget (for public participation, mobilization projects and construction projects) and clear control mechanisms between the project office, city administration and national administration departments. This approach, borrowed from the New Public Management philosophy, was one of the ways in which the efficiency of Kvarterloft was achieved.

By acquiring third-party funding from the "Lokale-og Anlaegefonden", additional financing was provided for culture and sports related construction projects.

As a first step toward reaching out to the residents, the project office for the Holmbladsgade Kvarterloft program was set up right in the middle of the district. This facilitated close contact with residents as the project office was easy for them to reach.

The Kvarterloft program was launched by holding a large meeting of residents at which the plans and course of action were presented and the residents enlisted into working groups to prepare a master plan. This event was a huge success. Nearly 400 residents attended this first meeting. Five working groups, (public spaces, buildings, culture and sport, social environment and

economy and employment), each composed of between 75 and 100 members, were then formed to prepare a plan of action for each of their areas. A total of almost 800 people took part in drawing up the plans. The working groups were given the responsibility of achieving their plans and objectives within the specified budget. They were also allowed to change allocation of a portion of the budget from one working group to another. Actively involving residents in the creation of a "residents' budget" ensured that participants acted responsibly with regard to their respective interests and plans and made sure that their participation did not just result in the creation of a long, unrealistic "wish-list". This approach also made it possible to integrate typical "protesters" into the process and to make them aware of budget restrictions and the complexity of various interests. After extensive decision-making processes, the proposals prepared were of a very high quality and were presented to the city administration for approval. The city administration made changes to only one proposal put forward by the residents. All other proposals were accepted unchanged. The plan of action was above all a residents' plan.



This intensive process of participation by residents was maintained in the implementation phase, particularly if it became apparent that changes to the original plan were necessary. The role of the local steering committee was particularly important in this regard. A majority of its members, in contrast to other Kvarterloft projects in Denmark, were residents. But the committee also included representatives of local associations and organizations (also of local companies for example) and representatives from the administrative authority. The main task of the

steering committee was to mediate between the city and local interest groups.

To further increase participation and mobilization, a local newspaper was set up using project funds to provide details of all planning and implementation phases. This was distributed free to every household.

In addition to participation in decision-making processes, local festivals, cultural events and small projects financed from a sub-budget of Kvarterloft were used to mobilize residents. It was thus possible to mobilize a wider section of the community, to increase awareness of public participation and its acceptance. 70 small and very small projects took up the implementation of various resident requests.

The overall success of the participation process was impressive. In a survey of residents, over 80 percent of people said that they were familiar with the regeneration project in their neighborhood. The survey also showed that over 10 percent were actively involved in the process. That is an impressive number, given that similar initiatives in the Netherlands for instance only achieved an active participation rate of 5 percent.

Mobilization through social infrastructure

It was not only the structural condition of buildings in Holmbladsgade that was of critical concern at the beginning of the project. There was also a considerable lack of open spaces and social infrastructure. There were almost no parks, sports centers or cultural or community centers. It was this situation that resulted in a total of 80 percent of the project volume (€ 39 million) being invested in the structural regeneration of the district, most of this going into modernizing apartments and re-developing open spaces.



Much more important to the overall success of the project however, were investments in three cultural and sports centers, which were financed mainly by third-party funds. The primary goal was to give residents an improved social infrastructure. The projects also had an appeal far beyond the district and thus helped to improve the image of Holmbladsgade. All decisions made in the planning and implementation phases were based on the principle of combining functionality with demands for the highest architectural standards. Due to the very limited budget, this meant using only the simplest material and techniques. The motto was “Keep it simple but do it well”. And this was followed in an exemplary fashion. All three buildings have an innovative architectural design, are highly functional but were also completed at a low cost.

Kvarterhuset: The oldest industrial building of the district is being used as a community and cultural center. It houses the community library, a cafe, a school, a children's facility, the local residents' committee and also offers a host of other community and networking activities.



Prismen: The newly created sports and cultural center is open to the use of all residents. Some of the activities are free to allow access to as many people as possible. With the aim of motivating the district's children and young people in particular, prior to completion of the center, a trainer was employed and a "sports container" built, to allow access to a range of various sports activities. Once opened, the sports and cultural center was then able to immediately link up with the activities already in progress and develop them further.



Det Maritime Ungdomshus: Building the youth center on the seafront gave Holmbladsgade a direct connection with the sea, something it previously never had. A range of different youth groups in Copenhagen use this facility for free to pursue all kinds of sea-related activities (such as environmental protection excursions, sailing, surfing, canoeing, fishing, diving and water-skiing). The youth center is known and appreciated far beyond Holmbladsgade and is a huge success. Since its completion five years ago, it has been used by around 50 children and young people a day between March and October every year.



Anchoring ensures sustainability

Right from the beginning of the project, one of the most important concerns was to clearly formulate a functioning exit strategy. The exit strategy implemented was one of the main reasons for the success of the revitalization project in Holmbladsgade. After structural improvements were completed and the first signs of success in the social mobilization policy were seen, the later years of the project were mainly dedicated to anchoring activities, i.e. carrying out activities which would guarantee the sustainability of the new structures, networks and facilities after the end of the development project in 2003 and into the future.

All town councils in Denmark which had received funding as part of the Kvarterloft program now pledged to provide funding to continue the work in the district after the end of the Kvarterloft program. In Holmbladsgade, the funds they provide are used to cover the cost of employees and some equipment at the new cultural and sports centers. These, however, are only a portion of overall costs and to obtain additional funds, all the facilities rely on various other forms of cooperation. The premises at Kvarterhuset for example are hired out to commercial and non-profit organizations with great success. But fundraising is only part of the plan. All organizations hiring the premises (both commercial and non-profit organizations) offer social services for local residents. The availability of these services is an important factor in mobilizing and joining residents together. This in turn, contributes to the sustainability of the regeneration project.

Intensive, active participation by residents ensured that real *ownership* was achieved i.e. that residents identify, accept and commit to the need to maintain the structures into the future. All the new cultural and sports facilities in Holmbladsgade have become firmly established in the area, are visited by large numbers of residents and therefore continue to be successful after completion of the development project.



Strengths

- Competent project management ensured efficient implementation of the Kvarterloft program in Holmbladsgade
- Inclusive approach to public participation turned protesters into participants, integrating them into the decision-making process and giving them responsibility
- Mobilization on a broad basis (including decision-making powers but also motivating cultural events and street festivals) guaranteed acceptance of the project
- Excellent new social and cultural infrastructure with an appeal extending far beyond the district
- Sustainability of Kvarterloft ensured by anchoring
- Successful initiation of private investment in residential construction/renovation (four Euro private investment for every Euro public investment)

Weaknesses

- Limited ecological dimension
- Sub-projects not accepted by residents (Prags Boulevard)

- Adult, heterogeneous population with a relatively high level of education not present in every district: limited transferability

Conclusion:

The Kvarterloft program in Holmbladsgade succeeded in saving a troubled area from further decline and in turning the development trend around into a positive direction. The approach of actively involving a wide section of the community can be applied to many districts with similar problems and therefore represents a best practice example.



Because residents were integrated into the decision-making and negotiating processes, they were able to develop and take away with them skills which they can use for the future benefit of the district or in many other ways (empowerment). Some residents are already working on re-creating the good experience in Holmbladsgade in neighboring areas.

The intensive integration of residents also created an identity and a feeling of involvement in the entire project ensuring the long-term commitment of residents.

Social infrastructure such as projects, networking and decision-making processes ensured the ongoing continuation of social mobilization. The high quality of the construction work as well as the quality of the range of cultural and leisure activities made available help to give active participation a firm place in the district and to ensure it continues into the future.

The success of resident participation in Holmbladsgade provides an example for the future trend in public administration. In view of increasing complexity, future administrations will have to rely more and more on close cooperation with residents in order to be able to deal with governance networks. Holmbladsgade is a prime example of how to do this.



Type of project: Regeneration of a disadvantaged district

Brief summary: Successful and sustainable regeneration of the district through public participation and new social infrastructure

Location: South Copenhagen

Area: 160 ha

Project management: Ministry of Refugees, Immigration and Urban Affairs, the City of Copenhagen and Holmbladsgade town council.

Financing:	€47 m , of which:
Buildings	€25 m
Project development	€6 m
Coordination and PR	€2 m
Cultural and sports projects	€14 m (private endowments)

2/3 of the public funding was provided by the state, 1/3 by the City of Copenhagen

Number of residential units: approx. 10,000

Number of residents: approx. 16,000

Planning period: 1997 – 1998

Implementation period: 1998 – 2003

Final completion: 2006