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# The Danish ‘ghetto initiatives’ and the changing nature of social citizenship, 2004–2018

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## Abstract

This article critically examines the Danish ‘ghetto initiatives’ of 2004, 2010, 2013 and 2018, with a particular focus on their implications for ‘social citizenship’. Its approach is twofold: firstly, it explores how each of the four major ghetto initiatives constructed ghettos and their residents as a problem for the welfare state, and what policy measures were proposed to address the problems identified. Secondly, it examines the legislative changes that resulted from each of the ghetto initiatives and assesses their implications for social citizenship. In doing so, it relates its findings to the different developmental stages of social citizenship in Danish welfare state history. The article argues that the ghetto initiatives have led to an unprecedented *spatialization* and *ethnicization* of social citizenship which mark a radical departure from the guiding principles of post-1945 Danish welfare thought and practice.

## Key words

Denmark, discrimination, ethnicity, housing, welfare

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## Introduction

For more than two decades, 'ghetto' has been an official policy term in Denmark. Since 2010, the Danish government has used changing sets of criteria according to which it publishes annual 'ghetto lists', defining areas that are deemed to present a concentration of social problems. In these areas, special legal provisions apply concerning crime prevention, integration, data protection, welfare and the allocation of public housing. The government's official use of such a historically loaded term as 'ghetto' has led to the Danish ghetto lists being widely discussed both within Denmark and beyond its borders. But the measures adopted as part of Denmark's 'ghetto initiatives' have also drawn media attention across the world. A 2018 initiative, for example, made it a legal obligation that children living in specific neighbourhoods attend at least 25 hours of mandatory day care in Danish institutions from the age of twelve months. The same initiative also allowed for a doubling of criminal penalties in ghetto areas. These measures were widely condemned as discriminatory and in violation of established principles of modern liberal democracies (Barry and Sorensen, 2018; Bendixen, 2018).

This article casts its spotlight on the ways in which Denmark's ghetto initiatives reflect changes in official policy approaches to social citizenship in the Danish welfare state. It proceeds in a twofold manner: firstly, it explores how each of the four major ghetto initiatives constructed ghettos and their residents as a problem for the welfare state, and how these arguments in turn were used to justify a range of policy measures aimed at targeting specific groups of individuals. Secondly, it examines the substantive changes that the ghetto initiatives brought to the status and rights of ghetto residents and welfare recipients and assesses their implications for the 'Danish model' of social citizenship. The guiding research question for this article is: What do the Danish ghetto policies reveal about changes in the nature of social citizenship in Denmark? In response to this question, the article argues that the ghetto policies of the past twenty years indicate a profound change to established Danish interpretations and practices of social citizenship in the postwar era. This change is seen in the way in which social citizenship is increasingly conceptualized and shaped in relation to geographic entities (*spatialization*), which in turn are defined, *inter alia*, by ethnicity (*ethnicization*). While the official argument, as we shall see, is that the policies are aimed at promoting 'equality', the policies introduce a *status differentiation* that deviates from the ways in which citizenship equality was understood for most of the twentieth century.

For the purposes of this article, 'social citizenship' is defined as that aspect of citizenship that concerns the relationship between the individual and public social policies, based on a set of rights and obligations in the citizen-state relationship. Citizenship, in turn, is defined as the status of being a full member of a national polity. This definition is an example of what is

sometimes referred to as 'narrower' definitions of social citizenship, derived from Marshall's influential work *Citizenship and Social Class* (1953; Powell, 2002). Other, broader, definitions of social citizenship have stressed the 'relational' aspect of citizenship by looking at an individual within the totality of their social existence, from the regional to the global (Lister, 2007; Karolewski, 2013). The purpose of this article is to assess how the relationship between the individual and the welfare state has been constructed in government policy. The narrower definition set out above will therefore be the most useful in the context of this article.

Methodologically, the article combines policy and legal analysis with conceptual history. The article employs a critical policy analysis with the aim of uncovering the explanatory and normative claims behind Denmark's ghetto initiatives (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016). Analysing the reasoning and justifications for the proposed measures in the four ghetto strategy papers allows us to assess how social citizenship has been conceptualized in relation to 'ghettos' over the past twenty years. In providing a structured account of the successive legal changes brought about by each ghetto initiative, the article then traces *substantive* changes in the particular individual rights and entitlements associated with social citizenship. Throughout, the article relates its findings to the more long-term history of the concept of social citizenship in Denmark. This combination of approaches is particularly well-suited to developing a nuanced understanding of social citizenship in the context of Denmark's ghetto initiatives, because changing conceptions of social citizenship are often deeply intertwined with changes to rights and obligations in practice, and both need to be seen in a long historical perspective.

The main sources of this article are the government's four 'ghetto strategy papers' (Regeringen, 2004, 2010, 2013, 2018). The four strategy papers are the key policy documents behind the Danish ghetto initiatives, and they outline in detail the proposed measures, why the government deems them necessary, and how both 'ghettos' as such as well as the residents within them relate to the Danish welfare state. The strategy papers therefore allow us to trace changes over time in official understandings of, and approaches to, social citizenship in the specific context of the ghetto initiatives. In addition, the article draws on legislative materials following from each of the four ghetto initiatives whenever it serves to highlight the nature of the policies more clearly, or where specific proposals from the ghetto strategy papers were amended or rejected by the Danish Parliament.

This article contributes to the growing literature on social citizenship in the twenty-first century (see for example Evers and Guillemard, 2012; Johansson and Hvinden, 2007). So far, the Danish ghetto initiatives have not yet been subjected to much scholarly review. Existing research has focused mainly on their role in wider political discourses concerning immigration, ethnicity and multiculturalism (Freiesleben, 2016; Lewenhaupt, 2018). Other scholarly

publications have focused on the justifiability, coherence and efficiency of the ghetto initiatives in light of empirical evidence (Skifter Andersen, 2007) and the growing political opposition against the measures (Bach, 2019). A recent report by the Nordic Council of Ministers offers a comparative analysis of Nordic anti-segregation measures launched in 2018 (Staver et al., 2019). However, the distinct relationship between the Danish ghetto initiatives and changing official ideas and constructions of social citizenship has not yet been explored in any detail.

The article is divided into six main parts. It starts with (1) a brief exploration of how social citizenship has been understood and developed throughout Danish history. Section (2) then provides a brief overview of the historical background to the ghetto policies, and in particular traces the use of the term 'ghetto' in Danish political discourse since the early twentieth century. Sections (3) to (6) examine each of the four Danish ghetto initiatives launched between 2004 and 2018. Following the approach outlined above, each ghetto initiative is analysed in regard to its characterization of ghettos and their place in the welfare state, the key measures adopted in the context of each policy, and its wider implications for social citizenship. The article also relates the Danish ghetto initiatives to comparable strategies across Europe and, in concluding, assesses whether the ghetto strategies represent a paradigm shift for Danish social citizenship.

## ***1. The evolution of social citizenship in Denmark***

This section examines how 'social citizenship' has been understood conceptually and how its contours have changed throughout Danish history. We can roughly identify four historical stages in the development of Danish social citizenship (Mouritsen, 2015: 83–87). The first stage encompasses the first comprehensive social welfare laws between the 1890s and the 1920s. The period was driven, as in other European countries, by fear of revolutions, political pragmatism and conservative philanthropy. While some social rights were granted, the idea of social citizenship was not yet the centre-point of political concern. Nevertheless, these early laws laid an important foundation in removing some of the stigma associated with earlier poor laws and in granting some welfare provision without the loss of civil and political rights (Petersen et al., 2010).

The social reforms of the 1930s, by contrast, were strongly shaped by social democratic ideas and driven by visions for equal and individual social rights (Petersen et al., 2011). The reforms were guided by a desire to remove more fully the stigma associated with welfare provision. These visions for social citizenship were premised on the idea of realising an individual's full membership of the national polity through status equality. During the interwar period, rights to various forms of social welfare became more comprehensive

and enforceable. While most schemes remained highly means tested, only to be expanded after the Second World War, the ideas developed during the inter-war period were to form the basis for the distinct type of socio-liberal social citizenship that evolved in the Nordic states during the twentieth century.

The third developmental stage commenced after the Second World War. This period, widely described as the 'golden era' of the welfare state, marked the consolidation of the Nordic model. This consolidation was facilitated by a period of economic growth and low unemployment rates. The Danish welfare system became defined by its universalism, generous benefits and a high degree of redistribution (Kildal and Kuhnle, 2005). It was also characteristically individualistic, tying social rights to the individual rather than the family unit. Within the welfare state framework, individuals were seen as equal, and the creation of welfare institutions shared by all members of society was to ensure an absence of stigma and promote individual self-respect (Mouritsen, 2015: 13, 85). Welfare institutions were expanded during this period, including in the field of childcare, enabling women to achieve high levels of labour market participation. But gradually, women were also *expected* to participate fully in the labour market. The Danish welfare contract began to rest on the idea that, as a rule, *all* individuals, regardless of gender, should support themselves through labour market participation and contribute to the community through income tax (the Nordic 'work line').

Towards the end of the twentieth century began the 'fourth phase' in the history of social citizenship. Rising immigration numbers and periods of economic stagnation and high unemployment put the social welfare system of the 'golden era' under pressure. Benefits were reduced in value, and in political discourse the emphasis shifted towards the role and duties of each citizen in the larger welfare state context (Jønsson and Petersen, 2013: 170). The ideal welfare state citizen was the 'active' citizen who contributed to society through labour, or at least demonstrated the willingness to acquire the skillset needed to do so. The 1990s saw the introduction of an array of conditionalities into welfare provisions with a focus on 'capacity-building' and 'workfare'. Social citizenship became more 'contractualized', with individual activation plans agreed upon between the state. This, in practice, gave wide discretion to 'street level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 1980), who individualized the conditions that needed to be met in order for individuals to qualify for various types of benefits.

A key driving force behind these changes in the conception and practice of social citizenship towards the end of the twentieth century was immigration. More than any other group, immigrants and Danes of 'non-Western' origin were scrutinised as to their contribution to the welfare state and the wider national community (Jønsson and Petersen, 2012). Participation in society began to be seen no longer exclusively in terms of work and tax contributions, but in a deeper engagement with the culture, language and 'values' of

Denmark (Mouritsen, 2015: 64–69). Full social citizenship became more difficult to access for those first entering the welfare system, with qualifying periods of seven (and later nine) years introduced for example for social assistance, with individuals only being eligible for a lower ‘integration benefit’ during the qualifying period. Many access requirements revolved around demands for cultural ‘integration’, and the Danish family ideal was explicitly promoted by way of child benefit caps at two children. Overall, these measures resulted in a ‘culturalization’ of social citizenship, with ethnic minorities the *de facto* addressees of tighter provisions, although these measures were not *legally* confined to them (Jønsson and Petersen, 2013).

The developments during the ‘fourth stage’ led to changes in the post-war model of social citizenship. The tighter monitoring of welfare recipients meant that the ways in which social citizenship was exercised weakened existing civil and political rights (Magnussen and Nilssen, 2013). The more encompassing focus on citizen duties to extend to a deeper engagement with society meant that the characteristic Nordic socio-liberal citizenship, in part, became more republican. As far as benefits were reduced and self-responsibility emphasised, this also signalled a shift towards a ‘libertarian’ conception of citizenship. However, scholars are agreed that the dominant citizenship model in Denmark remained the socio-liberal one developed in the twentieth century (Johansson and Hvinden, 2007, 223; Mouritsen, 2015: 32). And, despite making initial access more difficult and placing greater emphasis on the duties of welfare recipients, one guiding principle remained that, once an individual was a full member of the community of ‘social citizens’, individuals were treated as equal in status. The ghetto policies, however, are in the process of radically altering this idea of social citizenship.

## **2. The invention of the Danish ‘ghetto’**

The use of the term ‘ghetto’ in political discourse has changed considerably throughout Danish history, as have official policies surrounding segregated areas. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there had been various different geographic areas in Denmark with comparatively high proportions of immigrants. However, in public discourse, the term ‘ghetto’ was only used in relation to one of them, the *Borgergade-Adelgade* Quarter in Copenhagen, an area predominantly inhabited by Russian Jews (Freiesleben, 2016: 111–113). The policies concerning segregated areas in the early twentieth century focused mainly on the refurbishment and demolition of housing. Yet while the term ‘ghetto’ was widely used in media and wider public discourses at the time to refer to this area, it was not used at the official policy level.

In its current meaning, the term ‘ghetto’ did not enter political debate until the 1960s, following the first larger postwar immigration movements. ‘Ghettoization’ had strong negative connotations and came to refer almost exclusively to areas inhabited predominantly by immigrants. The background

to these debates over ghettoization was that immigrants – or ‘guest workers’, as they were referred to – frequently settled in Denmark’s subsidized public housing estates, while better-earning individuals were abandoning these areas. This led to high concentrations of non-ethnic Danes in specific localities. However, since it was assumed that ‘guest workers’ would return to their home countries, many deemed the problem to be only temporary.

As it became clear that many immigrants were going to stay in Denmark, however, areas with high proportions of immigrants were viewed with growing concern by politicians, in particular on the right of the political spectrum. By the mid-1990s, the topic of segregation had reached the centre of political debate and the term ‘ghetto’ began to be used across the party spectrum (Freiesleben, 2016: 118). A number of political initiatives followed that aimed at alleviating some of the social and economic problems associated with areas of high immigrant populations. At this stage, however, the term ‘ghetto’ was not yet used widely in official policy documents and was met with some scepticism in the political arena (2016: 119).

By the late 1990s, however, the government expanded its policies in the area of ‘vulnerable’ housing areas and began to use the term ‘ghetto’ in official policy papers. Despite not being clearly defined, the term ‘ghetto’ was now a commonplace in political debate and policy rhetoric, and ghettoization was widely accepted to be taking place (Freiesleben, 2016: 94).

### ***3. The welfare state and the ghetto: The early initiatives***

In 2000, the Social Democratic government increased financial resources to counter ‘ghettoization’. This was accompanied by a series of legislative measures focussed around Denmark’s public subsidized housing sector, which the government had identified as the main locus of Denmark’s social problems. The Danish public housing sector is one of the largest in Europe, making up around 22% of the housing mass (OECD, 2020). For this reason, the Danish government was able to implement its policies widely and across the country by changing the laws regulating public housing. Denmark’s public housing is run by housing associations and open to all residents of Denmark via a waiting list scheme. The housing associations receive public funding, which in turn gives the municipalities allocation rights for up to 25% of available housing to alleviate social hardship. One of the central aims of the government’s early policies was to bring about a more ‘balanced composition of inhabitants’. This was to be achieved through the introduction of ‘flexible’ letting rules, under which housing associations could give certain groups of applicants preferential treatment, for example wage-earners and students. The government argued that these new rules would allow housing associations to counter negative developments in ‘problem’ areas by attracting individuals with a



stronger attachment to the labour market (Folketingstidende, 1999–2000 tillæg A L 211).

From 2001 onwards, Denmark was led by a centre-right coalition government propped up by the right-wing populist Danish-People's Party (DPP). This government – partially due to its dependence on the DPP – brought about a profound shift in the country's immigration policy, with an increased focus on assimilating immigrants and individuals of 'non-Western' origin into Danish society and on tightening access routes to residence and citizenship. Its hostile attitudes towards immigration and multiculturalism were part of an overall shift towards more xenophobic rhetoric and regulation across Western countries following 9/11. Ethnic minorities were increasingly portrayed as a threat to Western democracies, and the early 2000s saw the introduction of a wide array of 'preventative measures', limiting ethnic minority rights in the fields of policing, naturalization and immigration, across Europe (Kaya, 2009; Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010).

Within the political discourses of this time, 'ghettos' came to refer more explicitly to Muslim and non-Western immigrant communities and were cast as a threat to the 'social cohesion' of the welfare state (Jønsson and Petersen, 2013; Peters, 2014). In 2004, the Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen announced a comprehensive plan to combat ghettos in his New Year's speech. Rasmussen linked ghettos closely to immigration, stating that

Many years of failed immigration policy have [. . .] created immigrant ghettos where the men are unemployed, the women are isolated, and the families speak only the language of their home country. The children grow up without learning Danish properly. Some are influenced by hardened criminals. [. . .] Ghetto formation leads to violence and crime and confrontation. We know this from abroad. And we neither can nor will accept this in Denmark (Rasmussen, 2004; translation by the author).

What followed in May that year was the government's first comprehensive strategy paper on ghettos. Entitled 'The Government's Strategy against Ghettoization' (Regeringen, 2004), the paper set out a series of measures for countering social problems in 'ghettoized areas', and for preventing further ghettos from emerging. The government paper roughly identified eight areas across Denmark as ghettos. It identified these areas based on the following 'indicators': a high proportion of adult residents living on transfer payments, low education levels, a dominance of subsidized housing estates, 'asymmetric moving patterns', and an overall lack of investment (Regeringen, 2004: 15). The paper did not list ethnicity as an explicit indicator for ghettoization. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the ghetto strategy paper revolved strongly around ethnic minorities.

To the government, one of the key problems with ghettos was their place in the welfare state. The paper argued that ghettos showed a stark deviation



in terms of residents' contribution to the welfare state when compared to other parts of the Danish population. As such, ghettos were seen as a potential threat to social cohesion and the functioning of the welfare contract. The main problem was identified as the high concentration of unemployment in these areas. Ghettos were seen as a deviation from the Nordic 'work-line' and a risk factor in generating a 'culture of unemployment' that discouraged individuals from becoming – or returning to be – contributors to the welfare state. Accepting such places of deviance could, in the government's reasoning, lead to a disintegration of society (Regeringen, 2004: 11).

The strategy paper offered a number of explanations for the deviation from the Nordic 'work-line' in ghettos. The main reason it identified was a lack of awareness of 'Danish values'. This lack of awareness was caused by a concentration of immigrants who often brought with them a work ethic that did not match the Nordic model, in particular with regard to women's employment. The paper almost exclusively framed deviations from the Danish 'work line' as an immigrant problem and did not address unemployed 'ethnic Danes'. The ghetto paper proposed that ghettos be converted into places that promote labour market participation, which in turn was deemed essential in enabling individuals to become part of society 'on an equal footing with others' (Regeringen, 2004: 11).

Because the government had identified ethnic difference as a key explanation for high unemployment, the main policy focus of the ghetto initiative was to achieve a greater exposure of ghetto residents to 'Danish values'. This was to be achieved by way of a 'more balanced composition' of residents, which would facilitate contact with 'Danes', make residents engage with the Danish language, and enhance their understanding of those 'norms and values that count here' (Regeringen, 2004: 12). The main policy instrument chosen was 'social mixing', a housing policy widely popular across Europe at the time (Phillips, 2010: 211; van Gent et al., 2018). While the social mixing paradigm has become increasingly contested following studies suggesting it is ineffective, it has been a powerful driver of European housing policy during the past few decades (Jepsen and Nielsen, 2018).

In pursuing its aim of social mixing, the government focused on the allocation of public housing, in line with its earlier measures in the late 1990s. The 2004 strategy called on municipalities and housing associations to use their existing allocation powers for public housing in order to counter ghettoization. The 2004 strategy urged municipalities to take into account the nature of the particular area when allocating individuals with pressing social housing needs, meaning that 'weak resource' individuals should be allocated to areas with fewer social problems. The strategy also encouraged housing associations to engineer the composition of residents more actively by utilizing the possibilities for 'flexible letting' based on criteria such as employment, education and income (Regeringen, 2004: 23).

In addition, the strategy aimed at introducing a number of *new* allocation powers for subsidized housing in ghetto areas (Regeringen, 2004: 27–45). It proposed a new model – ‘combined letting’ – which could be instituted in ghetto areas by agreement between the respective municipality and housing association. Under these new provisions, municipalities and housing associations could agree to *reject* welfare recipients already on a waiting list for subsidized housing, if their moving into the estate was deemed to increase the hardship of the area. The individuals rejected from waiting lists in a particular area would instead need to be allocated a flat in a different location within six months of the rejection notification. The paper also proposed that no new welfare recipients should be added to public housing waiting lists of areas at risk of ghettoization.

The government’s emphasis on promoting the interaction of ‘ghetto residents’ with ‘Danes’ was also expressed in further initiatives proposed in the ghetto strategy, which concerned cultural integration, crime prevention and schooling. Schools were to be permitted to promote a balanced ethnic composition, and to reject students of non-Danish ethnicity, if the schools were already deemed to be ‘overburdened’. These measures have to be seen in the context of other ‘cultural integration’ policies of the time. In 2004, for example, the Danish legislator had introduced mandatory ‘language stimulation’ for bilingual children, whose Danish was deemed insufficient at the age of three. This involved 15 hours of weekly Danish language training. While this measure was not directly connected to the ghetto strategy, it forms part of a series of measures that are aimed at increasing (future) labour market participation among non-ethnic Danes through greater exposure to Danish language and culture. Finally, the proposal contained plans to allow for council houses to be repurposed for businesses to make vulnerable areas more vibrant, and to sell a number of publicly owned houses to create a private property market. All of the measures proposed in the 2004 strategy paper were subsequently implemented by law.

The 2004 strategy marked the beginning of an increasingly *spatial* conceptualization of social citizenship. The strategy explicitly focused on *groups* of citizens in certain localities rather than individual performance within the welfare state. This meant that individuals were subjected to a greater degree of scrutiny due to their place of residence, regardless of their individual employment status. The spatial conceptualization of social citizenship was also reflected in how the state began to interfere more actively with the residence preferences of welfare recipients. It limited the possibilities of welfare recipients to realistically access specific housing localities due to its encouragement of preferential waiting lists for wage earners and other resourceful groups. This signalled a new – and very indirect – type of activation policy, which rested on the assumption that an individual’s location of residence had an impact on their labour force participation.

Although ghettos were not identified directly on the basis of ethnicity in 2004, the problems and ideals expressed in the strategy revolved strongly

around culture and ethnicity. The 2004 paper set out a 'Danish' ideal of social citizenship and defined areas in which individuals overall fell short of it. Throughout the ghetto strategy paper, there was an implicit understanding of a particular value set defining Danish social citizenship, accompanied by an assumption that ethnic minorities had a strong disposition to fulfilling their social citizenship duties.

The 2004 paper stated that *equality* was a guiding principle of the ghetto initiative: every citizen was, in future, to receive 'equal opportunities to participate in and contribute to society's growth and welfare' (Regeringen, 2004: 11). As such, the ghetto strategy could be interpreted as a measure aimed at *facilitating* equality. But in line with the increasingly assimilationist stance on integration seen in Denmark and across Europe in the early 2000s, this was a formalistic idea of equality that did not take into account social, economic and cultural realities on the ground. What is more, the vision of future equality that the strategy claimed to advance was accompanied by a process of eroding equality *in the present*. What justified this, in the view of the government, was the insufficient performance of ghetto residents within the welfare state. This firmly placed responsibility for low labour market participation with ghetto residents themselves, making their situation seem like a choice or individual failure while overlooking the wider structural biases that worked against these individuals in society as a whole (Grünenberg and Freiesleben, 2016). This conceptualization would later be used more explicitly to advance more targeted and punitive measures against ghetto residents and limit their rights further.

#### **4. Ethnicizing the ghetto**

The 2004 strategy had been a testing ground for targeted measures in designated ghetto areas. In October 2010, the centre-right Danish government issued a new ghetto strategy entitled 'Returning the Ghetto to Society – A Reckoning with Parallel Societies in Denmark' (Regeringen, 2010). Unlike the 2004 strategy paper, the 2010 paper set out a precise ghetto definition that was subsequently laid down by law. Based on this definition, the government would go on to issue an annual 'ghetto list'. A ghetto was now defined as a public housing residential area with a minimum of 1,000 inhabitants, to which at least two of the following applied:

The share of immigrants and descendants from non-Western countries exceeds 50%

The share of individuals between 18 and 64 year of age outside the labour market or education exceeds 40%

The number of criminal convicts exceeds 270 per 10,000 residents

Across Denmark, 29 areas met this definition, a marked increase from the eight ghetto areas identified in the 2004 plan. The introduction of a legal definition meant that targeted measures could now become binding and legally enforced in these areas. This also marked the beginning of a more punitive orientation of the Danish policies compared to those of other countries. Most significantly, 'non-Western immigrants *and descendants*' (emphasis added) was a novel criterion used in the identification of 'ghettos' that was unknown in other countries (Staver et al., 2019: 13).

With the inclusion of ethnicity as a defining criterion for ghettos, the ghettos were framed explicitly in terms of ethnic and cultural problems rather than socio-economic problems alone. Compared to 2004, the 2010 strategy paper was also more detailed in its explications on the relationship between the ghetto and the welfare state. It contained a separate chapter entitled 'Away from passive receipt of public welfare' (Regeringen, 2010: 26ff). The relationship between ghettos and the welfare state was presented as the consequence of a fundamental cultural incompatibility, turning the welfare state into an argument for a comprehensive policy of cultural assimilation.

The 2010 initiative was much more detailed than its predecessor, proposing 32 different policy measures. The aim, however, remained that of achieving a more 'balanced composition of residents'. The fact that in some areas six out of ten individuals were from 'non-Western' backgrounds was deemed 'unacceptable' (Regeringen, 2010: 15). The strategy went beyond the 2004 initiative by proposing that refugees and individuals from non-EEA countries could not be allocated by municipalities to areas defined as a ghetto. Moreover, the 2010 plan further weakened the position of welfare recipients. In addition to the rules of the 2004 framework, according to which municipalities could not allocate recipients of social assistance to ghetto areas, those on unemployment benefits, sickness benefits or early retirement schemes were now also to be excluded (Regeringen, 2010: 16). A further proposal, which was later abandoned, was that ghetto residents would not be eligible for family reunification.

Besides housing, a further focus of the strategy was on activation measures aimed at ghetto areas and an increased focus on enforcing obligations. There were, for example, to be more *Jobcentres* in ghettos, aimed at facilitating labour market integration. Another focus of the 2010 ghetto plan was on children. One aspect of this was a new law under which bilingual children had to be enrolled in mandatory Danish daycare at the age of three for 30 hours per week (an increase from the 15 hours under the previous rules) if their Danish was deemed of insufficient proficiency. While this applied across the country, the ghetto paper stressed that this would need to be particularly vigorously enforced in ghettos. Municipalities were to sanction parents by reducing their child allowance if they did not comply (Regeringen 2010, 21). Finally, the government intended to sharpen measures against social fraud and proposed 'systematic inspection efforts' (Regeringen, 2010: 32).

The 2010 strategy reinforced the spatial divide of citizens commenced by the 2004 strategy. It led to more groups being excluded from municipal allocation and from public housing waiting lists. Municipalities had to ensure that an individual would be allocated housing elsewhere within six months if they were rejected from a public housing waiting list in a ghetto. While as a whole, access to public housing was therefore not substantially diminished, the possibility of waiting times and the overall reduction of available housing for the individuals concerned still meant a reduction of their opportunities within the public housing sector. As in the 2004 strategy, this was justified as a type of indirect activation policy, according to which keeping specific groups of individuals away from specific localities was deemed to facilitate their labour market integration.

The most profound change following from the 2010 strategy was that ethnicity became a legal criterion in the identification of ghettos. Underlying this was an assumption that immigrants and individuals of 'non-Western' descent were less likely to fulfil their role within the welfare state. As in the previous strategy, problems concerning welfare state contribution – and policy measures developed to address them – were linked to specific localities. But with ethnicity becoming a very criterion for defining these spaces, the spatial and ethnic were coupled. The 2010 ghetto strategy thus signalled an explicit move towards an ethnicized understanding of social citizenship.

### **5. Interlude: The 2013 ghetto plan**

In 2011, a Social Democratic government assumed power. This government disagreed with its predecessors' ghetto criteria – in particular the criterion of ethnicity. It also took issue with the term 'ghetto' more generally and considered removing it from official vocabulary (Freiesleben, 2016, 164). In May 2013, the government presented its new strategy paper 'Vulnerable Housing Areas - The Next Steps – The Government's Strategy for a Strengthened Initiative' (Regeringen 2013), in which it outlined a new set of ghetto-criteria aimed at making the lists more nuanced. Despite opposition from the conservative and right-wing parties, the legal ghetto definition was expanded from three to five criteria to include income and education. The two additional criteria were:

The share of residents between 30 and 59 years of age without an occupational education exceeds 60%

The average gross taxable income for individuals over the age of 15 is less than 60% of the regional average

For an area to count as a ghetto, a residential area comprising 1,000 residents had to meet three out of the five ghetto criteria. Despite the Social

Democrats' attempts to distance themselves from their predecessors' ghetto policies, however, the underlying rationale of the ghetto policies remained the same. Ghettos continued to be portrayed as a threat to the individuals inside them as well as to overall social cohesion, and apart from changing the definition of a ghetto, the new initiative proposed only cosmetic changes to the legal tools available.

## **6. The 2018 ghetto initiative and the reshaping of the welfare contract**

In 2018, the Danish centre-right government launched a new ghetto strategy. The plan, entitled 'A Denmark without Parallel Societies – No Ghettos by 2030' (Regeringen, 2018), was the most radical ghetto initiative yet. It proposed to get rid of ghettos 'once and for all' by 2030 (Regeringen, 2018: 6) and introduced a range of new policy measures in order to achieve this aim. As a result of the 2018 initiative, the ghetto definition was changed once again. Residential areas could now fall into three different categories: vulnerable housing areas, ghettos, and hard ghettos. A vulnerable housing area met two out of the following four criteria:

The share of residents between 18–64 of age outside labour market exceeds 40%

The share of criminal convicts exceeds 2.7%.

The share of residents between 30 and 59 years of age with no more than primary school education exceeds 60%

The average gross taxable income for individuals between the age of 15 and 64 is less than 55% of the regional average

A ghetto, in turn, was an area that:

Meets the criteria of a 'vulnerable housing area', and

The share of immigrants and descendants from non-Western countries exceeds 50%

By way of the new definitions, ethnicity had become an *essential criterion* in identifying ghetto areas. This identification based on ethnicity was intended to allow government strategy to focus on the 'distinct challenges in ghetto areas based on a lacking integration of immigrants and their descendants from non-Western countries' (Folketingstidende, 2018–2019 tillæg A L 38: 9). A hard ghetto, finally, was any area that had been on government's official ghetto list for the past four years.

The ghetto strategy paper employed stronger rhetoric than the previous ones, emphasizing the unsustainability of tolerating ghettos within the Danish welfare state. Overall, the measures adopted were significantly more far-reaching than those of previous initiatives.

The new measures for achieving a ‘balanced composition of residents’ in vulnerable housing areas included *prohibiting* municipalities from allocating welfare recipients to social housing in such areas and rendering their residents ineligible for family reunification. Moreover, housing associations in vulnerable housing areas were *obliged* to introduce preferential treatment for wage earners, individuals in education, in an apprenticeship or individual who have been self-sufficient for more than six months. In ‘hard ghettos’, housing associations would be obliged to reject recipients of integration allowances or social assistance from waiting lists. Moreover, the paper proposed that individuals would have their level of social assistance reduced if they moved into hard ghetto areas. It is important to note that while the 2018 strategy built on earlier instruments, the law was changed to make use of these instruments *mandatory* for municipalities and housing associations.

The 2018 strategy also focused on the physical restructuring of ghetto areas. For ‘hard ghettos’, the government introduced a requirement that municipalities and housing associations produce a development plan on how the percentage of subsidized housing properties could be reduced to 40. If no feasible plan was developed to the satisfaction of the responsible government ministry, the government would take over the properties in question and privatize or demolish them.

A further significant measure of the 2018 plan was the parental obligation to enrol in Danish–language day care all children from the age of 12 months (paid by the state), with benefit sanctions being the consequence if parents did not comply. Notably, this new rule *only* applied to vulnerable housing areas and was not a general rule across Denmark.

Almost all of the measures proposed in the 2018 paper were adopted by law. The only measure abandoned during the legislative process was the reduction of social assistance for individuals who moved into ghetto areas.

The intricate sub-differentiation between vulnerable housing areas, ghettos and hard ghettos and the various measures of the 2018 initiative continued the previous development towards a spatialization and ethnicization of social citizenship. The 2018 strategy was the first strategy to introduce special conditionalities for individuals in vulnerable housing areas (in the form of mandatory day-care for children from the age of twelve months). This meant that residents of ghettos now carried a different set of duties in return for social rights than those outside. The mandatory nature of many of the allocation instruments for municipalities and housing associations further sharpened the meaning of space in the promotion and enforcement of the welfare contract. With language requirements and exposure to ‘Danish’ culture a key



aspect of full access to child benefits, the 2018 initiative also continued the culturalization of social rights.

Overall, the Danish ghetto policies are much more punitive and focused on ethnicity than those of its neighbouring countries - something which the 2018 initiative confirmed. Both Sweden and Norway also launched anti-segregation strategies in 2018, but these were much more focused on 'enabling' measures that seek to counter the wide range of socio-economic disadvantages experienced by residents of segregated areas (Staver et al., 2019). In a Nordic and European comparison, the Danish 2018 initiative stands out as one that explicitly targets ethnic minorities and limits their rights based on culturalist attributions of responsibility for a lacking contribution to the welfare state.

## Conclusion

Over the past two decades, the Danish ghetto strategies have changed the way 'social citizenship' is understood and shaped in Denmark. This article has highlighted how the four ghetto initiatives have gradually withdrawn full social citizenship status from ghetto residents.

As we have seen, the immediate physical and social environment of an individual has begun to play an increasingly central role in defining an individual's place in the wider national welfare community. The ghetto strategies have introduced a *spatialized* citizenship ideal in which an individual is no longer viewed in relation to their individual contribution to the welfare state, but also in terms of their social and ethnic environment, as translated into geographic territories. In its most extreme manifestation, this has led to the curtailment of certain rights associated with social citizenship, not because of an individual's failure to comply with their citizenship duties, but because of the overall 'performance' of the area in which they reside.

The most problematic marker of this spatialization is ethnicity. Ethnicity – rather than socio-economic factors alone – is seen in Danish policy as a key element of an individual's (potential) contribution to the welfare state. The curtailment of rights in specific localities is – by extension – justified on the basis that ethnicity as such constitutes a problem for the welfare state, due to an absence of 'Danish values' in these areas. While in most welfare states, curtailment of rights and the use of welfare sanctions tend to disproportionately affect ethnic minorities in practice, the Danish state has explicitly made ethnic minorities the target of such measures.

Many policy measures of the Danish ghetto strategies can be found in countries across Europe. The 'social mixing' paradigm has been popular among European policy makers, although it has faced increasing criticism for being inefficient. But while attempts to facilitate 'social mixing' have been employed across Europe, the Danish ghetto policies are unique. In no other

European country have legal 'zones' been created in which individuals need to comply with additional demands in return for welfare benefits. The Danish policies are also much more explicitly concerned with ethnicity and immigration than those of other Nordic countries, for example.

In justifying its ghetto strategies, the Danish government has argued that its aim is to promote equality. In doing so, it has drawn upon abstract notions of future equality in regard to both an individual's opportunities in, and contribution to, the Danish welfare state. But by introducing specific conditions for residents of particular areas, the ghetto strategies depart drastically from previous notions of social citizenship rights granted on equal terms. This futurist orientation of the ghetto policies erodes social citizenship in the present and idealises a future in which there will be no ghettos.

The justification is based on the idea that ghetto residents need to improve their performance within the welfare state, and that their insufficient performance is a matter of choice or will. Ghetto-inhabitants are thereby constructed as 'undeserving' and 'unfinished' citizens who need to prove themselves worthy of (re-)gaining full social citizenship. Blame for specific socio-economic outcomes is overwhelmingly attributed to ghetto residents themselves, which sidelines the fact that many social outcomes are not the result of individual choice or attitude, but the wider structural discrimination faced by ethnic minorities.

The consequence of the ghetto policies is that they allow for a differentiation among citizens and – ultimately – the attachment of *stigma* to certain citizens. It was one of the achievements of social citizenship as conceived in the twentieth century to promote social inclusion and remove social stigma from members of the welfare polity. The ghetto policies mark a drastic deviation from these core guiding principles of twentieth century welfare thought. Research has already shown how ghetto residents are stigmatized and how Danish society has become divided between ideas of 'us' and 'them' (Simonsen, 2016; Schultz-Larsen and Delica, 2019). Once ideas of differentiated citizenship status become more deeply entrenched among policy makers and in wider society, they are only likely to lead to further inroads into the ideals of equality that were once the hallmark of the Danish welfare state.

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