

Area-based policies in urban areas: how to promote good living conditions for children and youth (Norway, 13-14 November 2012)¹

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1. A brief assessment of the possible relevance and the learning value of the Norwegian policies to the countries of your members

The Norwegian and Danish approach towards children and youth is very much alike – securing fundamental rights through legislation, mostly managed by the Municipality, financed through taxation to secure equal rights and thus prevent poverty: housing rights, supplemented by rental subsidies for low income families – minimum income/social or unemployment benefits, supplemented by further benefits to secure fundamental goods for low income families – free education/student grants and health services, supplemented by education guidance towards youngsters with a low or no skilled background – day care system, supplemented by subsidies towards low income families – low fee Municipal leisure facilities – an active labour market effort etc.

It is crucial to state, that from an overall point of view this approach works as mentioned in the Oslo report to explain the low rate of poverty among children and youngsters in Copenhagen as in Oslo (family income below 60% of median). Furthermore, recent research in Copenhagen and the other five largest cities in Denmark shows, that approximately 50% of poor families do not stay poor, after two years, their income has increased.

It is also important to explain the dual background of the Danish approach. Social and other services are maintained to secure equal rights, which is also seen as an investment and therefore maintained to secure a healthy, highly skilled labour force to meet the demands of competitive, profitable enterprises, allowing high incomes to secure the financing of Public expenditure. This dual approach is mirrored in the Danish flexicurity system and for example explains the mobility in the Danish labour market, especially in Copenhagen. In Copenhagen, the average time in one post is 2,5 years in private enterprises – even currently. This also may explain the mobility in the population of low-income families.

Still, the number of low-income families in Copenhagen has increased in the last 12 years, seemingly not dependent of the economic boom 2002-2008 or the current financial crises. Furthermore, low-income families tend to live concentrated in six urban areas – and in a number of housing associations within these areas there are almost only or a majority of immigrant families². Low-income Danish families live

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2 Immigrants are defined as immigrants from third world countries and their children born in Denmark.



more widely spread out, although still more than 80% of them live within the six urban areas.

In Copenhagen, we have managed urban regeneration initiatives since 1988 as an on-going process. In 2011, the City of Copenhagen launched a 2012-2020 approach, targeting the six urban areas. This approach entails a policy for disadvantaged areas of Copenhagen, gathering existing initiatives, introducing new initiatives and introducing a new set of goals all financed by the City of Copenhagen and the Housing Association Fund.

Within the policy, there are a number of measures, similar to the measures in Oslo, like free leisure facilities and activities targeting children and youngsters, environment friendly renewal to create inviting urban areas among others.

From Copenhagen we especially look forward to following the outcome of the different initiatives and methods to teach immigrant women Norwegian and to involve them in the community. In Copenhagen, the Municipality offers a wide and flexible range of free Danish courses which include different approaches targeting the unemployed, non or low skilled immigrant women (especially mothers), as part of the urban initiatives. Within the last 8-10 years a vast number of different approaches and methods have been developed, but so far the outcome has been limited and very costly. We hope to collect new and valuable lessons from Oslo, as we believe that immigrant mothers hold the key to the future of their children. Looking into the last 100 years of immigration in Copenhagen, this group of women seems to be left behind: never learning Danish properly, entering the labour market or becoming part of the community – Russian, Finnish, Greek, Yugoslavian, Turkish, Pakistan, Somali for example.

2. How the universal provision approach and the approach of more targeted actions are balanced in the countries of your members?

As stated above, the universal provision approach is fundamental in Denmark to secure equal rights for all citizens and to prevent poverty through supplementing subsidies as described. Besides there is a right of services targeting citizens with special needs such as people with disabilities, orphans, citizens with a chronic disease etc. In this way, the Danish system balances a universal and a targeted approach.

The current debate focuses at two issues: If these services do not produce the expected outcome – then what? There are advantages and disadvantages to maintain a wide number of services targeting immigrant and other socially disadvantaged groups.

One example: Due to a growing number of youngsters leaving school with inadequate qualifications, a number of supplementing initiatives have been developed in the last decades – special classes, educational guidance, guidance services towards parents, guidance from social workers etc. In the last years, however, there is a growing demand for public services to change and become more efficient. As urban communities become more and more diverse - school teachers need accordingly, to change education methods to be able to embrace all pupils – one cannot change pupils to fit into existing education methods or allow an ever increasing expenditure to repair declining outcome.

The increase in the number of graduates regarded as one of the most important issues. Two generations ago, low skilled labourers could find a job and stay



employed however in the future, the low skilled jobs will disappear. 2020 prognoses show the lack of 50.000 skilled labourers in the Copenhagen region at different education levels and no employment opportunities for app. 60.000 low or no skilled labourers.

Research later years shows, that the most significant factor to explain why the percentage of graduates in the youth population is declining is the parents' lack of education, especially the mother's. Another factor, less significant, but still important, is the parents' unemployment. Therefore, the reason why many young immigrants never graduate is not their ethnic but their social background, as a higher percentage of immigrant parents are low or no skilled workers compared to Danish parents. This is the same results for Danish youngsters with low or non-skilled parents – and the gap between the two groups is closing. Looking into immigrant parents with a university degree, their children graduate from universities at almost the same rate as Danes with the same background – female immigrants from a number of nationalities like Pakistan even graduate at a higher rate than Danish women.

Furthermore, employment initiatives grouping immigrant youngsters or immigrant women (or socially disadvantaged groups with alike problems) result in a very limited outcome. There seems to be a tendency to focus on challenges from the employees as well as the immigrants - and the immigrants feel they are treated as problem citizens and act accordingly as victims. A growing number of initiatives using empowering methods show much better outcomes – overcoming challenges is one thing, developing potential is quite another. As part of new initiatives, private and public enterprises are much more involved. For example, when immigrant women visit a Scandic hotel to meet the female Somali boss of 110 house-keepers it had a much better impact than any employment course and most benefited from a learning by doing stay at the hotel to become employed. The different approaches are very much discussed among professionals in employment administrations and language schools – and it is an issue debated often in the media as well.

It is well known, that the Danish employment legislation has become very strict towards the long term unemployed in the last decade, especially hitting immigrant families due to a higher long time unemployment rate among the immigrant population. At the moment, it is a front page issue as well. On one hand, it does work and the employment rate in for example deprived urban areas has increased significantly. On the other, all initiatives towards the group of the socially most disadvantaged has shown little or no outcome - as one reason why the number of low-income families has increased. So, in Copenhagen, it is not a question of Danish versus immigrant populations, it is a question of a growing gap between the increasingly qualified, healthier and richer populations and the rest of the population not developing. From Copenhagen, we would like to learn lessons from other Member States, as we believe this to be a major issue for a number of reasons.

There is a growing segregation in the European cities not only between populations, but as well between richer a poorer urban areas, in Copenhagen as well – why is that a challenge? Research shows that the neighbourhood matters. One example: 72% of young people with a non or low skilled background enter education, if they live outside the six deprived urban areas, less than 50%, if they live within. It is also true the other way around, as fewer young people with a university background enter education, if they live within the six areas, compared to young people in the other areas. Research shows the impact – one example: In one of the six urban areas there has been urban regeneration initiatives since 1988, between 1998-2002 the number of unemployed was reduced people by more than 50%. As an important part of the initiatives, outdoor areas were renewed and a wide range



of leisure activities offered to children, youth and adults. Surveys showed the residents to be happy to live in the area no matter the reputation, much appreciating the initiatives. However, research also showed, that the former unemployed families moved as soon as their income allowed – as a result, the unemployment rate in 2002 was higher than in 1988.

Finally, research across Europe as in Copenhagen shows, that in deprived areas especially young males experience that they are not offered equal opportunities and are treated differently. Leading researchers point out, that it is not a question of if, but when we will see riots again.

It is very interesting to know, if the urban dynamics work differently in Oslo and why.

In Copenhagen, the reasons described is why the Policy for disadvantaged areas of Copenhagen has been launched, committing the City of Copenhagen to lift the six urban areas to the average of Copenhagen, still allowing and enhancing different urban cultures.

3. What are the main governance approaches in the countries of your members related to the implementation of policies/measures to combat child poverty?

The main governance approach is explained above – and as most services to prevent child poverty are governed by the Municipality, the City of Copenhagen decides policies and measures.

However, the challenges seem to be similar to some of the challenges described in the papers from Oslo:

- Public services tend to become more and more specialised, demanding more coordination between units within each administration. Furthermore, it has shown even more difficult to coordinate services across Municipal administrations. There are sadly many examples of citizens having to deal with several professionals – examples of young people with 16 professionals across social, employment, housing and education across Municipal and Government organisations.
- Coordinating across government bodies such as hospitals and the Municipalities is an issue too
- The debate across government and Municipality on measures and expenditure is a constant issue

One of the important goals of the Policy for disadvantaged areas of Copenhagen is to establish a transparent insight of services, measures, expenditure and outcome in each area to be able to coordinate across sectors intelligently in the years to come and to reach the targets within the budget.

The Oslo paper describes challenges to involve residents and other stakeholders. Lessons learnt in Copenhagen point at two issues:

1. It is important to involve local stakeholders to create a local ownership, as failures in the past show: the less influence, the less involvement and the more resistance against the city administrations – but who and how much power should be delegated to local residents on how to spend a many million kroner budget? Over the years, an agreed solution has been worked out: an overall plan as a frame, approved by the government and City Council – to be filled out by an assembly of professionals from the city administrations, groups of local residents each pointing out a chairman and representatives from local,



democratic bodies like school boards, residential boards, sport and culture clubs, enterprise associations, NGOs etc. It is very, very time consuming and causes a constant debate, but it does establish a local ownership and it does create innovative solutions using local resources, improving living conditions. The model was inspired by initiatives in Holland and the UK.

2. The other issue is more difficult: how to involve the more disadvantaged residents in the initiatives aimed to improve living conditions for example disadvantaged immigrant women and gangs of criminal youngsters? It has been a success to form groups of immigrant women and give them a role as ambassadors voicing the women's needs – inspired by Amsterdam. The Youth Job Centre plays an important role, offering criminal young people hands on assistance into education and jobs, helping young prisoners into education and to guide them into employment when released. However, it is difficult – so there is a need for ideas from other cities.

4. Europe 2020 strategy: What is the role for the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion and the forthcoming Recommendation on child poverty?

- Remind the Member States of their obligation towards the active inclusion policy as an important strategy to prevent poverty and social exclusion
- Point at social services as an investment like the Nordic countries
- To establish agreement across Member States on how to define poverty
- Improve job opportunities for socially excluded families as the best and most sustainable approach to prevent child poverty
- Research into best practise examples
- Support urban regeneration initiatives, creating education and job opportunities for excluded families

A final comment:

No EU funding so far has been sufficient to solve the challenges they aim at across the Member States – in this case, it may be better to spend the money on extensive research on if, how and why child poverty increase and how different structures in the Member States tend to increase or prevent child poverty?

For instance, the economy in Copenhagen is better compared to cities in other Member States, creating better opportunities to prevent poverty – on the other hand, the labour market demands still more qualifications and efficiency, attracting highly qualified labourers from the region. In this way, it is more difficult for the socially excluded to enter the labour market – they may have better opportunities in other cities. The structural differences may call for different solutions?

