

Beyond segregation: Nordic approaches to socially inclusive cities

Mats Stjernberg, Rebecca Cavicchia,
Ágúst Bogason, Alix Vuithier

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pub.nordregio.org/r-2025-7-beyond-segregation-nordic-approaches-to-socially-inclusive-cities

Summary

In recent decades, Nordic cities have witnessed a general trend towards increased urban segregation, which has led to a wide range of policy and planning interventions addressing these issues across the Nordic countries. Against this background this report examines how Nordic governments and cities address challenges of urban segregation through various policies, strategies, and plans that seek to foster greater social inclusion. The report also explores how the state and municipalities interact, as well as how public sector organisations and other actors work together to tackle segregation and foster social inclusion.

The study focuses on four main themes. The first theme concerns what the Nordic policy landscape looks like in terms of policies aimed at counteracting segregation and promoting social inclusion in cities, while the second relates to the role of indicators and data. The third theme explores the public participation and citizen involvement policies, strategies and planning approaches used in Nordic cities to strengthen inclusion in both newly built and existing neighbourhoods. The fourth theme concerns the role of architecture and design, and more specifically the built environment interventions employed by cities in response to the challenges of urban segregation and social inclusion. The study relies on a multi-case study approach, investigating 13 city cases across the five Nordic countries.

The study shows that counteracting segregation and creating more socially inclusive cities is both a complex and challenging task. Key preconditions for inclusive and effective implementation include close collaboration between relevant actors at different levels of policy and planning as well as citizen/stakeholder engagement throughout planning and development processes. The case studies highlight that there is no universal blueprint for creating more inclusive cities and neighbourhoods, and that different approaches have their advantages and limitations. For example, interventions in the physical living environment can have several positive effects on improving local living conditions and neighbourhood vitality, particularly if residents and actors are engaged in co-planning their local living environments. However, when it comes to addressing the more complex issue of urban segregation, which relates to broader structural causes such as greater social inequalities, the effects of physical interventions appear rather limited, and would also require interventions in other fields of policy. The study also highlights that indicators are important for monitoring segregation and guiding policy and planning interventions, but must be used carefully to avoid stigmatising disadvantaged areas. Overall, a holistic, multi-sectoral approach is essential for effectively tackling urban segregation, and this requires long-term planning and continuous efforts that range beyond the limited time frame of individual projects.

Sammanfattning

Under de senaste årtiondena har man i nordiska städer kunnat iaktta en allmän trend mot ökad segregation, vilket har lett till en rad olika policy- och planeringsinsatser för att ta itu med dessa frågor i de nordiska länderna. Mot denna bakgrund undersöker denna rapport hur man i Norden på både statlig nivå och i olika städer hanterar utmaningar med segregation i städer genom olika strategier och planer som syftar till att främja ökad social inkludering. Rapporten undersöker också hur staten och kommunerna samverkar, samt hur organisationer inom den offentliga sektorn och andra aktörer arbetar tillsammans för att motverka segregation och främja social inkludering.

Studien fokuserar på fyra huvudteman. Det första temat handlar om hur det nordiska policylandskapet ser ut när det gäller strategier som syftar till att motverka segregation och främja social inkludering i städer, medan det andra handlar om hur indikatorer används för att stödja policy- och planeringsinsatser. Det tredje temat utforskar de policyer, strategier och planeringsmetoder för offentligt deltagande och medborgarinflytande som används i nordiska städer i både nybyggda och befintliga stadsdelar. Det fjärde temat handlar om arkitektens och designens roll, och mer specifikt stadsplaneringsåtgärder som syftar till att förbättra den fysiska och sociala livsmiljön i städer. Studien undersöker hur man jobbar med de denna typ av frågor runtom i Norden genom att undersöka 13 städer i de fem nordiska länderna.

Utifrån studien kan man dra slutsatsen att det är både en komplex och utmanande uppgift att motverka segregation och skapa mer socialt inkluderande städer. Viktiga förutsättningar för ett inkluderande och effektivt genomförande av policy- och planeringsinsatser är bland annat ett nära samarbete mellan relevanta aktörer på olika nivåer inom politik och planering samt att invånare och andra centrala intressenter engageras genom hela planerings- och utvecklingsprocessen. Fallstudierna visar att det inte finns något universellt recept för att skapa mer inkluderande städer och stadsdelar, och att olika metoder har sina fördelar och begränsningar. Exempelvis kan insatser i den fysiska livsmiljön ha flera positiva effekter för att förbättra de lokala levnadsvillkoren och stadsdelarnas livskraft, särskilt om invånare och aktörer är engagerade i planeringen av sina lokala livsmiljöer. Men när det gäller att ta itu med den mer komplexa frågan om segregation i städer, som har att göra med bredare strukturella orsaker som större social ojämlikhet, verkar effekterna av insatser i den fysiska livsmiljön vara ganska begränsade och skulle också behöva stödjas av insatser inom andra relevant policyområden. Studien visar också att indikatorer är viktiga för att övervaka segregation och vägleda policy- och planeringsinsatser, men att de måste

användas med försiktighet för att undvika att stigmatisera områden.

Sammantaget är ett holistiskt, sektorsövergripande angreppssätt avgörande för att effektivt ta itu med segregation i städer, och detta kräver långsiktig planering och kontinuerliga insatser som sträcker sig bortom den begränsade tidsramen för enskilda projekt.



Source: City of Bergen, M. Rousse

1. Introduction and background

The issue of urban segregation has gained increasing political, public and scholarly attention across Europe, including the Nordic countries. While European cities have traditionally had lower levels of segregation compared to North American ones, in recent decades they have experienced rising social inequalities and segregation (Musterd et al., 2017; Tammaru et al., 2019). This is related to factors such as changes in welfare regimes and housing systems; global economic and labour market restructuring; and immigration (Musterd & Ostendorf, 1998; Tammaru et al., 2019; van Kempen, 2007). As noted by several scholars, income inequalities have grown in advanced capitalist countries since the 1980s, with the pursuit of free market efficiency, welfare retrenchments and privatisation – all of which have impacted the provision of social housing – exacerbating segregation issues (Arbaci, 2007).

Nordic countries and cities are not exempt from these trends. Despite robust social protection systems and high levels of income redistribution, they have seen mounting socio-spatial segregation and inequalities, combined with shrinking social housing stocks (Haarstad et al., 2021; Tammaru et al., 2021; Wessel, 2015).

A tendency towards increased urban segregation is observable in all the Nordic countries. While this trend is most evident in major urban regions and capital cities (Tunström & Wang, 2019), it is also present in many medium-sized and smaller towns (Saikkonen et al., 2018; SKR, 2022; Stjernberg, Oliveira E Costa, et al., 2020). The precise terms of the segregation situation varies, however, across the Nordic countries.

Residential segregation appears to be most pronounced in Sweden, with Stockholm exhibiting the sharpest socio-economic segregation among the Nordic capital cities (Haandrikman et al., 2023; Tammaru et al., 2021). In terms of ethnic segregation, spatial isolation trends among immigrants and ethnic minorities in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö are among the most extreme in Europe (Östh et al., 2015). Denmark, particularly Copenhagen, also displays significant segregation between ethnic and socio-economic groups, notably between rental and owner-occupied housing (Christensen, 2015). In Norway, demographic shifts and increasing inequality has made Oslo a focal point, with an increased concentration of non-European residents in rental housing and poorer districts (Turner & Wessel, 2013). Here, the ethnic and socio-economic divide between the eastern and western parts of the city is remarkable, reflecting both residential and school segregation patterns (Cavicchia & Cucca, 2020).

In Finland, numerous studies have drawn attention to increased socio-economic and ethnic segregation in the Helsinki region since the early 1990s economic recession (Kortteinen & Vaattovaara, 2015; Vilkkumäki et al., 2014). Deprivation has become increasingly multilayered and concentrated in areas where there are high concentrations of social rented housing (City of Helsinki, 2019). Finally, in Iceland, where residential segregation has traditionally been low, a rapid rise in labour migration over recent years has led to emerging patterns of spatial isolation among Reykjavík's immigrant and minority populations (Huilla et al., 2024; Magnúsdóttir et al., 2020).

In order to address concerns arising from these trends, governments and cities across the Nordic region – and Europe more broadly – have implemented an array of policies and urban planning measures aimed at promoting social inclusion and combating poverty. Such policies are often focused on specific urban or suburban areas, (Stjernberg et al. 2020; Tunström et al., 2016), typically post-war housing estates and deprived urban areas, which are increasingly associated with socio-economic and physical decline (Hess et al., 2018; Trætteberg et al., 2023). These regeneration efforts often include measures targeting the physical and social environments of such areas (P. Hall, 1997; Hess et al., 2018; Van Kempen et al., 2005). Other approaches include policies designed to encourage social mixing, such as inclusionary housing initiatives in Denmark (Granath Hansson et al., 2024), or the City of Helsinki's policy of housing tenure mixing, which has been applied since the 1960s in order to prevent segregation (Ronkainen & Eskelä, 2022; Vaattovaara et al., 2018). In broad terms, these policies and planning measures are designed either to promote social inclusion in disadvantaged or decaying neighbourhoods, or alternatively prevent the emergence of social problems in newly built areas.

It is these Nordic approaches and practices that form the subject of this report, which is part of the 'Planning for Socially Mixed and Inclusive Neighbourhoods' project, carried out as part of the work of the Nordic Thematic Group for Green and Inclusive Urban Development (2021–2024).

1.1 Aims and research questions

This study looks at Nordic policy-making and planning concerning the development of more socially inclusive cities and neighbourhoods. The region's national governments have introduced a range of policies and strategies designed to prevent segregation in cities, while planning interventions are typically carried out at the city or district level. Thus, the report explores how the state and municipalities interact, as well as how public sector organisations and other actors work together to tackle segregation and foster social inclusion. In particular, the report seeks to uncover how national policies, programmes and legislation influence – both directly and indirectly – policy and planning interventions carried out in cities and neighbourhoods. In doing so, the project focuses on four main themes, explored through four overarching research questions (see Table 1).

Table 1. Four main themes and research questions addressed in the study

Themes	Research questions
1. Policies aimed at counteracting segregation and promoting social inclusion in Nordic cities	<i>What policies and tools do Nordic governments employ to address segregation and foster more socially inclusive cities and communities?</i>
2. Segregation and social inclusion indicators used in policy and planning	<i>How is segregation and social inclusion measured and assessed, and what is the role of indicators in supporting policies and planning?</i>
3. Public participation and citizen involvement in policy and planning interventions	<i>What policies, strategies and approaches are used in the Nordic countries to foster public participation and citizen involvement?</i>
4. Policies addressing the relationship between the built environment and social inclusion	<i>How is the relationship between the built environment and social inclusion addressed in policy and planning?</i>

As outlined in Table 1, the first theme concerns what the Nordic policy landscape looks like in terms of policies aimed at counteracting segregation and promoting social inclusion in cities, while the second relates to the role of indicators and data. Key elements explored under the latter theme include who is responsible for managing the collection and assessment of indicators, as well as how they are used to support the development and implementation of relevant policy and planning measures.

The third theme explores the public participation and citizen involvement policies, strategies and planning approaches used in Nordic cities to strengthen inclusion in both newly built and existing neighbourhoods. While the main focus is on how such processes are organised at the city and neighbourhood level, the report also casts light on how participation is emphasised in national strategies and policies.

Finally, the fourth theme focuses on the role of architecture and design, and more specifically the built environment interventions employed by cities in response to the challenges of urban segregation and social inclusion. Here, the role of local governance and community engagement in support of more inclusive local living environments is of particular relevance.

All the themes' questions are explored through a multi-level governance lens, revealing how the state, municipalities and other actors and stakeholders interact when it comes to promoting social inclusion and preventing segregation. Each of the four themes is allocated a dedicated chapter (chapters 3–6 respectively).

1.2 Research approach

The study relies on a multi-case study approach, which not only offers a solid base for in-depth investigations of the phenomenon in question across various contexts (Yin, 2014), but facilitates comparison of how cities in different countries work to create more inclusive communities. While the first theme (Chapter 4) has a specifically national focus, the remaining three themes (chapters 5–7) address both the national and local levels, with a primary focus on the latter.

The case studies in chapters 5–7 address 13 city cases across the five Nordic countries (see Table 2 and Figure 1 for an overview). For Iceland, Reykjavík is examined in all the thematic case study chapters, whereas for the four other Nordic countries, each thematic case study focuses on a different city. In some cases, it is a large city under scrutiny, in others a more medium-sized urban centre. The various cities were selected based on their relevance to the relevant thematic focus, as well as a drive to encompass as diverse a selection of cities (in terms of size and type) as possible. In practice, this means there are thematically relevant initiatives ongoing in the chosen cities, and in many cases a long history of the city working to address the issues examined.

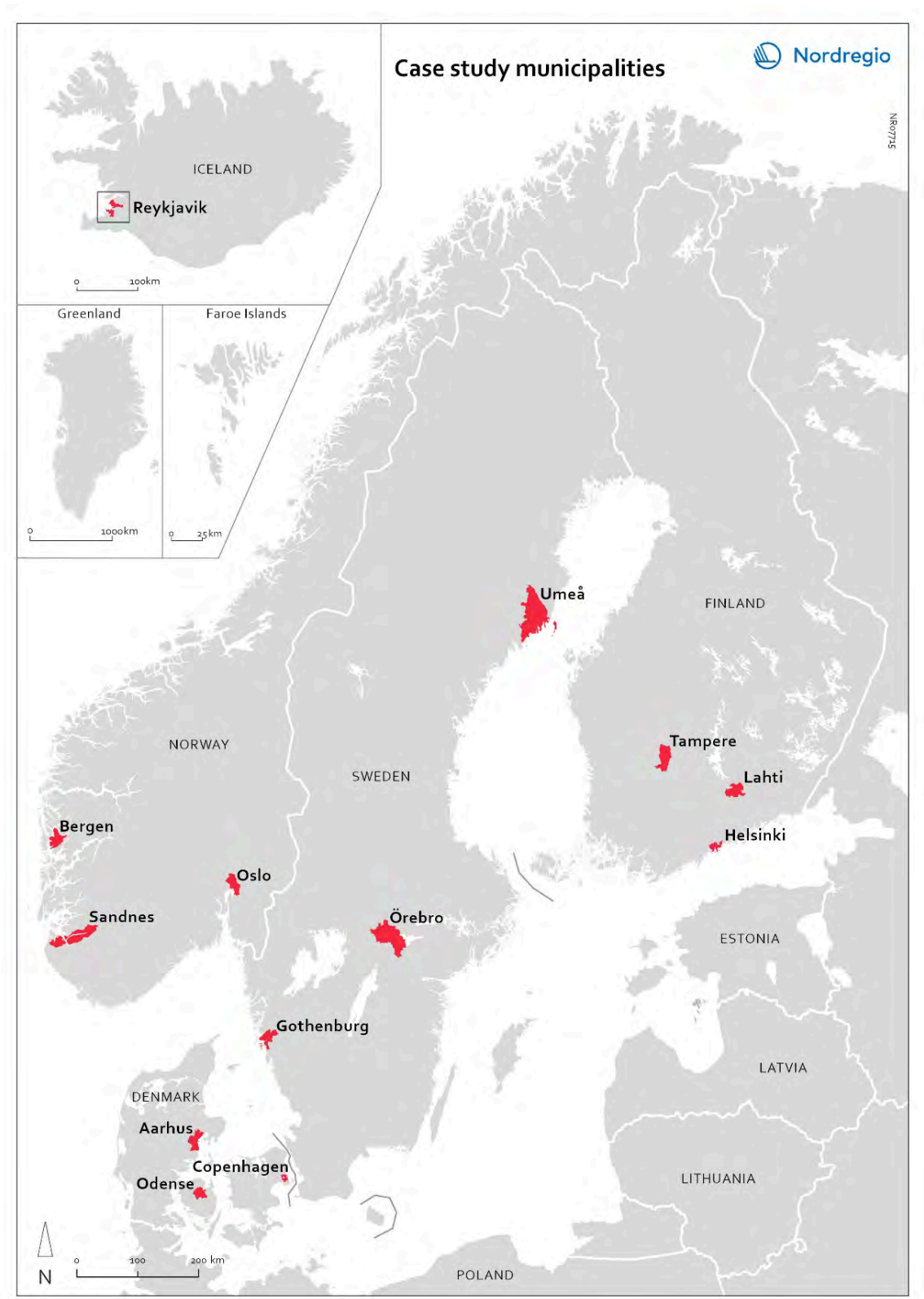
The purpose of the cases study approach is to provide an overview of the policies, approaches and tools employed to combat segregation and foster socially inclusive communities in Nordic cities. Here, it should be emphasised that the intention is to not simply provide a collection of best practices, but rather illustrate and problematise the spectrum of policy and planning approaches at play. While the

policies, tools and approaches spotlighted vary according to the local context, they all relate to the broader goal of counteracting the undesirable effects of inequality and segregation. Thus, an overarching aim of the study is to use the case studies as a jumping off point for discussions on what should be the key aspects for consideration in planning socially inclusive cities and neighbourhoods.

Table 2. Overview of city case studies

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
Chapter 4: Indicators for assessing urban segregation and social inclusion	Odense	Helsinki	Reykjavík	Oslo	Örebro
Chapter 5: Participatory planning for socially inclusive cities and communities	Copenhagen	Tampere	Reykjavík	Sandnes	Umeå
Chapter 6: Interventions in improving physical and social living environments	Aarhus	Lahti	Reykjavík	Bergen	Gothenburg

Figure 1. Map showing the location of the case study municipalities examined



The study employed a qualitative approach, with various national-, regional- and local-level policies, strategies, laws and planning documents analysed, and a total of 31 interviews with 47 key informants carried out between November 2022 and January 2024. Interviewees included national, regional and municipal authority representatives, as well as researchers and architects with thematic expertise on the relevant topics. The policies and initiatives examined were for the most part initiated or implemented during 2021–2023, when the case studies were mainly carried out. In some cases, subsequent policy developments have been incorporated into the analysis.

The report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 presents the study's theoretical framework, which is based on exploring segregation, social inclusion and public participation under the umbrella concepts of social justice and social sustainability. Following this, Chapter 3 provides an overview of national policies aimed at counteracting segregation and fostering social inclusion in the five Nordic countries (Theme 1). Chapter 4 focuses on indicators to assess segregation and social inclusion in Nordic cities (Theme 2), with Chapter 5 then proceeding to explore public participation and citizen involvement in spatial planning (Theme 3). Next, Chapter 6 delves into the interrelation between the urban built environment and social inclusion (Theme 4). Finally, Chapter 7 discusses the main research findings before presenting some final reflections on how best to plan for less segregated cities and socially inclusive neighbourhoods.



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2. Theoretical framework

The concept of residential segregation refers to the spatial separation of two or more social groups within a given geographic area, such as a metropolitan area or city (Timberlake & Ignatov 2014). Segregation can refer both to segregation processes, typically at the urban scale, and the spatial patterns that emerge as a result (Gregory et al. 2009). In urban studies, the concept of residential segregation typically refers to the geographical separation of population groups into different neighbourhoods, distinguishable by their socio-economic or ethnic characteristics. As a result, certain population groups may be overrepresented in certain areas of a city and underrepresented in others (see e.g. Massey & Denton, 1988).

The study's theoretical framework draws together a number of concepts that fall under the overarching principles of *social sustainability and social justice*. The key concepts underlying the research questions explored in this study are: 1) Social mix as a tool against urban segregation; 2) Public participation; and 3) Inclusive built environments.

As will be discussed, these concepts are closely linked to each other, as well as to broader notions of social sustainability and social justice in urban contexts.

2.1 Social sustainability and social justice in urban contexts

The concept of social sustainability provides a crucial framework for understanding and addressing the social dimensions of urban development. According to Colantonio (2009), it took until the 1990s for the social aspects of the urban

sustainability agenda to be considered seriously. Around this time, environmentalist and economist John Elkington highlighted what he termed the 'triple bottom line', with economy, environment and society identified as the three basic concepts of sustainability (McKenzie, 2004).

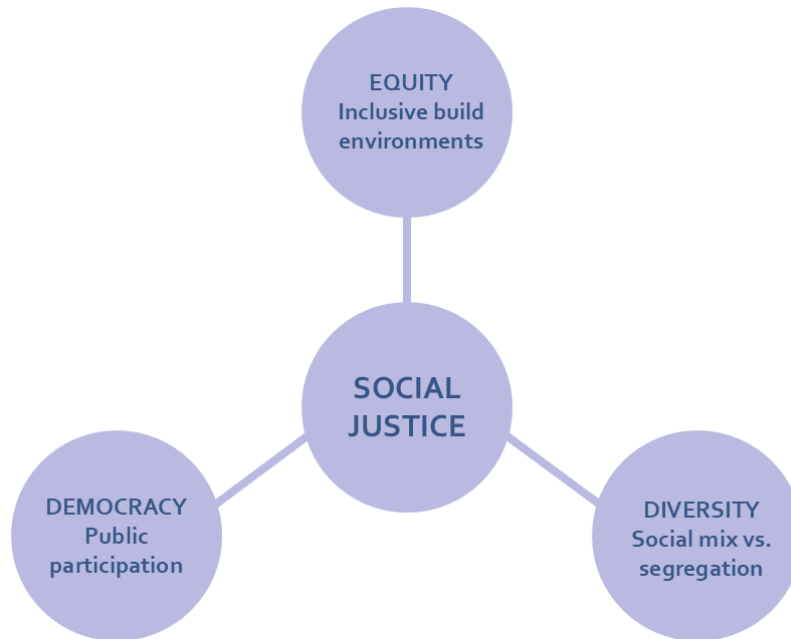
Despite Elkington's inclusion of 'the social' in his framework, several scholars argue this aspect has not received attention on a par with the other two dimensions. Moreover, although discussions and research concerning social sustainability has increased significantly since the 1990s, the concept remains somewhat nebulous (Colantonio & Dixon, 2011). Broadly speaking, the notion of social sustainability blends more traditional (and concrete) areas of social policy – such as income distribution, poverty reduction and livelihoods – with emerging (and more intangible) aspects such as wellbeing, happiness and sense of place (Table 3).

Table 3. Traditional and emerging social sustainability themes (based on Colantonio, 2009)

Traditional	Emerging
• Basic needs, including housing and environmental health • Education and skills • Employment • Equity • Human rights and gender • Poverty • Social justice	• Demographic change (ageing, migration, mobility) • Social mixing and cohesion • Identity, sense of place, culture • Empowerment, participation and access • Health, safety • Social capital • Wellbeing, happiness, quality of life

As illustrated in Table 3, equity, participation and social mixing, which are the core themes for framing this study, are considered as fundamental dimensions of social sustainability. It should be noted that these concepts are also basic components for how scholars have conceptualised social justice (Fainstein, 2014; Fraser, 2008; Sachs, 1999). The notion of social justice in cities has been defined by Susan Fainstein as being constituted by three main dimensions: equity, diversity and democracy. These three dimensions, which are deeply interconnected and, as it will be discussed, occasionally conflictual, provide a framework for linking the key topics explored in this study: social mix/segregation, public participation, and inclusive built environments (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Fainstein's dimensions of social justice as they relate to the study's main themes



Fainstein (2014) defines diversity as a complex concept that can refer either to the urban landscape's variety (housing, public spaces and multifunctionality) or social mix in terms of class, ethnicity or gender. The relationship between the first dimensions of social justice, *diversity*, and social justice as a broader concept is, however, not straightforward. For instance, Florida (2003) has pointed to urban diversity as a means of stimulating creativity and attracting artists, hipsters and tech workers (i.e. the creative class), which in turn brings economic growth. It is, though, important to explore this 'search for diversity' with a critical eye.

More recently, Florida himself recognises he was misguided in emphasising the importance of attracting the creative class to cities. In many places, the rise of the creative class has put pressure on housing markets while generating economic growth for the already rich. This in turn has displaced the poor and working classes, often working against urban diversity and leading to social exclusion and gentrification issues (Peck, 2005).

In exploring diversity in the context of Nordic cities, this report examines national- and local- (municipality) level strategies, policies and plans aimed at counteracting segregation and fostering social mixing. A variety of approaches are spotlighted in the case studies – while some have achieved positive outcomes, others have proved to be more controversial and contested. In order to better understand the diversity of outcomes arising from social mixing strategies, it is important to unpack the concept of social mixing and how it is rhetorically embedded in policies and plans combating segregation.

As previously mentioned, segregation describes a situation whereby a particular group is overrepresented within an urban area relative to, for example, the city or region as a whole (Arbaci, 2019; Van Kempen & Şule Özükren, 1998). Such spatial concentration may concern both disadvantaged and better-off social groups, often leading to a distinction being made between 'bad' segregation – which de-segregation or social mix policies are usually targeted at – and 'good' segregation (Musterd, 2020). In this respect, there is a vast body of literature taking a critical stance on social mixing policies. One of the key arguments made is that such strategies are generally one-sided (Alves, 2022). In other words, social mixing policies usually aim to introduce middle-income residents into disadvantaged areas, rather than vice versa (Fallov & Birk, 2022; Rosol, 2015). One prominent example of this is the Danish 'Ghetto Strategy' explored in chapters 3 and 4. Relatedly, social mixing strategies are often premised on the notion that concentrations of poor people are a problem, while concentrations of the well-off are not.

The positive connotations of social mixing are also largely built on the assumption that heightened spatial proximity leads to greater social proximity – in other words, the closer different social groups live to each other, the more they interact. In reality, there is little evidence that mixing people of different incomes, ethnicity or occupation leads to better social cohesion. Rather, various research has documented social frictions, avoidance, racial rejection and even so-called 'white flight', usually involving white middle-class residents leaving areas they perceive as hosting an overly high concentration of people from other ethnic backgrounds (Musterd, 2022).

Furthermore, social mixing policies have often been described as state-led 'gentrification by stealth' (Bridge, 2012), leading to forced displacement of vulnerable groups. Another critique is that social mixing policies seek to address the symptoms of inequality, and its cause. In this respect, social mixing does not generate sufficient upward social mobility for the least advantaged, as this also requires structural changes in economic conditions, job and educational opportunities, and access to affordable housing (Musterd, 2022).

On the other hand, scholars have provided more positive perspectives on tenure mixing and inclusionary housing policies (Alves, 2019). Inclusionary housing policies use planning restrictions to ensure affordable housing is included in otherwise market-rate projects (Granath Hansson, 2019). For instance, a specific percentage of affordable housing may be required in a new development (Calavita & Mallach, 2009). It should be noted that inclusionary housing policies are usually targeted at lower-income people, and so may be regarded as an alternative to public housing interventions (Granath Hansson, 2019).

Various examples of inclusionary housing policies can be found in the Nordic countries. In Denmark, the Planning and Building Act grants municipalities the power to stipulate that up to 25% of the housing stock in new developments be not-for-profit (Granath Hansson et al., 2024). In Norway, by contrast, such regulations do not exist (Cavicchia, 2023). In Sweden, inclusionary housing policy

centres around developing rental housing that is affordable to low- to mid-income households, and in doing so fostering social diversity. Each project includes a given proportion of housing (ranging from 20% to 100%) to which reduced rents are applied for a period of 15 years (Granath Hansson et al., 2024).

In Finland, the City of Helsinki has applied a policy of tenure mixing since the mid-1960s in order to prevent the emergence spatial segregation. While this policy appears to have helped slow down the segregation process, it has not been able to prevent it altogether (Vaattovaara et al., 2018). Kemppainen (2017) highlights a key perspective that sets the Finnish tenure mixing debate apart from the discussion in Europe more broadly – namely, that Finnish tenure mixing policies are applied to neighbourhoods in the planning and construction phase, rather than through renovation afterwards, which is the most common approach elsewhere. Tenure mixing may therefore have different implications depending on when and how it is implemented.

As all of the above suggests, ensuring urban diversity requires a multifaceted approach that not only encompasses the social, economic and spatial aspects of segregation, but critically evaluates the underlying assumptions and potential consequences of intervention strategies.

The second dimension of social justice, *democracy*, is described by Fainstein (2010) as the capacity of citizens to make decisions that are in both their own and the public's interests. The basic condition for democratic processes is a redistribution of power, without which there cannot be a redistribution of benefits. In this respect, there is a greater likelihood of more resourceful citizens taking part in participatory processes, as it will be discussed in Chapter 5.

While this implies a move towards democracy, it may not necessarily lead to more equitable decisions. Citizen participation increases policy-makers' awareness, but rarely has transformative power, as it usually concerns small-scale programmes. According to Fraser (2009), parity of participation is the normative core of integration between redistribution and recognition. Thus, if all members of society are to participate in democratic processes as peers, equal distribution of material resources and opportunities for achieving social esteem is essential.

The increased emphasis on grassroots citizen participation in urban planning since the turn of the millennium has largely been driven by critiques of traditional top-down approaches, particularly those employed in large-scale projects that tended to overlook the needs and desires of local communities (Legacy, 2017). Previously, planning was mainly conducted at the drawing board and focused on the city as a whole rather than the specific needs of its inhabitants.

Efforts to involve citizens in local development are often framed as social sustainability initiatives. Participatory planning, like other social sustainability policies, encompasses the democratic process of planning as well as its tangible outcomes, including the physical infrastructure of the city, accessibility concerns, community cohesion and a sense of place identity. The discourse on participatory

approaches in planning should not be oversimplified, however, as it concerns a spectrum of practices that range from mere tokenism to genuine empowerment.

Arnstein's (1969) 'Ladder of Citizen Participation' delineates three distinct levels of public involvement:

1. Information dissemination, characterised by a one-way flow of information from the government to stakeholders;
2. Consultation, which despite involving two-way feedback between stakeholders and governments, lacks mechanisms for meaningful incorporation of bottom-up knowledge; and
3. Empowerment, whereby stakeholders are equipped with the resources and rights to actively shape the decision-making process and policy outcomes.

The case study cities in Chapter 5 exemplify the hurdles associated with integrating various levels of public involvement, as well as the complexities of ensuring representation from diverse social groups in participatory processes. These challenges underscore the difficulty of transcending public participation as a mere symbolic gesture and actually achieving a more equitable redistribution of power, as advocated by Fainstein. As shown in Chapter 5, the importance of implementing diverse, innovative participation methods at the local level – which often go beyond the minimum requirements set by national regulations – is widely acknowledged in Nordic cities.

Fainstein's (2010) third dimension of social justice, *equity*, refers to the appropriate distribution of material and non-material benefits. This implies public policy should not disproportionately benefit those who are already advantaged. Thus, in cases of injustice, public policy should seek to mitigate inequalities by prioritising redistribution – for example, economic restructuring and reorganising the division of labour (Fraser, 2009).

Drawing on Fainstein's conceptualisation of equity, this study explores policy and practices aimed at creating 'inclusive built environments', understood here as places where urban infrastructure – including public spaces, housing and transportation – have been planned and designed so as to promote social inclusion. In this context, social inclusion translates to equitable access (in Fainstein's terms) for diverse social groups.

Ever since Jane Jacobs's seminal book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Jacobs, 1961), scholars and practitioners have discussed the ways in which the physical urban environment, urban design and urban form can affect social life (Mouratidis & Poortinga, 2020). Various strategies and initiatives – such as universal design, inclusive design, design for all and age-friendly environments – have been applied when designing the built environment in order to incorporate the widest range of users (Heylighen et al., 2017).

In the Nordic countries, there has been an increased focus on such concepts in recent years. National governments have implemented substantial action plans to ensure equal opportunities and accessibility, with a particular emphasis on innovation and extending efforts to urban planning, transportation and digital accessibility (Bendixen & Benktzon, 2015). When it comes to the principle of universal design, the gender aspects of creating inclusive urban spaces deserve particular attention. For example, Kern (2020) explores how urban spaces are often shaped by patriarchal norms and power dynamics, resulting in spaces that may feel unsafe or unwelcoming not only for women but groups such as LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities.

More recently, the scholarly focus has increasingly extended beyond how the physical environment affects urban vitality and livelihoods, encompassing health and social cohesion impacts, as well as dynamics such as spatial segregation, exclusion, displacement and gentrification (Anguelovski et al., 2018; Bardaka et al., 2018; Davidson & Lees, 2010). Here, architecture and urban design can present clear obstacles to vulnerable social groups wishing to access particular spaces (Schindler, 2014). For example, while greening interventions can improve vitality, livelihood and health conditions, it can also lead to green gentrification (Anguelovski et al., 2018). Chapter 6 explores the strategies, plans, policies and approaches adopted by those Nordic cities attempting to create more inclusive physical living environments, highlighting in particular issues related to public spaces, citizen engagement, housing and transportation, and engaging diverse population groups.

To conclude, while creating urban environments that prioritise equitable access, meaningful citizen participation and social diversity is crucial, meeting these objectives is not without challenges. Policies aimed at social mixing, for instance, often reflect one-sided approaches that address the symptoms of inequality, rather than the root causes. Similarly, participatory planning must move beyond tokenism if it is to ensure democratic decision-making processes that are inclusive of all social groups.

Additionally, the built environment plays a pivotal role in shaping social inclusion, influencing everything from access to public spaces to providing a sense belonging. As the study's case studies illustrate, Nordic cities provide valuable examples of both innovative and contested practices, underlining the potential of urban design to foster inclusivity while highlighting the complexities of addressing diverse needs in rapidly changing urban landscapes.

Ultimately, the pursuit of social sustainability and social justice in urban contexts requires a multifaceted, context-sensitive approach. Addressing structural inequalities, ensuring equitable resources distribution and fostering meaningful engagement with diverse communities are all essential to the achievement of more inclusive, just cities. With this in mind, it is hoped the report can contribute to a deeper understanding of the relevant challenges and opportunities.



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3. Policies for counteracting segregation and promoting social inclusion

This chapter focuses on the first of the study's four core themes, namely national policies aimed at counteracting segregation and promoting social inclusion in Nordic cities. In doing so, it provides an overview of the national policy landscape across all five Nordic countries, and sheds light on the policies and tools Nordic governments and cities are employing to address segregation and foster more socially inclusive communities. Building on this, the chapter addresses the similarities and differences apparent among the Nordic countries in dealing with segregation and social inclusion.

More specifically, the key questions addressed are:

- What does the national policy landscape concerning strategies aimed at preventing segregation and promoting social inclusion in Nordic cities look like?
- What are the characteristics of these policies and strategies in terms of design, implementation, aims and objectives, and what similarities/differences are there between countries?

Below, each of the five Nordic countries is addressed in turn. A cross-Nordic discussion on the topic is presented in the final chapter (section 7.1), containing takeaways from the individual countries and the Nordic region more broadly.

3.1 Finland

Segregation has emerged as a topic of growing societal importance in Finland over recent decades. Although there is no national strategy explicitly focused on segregation, there have been numerous policy initiatives and programmes featuring reduced segregation and increased social inclusion as key objectives.

3.1.1 Policies and initiatives

The Government Programme

In Finland, the Government Programme is a political action plan that describes the objectives and main areas of activity during a specific government's term of office (Finnish Government, n.d.). The notion of creating more socially inclusive, less segregated cities and neighbourhoods was strongly emphasised in the programme put forward by the government of former prime minister Sanna Marin for the years 2019–2023. Titled 'Inclusive and Competent Finland – A Socially, Economically and Ecologically Sustainable Society', the programme's overall aim was to transform Finland into a sustainable society by 2030 (Finnish Government, 2019). In terms of social sustainability, the programme discussed ensuring equality, reducing inequalities, promoting wellbeing, and allowing people agency over their life paths irrespective of where they live. Cities and urban areas in particular were mentioned as key to promoting sustainable growth and employment, combating climate change, and preventing exclusion.

The 2019–2023 Government Programme placed strong emphasis on preventing urban segregation and revitalising suburban areas. Over recent decades, many of Finland's suburban housing estates have been targeted by regeneration efforts in an attempt to counter unfavourable socio-economic development. The Government Programme's strategic focus on this area prompted the initiation of a new horizontal programme called the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme (*Lähiöohjelma*) 2020–2022 (Lähiöohjelma, 2020). The Finnish government also acknowledged the need for a more long-term national housing policy by launching the comprehensive Housing Policy Development Programme (*Asuntopoliittinen kehittämisohjelma*), covering the years 2021–2028 (Ministry of the Environment, n.d.-a).

Another important instrument mentioned in the Government Programme are the so-called 'MAL agreements' on land use, housing and transport. These are urban development partnerships between the central government and Finland's largest urban regions, and include specific objectives for land use development, housing production and key transport development projects over the coming years (Ministry of the Environment, n.d.-c). The MAL agreements also aim to mitigate segregation

and diversify neighbourhoods by allocating land for building affordable housing and sustainable transport links.

Regional policy priorities

Recent years have also seen social sustainability, inclusion and segregation feature prominently in Finnish regional policy priorities, as demonstrated by the Regional Development Decision 2020–2023 (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2020b). The document contains six key priorities, of which *increasing inclusion and wellbeing and preventing inequality* is the most relevant to this study.

Several key points were highlighted under this priority, including multidisciplinary cooperation on methods designed to reverse inequality trends and increase participation; promoting partnerships between companies and third/fourth sector actors; and well-functioning public services. Moreover, the Regional Development Decision emphasised that segregation in cities, along with disparities in wellbeing and health, are best addressed by ensuring equal access to services, education, employment and adequate livelihoods (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2020b).

National urban strategies

The relevant strategic aims contained within the 2019–2023 Government Programme were concretised in a variety of urban policy strategies and programmes. An important document in this regard is the National Urban Strategy 2020–2030. Aptly titled 'Stronger Together – Cities and Central Government Creating a Sustainable Future', the strategy sets out a vision of vibrant, climate-smart, socially sustainable cities (Ministry of Finance, 2020). Towards this end, partnerships are highlighted as an important means of strengthening cooperation between cities and urban areas of different sizes. Such cooperation encompasses everything from goal-setting to embarking on different paths that lead to shared objectives.

Underlining the responsibility borne by cities in mitigating spatial and demographic disparities, the National Urban Strategy advocates for a shared knowledge base that can help inform decision-making, particularly when it comes to education, employment and wellbeing. Social sustainability hinges on societal participation and solidarity, coupled with inclusive service provision across diverse demographics. Urban planning is mentioned as a tool for increasing inclusion and reducing social inequality, while housing affordability is another key focus area for the policy (Ministry of Finance, 2020).

The National Urban Strategy was concretised through various urban policy programmes and agreements between the central government and cities. Central to this was the Urban Programme 2018–2022 (Urjankangas & Voutilainen, 2018), which placed particular emphasis on the large cities and regional centres where socio-spatial disparities are most pronounced. Here, a key focus was on mitigating socio-economic and ethnic segregation, which have become increasingly

intertwined. Addressing disparities in education, employment and income was highlighted as a prerequisite for levelling out socio-spatial differences between people and neighbourhoods, thereby ensuring equal opportunities and fostering community security.

The Urban Programme 2018–2022 underscores the importance of cross-sectoral cooperation within city administrations, including the need for a common knowledge base when setting shared targets and aligning activities across administrative branches. In recognising the risk factors for marginalisation, especially among young people and those with migrant backgrounds, the programme advocates prioritisation of early childhood education, family support and youth services, alongside measures aimed at combating loneliness among older adults.

Also emphasised is the need for spatially targeted interventions in specific neighbourhoods, backed up by sufficient resources for implementation. Examples mentioned include improving public transport, cycling lanes and walking paths; applying social mixing to housing policy; and enhancing cultural and recreational services in order to promote participation and active citizenship (Urjankangas & Voutilainen, 2018).

In addition to the Urban Programme 2018–2022, several other national policies have been introduced targeting specific urban regions or types. One area of focus has been on Helsinki and its surrounding urban region, which has been addressed through the so-called 'Metropolitan Policy'. The Metropolitan Policy for 2019–2023 had a strong emphasis on sustainable urban development, with areas covered including the prevention of segregation; housing policy and land use; and the transition towards carbon neutrality (Ministry of the Environment, n.d.-d). In doing so, the policy encouraged a holistic approach to addressing urban challenges and leveraging opportunities for inclusive growth in the Helsinki metropolitan region, highlighting affordable housing and employment/skills development – especially for young people and migrants – as focal points for policy interventions.

So-called 'regional cities' have also been a focus of national urban policy. Although medium-sized centres in their own functional regions, these cities are not regional administrative, economic or cultural centres, nor located in the vicinity of larger regional centres. Such cities were the subject of the 2018 Regional Cities Programme (*Seutukaupunkiohjelman*) (Ministry of Finance, 2018), and its accompanying Implementation Programme of the Regional Cities Programme (*Seutukaupunkiohjelman toimeenpano-ohjelma*) 2020–2022 (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2020a).

The policy was based around the idea of effective cooperation, partnerships and networking between key actors at the national, regional and municipal level. This included efforts towards addressing structural unemployment, which poses a major

challenge in many cities of this type. Another issue highlighted was that declining property values present difficulties in financing housing renovations in many regional cities. In this respect, a possible solution put forward in the programme was demolishing social rented housing units in low-demand areas, with subsidies made available to cover demolition costs.

Housing policy initiatives addressing segregation and social inclusion

A central document for guiding Finland's national housing policy – which represents a key area for addressing segregation and social inclusion – is the Housing Policy Development Programme (*Asuntopoliittinen kehittämisohjelma*) 2021–2028 (VNS, 2021). The programme was prepared by a working group led by the Ministry of the Environment, although it included representatives from other key ministries and agencies dealing with housing. By ensuring extensive cooperation in preparing a programme that extends beyond a single government term, the aim was to make national housing policy more long term and goal oriented (Ministry of the Environment, n.d.-a).

The Housing Policy Development Programme defines the relevant objectives in this area, as well as the measures needed to achieve them. Key goals include safeguarding the right to good and affordable housing, and ensuring housing supply meets the needs of different population groups. In this respect, a diverse mix of residents within neighbourhoods is underlined as important for preventing segregation (Ministry of the Environment, n.d.-a). It also mentions state-subsidised housing as an important tool for preventing segregation when deployed alongside market-based housing, the programme acknowledges that policy initiatives in areas such as education, employment and access to services is crucial when it comes to addressing the root causes of segregation (VNS, 2021).

Urban policy programmes and national funding for local projects and interventions

Besides the national strategies detailed above, various other urban policy programmes involving national funding have been implemented with the intention of strengthening social inclusion and mitigating segregation in cities.

One such programme is the Sustainable City Programme (*Kestävä kaupunki - ohjelma*) 2019–2023, which promoted sustainable urban development through practical development initiatives and strategic management (Sustainable City Programme, n.d.). Based on cross-sectoral collaboration and a partnership-based approach, the programme brought together ministries, municipalities and other actors working towards sustainable urban development, and was strongly influenced by the UN New Urban Agenda and the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Concrete actions included developing new solutions through pilots and development projects, replicating good practices, and sharing experiences.

The programme's two main thematic focus areas – sustainable growth and sustainable wellbeing – were further divided into sub-themes (see Table 4). As can be seen, many of the core topics addressed in this report (e.g. preventing segregation, reducing inequality, affordable housing, integration) were grouped under the socially sustainable cities sub-theme (Sustainable City Programme, n.d.).

Table 4. Focus areas, sub-themes and topics in the Sustainable City Programme 2019–2023

Sustainable growth		Sustainable wellbeing	
Low-carbon cities	Smart cities	Socially sustainable cities	Healthy cities
• Circular economy • Sustainable food systems • Wood construction • Innovative, sustainable public procurements	• Sustainable transport and mobility • Smart infrastructure and energy • Smart services • Digitalisation	• Preventing segregation • Reducing inequality • Sense of community • Affordable housing • Integration • Culture • Safety	• Healthy indoor and outdoor spaces • Green spaces, recreation, ecosystem services, nature-based solutions • Accessibility

The Sustainable City Programme had a total budget of around €6 million, with €4.4 million of this provided by state funding. During the first two years of the programme, around 80 municipalities and 50 other organisations participated. In an interim evaluation carried out in 2021, the adoption of a broad perspective on sustainability was assessed positively. In a similar vein, strengthened cooperation was highlighted as important, as the various aspects that constitute sustainability are not the responsibility of any individual sector in the municipalities (Owal Group, 2021). According to the evaluation, the programme had helped in the development of new solutions, networks and expertise, successfully engaging and supporting municipalities based on their own needs.

Several projects relevant to this study were carried out under the Sustainable City Programme. In one project, 36 Finnish municipalities of varying sizes worked together to monitor sustainable development, setting and measuring sustainability targets using different indicators (Sustainable City, n.d.-c). In another project (discussed further in Chapter 4), the City of Tampere's approach to monitoring

segregation was scaled up to the broader city region (Hynynen, 2020; Sustainable City, n.d.-b). Several projects funded by the programme had a focus on participation, such as the City of Helsinki's efforts to develop a replicable model for enhancing the participation of residents with immigrant backgrounds in urban development projects (Sustainable City, n.d.-a).

In recent decades, a number of area-based regeneration projects targeting specific residential areas have been carried out, often with state funding. The first national programme for neighbourhood renewal in suburban districts launched back in the mid-1990s (Stjernberg, 2019a), while the most recent is the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme (*Lähiöohjelma*) 2020–2022 (Lähiöohjelma, 2020).

Figure 3. The suburban district of Jakomäki, in northeastern Helsinki, which has been targeted by numerous regeneration initiatives



Source: Helsinki City Museum, SKY-FOTO Möller

The latter was the fifth such national programme and a continuation of previous initiatives. Through the programme, state funding was provided to municipalities carrying out development projects in selected neighbourhoods, as well as for research projects addressing the development of suburban housing estates. In total, 24 development projects were carried out in 13 Finnish cities, along with 18

research projects, which were led by universities and research institutes from across Finland and implemented in cooperation with partner cities.

The Neighbourhood Renewal Programme 2020–2022 took a comprehensive approach to the renewal of suburban housing estates. Specific aims included strengthening the vitality of these neighbourhoods, promoting wellbeing and social inclusion, and combating segregation. Towards this end, a variety of themes was addressed, such as strengthening a sense of neighbourhood community and security through cooperation between key actors, and promoting neighbourhood vitality via interventions in the physical living environment. Other focus areas concerned the role of local schools in promoting educational equality, as well as child wellbeing; creating better, sustainable transport solutions; promoting infill development; and ensuring high-quality services and housing (Lähiöohjelma, 2020).

3.1.2 Implementation and governance structure

In Finland, regional and urban policy is to a great extent implemented through close cooperation between different administrative branches and actors at the national, regional and municipal levels. The key actors in this regard, together with their main responsibilities and duties, are presented in Table 5.

The Ministry of the Environment is central to steering national urban policy, together with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. Most programmes and initiatives addressed in this chapter were coordinated by the Ministry of the Environment, but implemented through close collaboration between several ministries and national agencies. Relevant ministries include the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Justice, while the national agencies involved include the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA), the National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), the Criminal Sanctions Agency, and the Social Insurance Institution (Kela). Up to now, ARA has had responsibility for coordinating housing-related subsidies, grants and guarantees, as well as supervising the use of state-subsidised ARA housing. In 2024, however, a decision was made to transfer the functions of the agency to the Ministry of the Environment, beginning in 2025 (ARA, 2024).

Regional policy in Finland is increasingly implemented not only through interactions at the national level, but through partnerships between actors at the national and regional levels, within the regions, and between public and private actors, organisations and citizens. The regional development legislation was revised in 2021 to include new forms of interaction, knowledge-based approaches and the consideration of longer-term objectives (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, n.d.-b). When it comes to implementing regional policy in Finland, the Advisory Board on Regional Renewal (AUNE) has a central role in promoting cooperation between national and regional actors, compiling the development

needs of regions, and monitoring the effectiveness of measures (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, n.d.-a).

At the national level, the Urban Policy Committee – which is appointed for each four-year government period – is responsible for promoting implementation of national urban policies, coordinating the ministries' urban policy measures, developing cooperation between the government and urban regions, and facilitating national and international networking (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, n.d.-c). The committee includes representatives from most ministries, numerous Finnish cities, and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities.

At the regional level, regional councils are statutory joint municipal authorities that have two main functions defined by law: regional development and regional land use planning (AFCM, 2017). In addition to their statutory mandate, the councils take on a broad scope of voluntary tasks determined by the relevant region's characteristics, and are involved in the preparation of regional programmes and plans, together with their implementation plans and regional EU programmes (Ministry of Finance, n.d.-b). Also relevant at the regional level are ELY Centres (Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment), which are tasked with promoting regional competitiveness, sustainable development, and supporting implementation of central government policy measures in the regions (ELY Centre, 2024).

While this section has focused on national-level policy initiatives, implementation is often managed and implemented at the municipality level. For instance, the Sustainable City Programme and Neighbourhood Renewal Programme allowed for state funding to be provided to municipalities, which were then responsible for carrying out practical interventions related to the broader thematic focus of the programmes.

In Finland, municipalities have a number of statutory duties when it comes to organising services for their residents, encompassing education; early childhood education and care; cultural, youth, library and sports services; urban planning and land use; water and waste management; and environmental services (Ministry of Finance, n.d.-a). Health and social services, along with fire and rescue services, which to date have fallen under the remit of municipalities, will be transferred to the counties as part of the current health and social services reform. In addition to their statutory duties, the municipalities may assume other tasks relating to, among other things, economic development, employment and housing.

Table 5. Key public actors in Finland and their responsibilities

Actors	Responsibility
The government	• Central government defines the general direction of national policy. • The government programme is a political action plan setting out the objectives and main areas of activity during a government's term of office, and includes various programme and strategies specifying the priorities and aims for different areas of policy (e.g. Regional Development Decision, National Urban Strategy).
Ministries and national agencies	• Various ministries and national agencies play important roles in different areas of policy. • The Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment have central roles within regional and urban policy. • Other key ministries include the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Justice. • Key national agencies include the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA) (discontinued in 2025), the National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), the Criminal Sanctions Agency, and the Social Insurance Institution (Kela).
Regions	• Regional councils are responsible for regional development and regional land use planning, along with the preparation of regional programmes and plans, and also their implementation plans and regional EU programmes. • ELY Centres (Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment) are tasked with promoting regional competitiveness, wellbeing and sustainable development; curbing climate change; and supporting implementation of central government policy measures in the regions. • The Advisory Board on Regional Renewal (AUNE) has a central coordinating role in the implementation of regional policy.
Municipalities	• Have statutory duties to provide services for residents across various policy areas (e.g. education; early childhood education and care; cultural, youth, library and sports services; urban planning and land use; water and waste management; environmental services). • May decide to assume other self-government tasks in matters concerning – among other things – the economy, employment and housing.

3.1.3 Key focus areas

The Finnish national policies and programmes examined above can be linked to a variety of related concepts. For example, all the policies address the broad theme of social sustainability in urban areas, while many have a strong focus on segregation and strengthening social inclusion. Despite the absence of a national strategy that explicitly deals with segregation as its core focus, the examples discussed point to the numerous policy programmes and initiatives that together aim to ensure less segregated, more socially inclusive cities and neighbourhoods. These policy initiatives are set against a background of mounting concern about the widening socio-spatial disparities apparent between different population groups and territories in Finland.

Social sustainability is commonly mentioned in these policies in relation to ensuring equality between people. Here, participation and trust among individuals and other actors are emphasised as important preconditions for achieving this. Promoting wellbeing and reducing inequalities are clear priorities, with key services an essential means of reinforcing social sustainability, everyday safety and community spirit. Another core focus is the role of schools in promoting educational equality, as well as the wellbeing and inclusion of children and young people.

Urban planning is highlighted in the policies as something that can help increase inclusion and reduce social inequality. When combined with other targeted actions and measures, such planning can create pleasant, functional, green living environments that contribute to neighbourhood vitality. When it comes to preventing segregation, there has historically been a strong policy focus in Finland on developing suburban housing estates, built during the 1960s and 1970s in particular. More broadly, housing policy – and especially social housing – is seen as an important tool for preventing segregation. In this respect, affordability, diversity of housing for people with different needs (including solutions for reducing homelessness), housing mixing and infill development are among the core concepts mentioned in the policies.

Overall, the policy programmes and initiatives have a wide-ranging thematic focus and for the most part endorse a holistic approach. One common characteristic when it comes to promoting social inclusion and counteracting segregation is an emphasis on cooperation and partnerships between policy sectors and key actors at the national, regional and local levels. Cooperation is considered important not only from the perspective of setting common goals and implementing measures, but in terms of building a common knowledge base that can be used to monitor progress towards shared targets.

Turning to implementation, preventive measures are highlighted by the policies as being particularly important, with inclusion and wellbeing best promoted by investing in the early identification of those in greatest need of support. Moreover, solutions should be tailored to the local context, and in some cases targeted to the specific needs of targeted population groups.

The policy frameworks examined in this section were mainly initiated during the 2019–2023 government period. In June 2023, however, a new right-wing government led by Prime Minister Petteri Orpo entered office, prompting a change in direction for Finnish national policy. While the 2019–2023 Government Programme (Finnish Government, 2019) had a relatively strong focus on preventing segregation, increasing neighbourhood vitality through area-based interventions, and promoting resident wellbeing and participation opportunities, the current government programme – titled A Strong and Committed Finland (Finnish Government, 2023) – is markedly less concerned with these issues. For instance, there is no continuation of the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme, nor an equivalent of the former Sustainable City Programme.

In terms of housing policy, income limits are to be reintroduced to publicly subsidised rental housing in 2025 (Finnish Government, 2024), while the construction of right-of-occupancy dwellings – essentially a mix between rental and owner-occupied housing – is to be discontinued (Ministry of the Environment, n.d.-e). All this is testament to the fact that a country's national policy landscape is subject to shifting political currents.

3.2 Denmark

In Denmark, the issue of segregation has been a national policy focal point for decades, culminating in the launch of the so-called 'Ghetto Strategy' in 2018, which aims to eradicate so-called 'parallel societies' by 2030 (Danish Government, 2018). The strategy adopts a multifaceted approach encompassing – among other things – housing, education and integration. As will be discussed, the strategy has been much contested due to its controversial content and outcomes. Housing plays a pivotal role in the strategy, including policies aimed at increased social mixing in vulnerable areas. The practical result of the strategy's policies has, however, often been a reduced concentration in public housing, with flexible rental criteria and redevelopment plans leading to demolition and significant transformations in the physical built environment.

Alongside the Ghetto Strategy, several other national initiatives emphasise socially sustainable urban development and inclusion, while various legislative frameworks, pilot programmes and partnerships seek to revitalise urban areas, promote social mixing and alleviate social exclusion.

3.2.1 Policies and initiatives

The 'Ghetto Strategy'

The previously mentioned Ghetto Strategy or 'Ghetto Package', formally titled 'A Denmark Without Parallel Societies – No Ghettos in 2030' (*Ét Danmark uden parallelsamfund – Ingen ghettoer i 2030*) (Danish Government, 2018), incorporates a wide range of policy measures dealing with housing and urban planning issues. In addition, it addresses integration; social issues such as education, language and social welfare; and crime and punishment.

The geographical areas targeted by the policy are identified using criteria related to demographic (ethnic) and socio-economic composition, as well as the criminal history of an area's population (these criteria are discussed in greater depth in section 4.2). The strategy includes 22 initiatives categorised under five different themes:

1. Physical demolition and conversion of vulnerable housing areas;
2. More tangible control of who can live in vulnerable housing areas;
3. Strengthened police efforts and higher penalties to combat crime and increase security;
4. A good start in life for children and young people; and
5. Monitoring of efforts aimed at preventing parallel societies.

The status of ongoing integration work is presented each year in an Integration Action Plan (*Regeringens Integrationshandlingsplan*) (Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2020). The plan covers both general measures related to integration, particularly such aspects as employment, and more specific measures previously set out in the Ghetto Strategy. Among the key proposals included in 2020 the Integration Action Plan were the abolition of fees for education; the expansion of target groups for integration basic education (IGU); a better socio-economic and ethnic distribution of students in upper-secondary school; integration through sports; and strengthened efforts against negative social control. The 2020 Integration Action Plan also reported on improvements seen in 'vulnerable areas' and 'ghetto areas', including the fact that the number of such areas fell by almost half between 2019 and 2020. Based on this, the government extended policy measures targeting these types of neighbourhoods.

In 2019, changes were made to the Immigration Act and other legislation relating to the Ghetto Strategy (Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2019). In February 2019, the so-called 'L140 bill' – presented as a 'paradigm shift' – was approved by the Danish parliament. The bill is a reform package that encompasses multiple laws concerning foreigners, integration, repatriation, and related matters. Following the revisions, individuals arriving as spontaneous asylum seekers (regardless of status), as well as those granted family reunification, can only have their status renewed if failure to do so would directly contravene Denmark's international obligations. Moreover, the Minister for Integration now has the authority to introduce a cap on family reunification with just a month's notice, should a surge in applications be deemed a strain on national or municipal resources. The reforms also reduced social benefits for individuals granted protection or family reunification, while significantly increasing penalties for violating entry bans or failing to report regularly to authorities (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2019).

While not all the policies affected by the L140 bill are about segregation, several of the changes particularly affect people living in targeted areas, or are applicable only to those living in such areas. For example, the 'integration assistance' system (i.e. social assistance for newcomers, which is lower than general social assistance) was renamed 'self-reliance and repatriation assistance' (*selvforsørgelses- og hjemreiseydelse*) in order to emphasise the temporary nature of protection in Denmark (Minister of Immigration and integration 2019). In addition, children entering school in designated areas must undergo language testing, with parents required to speak a 'functional' level of Danish. School absenteeism above 15% in a quarter, or failure to attend language testing, is sanctioned by reducing child benefit or holding it back completely.

Other relevant policy initiatives from recent years include measures connected to the 'parallel society' agreements introduced to strengthen police efforts – including increasing their visibility and control – within particularly vulnerable residential areas. The police can also designate stricter punishment zones, whereby the penalties for violating certain types of crime are, for a set duration, significantly increased. Tougher measures against domestic violence and harsher penalties for neglect by senior executives in public office have also been introduced (Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2020).

Social mix and housing

Social housing – operated by housing organisations (*boligforeninger*) and overseen by municipalities – is not only central to Danish welfare society (Housing 2030, n.d.), but a key tool for achieving social inclusion-related goals (Interview 1, 2023). Approximately half-a-million social housing (*almene bolig*) dwellings have been built in Denmark using public funding (Boligforeningen AAB, n.d.). Although such housing aims to maintain social mixing by accommodating a wide spectrum of tenants (Housing 2030, n.d.), there are particular obligations involved when it comes to

population groups with specific housing needs, such as students, older people, disabled people, single parents, refugees, and residents in need of rehousing due to urban renewal (Boligforeningen AAB, n.d.)

Following amendments to the Danish Planning Act in 2015 (Bolig og planstyrelsen, 2021), municipalities were given the power to require that 25% of housing stock in new housing areas be social housing, regardless of whether the land is privately or municipally owned (Skovgaard Nielsen et al., 2023). The overall objective of the Planning Act is to ensure cities develop in socially sustainable ways and prevent particular social groups from living in isolation (Skovgaard Nielsen et al., 2023). Against this backdrop, the amendments were influenced by a housing tenure indicator showing the distribution of tenures (ownership, private and public renting) in different areas, and aim to increase social mixing through increased tenure mixing.

Additionally, in areas where the housing market is under more pressure, such as in Copenhagen, the municipality can provide funding for the purchase of plots in areas where high land costs have traditionally stood in the way of building 'public housing for families, youth, and the elderly, as well as care homes' (City of Copenhagen, 2015). As scholars have demonstrated, however, a major obstacle to turning such objectives into reality is the fact that landowners retain the power to decide whether they are willing to sell their plots to public housing associations (Alves, 2019). Furthermore, there is a risk that housing in new developments is not actually affordable to those in greatest need.

Another relevant recent initiative adopted in July 2022 by the Danish parliament is the 'Fund for Mixed Cities – More Affordable Housing and a Way Out of Homelessness' (*Fonden for blandede byer – flere billige boliger og en vej ud af hjemløshed*), which consists of 10 billion Danish kroner (€1.3 billion) covering the period 2022–2035, provided by the construction fund *Nybyggerifonden* (Regeringen KL, 2022). The fund aims to promote mixed cities through the provision of affordable housing – which must not be located in vulnerable areas or areas at risk – and social housing rent reduction subsidies for those with acute housing needs but a low ability to pay.

The fund is accompanied by various support schemes that allow housing associations to buy private buildings, convert commercial or office buildings, and acquire land in expensive areas. The overall objective of the support schemes is to create new and better opportunities for public housing provision. This is especially the case in larger cities, where the need for public housing is estimated to be greatest due the difficulty in finding affordable accommodation. As such, an expansion in public housing can help counter the trend towards more divided cities.

While these various policies seek to encourage the construction and development of more social housing in urban centres, the 'Ghetto Strategy' takes a contrasting

approach by aiming to decrease public housing in specific areas. These divergent policies are intended to target different areas with the combined aim of increasing social mixing. The actual results have, however, provoked controversy.

Figure 4. Mjølnerparken, located in the Nørrebro district of Copenhagen, has been targeted by interventions carried out as part of the 'Ghetto Strategy'



Source: CC BY-SA 4.0, Leif Jørgensen

Strategies promoting sustainable cities and social inclusion

Denmark has a variety of national planning strategies and instruments to promote social sustainability and inclusion in urban development. One example is the Partnership for Living City Centres (*Partnerskab for levende bymidter*), a pilot network established in 2020 consisting of various actors from the public and private sectors working together to solve common challenges (Housing and Planning Agency, 2021). This initiative resulted in a number of recommendations being presented to the state, the municipalities and businesses (Housing and Planning Agency, 2023). Another example is the Act on Urban Renewal and Urban Development (Lov Om Byfornyelse Og Udvikling Af Byer, 2015), which contains building and area-based renewal initiatives, as well as the potential means to improve open spaces and the management of inadequate housing.

In recent years, Denmark has implemented several reforms and initiatives designed to contribute to the Europe 2020 strategy, which consists of five key focus areas: employment; research and development; climate and energy; education; and social inclusion (Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior, 2019). One of the national objectives set by the Danish government in its 2019 Reform Programme was to lift more people out of social exclusion. This in turn led to ten specific goals being formulated, which together underlined the importance of including more people in the working community and reducing social exclusion (Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior, 2019).

Moreover, several initiatives related to the Ghetto Strategy revolve around vulnerable children and young people in targeted areas. Examples include compulsory learning opportunities for one-year-olds, language tests from grade 0, and a requirement that no more than 30% of children from disadvantaged housing areas be newly admitted to a day care institution during a calendar year. In addition, more consistent intervention has been introduced regarding the supervision of primary and lower secondary schools, as well as the strengthening of responsibility for senior citizens (Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2020).

In 2021, the government launched a 43-point social programme of early interventions aimed at supporting children, including removing them from environments where they are mistreated, and ensuring children with non-Western backgrounds are not failed. The policy states that even though there is more violence in homes where the parents have non-Western backgrounds, their children are less likely to be placed in family homes (Ministry of Social Affairs and the Elderly, 2021). The 'Children First' agreement signed by Denmark's governing party and nine other political parties also states an intention to provide funding for 'rights schools' (*rettighedsskoler*) located in or close to the areas featured in the government's 2020 ghetto list. Here, the objective is to ensure all children, regardless of ethnic background, know their rights (Ministry of Social Affairs, Housing and the Elderly, 2021).

3.2.2 Implementation and actors

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing (formerly the Ministry of the Interior and Housing) is tasked with combating parallel societies, both in terms of coordinating the government's overall efforts and setting out action areas in the housing arena. Specific tasks include supervising development plans, rental rules, annual ghetto areas lists, and assuming the secretariat role for the government's ghetto representatives (see below) (Ministry of the Interior and Health of Denmark, 2019).

Meanwhile, the Danish Authority of Social Services and Housing (formerly Danish Housing and Planning Authority) is responsible for the general development of housing policies and urban renewal, as well as work with vulnerable areas and parallel societies. The authority also bears responsibility for coordinating social

housing efforts, usually designed as comprehensive plans – in many cases, this involves public housing organisations working in cooperation with municipalities. Here, a key aim is to lift up vulnerable public housing areas through locally based projects conducted in close collaboration with residents, with a particular focus on areas such as security and wellbeing, employment, education and crime prevention. (Danish Authority of Social Services and Housing, 2023)

In 2007, the Danish Local Government Reform came into force, using mergers to reduce the number of municipalities from 271 to 98. At the same time, the country's 13 counties were abolished and replaced by five regions (Blöchliger & Vammalle, 2012). These changes entailed a new distribution of tasks between different levels of government. The new regions took over responsibility for health care from the counties, as well as a number of tasks involving regional development, including environmental planning, soil pollution management and to some extent public transport (SOU 2020:8, 2020).

The regional administrations are not, however, the main actors when it comes to implementing the governmental strategies set out above. Instead, the newly reconstituted municipalities are now tasked with handling the majority of welfare responsibilities (Blöchliger & Vammalle, 2012). Although the municipalities' duties are comparable to the other Nordic countries in terms of spatial planning, children and elderly care, primary schools and social sector assignments, one key difference in Denmark is that the municipalities are responsible for the employment agency. By contrast, in Finland, Norway and Sweden this responsibility is borne at the state level (SOU 2020:8, 2020)

In order to follow up and monitor the Ghetto Strategy, the Minister of the Interior and Housing appointed three dedicated ghetto representatives with relevant competencies (Ministry of the Interior and Health of Denmark, 2019). The representatives are tasked with monitoring progress towards the milestones set out in master plans and development plans, including publishing written evaluations and recommendations.

When it comes to monitoring, the government also presents annual reports, including an overview of policies and the targeted geographical areas according to thematic area (Staver et al., 2019). The 2020 annual report showed that the number of 'vulnerable areas' had fallen from 40 to 25 between 2019 and 2020, the number of 'ghetto areas' from 28 to 15, and 'hard ghettos' from 15 to 13 (Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2020).

Table 6. Key public actors in Denmark and their responsibilities

Actor	Responsibility
Government and parliament	• The government – and in particular the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing (formerly the Ministry of the Interior and Housing) – is responsible for overall policies related to the 'Ghetto Strategy'. • Ministries and ministers are granted extensive decision-making powers and room for manoeuvre. • Several policies, strategies and laws are majority agreements involving multiple parties in parliament.
State agencies	• The Housing and Planning Authority is responsible for the general development of the housing market and urban renewal, as well as work with 'parallel societies'.
Regions	• Responsible for health care, environmental planning and to some extent public transport.
Municipalities	• Central actors for implementation of national strategies. • Responsible for public housing, schools, social care, planning, public transport, employment. • Responsible for municipal-level implementation and follow-up of the Ghetto Strategy and creation of development plans together with housing organisations. • Decide on settlement placement of refugees.

3.2.3 Key focus areas

The initiatives set out in the Integration Action Plan and Ghetto Strategy are centred around urban regeneration, privatisation, strategic demolition of public housing, and the development of new private housing. Drawing on the extensive literature on social mixing policies and their social implications (Bridge et al., 2011; Rosol, 2015), this can be seen as a form of planned gentrification, or 'gentrification by stealth'. The objective of these policies is often to change the residential composition of targeted neighbourhoods by hindering vulnerable groups from residing there, and introducing owner-occupied housing in areas dominated by public housing (Stjernberg, Oliveira E Costa, et al., 2020).

Another characteristic of these policies is that they not only target specific areas, but primarily affect non-Western immigrants either already living in such areas or looking to move there. Moreover, children and young people feature prominently in the policies – for example, through steering mechanisms such as the withdrawal of social subsidies in response to a lack of language skills, or the shutting down of local schools and transfer of children to schools in other neighbourhoods. On some issues, the policies have altered the power balance between the central state and the municipalities, as the state can assume responsibility for housing units owned by municipalities or housing organisations if intervention results are deemed unsatisfactory after several years.

The Ghetto Strategy has provoked controversy ever since it was introduced, and in September 2024 the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) held a public hearing to review the policy's legality under European law (Open Society Justice Initiative, 2024). This was preceded by a series of court cases, one of which was brought in 2020 by a group of residents in Mjølnerparken, Copenhagen, who took action against the Danish government on the grounds that the strategy's plan to sell homes was unlawful under both domestic and European Union law (Open Society Justice Initiative, n.d.).

There is an almost non-existent focus on work and employment in the Ghetto Strategy, which is surprising given that this is an important criterion for identifying vulnerable areas placed on the list (see section 4.2). It also sets the Danish policy apart from the key strategies pursued in the other Nordic countries, where work and employment are strongly emphasised.

On the other hand, a number of other recent Danish integration reforms have addressed these issues, including the so-called 'basic integration education' and changes to the benefits system (such as integration assistance), which are intended to make employment more attractive compared to receiving benefits. Also missing from the Ghetto Strategy is any specific mentioning of civil society. By contrast, this aspect is highlighted as important in several of the Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish policies discussed in this study.

3.3 Norway

Concern over segregation and social inclusion is on the rise in Norway, particularly in terms of the profound implications for social cohesion, economic opportunities and overall wellbeing within communities. The impact of these issues on Norway's urban policy agenda is reflected in research showing that both ethnic and

socio-economic segregation has increased over recent years, in Oslo especially (Cavicchia & Cucca, 2020; Wessel, 2015).

Efforts to address segregation and promote social inclusion in Norway are multifaceted, encompassing integration, education, employment, housing and physical regeneration. Norway's approach to dealing with these challenges relies on close cooperation between different levels of government and a variety of sectors, as well as collaboration with other actors, including civic organisations. Against this backdrop, Norway has undertaken a range of initiatives aimed at fostering integration and social inclusion in cities.

3.3.1 Policies and initiatives

National Integration Strategy

A key national-level policy document is Norway's 2019–2022 Integration Strategy (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019), which addressed the integration of immigrants mainly through a focus on education and qualifications. Here, the overriding goal was to increase immigrant participation in working life, and by extension society more broadly (see also Karlsdóttir et al., 2020). The strategy set out a number of economic and social sustainability targets corresponding to the government white paper, 'Opportunities For All' (Ministry of Finance, 2019). In addition, the strategy made specific reference to efforts aimed at counteracting segregation and exclusion, with particular emphasis placed on measures promoting participation and togetherness (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019). These measures were to be followed up with others designed to increase children's and young people's participation in activities. Such measures were to be achieved through settlement policy, housing policy, and cooperation with voluntary services and civil society (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019).

The Integration Strategy included the following four priority areas: 1) education and qualifications; 2) employment; 3) 'everyday integration'; and 4) the right to live a free life (The Ministry of Education and Research, 2019). While the strategy must be seen in the broader context of Norway's immigration policies, it nevertheless exemplifies how the prevention of segregation and promotion of social inclusion are implemented across sectors, often at the local level.

In parallel, the government formed a 'City and Living Conditions' (*By- og levekårsutvalget*) expert commission tasked with examining residential and ethnic segregation, including the challenges thrown up by living conditions and integration issues in and around Norway's major cities. In response, the committee produced a report titled 'Living Conditions in Cities: Good Local Communities For All' (*Levekår i byer – Gode lokalsamfunn for alle*) (Ministry of Education, 2018), which took a comprehensive approach to understanding living conditions and emphasised the importance of countering economic inequality and ensuring basic welfare

(Andersen et al., 2021). Having summarised the latest knowledge on the topic, the report presented a toolbox of strategies and measures aimed at ensuring all the country's residents can live in safe, inclusive communities with good living conditions.

Strategies to counteract segregation

Another relevant national policy document is the 2023 government white paper 'Good Urban Communities with Small Differences' (*Gode bysamfunn med små skilnader*) (Meld. St. 28, 2022–2023) (Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, 2023). In the paper, the government proposed various measures designed to reduce socio-spatial disparities and provide greater opportunities for those living in vulnerable areas. In doing so, the paper addressed various topics, such as existing economic policy and general welfare schemes; the promotion of better living conditions and participation in society; the key drivers and challenges affecting living conditions in Norwegian cities; and the measures used by the government to target neighbourhoods with accumulated welfare challenges. Another key focus was the role of urban planning, housing policy and the local living environment in preventing urban segregation, and how municipalities – through community and land use planning – can play a vital role in ensuring social cohesion, as well as economic and environmental resilience.

Measures to prevent segregation and promote social inclusion also featured in the government's 2017 urban sustainability and rural strength white paper, which emphasised that every Norwegian citizen should experience equal living conditions and have access to basic services, regardless of how and where they live (Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, 2017). In this respect, the document expressed governmental concerns on preventing increased inequality between population segments, as well as its desire to ensure healthy, inclusive communities (Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, 2017).

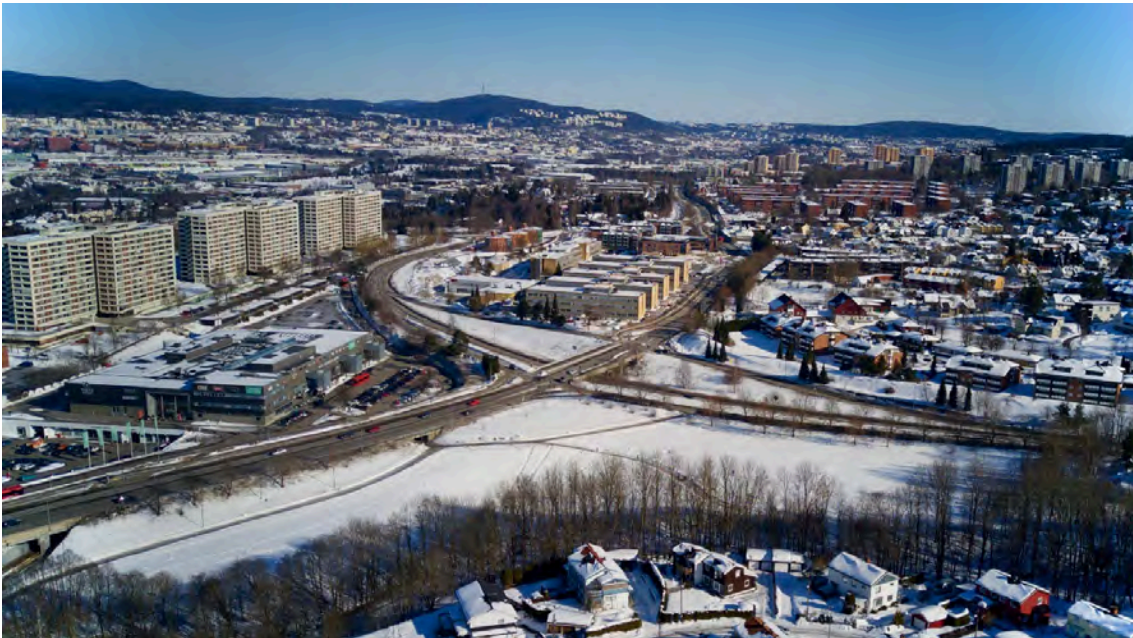
Area-based initiatives

Relatedly, the white paper included a six-point priority list concerning innovative working methods and models to be developed through area-based initiatives (*områdesatsninger*), with a particular focus on social sustainability, employment opportunities, preventing loneliness and promoting social inclusion. In turn, the learnings from these area-based initiatives were to be inputted into the design of new governmental policies.

Initiatives targeting specific areas confronted by a concentration of welfare challenges are a key approach when it comes to addressing urban segregation in Norway (Andersen & Brattbakk, 2020). Essentially, area-based initiatives are founded on long-term contractual partnerships between the Norwegian state and certain municipalities, with the aim of using neighbourhood initiatives to improve living conditions and enhance the vitality of local communities. As of 2023, the

central state had agreements in place with the municipalities of Oslo, Bergen, Drammen, Stavanger and Trondheim, Sarpsborg, Fredrikstad, Kristiansand and Skien. The following year, plans were made to enter agreements with the municipalities of Gjøvik, Halden, Indre Østfold, Larvik and Tromsø (Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, 2024).

Figure 5. Aerial view of Oslo's Groruddalen district, which has been targeted by various area-based regeneration initiatives



Source: CC BY-SA 3.0,

Strategies for inclusive communities

Elsewhere, the 2019 'Opportunities For All: Distribution and Social Sustainability' white paper (Meld. St. 13, 2018-2019) stressed that Norway's distribution and inclusion policy – coordinated by the Ministry of Finance – will need to focus on education, competence, work and better integration (Ministry of Finance, 2019). In addressing the issue of inequality and the impact of low incomes in Norway from an international perspective, the paper highlighted the importance of the Norwegian labour market and how the country's social security schemes help distribute opportunities, support lifelong learning, reduce healthy inequalities, and promote democratic and social participation.

Following this, a strategy for small and medium-sized towns was published in 2021, outlining the government's cross-cutting priorities concerning the development of compact, attractive cities and towns (Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, 2021). The aim of the strategy was to facilitate good physical surroundings, vibrant urban centres, mixed housing, and a wide range of goods,

services and cultural/leisure facilities in small and medium-sized towns, thereby strengthening their status as regional powerhouses. The strategy also stressed the importance of these towns as residential, visiting and business hubs servicing their surrounding regions.

The national strategy for social housing 2021–2024 (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Affairs, 2020) built on previous strategies outlining national efforts and targets towards supporting people disadvantaged by the housing market, both in terms of accessing suitable housing and ensuring good living conditions. The strategy was titled 'We All Need a Safe Place to Call Home', with 'home' in this context referring to as a framework for social life, along with a sense of belonging to a local environment and community. The government states in the document that living well and safely is important for citizens, as is receiving an education, starting a family, having employment and taking care of one's health.

Although the strategy features a chapter dedicated to social sustainability, the concepts of inclusion and segregation go unmentioned. Instead, the key linkages between immigration and integration policies and housing policies can be found in the goals and measures relating to the settlement of newcomers, particularly refugees.

Norway's national spatial planning strategies are also key to meeting cross-cutting targets for socially mixed and inclusive neighbourhoods, and to promoting social inclusion. In this regard, the 2019–2023 National Expectations Regarding Regional and Municipal Planning represented a key guideline document (Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, 2019), underlining that municipalities must plan for sustainable social and economic development, while ensuring social justice and good public health services. Objectives contained in the document include the cultivation of trust among the local community, access to work and education, and the provision of a local environment conducive to feelings of security and belonging.

3.3.2 Implementation and actors

Norway's national-level approach to preventing segregation and promoting social inclusion is distributed across a range of policies and strategies. These are primarily devised by key ministries in cooperation with regional and local administrations. A brief overview of the relevant national-, regional- and municipal-level public actors, including their main responsibilities and duties, is presented in Table 7.

The government bears primary responsibility for the strategies overseen by its respective ministries. Implementation of national goals and objectives are translated to the local level, where regional strategies and frameworks shape how municipalities approach place-specific land use and community development issues. Depending on the strategy, government agencies and other stakeholders may also have a role to play in policy translation and implementation. For example, in

pursuing area-based initiatives, cooperation has been built between different levels of government – ranging from ministries to municipalities and city districts – and actors such as the Norwegian State Housing Bank (*Husbanken*) and Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI), along with various civic organisations (Staver et al., 2019).

Regional policies are presented every two-to-four years and fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (KDD). These high-level visions are operationalised under the thematic areas set out in *By- og stedsutvikling* (city and place development), which includes both an urban and a rural focus. *By- og stedsutvikling* encompasses initiatives for sustainable land use and urban development, including area-based initiatives. KDD has a dedicated website for this work, which provides practical guidance on how to plan and develop towns and cities for the benefit of residents, businesses and the environment (Norwegian Government, n.d.).

Tackling urban segregation and promoting socially mixed and inclusive neighbourhoods features in numerous national policies, with the country's largest cities often the main beneficiaries of large, targeted support grants, including government-funded area-based initiatives (Onsager et al., 2021). Over the past few decades, interventions directed at areas facing accumulated welfare challenges have been central to Norwegian policies targeting segregation (Andersen & Brattbakk, 2020). The overarching aim of such initiatives has been to improve the housing, living conditions and wider environment found in these vulnerable areas, thereby making them more attractive.

One example of efforts to strengthen the knowledge base in this area is the Roadmap for Smart and Sustainable Cities and Communities – developed by Design and Architecture Norway (DOGA), the Norwegian Smart City Network and Nordic Edge – which essentially acts as a guide for local and regional authorities (DOGA, 2019). Among the key principles contained in the roadmap – which seeks to promote the development of sustainable, productive, resilient cities and communities – is the meaningful pursuit of inclusion and co-creation, with the views of those affected placed centre-stage in relevant initiatives.

Table 7. Key public actors in Norway and their responsibilities

Actor	Responsibility
National government	• Key ministries are responsible for devising overall strategies and policies, as well as overseeing implementation of national goals and objectives. Work addressing specific issues related to segregation and social inclusion is carried out in cooperation with regional and local administrations. • The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (KDD) is responsible for regional policies addressing segregation and social inclusion. These policies are operationalised under thematic areas such as urban and rural development.
National agencies	• The Norwegian State Housing Bank (<i>Husbanken</i>) supports implementation of initiatives targeted at vulnerable areas, including those promoting inclusion through housing-related programmes and projects. • The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) plays a role in the implementation of strategies related to immigration and integration.
Regional and local administrations	• Responsible for translating national strategies/objectives into regional and local initiatives, which in turn how municipalities approach place-specific issues through land use and community development plans.

3.3.3 Key focus areas

There is currently increased attention in Norway on combating segregation and enhancing social inclusion through national, regional and local policies and initiatives. In this respect, integration, inclusion and social mixing are all key themes of the most recent national integration strategy. Efforts have been directed towards ensuring equal opportunities, education and employment for individuals from diverse backgrounds (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019). The spatial concentration of social challenges is another priority area, with concerted efforts made to address issues affecting 'areas with complex welfare challenges' (*komplekse levekårsutfordringer*).

National policy objectives and instruments aimed at ensuring equal living conditions, value creation and sustainable settlements throughout the country are mainly linked to regional and rural policies. These set the stage for how the government seeks to address social sustainability issues: while rural policies target

the most remote and rural municipalities, regional policies usually apply to every type of municipality. Within these policies, the concept of social sustainability encompasses everything from avoiding poverty to creating integrated local communities with adequate housing, educational opportunities, jobs, social meeting places and security.

There is also a growing emphasis on urban development issues and specifically ensuring that the physical design of small and medium-sized cities contributes to social inclusion. City parks and other publicly accessible meeting places such as libraries, cultural centres and sports facilities are important arenas in this respect. Such policies and strategies also acknowledge that immigration and integration – in conjunction with holistic planning processes – are important for local development. Towards this end, Norway's larger cities have been the main beneficiaries of area-based initiatives dealing with issues of urban segregation and integration.

The underling objective behind Norway's integration and segregation policies is the empowerment of individuals through strengthening social integration, education and employment opportunities. Target populations are usually residents of disadvantaged areas or groups with an immigrant background. At the local level, these policies aim to improve the local living environment by focusing on housing and living conditions within a specific area, thus mitigating certain vulnerabilities and strengthening the social fabric of local communities.

Turning to regional development policies, the housing market, physical planning and local sustainable development are all important levers for encouraging socially mixed and inclusive neighbourhoods, including securing socio-economic equity across regions and communities. Such efforts are vital when it comes to preparing Norwegian society for long-term sustainability. Above all, it is important to continuously adapt to find out what works well, implementing change across relevant policy areas when plans and programmes are implemented at different governance levels.

3.4 Sweden

Sweden has experienced a noticeable rise in residential segregation since the 1990s. This is related not only to increased socio-economic disparities across the country at large, but also changes in the population's demographic composition as Sweden has become more ethnically heterogeneous over time (Boverket, 2023a). Studies comparing the Nordic countries have found socio-economic and ethnic segregation to be most pronounced in Sweden (see e.g. Haandrikman et al., 2023; Östh et al.,

2015; Tammaru et al., 2021). This growing segregation is reflected in stark disparities between residential areas across the country – both in major cities and smaller towns (Boverket, 2023a) – highlighting the pivotal role of location in determining an individual's life opportunities and outcomes (Boverket, 2021).

In response, Sweden has actively sought to address the issue of segregation through comprehensive governmental strategies and action plans. Such initiatives recognise segregation as a multifaceted phenomenon encompassing – among other things – housing, education, labour market participation, democratic participation and crime. In addition, they acknowledge the interconnectedness of these various aspects, and thus the importance of correct sequencing when attempting to counteract segregation. Legislative frameworks, such as the Discrimination Law and housing policy reforms, have also played a crucial role in promoting equal rights and opportunities, while combating discrimination in housing and labour markets. Additionally, national initiatives focused on sustainable urban development demonstrate the weight placed on creating more inclusive, cohesive cities.

3.4.1 Policies and initiatives

Two key national policies pursued in recent years have had an explicit focus on counteracting segregation in Sweden: the government's 2018 long-term strategy to reduce and counteract segregation (Ministry of Culture, 2018), and its related governmental action plan, 'A Sweden That Stays Together – the Government's Efforts to Reduce Segregation and Promote Good Life Chances For All', from 2020 (Ministry of Labour, 2020a). Both policies arose from the Long-term Reform Programme for Reduced Segregation 2017–2025 (Government Office, 2017).

National strategies to reduce segregation

The long-term strategy to reduce and counteract segregation (Ministry of Culture, 2018) is based on the notion that segregation consists of five closely related dimensions: 1) housing; 2) education; 3) labour market; 4) democracy and civil society; and 5) crime.

The strategy emphasises that work related to these five dimensions – which have helped guide efforts to address segregation in Sweden over recent years – should be observable and measurable (see also Nordic Welfare Centre, 2018). In terms of *housing*, the government states that a longstanding failure to build sufficient housing, together with unequal access to the housing market and a failure to create areas with mixed housing, represents the first link in a chain of problems concerning segregation. Thus, housing is connected to *education*. Here, the long-term strategy states that a combination of growing housing segregation and reforms enabling the establishment of more private schools has led to an increasingly segregated

school system. This is evidenced by the differences in high school completion rates between native and foreign-born students.

Education is directly connected to the *labour market*, as an individual's level of educational attainment greatly impacts their employment prospects. The strategy highlights the significant differences in employment status between those who completed high school and those who did not, as well as between native and foreign-born residents. Moreover, given socio-economic status impacts the degree to which one can participate in society and community life, educational level and employment status have a clear impact on *democracy and civil society*. This in turn relates to *crime*, as democratic participation is important for counteracting social exclusion, and thus preventing distrust in public institutions and crime.

An overview of the key policy measures presented in the Swedish government's long-term strategy to reduce and counteract segregation is presented in Table 8 (Ministry of Culture, 2018).

Table 8. Policy measures from Sweden's 2018 long-term strategy to reduce and counteract segregation

Dimensions	Measures
Housing	• Increase diversity in housing tenure, size, type and price in vulnerable areas through new construction. • Invest in research on the housing market and sustainability in planning and social housing policy. • Make housing more accessible for low-income groups. • Reform policies to allow a more even distribution of asylum seekers and newcomers, with limitations on self-settlement in socio-economically challenged areas.
Education	• Map preschool participation in order to increase it. • Review school admission rules for student diversity. • Address socio-economic disparities by allocating increased funding to school leaders. • Prevent dropouts and incentive education for newly arrived students. • Emphasise adult education for labour market integration and provide support for children's education.
Labour market	• Pursue targeted measures for young people, women, long-term unemployed and newcomers. • Utilise the Delegation for Employment of Young People and Newly Arrived Migrants (Dua). • Enforce regulations requiring newcomers in employment programmes to enter education. • Provide funding for Swedish classes and anti-discrimination efforts. • Enact Employment Service reform and work-oriented integration programmes.
Democracy and civil society	• Pursue reforms aimed at enhancing democratic participation, addressing discrimination and understanding residents' experiences. • Provide funding for libraries, civil society organisations and local culture schools.
Crime	• Increase police budgets, including for the employment of officers tasked with tackling organised crime, especially gun violence. • Adopt both supply- and demand-side approaches to drug issues, with prevention efforts targeting children.

In 2020, the Swedish government presented its 'A Sweden That Stays Together' action plan, based on the previously discussed long-term strategy to reduce and counteract segregation (Ministry of Labour, 2020a). The plan presented a wide range of measures and collaboration efforts that were to be implemented over the coming years. The long-term strategy drew on the latest social science research base concerning segregation, while also building on previous experiences of tackling segregation.

In doing so, the strategy emphasised a number of key principles for combating segregation, such as adopting a cross-sectoral approach, relying on collaboration and coordination, and adopting a knowledge-based approach. Alongside this, it stressed the need for a variety of broad reforms, targeted efforts and preventive measures. The overarching perspective expounded by the strategy was that efforts addressing segregation are needed at all levels of policy and planning, and should involve relevant actors at the national, regional and local levels (Ministry of Culture, 2018).

Another core aspect of the long-term strategy and its action plan is the notion that segregation as a phenomenon is relational. This means a 'segregated' area cannot simply be viewed in isolation – rather, segregation refers to the relationship between at least two groups in society and at least two geographical areas. Thus, urban segregation should be understood in the context of the whole city or region, as the development of one neighbourhood will impact the development of other residential areas.

Nevertheless, the long-term strategy specified that its main purpose was to address those aspects of segregation that have negative consequences for people's rights, preconditions and possibilities (Ministry of Culture, 2018). In this respect, segregation was explained as a complex, interrelated phenomenon linked to various societal structures and individual choices, with the main driver being increased economic inequality over time (Liang, 2021; Scarpa, 2016).

The stated objectives of the policies were to reduce segregation, ensure equal conditions for growing up and living, and provide good life chances for all (Ministry of Culture, 2018). As reflected in the strategy's name, a long-term – specifically ten-year – perspective was adopted. Thus, implementation should go beyond merely improving the situation in areas with significant socio-economic challenges, and address the underlying structural causes of segregation. With this in mind, the strategy put forward the goal of Sweden one day no longer having any 'especially vulnerable' areas (*särskilt utsatta områden*) or areas afflicted by socio-economic challenges. Towards this end, it was envisaged that the number of such areas, along with segregation and exclusion in the broader sense, would gradually be reduced year on year (Ministry of Culture, 2018).

The strategy also referred to previous large-scale efforts dealing with segregation, which had been implemented in Sweden since the mid-1990s. One of the first

reform programmes was the so-called '*Blommansatsningen*', initiated in 1995, which targeted areas characterised by exclusion in eight Swedish municipalities: Botkyrka, Gothenburg, Haninge, Huddinge, Malmö, Solna, Stockholm and Södertälje. The programme aimed to tackle ethnic segregation by increasing the skills of immigrants, thereby strengthening their position within the labour market. Implementation of *Blommansatsningen* was carried out through locally developed actions plans, in collaboration with various key actors.

In 1999, a succeeding reform programme, *Storstadssatsningen*, was launched. Targeting 24 disadvantaged areas in seven municipalities in Sweden's three largest urban regions Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, the new initiative placed greater emphasis on cooperation across levels of government (see also Staver et al., 2019). Several years later, in 2007, the government entered into development agreements with 21 municipalities concerning 38 vulnerable areas, with a second round of efforts undertaken in some of the targeted areas in 2012. The thematic focus of the 2007 agreements tilted towards employment, education and safety. Moreover, rather than relying on project-based efforts, as in the previous initiatives, the agreements sought to develop existing institutional structures and link various policy areas (Ministry of Culture, 2018).

Figure 6. New housing construction in Alby, Botkyrka, one of the areas targeted by both the *Blommansatsningen* and *Storstadssatsningen* initiatives



Source: CC BY-SA 4.0

These preceding initiatives had all targeted specific neighbourhoods regarded as disadvantaged or vulnerable; relied on some form of public engagement or participation element; and had action plans developed locally in cooperation with various actors (Staver et al., 2019). In referencing these previous national efforts, the long-term strategy emphasised their positive impacts at the local and

individual level (Ministry of Culture, 2018). Nevertheless, a major shortcoming of the previous initiatives was that they had ultimately failed to tackle the broader structural causes of segregation. Hence, the long-term strategy underlined that, going forward, such efforts had to take full account of, among other things, the planning of neighbourhood living environments and housing stocks, as well as employment and integration.

Legal frameworks

In terms of relevant legislation, the Discrimination Law, updated in 2008 (2008:567), promotes equal rights regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation or age, and moreover stipulates that no one should be discriminated against in the housing market (Diskrimineringslag, 2008). In 2006, the Equality Ombudsman – a governmental body tasked with promoting equal rights and opportunities – initiated targeted efforts to address housing market discrimination, with a particular focus on the cities of Gothenburg, Malmö and Sundsvall. More recently, in 2017, the Swedish government entrusted the task of reducing labour and housing market discrimination to the Equality Ombudsman and the Swedish Agency for Participation (MFD) (Ministry of Culture & The Ministry of Social Affairs, 2017).

The so-called 'EBO Act' is also relevant to the thematic focus of this study. The law originally gave asylum seekers the right to seek accommodation on the regular housing market and be compensated for its cost by the Migration Agency (*Migrationsverket*) in the form of extra housing benefits. In 2016, however, the legislation was changed in order to allow the state to refer newcomers to particular municipalities (SOU 2018:22, 2018). Three years later, the Swedish parliament approved a government proposal limiting the rights of asylum seekers to seek non-government housing (Prop. 2019/20:10, 2019).

The following year, the law was further reformed, allowing certain municipalities to limit the application of the EBO Act in areas with socio-economic challenges. The aim of this change was to encourage more asylum seekers to choose to live in areas more conducive to a socially sustainable reception and thereby avoid potentially negative social consequences in already vulnerable areas (Swedish Association of Municipalities and Regions, 2021). Since 2020, refugees and asylum seekers have been denied benefits if they settle in areas identified as having socio-economic challenges (Swedish Parliament, 2021).

Strategies for sustainable cities

Finally, there are several national policy initiatives related to the theme of sustainable cities that have direct relevance for policies aimed at reducing segregation. For instance, the 'Strategy for Living Cities – Policies for Sustainable Urban Development' (Ministry of the Environment and Energy, 2018) highlights addressing segregation as a crucial element in creating more sustainable cities (this strategy is addressed in greater depth in section 6.4). More specifically, the strategy

states that architecture, urban form and the design of physical living environments can contribute to reducing segregation and increasing social cohesion. It also stresses that sustainable urban development must include the whole city, including all its inhabitants and areas, if it is to effectively counteract segregation processes.

3.4.2 Implementation and actors

Over recent years, work against segregation in Sweden has leaned strongly towards a long-term, cross-sectoral perspective, involving cooperation between different levels of governance and diverse sectors. Through the previously addressed long-term strategy, the government aimed to clarify the role of the state, as well as provide all relevant actors with an environment conducive to working towards shared goals (Ministry of Culture, 2018). The government is the main actor responsible for national strategies relating to segregation. More specifically, as of October 2024, work against segregation and discrimination comes under the purview of the Ministry of Employment (Government of Sweden, n.d.).

Strategy implementation is further distributed between state agencies. Here, the long-term strategy highlighted that a clear shortcoming in previous work to counteract segregation had been that some agency missions were ill-defined (Ministry of Culture, 2018). Thus, an explicit aim of the long-term strategy was to clarify the role of several government missions and thereby tie them closer to the strategy's objectives. According to the long-term strategy, approximately 25 state agencies and county administrative boards are in some way connected to segregation-related thematic areas. At the time of the strategy's launch, there were two agencies given assigned specific responsibility for reducing segregation: the Delegation Against Segregation (Delmos), and Boverket – the Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning.

The establishment of Delmos, a state agency, in January 2018 was an important element of the long-term strategy (Ministry of Labour, 2020a). The agency's overall mission was to promote research, cooperation and knowledge exchange on issues relating to segregation, including providing support to regions, municipalities and civil society. Delmos also distributed government funds to municipalities deemed eligible for this purpose (Delmos, 2021c). The 2021 budget saw the Swedish parliament decide to discontinue Delmos, which was told to phase out operations by the end of 2022 (Ministry of Labour, 2021).

Boverket is Sweden's national-level authority for issues concerning the built environment, including land and water area management, physical planning, construction, building management, and housing and housing finance issues. Boverket also coordinates the government's efforts to reduce exclusion in specific districts. Such efforts are designed to achieve positive social and economic development, reduce housing segregation, and promote sustainable housing

environments and better school results in the targeted districts (Ministry of Culture, 2018).

Other relevant agencies reporting to the national government mentioned in the long-term strategy include the police, the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, the National Agency for Education, the Public Employment Service, and the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth. In addition, several agencies have a more general remit concerning equality and inclusion, such as the Agency for Equality and the Swedish Agency for Participation. Various forms of collaboration between agencies exist, such as the Council for Sustainable Cities, which works to strengthen the conditions in municipalities for developing vibrant, sustainable cities and communities (Ministry of Culture, 2018).

Statistics Sweden also has an important role in work against segregation. Particularly relevant in this context is the database developed by the agency covering 38 areas previously targeted by area-based policies in the past. In 2019, the government tasked Delmos and Statistics Sweden with mapping what segregation looked like in Sweden at that moment, and also investigating how it has developed over time (Ministry of Labour, 2020b). One of the concrete results of this work was the Segregation Barometer (discussed in section 4.4), a tool that uses a variety of indicators based on the key themes related to segregation presented in the long-term strategy. In doing so, the aim is to increase knowledge on segregation and establish a common starting point for discussions (Delmos, 2021c).

Following Delmos's discontinuation at the end of 2022, Boverket assumed responsibility for maintaining and updating the Segregation Barometer (Boverket, 2023a). It is noteworthy that the classification of areas in the Segregation Barometer does not entirely overlap with the classification of vulnerable areas developed and maintained by the Swedish Police. The police list (also discussed further in section 4.4) has been the subject of much public debate in recent years, and is frequently cited by actors advocating urban planning and development initiatives in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Salonen, 2023).

Municipalities and regions are key actors when it comes to implementing the long-term strategy, as well as work combating segregation more generally. In Sweden, municipal and regional authorities are responsible for most policy areas relevant to segregation, including housing, education, planning and public transport (see Table 9). Municipalities are also important actors in encouraging citizen participation and democratic inclusion, which are key elements of Sweden's approach to dealing with segregation.

The long-term strategy emphasised the government's intention of providing a more conducive environment for municipalities to deal with segregation. As part of this, a funding instrument known as the 'welfare billions' (*välfärds miljarderna*) was

introduced in 2018. Through this mechanism, state funding to municipalities was increased by SEK 10 billion (around €900 million), with funds disbursed based on the number of citizens, asylum seekers and newly arrived immigrants in a municipality (Ministry of Culture, 2018). In parallel, the government set out a series of long-term efforts covering the period 2018–2027 aimed at municipalities and areas with socio-economic challenges. Moreover, in order to facilitate the coordination of local-level work, separate government grants were made available in 2018 for municipalities and regional councils wishing to pursue networking and knowledge exchange, or the development of new knowledge and methods (Ministry of Culture, 2018).

The long-term strategy also mentions civil organisations as being central to several of its thematic areas, while at the same time highlighting the role of Sweden's private sector in counteracting segregation, for instance through providing finance, services, and employment and internship opportunities in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Finally, the strategy references agreements entered into by the government, different labour unions (LO, *Unionen*), and the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (*Svenskt näringsliv*) in 2018, concerning so-called 'establishment jobs' for the long-term unemployed and newly arrived persons (Ministry of Culture, 2018).

Table 9. Key public actors in Sweden and their responsibilities

Actors	Responsibility
The government	• Responsible for overall work and strategies aimed at countering segregation. • Each department and minister is responsible for dealing with segregation issues in their sector. This work is coordinated by a group of ministers led by the Minister for Cooperation. • The government and parliament assign governmental missions to relevant state agencies.
State agencies	• Undertake governmental missions and cooperate with each other to counter segregation. • Two key agencies are Boverket and Delmos (which operated between 2018 and 2022).
County administrative boards	• Main mission is to represent state interests in the regions, following up on national strategies and goals as they apply to the relevant region. • Coordinate activities between municipalities, agencies, organisations and companies on issues relevant to segregation, such as elections, emergency services, businesses, social development, infrastructure and housing. • Also given more specific, time-limited missions, such as coordinating crime prevention, municipal capacity for accepting newly arrived children and adults, and early initiatives for asylum seekers.
Regions	• Responsible for health care and public health, including reducing health inequalities. • Also responsible for public transport, culture and leisure activities, regional development, and business development.
Municipalities	• Responsible for housing, water and sewage, environmental and health protection, schools, libraries, social care, planning and building, public transport. • Play an important role in increasing citizen participation and inclusion. • Cultural and leisure activities, which can play a central role in the work against segregation, may be undertaken should a municipality wish to do so.

3.4.3 Key focus areas

The above has mainly addressed the Swedish government's 2018 long-term strategy to reduce and counteract segregation and its related 2020 governmental action plan (Ministry of Culture, 2018; Ministry of Labour, 2020a). The strategy and plan had a strong focus on socio-economic segregation, defined as people being separated into different housing areas based on level of education, income or their occupation (Ministry of Culture, 2018).

While the policies did not specifically focus on ethnic segregation, its importance was acknowledged and its existence primarily ascribed to socio-economic factors. Housing segregation was strongly emphasised in the policies, as a person's place of residence can substantially affect their life chances, for example through children's access to education and adults' access to work opportunities. This underlines the connection between residential, school and labour market segregation.

Since the previously discussed policies were launched, there has been a shift in Sweden's national policy discourse concerning urban segregation and social inclusion. This can be seen in the policy reorientation that has taken place since the current right-wing government took office in October 2022. Broadly speaking, counteracting social exclusion, particularly in disadvantaged areas, remains a clear policy focus. However, while the former strategies were explicitly directed at counteracting socio-economic segregation, defined as a complex phenomenon, the current national policy is more oriented towards social exclusion specifically. Thus, the current national policy aims to reduce the number of people living in exclusion, combat parallel social structures, and increase people's security and life chances (Government Offices of Sweden, n.d.). Alongside this, there is a stronger focus on individual responsibility.

Preventing crime and increasing security in particular have been prioritised by the current government, with the former issue addressed via targeted measures relating to education, the labour market, exclusion and integration. Specific focus areas include dealing with gang crime, increasing the number of foreign-born women in the labour market, providing more resources to schools in vulnerable areas, and creating summer jobs for young people in municipalities with high unemployment (Government Offices of Sweden, 2023a).

In this vein, the government released a written communication (*skrivelse*) in March 2024 outlining its crime prevention stance and the kinds of measures it believes are needed (Swedish Government, 2024). Areas mentioned in the communication include blocking recruitment into criminal networks, preventing children and young

people from becoming involved in crime, and inducing individuals engaged in illegal activities to leave crime behind.

A new law introduced in April 2024 allows for the setting up of so-called 'security zones' (*säkerhetszoner*, also known as 'stop-and-search zones') (Swedish Parliament, 2024) for up to two weeks – although the police can extend this if necessary – in areas deemed to be at severe risk of crime (Swedish Police, n.d.). The security zones allow the police greater powers to search people and vehicles under suspicion within the designated area, and are intended to make it more difficult for criminals to prepare and carry out serious violent crimes.

Another core focus of the current national policy is integration, reflected in two Swedish official reports (SOU) that were presented on the matter in 2024. The first was an interim report titled 'Objectives and Aim of Integration' (SOU 2024:12), which proposed a reorienting of the country's integration policy based on the principle that people intending to remain in Sweden for the long-term must take responsibility for becoming part of Swedish society (Government Offices of Sweden, 2024a). The second was a final report titled 'Strong Governance for Successful Integration' (*Styrkraft för lyckad integration*) (SOU 2024:41), which made a number of proposals regarding the strategic, coherent governance of integration policy (Government Offices of Sweden, 2024b). Among other issues, the report highlighted the inadequacy of current governance and monitoring, as well as the need for relevant indicators and an integration barometer.

The various policies, strategies and initiatives discussed above illustrate how Sweden's policy landscape is constantly evolving. While a certain path dependency can be observed, with more recent policies often building on previous ones, there has nevertheless been an observable shift in the direction of policy and prioritisation over the last couple of years.

3.5 Iceland

Iceland differs from the other Nordic countries in that segregation – whether socio-economic or ethnic – has not generally been considered a significant societal problem. This may be down to a number of reasons. The first is that until relatively recently immigration was not a noticeable demographic trend in Iceland. Over the past couple of decades, however, immigration has become much more pronounced, reflected in the fact that the proportion of Iceland's population with a foreign background increased massively from approximately 5% in 1996 to 27% in 2023

(Heleniak, 2024). Nevertheless, the proportion of second-generation immigrants is lower in Iceland than in the other Nordic countries, which is testament to the country's short history of immigration: only 1.4% of the population were second-generation immigrants in 2018, compared to a miniscule 0.1% in 1998 (Statistics Iceland, 2019b). Thus, while various issues often associated with immigration, such as segregation, inclusion and integration, have historically not been high on Iceland's policy agenda, the increased immigration seen in recent years means they are becoming increasingly important.

Another possible reason why segregation has attracted relatively little policy attention in Iceland is that the country has a comparatively small population. Around two-thirds of the country's inhabitants live in and around the Reykjavík Capital Region in the southwestern part of the country, with settlements in other regions usually host to no more than a few thousand inhabitants – and often far less than that. This may also explain why Iceland has less experience of segregation as a phenomenon compared to the other Nordic countries, which have significantly larger urban populations. Moreover, the housing market often plays a crucial role in segregation dynamics. In this respect, the majority of Icelandic households own the dwelling in which they live (Sveinsson, 2020), while the country's rental market is almost exclusively private and generally considered expensive, insecure and congested (Anundsen et al., 2021).

Even so, despite segregation not being an issue of great societal importance historically, the increased immigration seen over the past two decades – along with developments such as rapidly increasing housing prices – has led to a growing policy focus on issues relating to integration, segregation, inclusion and social mixing.

3.5.1 Policies and initiatives

One reason for the emergence of segregation-related concerns in Iceland is that the integration of immigrants and their children does not always appear to be working as intended (OECD, 2023). Given that Iceland has few existing national strategies or policies in this area, it is increasingly looking to other countries for inspiration in dealing with these challenges. This is reflected in the various policy initiatives and interventions that have been introduced over the last few years.

Housing policy and urban planning

Housing is generally considered to be the main policy area relevant to segregation and social disruption in Iceland. The country's social housing system was abolished at the end of the last century, resulting in a halving of its social housing stock between 1998 and 2017 (Kjarninn, 2019). A shortage of housing, alongside urbanisation and increased international tourism, has in recent years pushed housing prices up, especially in and around the capital region (Guðnason, 2020).

Prior to the signing of the collective agreements on the labour market in 2019, the

issue of housing was a major area of contention between the labour market unions and the government. As a result, a task force was established to identify key challenges related to housing and suggest ways of resolving the dispute as part of a larger collective agreement between the labour unions, the government, municipalities and the Confederation of Icelandic Enterprises (Government of Iceland, 2019b).

In 2019, the task force presented 40 proposals, grouped into seven categories, to Iceland's prime minister (Government of Iceland, 2019a). Suggestions included re-introducing the public housing system with higher initial contributions and income limits; legally mandating a capital contribution to public housing in order to improve the housing security of low-income families; creating a supply of affordable apartments, with the rent charged not to exceed 25% of income; increasing support for non-profit housing associations; reviewing regulations with a view to simplifying them; pursuing digitalisation of planning and construction administration; and allocating state-owned land for apartments (including rental units) (Government of Iceland, 2019a).

Another relevant initiative is the Icelandic Equity Loans (*Hlutdeildarlán*), a governmental remedy introduced in 2020 to help provide access to the real estate property market (HMS, n.d.). Applicants must be first-time buyers or those who have not owned a property during the preceding five years, have personal funds for a 5% deposit, and earn an income below the stipulated limit. The initiative is based on the principle that buyers can apply for a mortgage covering 75% of the purchase price, with the Housing and Construction Authority (HMS) providing an equity loan for the remaining 20% (once the 5% deposit is taken into account). This arrangement is intended to encourage the construction of affordable housing, with loans only provided for the purchase of newly built affordable properties approved by the HMS – although in exceptional circumstances, older properties outside the Capital Area can also be approved if they have been fully refurbished (HMS, n.d.).

While equity loans may be regarded as preventing social segregation by allowing more people to enter the housing market, they have also been criticised. Such loans are only intended for low-income groups and newly built housing below a certain sale price. However, this largely excludes people seeking to buy property in the more central and established parts of Reykjavík, where new housing is deemed too expensive. As such, some view the initiative as pushing those who qualify for the equity loans to the outskirts of the city, which may lead to increased socio-spatial segregation through the formation of low-income areas on the urban fringes (Valdimarsson, 2024).

In 2023, the Ministry of Infrastructure published a report on housing as part of the government's policy-making process on the subject (Ministry of Infrastructure, 2023) – the first time a formal policy on housing matters had been developed at the national level. The report lays the foundation for a housing policy covering the

next 15 years, as well as a five-year action plan. Although the report includes a status assessment of housing issues and presents a draft of the policy's key issues, vision and priorities, it does not directly address segregation. Instead, it limits itself to emphasising the need for better targeted housing support, improvements in tenants' legal status and housing security, and more public housing and rental apartments (Ministry of Infrastructure, 2023).

In addition, Iceland's National Planning Strategy (*Landsskipulagsstefna*), which supports municipalities and lays out national policy in planning matters, was recently revised to put more emphasis on public health, air quality and land use (WHO, 2020). With this in mind, the revised strategy clearly states that a key objective for spatial planning and land use is enhancing people's quality of life (Planning agency, 2016b, 2021a). In relation to developing urban areas – almost exclusively in the capital region around Reykjavík – great emphasis has been placed on public transport infrastructure as a means of making neighbourhoods more accessible and inclusive.

The government has also approved the *Borgarlína* infrastructure project – a joint venture between the state and the capital region's association of municipalities aimed at accelerating development of transport infrastructure and public transport in the capital region (see e.g., Lidmo et al., 2024). The project is viewed as an efficient way of making transport faster and shortening travel distances between the suburbs and the city centre. More generally, increased accessibility through public transport is viewed as a good way of reducing segregation within, and especially between, residential areas in Iceland, thus promoting diversity in urban development. This can be seen, for example, in the transport agreement between the capital region's municipalities and the state approved in 2019, as well as in the capital region's 2015 regional plan (SSH, 2015; Statistics Iceland, 2019a, 2019a).

Integration strategies

Other governmental policies introduced as part of plans to increase integration, reduce segregation, and establish socially mixed neighbourhoods include the 'Action Plan For Immigration Matters 2016–2019' (Parliament of Iceland, 2016), which was followed up by a new action plan covering the years 2021–2024 (Government of Iceland, 2024a). Both action plans were based on five pillars – 1) society; 2) family; 3) education; 4) the labour market; and 5) refugees – with the measures contained within them reflective of the action plan's objectives around promoting a society where everyone can be an active participant, regardless of nationality or origin.

The governmental 'Action Plan For Immigration Matters 2021–2024' addresses – among other things – segregation, integration, housing, social security and welfare. The specific proposals set out in the plan represent either a continuation of policies initiated under the previous action plan, or are based on needs identified through research, development projects or general societal developments. Regarding social inclusion and segregation, the action plan focuses on the topic specifically from the

perspective of immigration (Icelandic Government, 2022), with possible future actions including the development of a platform that enables the sharing of relevant research, knowledge and statistical information.

In the end of 2024, a draft proposal for a Policy on Matters of Immigrants for 2025–2038, together with a four-year action plan for the years 2025–2028, were introduced and presented for public commentary (Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, 2024b, 2024c). The new policy builds on the same pillars as the previous policy, while defining three new main goals. The first one is *Participation, Equality, and Diversity*, which refers to ensuring that immigrants are active participants in society and enjoy equal opportunities. The policy promotes respect for diversity and strives to create an inclusive society where immigrants can thrive, while also stating that efforts will be made to reduce poverty among immigrants and increase their representation in public sector jobs. Additionally, the visibility of immigrants in public media will be enhanced to foster a more inclusive narrative.

The second goal concerns *Information, Accessibility, and Services*, highlighting the importance of providing comprehensive and accessible information services to new residents. Timely support will be offered to refugees, and the recognition of foreign qualifications will be facilitated to help immigrants better integrate into the workforce. There is also a focus on improved research and data on immigration issues to better inform policy decisions. Furthermore, the educational and social needs of children and young people with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds will be addressed, along with ensuring equal access to housing for immigrants.

The third goal refers to *Communication and Language* and to provide more diverse and inclusive ways of learning the Icelandic language. Also, standardised assessments for Icelandic language proficiency will be implemented to ensure consistent and effective language education. These efforts aim to help immigrants integrate into Icelandic society and participate fully in community life. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, 2024b, 2024c).

Many of the topics addressed in the new policy draft are based on a large consultation process involving numerous stakeholder, as well as recommendations from the OECD(2024) report 'Skills and Labour Market Integration of Immigrants and their Children in Iceland'. The OECD publication highlighted, for example, the need for better data collection on immigrants, enhancing the scope and quality of Icelandic language education, and better utilizing the education and skills of immigrants in the labour market, to help them secure jobs that match their qualifications and experience. Additionally, there is a call to place greater emphasis on integrating the families of those who move to Iceland for work, along with addressing discrimination against immigrants, particularly on the housing rental market. Furthermore, the policy stresses the need to invest in measures that support the children of immigrants, for instance, by implementing systematic assessments of their language skills from preschool age and providing targeted

language support to those in need. These recommendations aim to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for immigrants in Iceland, ensuring they can fully participate in society and the workforce. Alongside new policy drafts, funds for the Development Fund for Immigrant Affairs were increased to accommodate more research and projects related to democratic participation and combating prejudice and discrimination towards immigrants (Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, 2024a).

The Multicultural Information Centre (MCC), a governmental institute, has in the past assumed the role of disseminating information to immigrants with a view to enabling their active participation in Icelandic society (mcc, n.d.-b). In 2019, however, the Icelandic parliament passed a resolution calling for the establishment of an immigration advisory office called 'New in Iceland'. This pilot project has since evolved into a counselling service hosted at the MCC. The office is responsible for providing immigrants with accessible advice, guidance and information on their rights and obligations, as well as necessary services. It is also intended to be a forum for cooperation between state institutions, municipalities, and stakeholders such as trade unions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). All services are free and provided in a variety of languages (English, Polish, Spanish, Ukrainian, Arabic, Lithuanian, Russian and Icelandic) (MCC, 2024).

In Iceland, education, equality and human rights laws require that the state make proactive efforts to combat segregation and social inclusion. For instance, national educational policy states that the state must offer a wide range of free education to ensure everyone has good access to the education system, regardless of background or other circumstances. The educational rights afforded to immigrants are more clearly defined in the previously mentioned action plan, in addition to which there is a plan called 'Inclusive Education' (*Menntun án aðgreiningar*). As mentioned earlier, the new policy drafts for immigration matters also addresses language education specifically. Numerous ministries and governmental institutions are involved in addressing matters concerning segregation, including the Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, Ministry of Transport and Local Government, and Ministry of Education and Culture.

3.5.2 Implementation and actors

At the national level, the government is responsible for establishing general strategies and policies, while implementation mainly takes place at the local level. Icelandic municipalities are responsible for overall planning when it comes to aspects such as housing, social care, primary and elementary school, and children's leisure activities (MCC, n.d.-a).

As such, municipalities have considerable responsibilities when it comes to preventing social segregation, securing integration, and planning socially inclusive, mixed neighbourhoods. In this context, Iceland's municipalities – particularly Reykjavík – have developed various policies and plans addressing these matters.

City of Reykjavík initiatives

Reykjavík, the capital city, is by some distance Iceland's largest urban settlement – together with its surrounding municipalities, it is home to around two-thirds of the entire Icelandic population. Reykjavík has over recent years developed various plans for mixed neighbourhoods, as well as setting its own 'Policy in Matters of Immigrants, Refugees and Applicants for International Protection 2018–2022'. This policy addressed Reykjavík's role as an authority, employer, and provider of services and social assistance in matters concerning immigrants (City of Reykjavík, 2017b).

Figure 7. Aerial view of Reykjavík



Source: Mats Stjernberg

Also noteworthy is that Reykjavík's masterplan 2010–2030/2040 contains a chapter dedicated to mixed and inclusive neighbourhoods, titled 'Residential and Mixed Neighbourhoods' (*Íbúabyggð og blönduð byggð*) (City of Reykjavík, 2019). Similarly, the main aim of the Reykjavík Housing Policy is creating more inclusive, mixed neighbourhoods, with an emphasis on densification, especially in the city's more central areas and older, more established settlements. Suburban development is also considered important, with stress placed on providing sustainable means of transport to better connect suburban areas to the city centre. The aforementioned *Borgarlína* public transport project is a vital part of this policy, as it aims to introduce a high-speed bus network connecting the capital region's municipalities (City of Reykjavík, 2017a).

While Iceland's public authorities are primarily responsible for policy-making and implementation related to social inclusion and integration, a number of other actors are also deeply involved in these matters. These include various NGOs, associations of foreign-born people, and labour unions. In recent years, the country's workers movement and labour union associations have attempted to pressure the authorities to produce measures on more affordable housing, more rental apartments, and more generally better conditions for the tens of thousands of immigrants and migrant workers who have moved to Iceland in search of employment.

The fact that the construction of new housing has lagged far behind the rate of population growth has created various problems. For instance, large groups of foreign workers have been housed in industrial buildings that do not meet the standards set for residential houses (ASÍ, 2021). Both NGOs and the labour movement have highlighted this problem and pushed the authorities to act accordingly. The same actors have also been central in encouraging political participation among immigrants, helping foreign-language speakers access social services, and providing information in languages other than Icelandic, including on labour market rights.

The newly updated Reykjavík Housing Plan 2024–2033 outlines a number of specific actions promoting social inclusion. These include strengthening non-profit housing associations in order to provide affordable housing options for various social groups; integrating public transport to guarantee accessibility for all residents; ensuring young people, the elderly and those with special needs have access to suitable housing; providing significant financial contributions from the city and state to support housing initiatives, particularly for vulnerable groups; and collaborating with labour unions, non-profit organisations and other stakeholders to ensure diverse community needs are met (City of Reykjavík, 2024).

Table 10. Key actors in Iceland and their responsibilities

Actor	Responsibility
National government	• Establishing general strategies and policies. • Provides financial assistance for initiatives such as the <i>Borgarlína</i> high-speed bus system.
Municipalities	• Overall planning in sectors such as housing, social care, primary and elementary school, and children's leisure activities. • Considerable broad responsibilities for preventing social segregation, ensuring integration, and planning for socially inclusive, mixed neighbourhoods. • Specific responsibilities potentially include implementing plans for mixed neighbourhoods and immigrant integration, as seen in Reykjavík's case.
Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and associations	• Play a prominent role in matters of inclusion and integration. • Advocate for the rights of and better conditions for immigrants and migrant workers. • Push for measures such as cheaper housing and rental apartments. • Promote activity, political participation and access to social services among immigrants.
Labour unions	• Actively participate in pressuring authorities to improve housing conditions. • Advocate for better conditions for immigrants and migrant workers. • Promote political participation and access to rights on the labour market.

3.5.3 Key focus areas

As discussed above, the issues of segregation, integration and inclusion have only fairly recently gained prominence on Iceland's policy agenda, in large part because the proportion of foreign-born people living in Iceland was extremely small prior to the past two decades. Nevertheless, several policies and plans relevant to integration, education and housing already exist and more are in development, both at the national level and among municipalities. In the latter respect, Reykjavík has been particularly active in developing its own policies and plans for securing socially

mixed, inclusive neighbourhoods. To date, however, initiatives have largely been reactive. Despite this, there is growing political will in Reykjavík, and some parts of the Icelandic parliament, to pursue more proactive measures aimed at tackling future problems. Moreover, better policy coordination is needed between the governmental and municipal level, as well as with various labour market actors and NGOs seeking to be included in formal policies.

In December 2024 a new government consisting of the Social Democratic Alliance, the Reform Party and the People's Party assumed power in Iceland. The coalition government's proposed platform outlines a number of initiatives designed to further promote social inclusion and prevent segregation, as well as address housing issues. These include rapidly increasing the number of available homes in order to achieve housing market balance, supporting non-profit housing associations and improving the position of tenants. The plan also emphasises the development of moveable modular homes; converting commercial properties into residential housing; making state land available for development; and simplifying building and planning regulations.

Financial support is promised in support of these aims, with measures ranging from profit participation loans to encouraging pension funds to enter the housing construction sector. Additionally, the government aims to combat social dumping; increase public safety; improve relations between the state and local governments; and support marginalised groups through emphasising equal status for all and eradicating deep-rooted societal prejudices (Government of Iceland, 2024b)



Source: City of Lahti

4. Indicators for assessing urban segregation and social inclusion

The importance of indicators is emphasised in many of the Nordic countries' policies aimed at enhancing social inclusion and counteracting segregation. The focus of this chapter is therefore on the role of indicators in supporting policy and planning towards more socially inclusive cities across all the Nordic countries.

Having first detailed the relevant national-level indicators already in existence or in development, as well as how data, indicators and research-based knowledge is addressed in national policies, the chapter hones in on the city level: specifically Helsinki (Finland), Odense (Denmark), Oslo (Norway), Örebro (Sweden) and Reykjavík (Iceland). Throughout, a key focus is on exploring what the governance of indicators looks like at different territorial levels, including which actors are involved in collecting and assessing the relevant data, and in using it to support policy and planning measures.

More specifically, the following overarching questions are addressed:

- What role do indicators play in supporting policy and planning towards more inclusive cities, both at national level and in different cities?
- How, to what extent, and by whom are these indicators used to support policies and strategies at the national, city and neighbourhood level?
- What benefits and opportunities – and conversely risks and challenges – do the indicators present?

4.1 Finland

Several of Finland's national policies dealing with segregation and social inclusion place stress on the role played by data and indicators, as well as the importance of research-based knowledge in supporting policy-making and planning. For example, the former government's programme Inclusive and Competent Finland (Finnish Government, 2019), launched in 2019, pledged to make policy-making more knowledge-based, reliant on systematic impact assessments, and founded on deeper cooperation with the scientific community. Building on this, the need for a range of indicators, assessments and research in support of the programme's objective of strengthening participation and trust, while reducing social exclusion, was highlighted.

Similarly, the Regional Development Decision 2020–2023, which specified the government's regional policy priorities, placed strong emphasis on indicators (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2020b). Promoting inclusion and wellbeing while preventing inequality was one of the programme's six key priorities, and towards this end the Finnish regions were tasked with using effective tools for monitoring, preventing and reducing inequality.

In addition, the national Urban Programme 2018–2022 highlighted the importance of a common knowledge base for setting and monitoring shared planning targets, stressing that cities need up-to-date information on the wellbeing of various population groups across different territories (Ministry of Finance, 2020).

Meanwhile, the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme 2020–2022 targeted suburban housing estates, with a key strategic focus being the use of data and knowledge-based decision-making in the prevention of segregation (Nevalainen, 2021). The programme provided funding to cities carrying out development projects in selected neighbourhoods, and also funded numerous research projects dealing with housing estates and segregation.

4.1.1 From fragmented local monitoring towards more harmonised national segregation indicators?

The above-mentioned examples demonstrate the increased societal importance ascribed to social sustainability, inclusion and segregation in Finland's cities, and consequently the strong emphasis placed on using knowledge, data and indicators to support planning and policy work in relevant national policies. Even so, when it comes to monitoring segregation or social inclusion in cities across Finland, no common indicators currently exist. This is perhaps surprising given Finland generally

enjoys a high standard of national indicators and statistics, which are well developed in many thematic areas.

One interviewee for this study suggested the absence of relevant indicators was largely due to the relatively recent emergence of urban segregation as an important societal issue in Finland (Interview 4, 2023). For a long time, the prevailing sentiment was that the country's key territorial disparities existed between different regions and municipalities, meaning the monitoring of territorial differences has to date largely been carried out at this level. Recent years, however, have seen more widespread acknowledgement that urban segregation should be monitored at both a national and more granular level, in order to capture socio-spatial differences between neighbourhoods and local areas (Interview 4, 2023).

While it is only recently that the imperative of monitoring segregation at the national level has emerged, some municipalities have long used various indicators to systematically follow-up on segregation. This is especially the case for the City of Helsinki, examined in the next section, but can also be seen in, for instance, the Tampere region and the City of Lahti, where segregation has been monitored in order to support policy-making and planning (see Box 1). A more thorough examination of the City of Tampere and City of Lahti can be found in sections 5.1 and 6.1 respectively.

Box 1. Monitoring segregation in Tampere and Lahti

- The City of Tampere's model for monitoring segregation has recently been upscaled to the wider Tampere region in order to shed light on and prevalence of segregation and the factors driving it. A 2020 report broke down segregation across the region based on a wellbeing index, constructed using grid-level data (250 × 250 m) on unemployment rates, educational levels and income levels from different years (1995, 2005, 2015, 2017) (Hynynen, 2020). The results have been used, for example, in supporting regional housing policy and welfare service planning (Sustainable City, n.d.).
- The City of Lahti has made the systematic use of data and indicators when monitoring development of the city and its different areas a core governance principle. In preparing the city's 2023–2028 housing and land use policy, data was employed to analyse segregation patterns and trends across the city (Kangas, 2021). This involved a socio-economic index based on grid-level data (250 × 250 m) on income levels, educational levels and unemployment (City of Lahti, 2023a), calculated for the years 2000, 2010 and 2019. Inspiration has been drawn from the methods employed in Helsinki and Tampere (City of Lahti, 2024).

From a national policy perspective, the fact that certain large municipalities have created their own indicators and monitoring systems – often independently of each other – has led to the field becoming somewhat fragmented. At the same time, most of the other Finnish municipalities lack such data and indicators in their work. This is especially the case for smaller municipalities, which often lack the resources and expertise necessary to conduct this type of monitoring. Consequently, little is known about segregation trends outside Finland's largest urban regions (Interview 4, 2023).

Against this backdrop, in 2020 the Urban Policy Committee^[1] proposed an initiative for developing national segregation indicators (Interview 4, 2023). The initiative arose from the previously mentioned emphasis in the 2019 government programme on developing knowledge and indicators to support decision-making. This in turn led to a project tasked with developing indicators to help monitor the land use, housing and transport issues covered in the MAL agreements (see Chapter 3) (Ministry of the Environment, n.d.-c). Monitoring is a central element in these agreements, with new types of indicators constantly being developed to complement those already in use (Tiitu et al., 2023).

The Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE) has been tasked with taking the lead in developing national segregation indicators as part of MAL monitoring. According to a report presenting key considerations for this work, the indicators will be calculated at the sub-municipal level – while the exact territorial unit is not specified, postal code areas are mentioned as a possibility (Tiitu et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the intention is for the indicators to be presented at a more generalised territorial level, such as for municipalities as a whole, rather than openly providing monitoring data for individual neighbourhoods.

The MAL agreements concern Finland's largest urban regions. As such, the initial indicators have been developed for the regions signed up to these agreements (Helsinki, Tampere, Turku, Oulu, Jyväskylä, Kuopio, Lahti). Nevertheless, the indicators could relatively easily be upscaled to cover other regions, or even the whole country. The indicators will build on data from the Building and Housing Register (RHR), as well as the YKR monitoring system of spatial structure and urban form, with key variables set to include educational level among the employed population, unemployment rate, disposable monetary income, proportion of foreign-language speakers, and proportion of rental housing (Tiitu et al., 2023). At the time of writing, however, it remains unclear what role these indicators will actually serve in supporting policy and planning interventions.

1. The Urban Policy Committee consists of representatives from various ministries and cities, as well as the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, and is tasked with supporting implementation of national urban policy during a given government's term, including strengthening cooperation between different levels of governance (Ministry of the Economic Affairs and Employment, n.d.).

4.1.2 Counteracting segregation as a strategic goal in the City of Helsinki

Among Finnish cities, segregation has undoubtedly been most prominent on the policy agenda in Helsinki. Various studies have drawn attention to the growing segregation seen in Helsinki since the severe economic recession of the early 1990s, with socio-spatial differences subsequently becoming more pronounced during the 2000s (Kortteinen et al., 2006; Kortteinen & Vaattovaara, 2015; Vaattovaara et al., 2011; Varady & Schulman, 2007).

Such issues were clearly expressed in a report produced by the City of Helsinki in 2019, which stated that while segregation is generally not severe, worrying signs are present (City of Helsinki, 2019). According to the report, while no part of the city has deteriorated in absolute terms, the most affluent areas have become increasingly well-off, while deprivation has become more multilayered and concentrated in other areas.

Raised concerns about segregation have also been driven by developments in neighbouring countries, particularly Sweden and Denmark. In this respect, the city administration has expressed interest in learning more about the potential problems posed by segregation, and how best to prevent them becoming overly severe (Interview 3, 2022).

Several of the 13 priorities set out in the current Helsinki City Strategy, which covers the years 2021–2025, have a focus on counteracting segregation (City of Helsinki, 2021a). According to the strategy, Helsinki aims to be a city where widening polarisation between districts is prevented and residents of every neighbourhood can live a safe, pleasant life. Towards this end, the strategy states that Helsinki will practice positive discrimination and combat segregation across all its activities, from housing policy and spatial planning to social work and education, to culture and leisure.

Here, the role of high-quality early childhood education in balancing out socio-economic differences between children, together with urban culture and investments in parks, playgrounds and sports facilities, are highlighted as key enablers for a good life across neighbourhoods. In addition, one of the four strategic objectives in the 2020 Implementation Programme on Housing and Related Land Use (City of Helsinki, 2021b, 2021c) concerns neighbourhood vitality and preventing segregation.

A key policy approach for counteracting segregation, which has been applied by the City of Helsinki since the 1970s, is social mixing (Ronkainen & Eskelä, 2022). This involves mixing different housing tenure forms in neighbourhoods in the planning and construction phase, with the aim of ensuring that the housing stock is not limited to social rented housing (e.g. Kempainen 2017). Successfully pursuing this strategy has not only required a city planning monopoly, but strong land ownership

on the part of the city authorities in terms of conveying housing plots (Ronkainen & Eskelä, 2022). While this policy has not prevented the emergence of segregation altogether, it does seem to have slowed down and mitigated the growth of spatial disparities between neighbourhoods (Vaattovaara et al., 2018; Vilkkama et al., 2023).

Figure 8. Construction in Kalasatama, a new waterfront area being developed in Helsinki



Source: City of Helsinki, Jussi Hellsten

Another important approach has been the City of Helsinki's Neighbourhood Project (*lähiöprojekti*), which includes earmarked funding for developing certain suburban neighbourhoods deemed to be less well-off (City of Helsinki, 2016a). The project was originally launched in 1996 to alleviate the consequences of the 1990s recession, when several suburban areas in the eastern parts of the city became associated with high unemployment, social problems and exclusion (City of Helsinki, 2016b; Salmela, 2014). More recently, the neighbourhood project model was revisited in connection with a major reorganisation of the city and a desire to find new ways of working. The new area-based model known as the Suburban Regeneration Model (*kaupunki uudistus*) aims to prevent segregation and improve the liveability and appeal of residential areas in a comprehensive way, using infill construction as a key tool (City of Helsinki, 2021c). The new model is based on more cross-sectoral ways of working, with various long-term measures and investments targeted at specific suburban areas (Interview 3, 2022).

The adoption of the new approach coincided with the creation of Helsinki's new Participation and Interaction Model (*osallisuus- ja vuorovaikutusmalli*) (City of

Helsinki, n.d.-d), which is partly operationalised through so-called 'borough liaisons' (*stadiluotsi*). These operatives are city employees who work in residential areas and seek to strengthen the inclusion of local residents. Thus, beyond simply counteracting segregation, the issue of social inclusion has also grown increasingly important and is now tied to the City of Helsinki's objectives concerning segregation (Interview 3, 2022).

When it comes to counteracting segregation, a key challenge mentioned by interviewees is that the City of Helsinki is a very large organisation (Interview 3, 2022). This means different entities within the city organisation are tasked with carrying out a variety of different measures, resulting in a somewhat fragmented approach that often lacks overall coordination. In acknowledgement of this, new strategic programme groups were set up when the new mayor entered office in 2021, including a segregation programme group that aims to improve coordination between different branches of the city administration.

4.1.3 The role of indicators in supporting the City of Helsinki's policy and planning

The City of Helsinki has a long tradition of using research and data to support its planning and policy-making, with the city's first statistics unit established way back in 1911 (Cantell & Lahti, 2011). Today, the Executive Office's Urban Research and Statistics Unit conducts research, maintains official statistics, registers data, produces statistical publications, and provides relevant information services (City of Helsinki, n.d.-g).

Alongside this, several other city administration units gather and maintain indicators for specific purposes. More generally, data and indicators are used by different administrative branches in various ways.

Box 2. Examples of openly available statistical data from the City of Helsinki

The City of Helsinki's Urban Research and Statistics Unit maintains various [statistical databases](#), most of which can be accessed openly and free of charge. Key databases include:

- [Aluesarjat](#), which contains statistical time series data for the City of Helsinki and its wider region on a variety of phenomena, including population structure; development and projections; household structure; income; education; labour market and employment; and the built environment and housing stock. The database is updated regularly (monthly, quarterly or annually depending on the data), with the longest time series ranging back to 1962. Data can be obtained for the entire region at the municipality or district level, while more spatially detailed neighbourhood-level data exists for the cities of Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa.
- The [Wellbeing Statistics](#) database contains time series data on the wellbeing of children and young people in Helsinki, including in the areas of population and living conditions; education and school conditions; work and employment; health and lifestyles; social relations; leisure; and security. Subdistricts are most detailed spatial level for which data is available.

When it comes to addressing segregation, indicators are used for determining which districts will be subject to area-based interventions as part of the Suburban Regeneration Model. Areas are selected based on data concerning socio-economic characteristics, housing stock, service structure and rail transport connectivity (City of Helsinki, n.d.-e). Here, the objective is to identify areas that are socio-economically disadvantaged; where the built environment requires significant refurbishment; and where housing stock mainly consists of rental housing – in other words, areas where regeneration efforts aimed at enhancing neighbourhood vitality are most needed.

One method deployed by the City of Helsinki to tackle school segregation is providing so-called 'needs-based funding' (*tarveperusteinen rahoitus*) to those comprehensive schools in greatest need of support (Ramos Lobato, 2023). This approach relies heavily on data, with funds distributed according to a calculation model that uses key variables associated with learning outcomes, specifically the

proportion of: 1) households with a parent with tertiary education; 2) households with an unemployed parent; 3) households in the lowest income quintile; and 4) students with a foreign language registered as their first language. This model helps predict learning outcomes and captures neighbourhood differences in the educational wellbeing challenges faced by schools (Oittinen et al., 2023).

Interviewees also pointed to the nationwide 'School Health Promotion Study' (*Kouluterveyskysely*) as an important source of data for tackling segregation (Interview 3, 2022). The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) has conducted the study every second year since 1996 in order to monitor the wellbeing, health and school results of the country's children and adolescents (THL, 2024). The data concerning Helsinki provides valuable background information on neighbourhood-level differences in wellbeing from a children and youth perspective (Interview 3, 2022).

Another priority highlighted in the Helsinki City Strategy 2021–2025 is strengthening residents' sense of security (City of Helsinki, 2021a). An important data source in monitoring progress towards this goal is the Helsinki Safety Survey, which has been conducted every third year since 2003 (City of Helsinki, n.d.-a). The survey captures the experiences and views of Helsinki residents aged 15–79 on the city's safety and security situation in both the wider city and their own neighbourhood. Other important data sources on this subject include police reports and qualitative observations received from those working on the ground in neighbourhoods, which are important for assessing the security situation across different parts of the city – for instance regarding street gangs, which have been a growing concern in recent years (Interview 3, 2022).

While Helsinki has a long history of using qualitative and/or quantitative data and indicators, interviewees were keen to point out that their importance has grown (Interview 3, 2022). The 2021–2025 city strategy includes 13 priority areas, each of which is monitored using 2–8 indicators. The 'Cultivating safe neighbourhoods with distinctive identities' priority area, for instance, has a strong focus on counteracting segregation and ensuring people can live a safe, pleasant life in all neighbourhoods. Here, three main indicators are used to monitor progress: 1) a socio-economic sum index, based on the proportion of residents with a low income, no job and/or a low educational level in a given area; 2) how pleasant residents perceive their area of residence to be; and 3) the share of owner-occupied and right-of-occupancy dwellings in areas where housing stock is primarily renter-occupied. More generally, the use of data and indicators to support policy work and planning is directly reflected in the priority area stating that data and digitalisation will be used to help run a smart city (City of Helsinki, n.d.-b).

Furthermore, indicators are central to monitoring Helsinki's progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In total, more than 60 indicators are used to

follow the city's progress in meeting the 17 goals. For instance, reduced segregation is explicitly stated as a key goal in relation to SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), (City of Helsinki, n.d.-f), with four main indicators used to monitor progress: 1) Gini coefficient (index of relative income inequality); 2 NEET share (Not in Employment, Education or Training), 20–24-year-olds; 3) segregation by educational background; and 4) segregation by ethnic background (City of Helsinki, n.d.-c).

4.1.4 Overcoming challenges with linking indicators to policy and planning

A key interest of this chapter is better understanding how data and indicators can support policy and planning, including what the main advantages and challenges are. In this respect, interviewees emphasised the City of Helsinki's established traditions of using data and research to support policy and planning, and moreover that counteracting segregation has been a clear political priority addressed by a range of preventive measures over the years (Interview 3, 2022). Important in this context is the broad support given by Finland's political parties to addressing segregation – while views on the exact measures to be implemented may vary, there is general agreement on the need to deal with the issues faced.

Interviewees also highlighted the research conducted on segregation in Helsinki and its wider region over recent decades. In particular, they noted that individual researchers have played an important role in ensuring segregation is now recognised as an issue that requires proactive, early-stage measures (Interview 3, 2022). Here, close relations and collaboration between university researchers and the City of Helsinki was mentioned as an important strength, as was the fact that the authorities have funded university research to help gain a better understanding of the city's development. Alongside this, the City of Helsinki's own research and statistics unit has proven to be an important resource, helping establish the principle that data and research-based evidence are important prerequisites for good governance.

A key challenge faced by the City of Helsinki is that it is a large and complex organisation, within which there are numerous producers and users of data. Interviewees described how the data and knowledge used by the City of Helsinki constitutes a complex web, with different organisational actors and branches working towards common strategic goals (Interview 3, 2022). However, there is not always a clear overview of what types of data and indicators actually exist. Another issue is that the system currently in place does not necessarily allow data to be shared between different branches of the administration. As such, mechanisms to aid the internal flow of information are needed.

A situation in which data becomes more widely available and used for different purposes throws up its own issues, however. One concerns how data and indicators

are interpreted. For instance, when dealing with segregation, there is a risk that oversimplified conclusions are made, or that cause and effect are mixed up (Interview 3, 2022). Interviewees expressed concerns that politicians and policy-makers may have an exaggerated belief in the power of data to provide solutions to problems. In this regard, they underlined that a strong understanding of and ability to interpret data and indicators is needed to make well-informed decisions.

Another issue concerning monitoring of segregation or urban renewal-related interventions is that change often occurs relatively slowly, which makes frequent monitoring difficult. In some cases, the City of Helsinki conducts monitoring on a quarterly basis, which may be too frequent to identify noticeable changes in long-term trends (Interview 3, 2022). On the other hand, various resident surveys are being used to collect short-term indicators, which enables residents to make their voices heard. This is particularly important for urban regeneration projects where large infill construction is planned in a certain area. These more short-term indicators can be collected as necessary, and are often extremely useful in understanding the different effects of measures carried out locally.

4.1.5 Key takeaways

Finland's increasing emphasis on data, indicators and research-based knowledge in support of policy-making and planning has taken place in parallel with growing political, public and scholarly interest in segregation and social inclusion. While there are currently no national indicators for monitoring segregation in Finland's cities, steps are being taken to develop harmonised urban segregation indicators. At present, however, the exact role these indicators will play remains unclear.

The role of indicators is more established in some of the larger Finnish municipalities, with the City of Helsinki the clearest example of this. Here, counteracting segregation is treated as a clear strategic focus, and the city authorities have a long history of using data and indicators to support policy and planning interventions. Various quantitative and qualitative indicators are used to monitor progress towards the city strategy and the SDGs. Indicators are also used to determine which geographic areas should be targeted by area-based regeneration interventions, as well as which schools should be given needs-based funding in order to counteract school segregation. In addition, surveys used to monitor perceptions of security and wellbeing are important aids for policy and planning interventions, particularly when backed up by data on – among other things – the housing stock, built environment, and socio-economic and demographic characteristics of different neighbourhoods.

In Helsinki, research has played a central role in putting issues of segregation and social inclusion on the policy agenda. One of the challenges faced, however, is that the City of Helsinki is a large and complex organisation with numerous producers and users of data. Moreover, data cannot always be shared easily between the different branches of the administration. In the context of using data to support policy-making, especially when addressing and monitoring segregation, acknowledging the complexities involved in interpreting data and indicators is crucial.

Overall, the general trend seen in the City of Helsinki is that data and research are increasingly being relied on to support strategic decision-making and planning. This necessitates close consideration of not only the benefits and added value this offers, but the potential risks attached to using data and indicators for these purposes.

4.2 Denmark

As discussed in section 3.2, the 2018 Danish national strategy against parallel societies, colloquially known as the 'Ghetto Strategy' (Danish Government, 2018), is the fulcrum of the Danish approach to combating segregation. The strategy is strongly based on national indicators, which are used to identify areas experiencing various degrees of vulnerability, based on the levels of income, education, employment, crime convictions and concentration of non-Western immigrants.

Understanding Denmark's 'Ghetto Strategy' – which is highly contested due to its alleged role in stigmatisation, displacement and loss of public housing units (Alves, 2019) – requires retracing the country's past 30 years of policy development, which has not only seen increased focus on the concentration of ethnic minorities in certain areas, but set social mixing as a desired goal (Fallov & Birk, 2022). By the early 1990s, the topic of segregation had moved to the centre of political debates.

Since then, and especially from 2004, the main policy focus regarding segregation has come to rest on immigrants, legitimising the rhetoric around 'ghettos'. When a new Conservative government came to power in 2004, it published a strategy explicitly arguing against ghettoisation. At the time, the 'Danish ghetto' was not yet considered to exist – rather, it was a process that could still be prevented.

Initially, 'ghettoisation' was primarily referred to in Danish policies and political debates as being the result of failed urban planning, integration and employment policies. By 2018, however, the term was mainly being used to describe the implications of high immigration. Back in 1994, a ministerial report described the idea of the 'ghetto' as a 'misleading concept' (Stjernberg, Oliveira e Costa, et al.,

2020), and the term was eventually replaced – at least officially – by 'parallel societies' in the 2018 national strategy (Danish Government, 2018).

Although it was a Conservative government that instated the Ghetto Strategy, the Social Democratic governments that followed in 2019 and 2022 retained most of its initiatives and policies, which are now part of the country's national strategy against parallel societies. Furthermore, in 2021, the Danish Ministry of Immigration and Integration introduced a new statistical category for migrants called MENAPT, which singles out people from North Africa and the Middle East. This category has since been used in statistical analyses of high crime and low employment rates (European Commission, 2020).

4.2.1 Denmark's approach to combating 'parallel societies'

Denmark's national segregation indicators are strongly linked to the 'ghetto' and 'parallel society' strategies described previously. 'Ghetto lists' – government-curated lists of areas defined as 'ghettos' (or, from 2018, 'parallel societies') (Ministry of the Interior and Housing, 2022) – have been published by the Ministry of the Interior and Housing (currently Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing) every year since 2010. Between 2010 and 2018, these segregation indicators went from being simply a monitoring tool without concrete policy consequences, to becoming a central element not only in determining funding allocations for social welfare initiatives, but for drastic physical transformations of specific areas (Interview 2, 2023).

As of 2022, four categories of residential areas feature in the national strategy against parallel societies: 1) 'vulnerable housing areas'; 2) 'parallel societies'; 3) 'transformation areas'; and 4) 'prevention areas'. These are distinguished according to indicators concerning employment, income and education levels, crime rate, and presence of immigrants and descendants from non-Western countries (see Box 3 below).

Box 3. Categorisation of vulnerable areas in the Danish national strategy against parallel societies

- **A vulnerable residential area is defined as a public housing area of at least 1,000 residents that meets two or more of the following criteria:**
 1. More than 40% of residents aged 18–64 are outside the labour market or educational system (calculated as an average over the past two years).
 2. The proportion of residents convicted of violating the Penal Code, the Gun Law or the Act on Euphoriant Substances is at least three times the national average (calculated as an average over the past two years).
 3. More than 60% of residents aged 30–59 only have a basic education.
 4. Residents aged 15–64 (excluding students in further education) earn an average gross income that is less than 55% of the average gross income of the age group in the region as a whole.
- **A parallel society is a vulnerable residential area where the proportion of immigrants and descendants from non-Western countries exceeds 50%.**
- **A transformation area is an area that has been listed as a 'parallel society' for four consecutive years.**
- **A prevention area is an area 'at risk' of becoming a 'vulnerable residential area'.**

Source: Danish Government, 2018

Besides the so-called 'ghetto lists', which are the main source for identifying areas experiencing social vulnerability, the national [Integration Barometer](#) is a statistical tool covering the following thematic areas: labour, education, Danish language skills, citizenship, equal treatment, support and vulnerable areas (National Integration Barometer, 2023). Specific indicators include the number of parallel societies, as well as the numbers of vulnerable, transformation and prevention areas, both for the country as a whole and for all Danish municipalities. It should be noted that these indicators only encompass immigrants and descendants of immigrants with non-Western origin. The barometer includes data for different years, and can thus be used for examining changes over time (for some indicators since 2012).

In addition, knowledge about the development of areas targeted by relevant policy interventions, including the effects of initiatives linked to the national strategy against parallel societies, is being continuously produced by researchers from Aalborg University and the Danish Center for Social Science Research (VIVE). This research receives funding from the National Building Fund and is published on a dedicated website named [Udsatte områder](#) (Udsatte områder, n.d.).

Figure 9. Map showing the location of vulnerable areas (green), parallel societies (yellow) and transformation areas (red)



Source: Adapted from Udsatte områder, n.d.-b

When examining changes over time using the Integration Barometer data, it can be observed that the number of vulnerable areas, parallel societies and transformation areas all decreased between 2018 and 2023, respectively from 43 to 19, from 29 to 12, and from 15 to 8 (see National Integration Barometer, 2023). These results, while showing that the national policy has been effective in terms of the goals set (reducing the concentration of immigrants, low-income or unemployed people, and people with criminal convictions), this has been achieved in part by reducing public housing units and displacing vulnerable communities (Interview 1, 2023).

More specifically, where the national list indicates an area has been a parallel society for more than four years, the strategy stipulates a physical transformation process must be initiated, including reducing social housing in that area to 40% or less than current numbers. Consequently, local municipalities and social housing associations have to either tear down social housing units or sell them as owner-occupied or private rental properties. Here, it is relevant to note that while the criteria for determining which areas are included on the 'ghetto lists' and then subject to physical transformations are set nationally, municipalities have their own statistical offices to monitor the progress of particular areas and customise local interventions in close collaboration with housing associations (Interview 2, 2023).

A number of initiatives have also been put in place to prevent areas becoming parallel societies in the first place, and thus avoid having to undergo physical transformation processes, which can have substantial social impacts. These initiatives encompass social policies aimed at – among other things – improving the employment levels, Danish language skills, education and professionalisation of young residents, as well as criteria to allocate new or existing public housing. Where areas are at risk of becoming vulnerable (prevention areas), the allocation criteria for public housing units are set based on the socio-economic profile of households via collaboration between municipalities and housing associations. For example, employed people without crime convictions may be prioritised for public housing units (Interview 2, 2023).

The Ghetto Strategy exemplifies a common tendency seen in international urban development since the 1990s, whereby concentrated social vulnerability is addressed by mixing public and rental housing with market-rate housing and other forms of ownership (Bridge et al., 2011). The underlying idea is that a mixed supply of housing attracts a more mixed composition of residents, including people with greater economic and social resources, which in turn alleviates an area's social problems. Nevertheless, the question remains: how should urban development be arranged and designed so that these mixed districts become well-functioning, socially sustainable local communities?

4.2.2 Vollsmose, Odense: A 'transformation area'

As of December 2022, the residential area of Vollsmose in Odense – Denmark's third most populous city – was the largest area on the list of 'parallel societies', having been categorised as a 'transformation area' (Ministry of the Interior and Housing, 2022). Vollsmose has been on the list since 2010 and, despite some improvements (Bech-Danielsen et al., 2020), the area still meets all the transformation area criteria. There are approximately 3,100 dwellings in Vollsmose, of which 2,900 are social housing units for families, with the remainder privately owned rental housing (City of Odense, 2023).

Figure 10. Vollsmose in Odense, undergoing large-scale redevelopment



Source: Fremtidens Vollsmose

A number of initiatives linked to Vollsmose being designated a transformation area have been implemented since 2017, encompassing both physical transformation and social policy measures. A comprehensive realisation plan published in 2021 (City of Odense, 2021a) set out the strategic vision for developing a ‘future’ Vollsmose by 2030 (City of Odense, 2021b). The plan is organised around eight sub-programmes focused on: 1) area attractiveness; 2) economic growth, jobs and education; 3) safety; 4) professional growth for children and young people; 5) children’s wellbeing; 6) culture; 7) public health; and 8) mixed urban and residential areas.

In addition, a statutory development plan (Civica et al., 2019b) for Vollsmose was launched in 2019, based on a collaboration between three political parties, the municipality of Odense, and the housing associations Civica and FAB (City of Odense et al., 2019b). The plan aims – reflecting the national legislation for ghetto areas – to reduce social family housing to a maximum of 40% of the total stock by 2030. Among the main measures put in place to achieve this are:

- Demolition of approximately 1,000 social housing units;
- Renovation of remaining social housing units;
- Construction of 1,600 private dwellings;
- Construction of non-residential buildings for private or public purposes in order to enhance Vollsmose’s attractiveness; and

- Construction of new infrastructure to improve connections within Vollsmose and better connect the area to central Odense, thereby improving the physical characteristics of an area currently surrounded by wide, busy roads.

The housing interventions in Vollsmose are designed to alleviate the poverty and social issues linked to the area's high concentration of public housing. Regarding the demolition and reconstruction of public housing, the agreement between the City of Odense, Civica and FAB requires that a number of relevant issues be considered (Civica et al., 2019a).

First, new social housing must be located in mixed districts representative of different generations, forms of ownership and socio-economic backgrounds. Second, the city council's political parties have an agreement that the construction of social housing must be undertaken in conjunction with private investment in order to create synergy and promote general urban development. Third, as specified in the area's relocation plan (Civica et al., 2019a), of the total 25 million Danish kroner allocated for reconstruction interventions, 15 million is already earmarked, such that each housing unit demolished in Vollsmose is to be replaced according to a 1:1 principle (City of Odense et al., 2019a). Concretely, this means that for each social family housing unit in Vollsmose that is to be demolished, the relevant housing association will be offered a capital contribution towards a replacement social housing unit (not necessarily to be built in Vollsmose). Thus, the transformation becomes a mutual responsibility, with housing associations taking on the construction of replacement buildings and rehousing residents, the municipality funding the 1:1 capital subsidy that makes this possible.

This collaboration between the municipality and housing associations is important not only in terms of the physical transformation process, but for setting up pre-emptive initiatives to counteract segregation. Here, there is also a strong focus on social policies, employment and education as possible means to achieve a welfare boost.

For instance, the Social Housing Masterplan (Social Housing Vollsmose, 2021), which is supported by the National Building Fund (*Landsbyggefonden*), is built around the following four areas of interest: 1) education and life chances; 2) employment; 3) crime prevention; and 4) cohesion and citizenship. Within this framework, local associations work to promote participation and engagement among Vollsmose residents, thereby improving safety and cohesion, and cultivating a sense of belonging.

BoligSocialt Hus is one such collaborative initiative, bringing together a housing organisation, resident representative and the municipality to strengthen social cohesion in Odense's vulnerable residential areas (BoligSocialt Hus, 2024). Box 4, which looks at planning interventions in Copenhagen, provides a broader perspective on how indicators are used locally in Danish municipalities to help create more socially inclusive, mixed neighbourhoods.

Box 4. Indicators supporting planning interventions in Copenhagen

Social inclusion as it pertains to Danish national and local initiatives is, generally speaking, primarily linked to combating segregation, with municipalities sometimes creating their own, context-specific, indicators. Here, the City of Copenhagen represents a relevant case study when it comes to categorising 'prevention areas' – that is, areas at risk of becoming vulnerable and, potentially, parallel societies.

Using detailed socio-economic data, the municipality identifies red, yellow and green prevention areas, assigning strict criteria to each of these for renting out public housing (City of Copenhagen, 2021b). The tool for determining the rental criteria is called 'flexible renting' (*fleksibel udlejning*), and is set according to an area's specific socio-economic characteristics (City of Copenhagen, 2021b).

Another relevant example in terms of promoting better social mixing and inclusion using national indicators is Christiania in Copenhagen. In August 2022, Christiania – known as a hippie enclave and one of the city's main touristic attractions – entered into an agreement with the Ministry of the Interior and Housing and with the Housing and Planning Authority regarding the establishment of 15,000 m² of public housing by 2031. The aim of the agreement, which is part of the Fund for Mixed Cities (see section 3.2), is to create social mixing not only in vulnerable areas, but in areas (particularly in large cities) where it would be difficult or impossible for people with lower incomes to reside on a free-market basis.

4.2.3 Key takeaways

In the Danish context, a vast array of detailed socio-economic data is used to inform national- and local-level indicators of segregation, which can then be applied to relevant policy. To date, the results have been mixed and sometimes contested. While 'ghetto lists', as well as the legislation informing pre-emptive and transformation measures, are national, local actors – particularly municipalities and housing associations – are centrally involved in using indicators to set up area-based initiatives. This is exemplified by the case of Vollsmose, Odense, examined in this section.

The main indicators affecting Denmark's segregation-related policies and physical interventions are those informing the so-called 'ghetto lists' of areas considered vulnerable or at risk of becoming vulnerable based on levels of income, education, employment, criminal convictions and concentration of non-Western immigrants.

The role of the indicators is threefold.

First, they act as a monitoring tool for checking on vulnerable areas year by year. Second, they are a pre-emptive tool for preventing areas at risk becoming vulnerable. Here, indicators inform the selection criteria for renting out social housing units, thereby preventing a further concentration of vulnerable groups (see the case of Copenhagen in Box 4). Third, they inform policies for the physical transformation of areas where a high proportion of social housing and vulnerable groups have contributed to poor living conditions and strong segregation (see Vollsmose). At the same time, the indicators inform local level social welfare initiatives focusing on, for instance, education, language and labour market training.

Several challenges arise from the use of indicators to classify vulnerable areas and parallel societies, as well as defining the initiatives to be implemented in response. The first concerns the public availability of vulnerable area and parallel society lists, which risks further stigmatising the areas involved. The second is the connection between indicators and transformative interventions, which, in order to adhere to the nationally set limit of no more than 40% social housing in vulnerable areas, have led to several public housing units being demolished, households being displaced, and the promise of 1:1 replacements not always being fulfilled. Finally, quantitative indicators do not give any qualitative information on what it's like to live in areas defined as vulnerable, including what kind of communities are established or what sense of belonging exists among residents. Moreover, indicators cannot capture individual experiences, such as how someone might feel about being relocated because their housing unit has been demolished. As such, policy-makers should consider making greater use of qualitative data in order to ensure the indicators they use are both more comprehensive and nuanced.

On the other hand, the use of indicators as monitoring tools in Denmark has emerged as a potentially useful way of counteracting segregation. In this vein, it should be highlighted that the use of indicators to inform Denmark's social mixing policies is not purely limited to vulnerable areas – increased efforts are also being made to ensure affluent areas become more mixed. This is reflected in the previously mentioned case of Christiania, as well as in the use of the Fund for Mixed Cities to acquire land in more expensive areas on which housing associations can build public housing.

4.3 Norway

In Norway, the drive to strengthen social inclusion arises from a recognition of the potential impacts of a neighbourhood's characteristics (e.g. its environment, location, accessibility aspects and social environment) on residents' life opportunities. At the national level, a number of relevant strategies have been introduced in recent years (see section 3.3). Furthermore, the SDGs have prompted greater awareness of the connections between the quality of local environments, social cohesion, social mobility and public health. In order to better understand these connections, increasing political attention is being directed at developing indicators that describe social conditions in different urban areas and so be used to inform policy development and implementation.

Several of Norway's key policies mention the need for reliable indicators to support decision-making and assess policy efficacy. For instance, the 2019–2022 Integration Strategy refers to the government's intention to 'further develop the performance indicators in the area of integration, to ensure a good basis for measuring the effect of policies' (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019, p. 65). Similarly, the 2019–2023 National Expectations Regarding and Municipal Planning states that the government will 'continue work on developing indicators for all the sustainability goals', which 'must be adapted to regional and local conditions, so that counties and municipalities that wish to do so, can measure the effect of their own efforts' (Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, 2019, p. 6).

Regarding segregation more specifically, the official report 'Living Conditions in Cities – Good Communities for All' calls for more systematic knowledge (Ministry of Education and Research, 2020). While many municipalities have developed their own indicators for monitoring welfare conditions, the routines, content and use of these indicators vary. Given this, the documents mentioned above indicate that the central government will increasingly take a coordinating role in further developing relevant indicators. At the same time, the documents emphasise the role of municipalities as the main end users of such data. Overall, the main rationale underlying the improvement of social indicators is strengthening municipal decision-making and local-level integration efforts.

4.3.1 Policies and strategies

Currently, no national-level indicators are actively being used to monitor segregation in Norwegian cities. Instead, many municipalities – including all the big cities – have developed their own systems for monitoring local variations in welfare

conditions. How, and to what degree, these systems are used varies. In most cases, however, the municipalities draw on socio-economic indicators from Statistics Norway (SSB), combined with other analytical data, for instance from the Norwegian Institute of Public Health, and/or Ungdata, a national data collection scheme targeting youth and children in Norwegian municipalities through surveys (Ungdata, n.d.).

'Living Conditions in Cities' suggests developing a harmonised system for monitoring segregation across Norway's municipalities, in order to produce comparative knowledge (Ministry of Education and Research, 2020). According to the report, a national indicator system would provide a number of benefits, including helping to:

- target public authority efforts at areas with the greatest need, and equitably distribute funds across different areas;
- enhance understanding of areas vulnerable to risks, enabling the implementation of preventive measures;
- facilitate prioritisation of resource allocation across sectors (e.g. education, healthcare, recreation, housing);
- assess the needs of area-based initiatives;
- streamline municipalities' compliance with their Public Health Act responsibilities, thereby ensuring they maintain a comprehensive understanding of the local environmental factors impacting public health; and
- create a unified analysis framework that reduces the financial and operational barriers faced by municipalities, enabling easier comparison across regions.

In addition, the report mentions the Swedish Segregation Barometer (discussed in section 4.4) as a potential source of inspiration, and suggests municipalities could receive support in analysing and making use of information – for instance, from Statistics Norway – in order to avoid indicators being misinterpreted. To concretise the work of developing an indicator system, a follow-up report was delivered to the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (KDD) in 2022 (Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, 2022).

4.3.2 Qualitative and quantitative indicators in area-based policies

Over recent decades, area-based policies have become a key approach in Norway for improving neighbourhood conditions and addressing inequalities in targeted areas. Furthermore, these projects have provided an important arena for public innovation and new ways of collaborating across levels and departments. Various

socio-economic indicators on living conditions (e.g. unemployment, educational attainment, income, neighbourhood resident turnover, and living space per person) are used to identify which areas should be targeted by area-based investments.

Moreover, the indicators provide insights on the broader issues affecting an area, which can result in reduced attractiveness and thus lower housing prices, leading to a greater concentration of groups with a lower ability to pay for housing. Thus, statistics on living conditions are also used as an early indicator for challenges posed by the physical environment (Lund, 2014). Given the complex, mixed challenges often faced in targeted neighbourhoods, statistical indicators are usually supplemented by local knowledge and different mapping methods.

How best to make investments and initiatives measurable has been a recurring topic, with various assessment tools tested in this respect. For instance, the State Housing Bank (*Husbanken*) developed an interactive tool in 2017 visualising different indicators for the 14 areas included in the 'Area Boost' (*Områdeløft*) project (nine areas in Oslo, three in Bergen, one in Drammen, and one in Trondheim) (Husbanken, 2023). The active use of this platform was limited, however, as longitudinal data was scarce and the area unit sizes involved were too large to identify specific neighbourhood challenges. The analytic utility of some indicators was also questioned – for example, the perceived safety measurement included both petty crime and serious offences, including acts of violence. These shortcomings point to wider methodological issues when it comes to quantitative indicators, such as access to longitudinal data, defining relevant unit sizes for measurements, and determining how different aspects should be monitored (Interview 10, 2022; Interview 11, 2022).

Reliance on misleading data from indicators is a potential risk when working with area-based initiatives (Interview 9, 2022). While indicators can help locate areas for funding, it is unlikely these indicators will change within the timeframe of a project, as reversing segregation is a slow process that requires structural change beyond the means of area-based investments.

In other words, indicators have limited applicability in evaluating efforts. Even if an indicator improves, it is difficult to assess whether this is due to a particular initiative or the outcome of other welfare policies, societal forces and/or house market fluctuations. Similarly, it is hard to determine what would happen if no initiatives were set in motion. Even so, the direct benefits of initiatives are often of significant value to residents in terms of increased neighbourhood satisfaction and cultivating a sense of ownership and belonging, which can be documented using qualitative methods, such as interviews and surveys.

4.3.3 The role of indicators in Oslo

Oslo has long been characterised by a socio-economic divide between the more affluent groups living in the city's western parts, and the lower-income groups living

in the eastern parts (OsloMet, 2023; Wessel, 2000). To compensate for neighbourhood differences, several area-based regeneration initiatives involving collaboration between the state and the municipality have been implemented. This section addresses the use of indicators in these efforts and in the city's neighbourhood policy (*Områdepolitikk*), which was instated following the first major area investment project in the Groruddalen area.

Area-based initiatives

More than a fifth of Oslo's population resides in the north-eastern district of Groruddalen, characterised by large housing estates built during the post-war decades. A ten-year collaborative project (*Områdesatsing*) between the state and the city was initiated in 2007 with the aim of improving the quality of Groruddalen's neighbourhoods. Prior to this initiative, similar efforts had been carried out on a smaller scale in Oslo's eastern city-centre districts, including *Miljøbyen Gamle Oslo* (Unstad & Whist, 1997) and *Handlingsprogram Oslo indre øst* (Holm & Søholt, 2005).

Figure 11. Haugenstua, located within the Groruddalen district in Oslo



Source: CCO 1.0

In 2017, the Groruddalen project was extended for another term (2017–2026), alongside new projects established in Oslo's south-eastern suburban areas (*Oslo sør-satsingen* 2018–2026) and the inner east (*Oslo indre øst-satsingen* 2019–2026) (City of Oslo, n.d.-b, n.d.-a). While physical interventions were prioritised during the first project period, the second period placed greater emphasis on the overlapping dimensions of physical and social challenges. Specifically, the main goal of the current investment projects in Groruddalen is to contribute to lasting service and neighbourhood quality improvements in areas of greatest need, thereby helping residents become financially independent and actively included in their local and wider communities (City of Oslo, 2016).

The funding and organisation of investments is divided into three strategic sub-programmes focused on: 1) employment; 2) childhood and education; and 3) local environment. Each area within the targeted subdistricts receives funding for improving local area conditions ('*områdeløft*'). Given the overarching aim of bringing about long-term change, it has been difficult to make concrete assessments of the projects' results and effects. As such, many of the evaluations have focused on the frameworks, organisational structures, work methodology and processes developed to ensure the efforts achieve long-term results (Pwc & Fafo, 2021). Here, a common goal has been to provide information that can be used for learning, management and developing ways of assessing both smaller and larger projects. At the same time, it is important that measurements reflect desirable and realistic effects, and that the overall benefits of the indicators are greater than their cost (City of Oslo, 2022).

There have been variations in the process of selecting areas for funding. Initially, when the state and the City of Oslo allocated funds for initiatives in Groruddalen, the area's prevailing challenges were so widely acknowledged that no fresh analyses were deemed necessary (Interview 9, 2022). When it came to pinpointing specific subdistricts for funding, however, it became evident that the gathering of additional information was imperative. This necessitated delving into data on a more granular geographical scale, as well as reassessing the geographical boundaries of statistical units in order to accurately capture the divergent characteristics of neighbourhoods (Interview 9, 2022). For instance, certain subdistricts contain high- and low-income populations residing in close proximity but in distinct neighbourhoods. Consequently, relying solely on statistical averages could obscure significant discrepancies between streets and blocks (see also Lund, 2014).

While socio-economic statistics have been prioritised as foundational in selecting areas for funding, the overarching goal is to address the multifaceted challenges faced by communities. Beyond socio-economic factors, neighbourhoods often grapple with issues such as poorly maintained public spaces, heavy traffic congestion, environmental pollution and inadequate community amenities (Lund, 2014).

Uncovering these challenges has required various mapping techniques and participatory methods. Furthermore, insights gleaned from surveys conducted by the city have been instrumental in gaining a better understanding of residents' perceptions and evaluations of their districts. Here, it should be stressed that local knowledge extends beyond problem identification, serving as a crucial asset in devising solutions, guiding interventions and bolstering community resilience.

The funding allocated to an identified neighbourhood typically encompasses its surrounding areas in order to foster community engagement and leverage local resources from a broader catchment area. A multiscale approach has therefore been advocated to monitor initiatives at the neighbourhood, sub-district and district levels, which – along with lessons learned from initiatives in Groruddalen – has been integrated into Oslo's city-wide neighbourhood policy, initiated in 2017.

Neighbourhood policy

The main goal of the city-wide neighbourhood policy (*områdepartitikk*) is to: 'contribute to ensuring that all local areas in Oslo are experienced as good and safe places to live and grow up' (City of Oslo, 2017). The policy lays out three main strategies, the first of which is establishing a monitoring system that covers all of the city's local areas. Statistical analysis is considered an important means for the municipality to proactively identify and address negative trends at an early stage. The relevant statistics encompass – among other facets – living conditions, demographics, environmental stressors and housing market dynamics. This systematic approach is intended to furnish Oslo's city council with a robust foundation for making informed political decisions regarding the strategic allocation of initiatives (City of Oslo, 2017).

Drawing on learnings from Groruddalen, the policy states that statistical information should be combined with other kinds of data when selecting areas (City of Oslo, 2017). While the exact form this other data should take is not specified, residential participation and the knowledge of public servants in the community is highlighted as relevant. Moreover, the policy emphasises that detailed lower-level geographical information should be collected in order to better identify local differences.

A monitoring system, together with standardised approaches for selecting areas for investments, was formalised in 2020 (City of Oslo, 2020). The monitoring system, which collects data for each of the city's 98 subdistricts, is used by the municipal administration to identify areas that score significantly lower on several socio-economic indicators compared to the city average. In addition, Statistics Norway's basic statistical unit, which divides the city into 589 geographical areas, provides information at a lower geographical level on employment ratios, education levels, non-Western immigrants, homeownership and moving frequencies.

The monitoring system does not, however, operate as a list of criteria with threshold values – rather, it is used for making initial comparisons of areas. This provides a basis for identifying areas that should be prioritised, while leaving room

for other considerations. Currently, the monitoring system tracks nine indicators (see Table 11). Going forward, additional indicators from other statistical registries may be added in, such as changes in housing prices, school statistics and environmental factors.

Table 11. Indictors for monitoring local area development and selecting areas for renewal in Oslo

Theme	Variable	Territorial level
Employment	Share of employed (20 hours/week or more)	Sub-district (<i>delbydel</i>) Basic statistical unit (<i>grunnkrets</i>)
Not completed upper-secondary school	Proportion of people aged 21–29 who started an upper-secondary school education but did complete it after five years	Sub-district (<i>delbydel</i>)
Low educational level	Proportion of people with a low educational level	Sub-district (<i>delbydel</i>) Basic statistical unit (<i>grunnkrets</i>)
Low-income families	Proportion of low-income households with children	Sub-district (<i>delbydel</i>)
Non-Western immigrants	Percentage share of Non-Western immigrants with short period of residence	Sub-district (<i>delbydel</i>) Basic statistical unit (<i>grunnkrets</i>)
Overcrowding	Less than one room per person, and less than 25 m² per person	Sub-district (<i>delbydel</i>)
Housing tenure	Proportion of renter-occupancy	Sub-district (<i>delbydel</i>) Basic statistical unit (<i>grunnkrets</i>)
Social security benefits	Proportion of households where social security benefits provide more than half the household income	Sub-district (<i>delbydel</i>)
Migration	Moving frequencies	Sub-district (<i>delbydel</i>) Basic statistical unit (<i>grunnkrets</i>)

Source: Municipality of Oslo, 2020

Box 5. Additional examples of indicator systems in Norway

- Boligsosial monitor, developed by the Norwegian State Housing Bank (*Husbanken*), provides an overview of the social housing situation both in Norway overall and in its municipalities. The information gathered about social housing challenges in a particular municipality helps inform local-level analyses and measures. The system does not provide comparative data at a more detailed level than the municipal level.
- Utenfor-regnskapet, maintained by the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS), aims to demonstrate from the perspective of municipalities how much society can save by pursuing a preventative – rather reactive – approach, and by investing in people rather than seeing them as an expense.
- Bydelsfakta, developed by the City of Oslo, includes various official statistics concerning population, living conditions and housing in Oslo's administrative districts and subdistricts. While the tool can be used for district- and sub-district-level analysis, it does not include data on more detailed spatial levels, meaning it is not detailed enough to be used in area-based initiatives.

4.3.4 Key takeaways

Norwegian municipalities have access to a variety of demographic, socio-economic and socio-cultural indicators designed to improve social sustainability in cities. While many of these have been developed by national-level actors and agencies, such as Husbanken, KS and Statistics Norway, a number of municipalities have developed their own systems. How – and the extent to which – these indicators are used varies depending on municipal goals and resources.

Although there is no comprehensive national monitoring system for following up on segregation trends, such a system is now on the government agenda following the recommendations of a Norwegian Official Report on 'Living Conditions in Cities' (NOU 2020:16) (Ministry of Education, 2018). A harmonised national system would give a comprehensive overview of all regions, providing comparative data with which to assess policies and efforts at different levels. More specifically, such a system could not only support the process of selecting areas for state–municipal investments, but help municipalities perform regular tasks, such as distributing welfare funds between administrative districts.

Area-based initiatives have gained popularity as a method for offsetting neighbourhood disadvantages and strengthening local communities. Such projects utilise both quantitative and qualitative indicators to establish a holistic understanding of local challenges. Statistical data is used in the early stages to identify areas that have significantly lower scores compared to the city average according to several socio-economic indicators. Other analyses are also taken into consideration when weighing up the social and physical challenges faced by potentially targeted areas. Continuous participation and community involvement is emphasised at all stages of projects in order to ensure funding is tailored to local needs.

An important lesson arising from the experiences of area-based initiatives – as well as from policy work more broadly – is that granular-level knowledge is required to determine which challenges are characteristic of a local area. The geographical borders of statistical units also matter, as standard units may not correspond with actual neighbourhoods, obscuring the differences that play out in local communities. In addition, access to data on multiple scales can further assist in a range of efforts and policies directed at the neighbourhood, sub-district and district levels.

The biggest risks posed by indicators relate to misinterpretation or wrongful application. Regarding area-based interventions specifically, quantitative indicators can be useful in detecting areas with complex challenges. If the ambition is to use indicators to follow up on an intervention's effects, however, it should be acknowledged that specific indicators are unlikely to reveal noticeable changes within programme periods, which typically have a limited, relatively short, duration. Thus, while indicators may be useful tools for monitoring changes in social structures and segregation patterns over longer periods of time, they should be treated with caution when determining the impacts of time-limited projects.

A recognised dilemma arises when area-based investments are justified by existing disparities in welfare conditions, yet their primary objective is not necessarily to resolve these disparities. Hence, it is crucial that the selection of indicators aligns with realistic goals and ambitions. As emphasised earlier, although indicators can significantly bolster policies aimed at mitigating segregation, there are inherent risks and challenges involved. It is therefore imperative that the benefits derived from these indicators outweigh their associated costs.

In sum, local initiatives, neighbourhood enhancements and public innovations necessitate a distinct set of evaluation tools, wherein indicators play a pivotal role in facilitating policy development and implementation.

4.4 Sweden

Various initiatives have been launched in recent years aimed at monitoring, understanding and addressing segregation trends across Sweden. In this context, the Segregation Barometer stands out as a key tool for visualising, analysing and tracking segregation dynamics at different territorial scales. As such, the tool has been widely used to support policy and planning interventions at the national, regional and municipal levels, and for targeting interventions in local communities and neighbourhoods.

Besides examining the Segregation Barometer, this chapter addresses how data and indicators are used in both Örebro County and Örebro Municipality to address segregation challenges and support policy and planning interventions. Within Örebro County, various data related to socio-economic and health status has been used to categorise areas. Örebro Municipality, meanwhile, has utilised the Segregation Barometer to assess the efficacy of local initiatives, including master plans aimed at fostering mixed communities and reducing segregation.

4.4.1 The Segregation Barometer

The [Segregation Barometer](#) (*Segregationsbarometern*) is an interactive web-based monitoring tool for visualising, analysing and following up on segregation trends in Sweden. Development of the tool was led by the Delegation Against Segregation (Delmos). In 2019, as part of its efforts to better understand segregation, the government tasked Delmos and Statistics Sweden (SCB) with mapping what segregation patterns look like in Sweden, and how they have evolved over time (Ministry of Employment, 2020). The Segregation Barometer, launched in 2021, is a concrete output from this work.

Although development of the tool was led by Delmos, several other agencies and actors with relevant expertise were consulted during the process (Interview 13, 2023). Delmos was discontinued at the end of 2022, following which the Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (*Boverket*) assumed responsibility of administering the Segregation Barometer (Boverket, 2023b).

The Segregation Barometer is freely available for all users, but is primarily intended for practitioners and decision-makers working in municipalities, county councils, national authorities or other organisations dealing with segregation. The overall aim of the tool is to support segregation-related policy and planning through provision of an enhanced knowledge base, and the highlighting of questions and needs that require specific attention (Boverket, 2023b). Towards this end, the tool sets out segregation patterns at different geographic levels based on common measures.

Dimensions, indicators and territorial scales

The Segregation Barometer includes various indicators relevant to understanding socio-economic residential segregation patterns and development trends over time, which can be visualised in the form of maps, diagrams and tables. An interviewee for this study cited the US [Opportunity Atlas](#) tool as a source of inspiration for the Segregation Barometer (Interview 9, 2022).

The data in the Segregation Barometer originates from Statistics Sweden's statistical registers, while the indicators included are based on six key priority areas: 1) socio-economy; 2) housing and public services; 3) labour market; 4) education; 5) democracy; and 6) civil society and health (see Table 12). These priority areas are based on the core themes set out in the Swedish government's 2018 long-term strategy to reduce and counteract segregation (see section 3.4), although in some cases they are termed differently.

The number of indicators varies between thematic areas, as not all statistics are available at the more detailed territorial levels. The indicators can be broken down according to different background variables, such as gender, age group, foreign-born or Swedish-born, and for some indicators educational level and income quintile. The tool includes time series data, which allows examining change over time. For some indicators, data extends back to 2011 (Boverket, 2022c).

Table 12. Indicators according to different dimensions of segregation included in the Segregation Barometer (Delmos, 2021a)

Dimensions	Indicators
Socio-economy	• Disposable income per consumption unit (median) • Proportion of people with a low economic standard • Proportion of people with a high economic standard • Proportion of people with income support but without other allowances • Proportion of children aged 0–17 living at home in families with a low economic standard • Level of education
Housing and public services	• Proportion of households by housing tenure type • Average living space per person • Ratio between in- and out-migration
Labour market	• Proportion of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) • Proportion of people unemployed for longer than six months • Proportion of gainfully employed
Education	• Proportion of children registered in preschool • Average merit rating from compulsory school • Proportion in upper-secondary vocational education • Proportion of students who have completed upper-secondary school within 3–5 years
Democracy	• Voter turnout in parliamentary elections • Voter turnout in regional elections • Voter turnout in municipal elections
Civil society and health	• Sickness rate (average number of days with sick pay, occupational injury compensation, sickness allowance, activity allowance and rehabilitation)

The Segregation Barometer includes national-, regional-, municipal- and sub-municipal-level indicators. At the sub-municipal level, indicators are available at the level of regional statistical (RegSO) areas and demographic statistical (DeSO) areas, which means more localised differences can be detected at the neighbourhood or district level.

Furthermore, the tool is based on the idea that segregation is relational, meaning that conditions in a specific place are also determined by the broader conditions in the city or region it is part of. One of the tool's purposes is therefore to illustrate how local residential (RegSO or DeSO) areas relate to each other at the municipality and regional level (Boverket, 2023b).

In addition to the individual indicators measuring different aspects of socio-economic segregation, the Segregation Barometer includes an inequality index (*ojämlikhetsindex*) developed by Delmos and Statistics Sweden (Delmos, 2021b). The index, which is based on disposable household income, describes the degree of segregation within a municipality or region based on the residential patterns of different socio-economic groups. More specifically, it describes how evenly distributed the lowest and highest income groups are (based on quintiles) in different (DeSO) areas in a municipality or region.

The Segregation Barometer also allows for the classification of area types (*områdestyper*), which in turn enables comparison of different residential districts (RegSO) based on their socio-economic conditions. The classification relies on a weighted socio-economic index constructed using the following three indicators: 1) proportion of people with a low economic standard; 2) proportion of people with a low educational level; and 3) proportion of people who have received financial aid and/or been unemployed for longer than six months (Delmos, 2021a). In total, there are five area types: 1) areas with great socio-economic challenges; 2) areas with socio-economic challenges; 3) socio-economically mixed areas; 4) areas with good socio-economic conditions; and 5) areas with very good socio-economic conditions.

The area type classifications were developed to complement the inequality index: while the latter shows the degree of segregation, as well as how different income groups are spread out across a municipality or region, the former describes the socio-economic conditions of different residential areas. In this respect, there is a clear connection between the different area types and the degree of segregation shown by the inequality index (Boverket, 2022c; Delmos, 2021a).

Strengths and limitations of the Segregation Barometer

One of the Segregation Barometer's main strengths is that it builds on a comprehensive dataset harmonised to facilitate analysis of segregation patterns and trends across Sweden at various territorial scales (Interview 13, 2023). Additionally, its open accessibility promotes widespread utilisation for policy formulation and planning purposes, while the uniform territorial classifications further enhances its value by ensuring greater comparability in analyses and

improving the coherence of temporal segregation assessments. Challenges arise with the DeSO areas, and given that as a geographical designation they have been created and delimited to be as homogenous as possible, this somewhat impacts the tool's accuracy in reflecting socio-economic realities (Interview 13, 2023).

Given that municipalities are identified as key users of the Segregation Barometer, it is crucial that the tool is aligned with local needs regarding parameters, data, indicators and area classifications (Interview 13, 2023). Boverket acknowledges that the Segregation Barometer has certain limitations, emphasising its suitability for monitoring segregation rather than providing a comprehensive analysis. In recognition of the complexity inherent to segregation, Boverket advocates supplementing the tool with local perspectives and additional data sources in order to gain a more holistic understanding (Boverket, 2022c).

While the Segregation Barometer predominantly focuses on socio-economic segregation, some of the authorities and segregation experts consulted during the tool's development phase suggested it would have been useful to also include ethnic segregation indicators (Interview 13, 2023). This is based on the notion that socio-economic and ethnic segregation are closely connected, meaning the tool would be able to provide a more comprehensive picture of residential segregation if both aspects were included.

According to a study interviewee, the reluctance to include indicators such as country of origin may be due to ethnicity having long been a politically sensitive issue in Sweden – more so than in Denmark, for instance (Interview 13, 2023). Nevertheless, several authorities that use the Segregation Barometer have access to a wider range of statistics that can be used to complement the tool's indicators.

Another widely used tool is the Swedish Police's nationwide list of vulnerable areas (see Box 6). While the primary purpose of the list is to help prioritise resources within the police, it is also utilised more broadly by various actors to support urban planning and development initiatives in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Salonen, 2023). According to Delmos (2022), however, the area type categorisation used in the Segregation Barometer allows for more nuanced, in-depth mapping and analysis of socio-economic segregation, based on the notion that segregation is a complex phenomenon. As such, the Segregation Barometer is better suited to supporting spatial planning and analysis than the police list, which was designed to aid the implementation of measures related to combating crime (Delmos, 2022).

Box 6. Police list of vulnerable areas

Since 2015, the Swedish Police has maintained a list of 'vulnerable areas' (*utsatta områden*), defined as places of low socio-economic status where criminals have an impact on the local community. This work – which is carried out collaboratively by local police districts, municipalities and the police's national operation department (NOA) – is part of a government assignment requiring the police to produce national situation reports (every second year) of disadvantaged areas vulnerable to crime (Polisen, 2023).

The area categorisations build on a national assessment supported by local area descriptions, together with a living conditions index developed by the Swedish Police Authority, Malmö University and Lund University (Delmos, 2022). The index relies on indicators describing economic marginalisation (employment rate, income, educational level); segregation (foreign background); and vulnerable family and housing conditions (overcrowding, single persons with children, number of children aged 0–15, number of young people aged 16–19) (Salonen, 2023).

The categorisation consists of three area types. Firstly, 'vulnerable areas' (*utsatta områden*), characterized by low socio-economic status, and where criminals have a negative impact on society and public institutions. Secondly, 'risk areas' (*riskområden*), which meet all the criteria of vulnerable areas, and moreover are at risk of becoming 'especially vulnerable' if no interventions are put in place. And thirdly, 'especially vulnerable areas' (*särskild utsatta områden*), where there are signs of parallel social structures and extremism, as well as high concentrations of criminals who threaten residents, making it difficult for the police to operate in the area. The total number of areas on the list has remained relatively constant since 2019 (Polisen, 2023), with the 2023 list including 17 'vulnerable areas', 15 'risk areas' and 27 'especially vulnerable areas' (PMY, 2023).

4.4.2 Indicators in supporting policy and planning interventions in Örebro

This section focuses on Örebro County, located in central Sweden, and its largest city, Örebro Municipality. The county has a population of approximately 308,000, of which roughly half (159,348) live in Örebro Municipality (Regionfakta, 2024).

Figure 12. Aerial view of Örebro



Source: CCO 1.0

In 2021, a sophisticated tool aimed at clustering DeSOs based on socio-economic indicators was developed in Örebro County for the purpose of monitoring the county's year-on-year development (Raptis, 2021). The initiative was commissioned by the culture and non-profit sector within Örebro County's regional development unit (Interview 14, 2023), with the outcomes published in 2021 in the form of a report (Raptis, 2021) and interactive maps (Region Örebro County, 2021). The report's primary objective was to delve into the socio-economic characteristics of each area within the county in order to spotlight their influence on participation in cultural, sports, arts and other social activities.

Both the report and its associated tool have since been integrated into the regional development strategy (RUS), which serves as a blueprint for driving development and enhancing resident's quality of life (Interview 14, 2023). Not only was the tool designed to be reused in future socio-economic analyses, it was created to benefit all areas of the administration by drawing attention to both common and specific challenges faced by the county's 12 municipalities (Interview 14, 2023).

The tool aims to capture the county's socio-economic heterogeneity in greater level than can be achieved at the municipality level, thereby supporting the creation of more specific development strategies and directing funding to particularly challenged areas. On top of this, the tool can highlight similarities between areas where collaboration can be fostered. The analysis is currently employed in RUS follow-ups designed to identify which areas should be the focus of development efforts. Specifically, the data has been used to help map Örebro County's cultural infrastructure (Raptis, 2021).

The clustering relies on nine socio-economic variables: 1) median income; 2) number of sick days per inhabitant; 3) proportion of people born outside the EU/EFTA; 4) proportion of economically active people; 5) proportion of people with a higher education; 6) proportion people receiving financial aid; 7) proportion of people unemployed; 8) proportion of people aged below 20; and 9) proportion of people aged 65 and over (Raptis, 2021).

The choice of indicators came from an established method produced by Statisticon called the social compass (*Den sociala kompassen* – SEKOM), which classifies areas into five clusters. Based On this, the minimum, maximum and mean values of each variable within a cluster was analysed and compared to the mean values of the county overall. Having done so, the clusters were named according to their salient socio-economic traits (Raptis 2021).

The five socio-economic clusters identified in Örebro County and their key characteristics are as follows:

1. **Orange cluster – 'City and peri-urban wellbeing':** High-income areas with a large proportion of people with a post-secondary education, many families, and low proportions of unemployment.
2. **Green cluster – 'Rural and urban wellbeing':** Wellbeing areas with high employment rates, above average incomes, low need for financial support, and a below average proportion of people with a post-secondary education.
3. **Purple cluster – 'Urban mix':** Diverse areas with a high percentage of the population of working age and a high proportion of people with a post-secondary education, but large differences between areas within the cluster.
4. **Blue Cluster – 'Structural Transformation':** Areas with ageing populations, below average proportions of employment, relatively low educational levels, and relatively high financial aid needs.
5. **Yellow cluster – 'Socio-economic challenges':** Areas with the greatest socio-economic challenges, including low employment rates, low levels of education, low incomes and high percentages of people aged under 65.

The analysis, implementation of the tool and data updates are handled by analysts at Örebro County's regional development unit. There has also been discussions concerning collaboration with other analysts at the county administration who have implemented a comparable cluster analysis focused on dental health among children and young people using the same DeSo area classification but relying on different variables (Interview 14, 2023). Two reports were published in 2019 and 2024 mapping the interconnections between dental health and socio-economic conditions in areas across the county (Persson & Sannevik, 2019, 2024).

Socio-economic monitoring is also carried out in Örebro Municipality as part of follow-up on the master plan, which aims to reduce segregation through ensuring

mixed housing types in neighbourhoods and enhancing access to services, including leisure and green spaces (Interview 12, 2023; Municipality of Örebro, 2021). The follow-up process, which involves evaluating the need for revisions every four years, makes use of the Segregation Barometer – specifically its inequality index and five neighbourhood types (Municipality of Örebro, 2021). Here, the inequality index is used to describe changes in segregation levels across the municipality overall, while the classification of neighbourhood types is used to monitor how non-mixed areas develop over time (Municipality of Örebro, 2021). The analysis focuses mainly on type 1 (great socio-economic challenges), type 2 (socio-economic challenges) and type 5 (very good socio-economic conditions) areas as representative of the extremes of socio-economic segregation. Given that one of the municipality's key strategic aims is to create more socially mixed neighbourhoods, any increase in the number of areas belonging to these three area types would indicate that this objective has not been achieved (Interview 12, 2023; Municipality of Örebro, 2021).

4.4.3 Key takeaways

When it comes to addressing segregation, the use of comprehensive data and analysis has been acknowledged as essential by Sweden's policy-makers and researchers. This has resulted in the deployment of various initiatives to monitor, better understand and combat segregation trends across the country.

Foremost among these is the Segregation Barometer, which was designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of segregation at various geographic levels. Focused on socio-economic residential segregation, the tool incorporates indicators encompassing such key priority areas as socio-economy, housing, labour market, education, democracy, civil society, and health.

At the national level, the Segregation Barometer enables stakeholders to analyse trends and disparities across territorial scales, from the national to sub-municipal level. This nuanced understanding of segregation dynamics can then be used to support relevant policy formulation and planning efforts. The tool is also employed at the municipal level, as exemplified by Örebro Municipality, where the Segregation Barometer has been used to assess the effectiveness of local initiatives, including master plans aimed at fostering mixed communities and reducing segregation.

Despite the Segregation Barometer's strengths, its use also throws up certain challenges, such as ensuring alignment with local perceptions and the need for supplementary data sources in order to provide a more holistic understanding of segregation. In this regard, there have been discussions about incorporating new indicators or broadening its focus to include related phenomena like energy poverty

(Interview 13, 2023). As of 2024, the Segregation Barometer remained in widespread use, with new data incorporated into the tool on a yearly basis. Moreover, there have been initiatives to further develop the tool (Boverkett, 2023f), while Boverket has continued to publish annual reports on socio-economic segregation in Sweden, the most recent of which was published in summer 2024 (Boverkett, 2024a).

Overall, utilising different types of data and indicators to support policy development remains a high priority in Sweden. This is evidenced by the fact that in 2023 the government tasked several key state agencies with incorporating statistical data that can be broken down geographically, thereby facilitating more effective measures related to integration and exclusion (Government Offices of Sweden, 2023c). The same year, the government commissioned Statistics Sweden and Boverket to conduct an in-depth analysis of the conditions, needs and problems associated with exclusion in different areas (Government Offices of Sweden, 2023b). The stated purpose was to help authorities identify geographical areas where exclusion is particularly high, and where there are specific needs in terms of public sector initiatives.

The lessons learned from the Swedish Segregation Barometer offer valuable insights for the other Nordic countries. A key issue here is considering which conditions, needs and problems are most important to capture in different territorial contexts. While there are many similarities between the Nordic countries, there are also clear country-specific differences – capturing these should be one of the main starting points in developing a national-level tool elsewhere. Overall, the Segregation Barometer exemplifies the importance of data-driven approaches and collaborative efforts in addressing segregation.

4.5 Iceland

Historically, issues of exclusion and segregation have not been a political priority in Iceland, partly because Iceland's levels of income inequality are among the lowest in Europe. Over the past two decades, however, the number of foreign-born people residing in Iceland has risen significantly, to the extent that the proportion of non-natives is among the highest in the Nordic countries (Heleniak, 2024).

These developments have led to growing signs of segregation in Iceland (Oddsson, 2022). In particular, increased diversity and a tightened housing market has led to limited affordable housing options, heightening the need for effective policies

aimed at strengthening social inclusion and counteracting segregation. While there are currently few specific policies explicitly addressing segregation, a number of initiatives have sought to develop social cohesion- and equality-related indicators that can provide a more solid basis for supporting policy-making and planning.

With this in mind, this section explores various social indicators developed in Iceland for monitoring the health and social wellbeing of its population. This includes both national-level indicators and initiatives in the City of Reykjavík, where relevant indicators have been used to guide the planning and targeting of services.

4.5.1 Policies and plans

As already outlined in section 3.5, the issues of segregation, integration and inclusion have only fairly recently gained prominence on the policy agenda in Iceland. Nevertheless, several policies and plans relevant to spatial planning, integration, education, and housing already exist and more are in development, both at the national level and among municipalities. This is the case especially in Reykjavík, where the city has taken an active role in developing its own policies and plans for securing socially mixed, inclusive neighbourhoods.

From the perspective of using indicators to support policy actions, the governmental 'Action Plan For Immigration Matters 2021–2024' is a relevant document (Icelandic Government, 2022). Regarding social inclusion and segregation, the action plan focuses on the topic specifically from the perspective of immigration with possible future actions including the development of a platform that enables the sharing of relevant research, knowledge and statistical information. Given that Iceland does not yet have a formal policy on countering segregation and promoting social inclusion, no indicators on these specific topics currently exist. That said, some social wellbeing indicators are already available and will likely play a role in developing action plans going forward.

One initiative specified in the previously mentioned action plan involves establishing cooperation between two key governmental institutions – the Multicultural Centre and the Office of Equality – in order to support local authorities seeking to integrate multicultural policies and equality programmes. Many ministries, governmental institutions and municipal institutions are directly or indirectly involved in matters concerning segregation and social exclusion. At the state level, the most important actors are the Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, Ministry of Infrastructure, and Ministry of Education and Culture. Furthermore, the government tasks Statistics Iceland with gathering certain social indicators on its behalf.

At present, however, the indicators are employed purely as a monitoring tool, with the data yet to be used directly in policy development at either a state or municipal level. This may be set to change, given that the social indicators were purportedly developed not only to monitor the welfare of the population, but to inform policy-making and political decisions (Interview 5, 2023; Interview 19, 2023; Statistics Iceland, 2023).

4.5.2 Social indicators for measuring wellbeing

Although the social indicators gathered in Iceland have yet to be utilised in formulating or implementing specific social exclusion- and segregation-related policies, it is highly likely that they will come to play a vital role in the near future. The development of social indicators was initiated by the Icelandic government in 2009 following the international banking crisis, which hit Iceland particularly hard. Since 2012, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Statistical Office of Iceland have collected and published annual measurements encompassing various factors intrinsic to people's lives and their social wellbeing (Statistics Iceland, 2023). Social wellbeing is divided into 11 dimensions according to the classification used by various statistical offices and international organisations. Building on this, there were a total of 55 indicators used in Iceland's first round of measurements, rising to a high of 67 in 2014, divided into the following categories: demographics, equality, sustainability, health and cohesion.

In 2015, under the Icelandic presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers, a cross-Nordic project was established aimed at developing a national indicator system suitable for Nordic collaboration. The project was carried out in collaboration with NOSOSCO (Nordic Social-Statistical Committee) and NOMESCO (Nordic Medico-Statistical Committee). One important duty assigned to the project's task force was reviewing relevant existing international methods and measurements. Having acknowledged that most of these existing indicator systems employ similar approaches, the project's final report attempted to set out a range of indicators that would specifically address Nordic settings and challenges (Nyman et al., 2016).

The Icelandic social indicator system was subsequently developed using the final report as a frame of reference, with also taking into account the quality criteria set out by the Statistics Office of the European Union (Eurostat), as well as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s 2018 report on wellbeing (European Statistical System Committee, 2017; OECD, 2018). Since 2019, the Icelandic system has used 41 statistical parameters, defined and placed within the following 11 dimensions: 1) education; 2) employment; 3) work-life balance; 4) economy; 5) housing; 6) security; 7) wellbeing; 8) health; 9) social connections; 10) democracy; and 11) environmental quality (see Table 13) (Statistics Iceland, 2023).

While some indicators are still under development, most are published and can be viewed at the municipal level. In the case of the Reykjavík Capital Area, it is also possible to dig down to the district level. It should, however, be noted that many Icelandic municipalities have very few inhabitants, meaning municipal – and by extension sub-municipal – comparisons are often of little relevance. Data is collected and published annually, with the underlying notion being that it is important to consider various aspects of people's situations beyond the financial

when attempting to understand social wellbeing. In this context, the concept of welfare inequality – which assumes that inequality can exist in many different ways – is utilised (Statistics Iceland, 2023).

Table 13. Indicators gathered (or under development) by Statistics Iceland

Social dimension	Indicators
Employment	NEET: Young people not in work, study or vocational training Unemployment: Percentage of unemployed in the labour force Employment: Ratio of labour force to the total population Long-term unemployment: Percentage of unemployed people who have been actively looking for a job for at least a year Outside the labour market: Percentage of people aged 16–74 outside the labour market Those with limited work: Percentage of people in part-time jobs but want to work more
Social connections	Social networking: Indicator under development Social support: Indicator under development Participation in social life: Indicator under development
Economy	Properties: Average family assets Total revenue: Sum of employment income, capital income and other income Low-income ratio: Percentage of individuals with an income below 60% of the median disposable income Debts: Total family debt Lack of material quality: Percentage of households that lack certain material qualities Significant lack of material quality: Percentage of households living with a significant lack of material quality (defined as those that fall below the threshold of at least three of nine defined indicators, e.g. cannot meet unexpected expenses, cannot afford a car or a yearly week-long vacation) Financial aid recipients: Number of people receiving financial assistance from the municipality by family type Persistently low income: Indicator under development
Health	People in good health: Percentage of people living in good health People with health restrictions: Percentage of people facing limitations in their daily life due to health conditions Refusal of health care due to cost: Percentage of people who refuse health care because of cost Denial of dental care due to cost: Percentage of people who refuse dental care because of cost

Housing	Burdensome housing costs: Housing costs of at least 40% of household disposable income Poor condition of housing: Percentage of people who say they live with damp, mould and leaking roofs Cramped living: Proportion of people who live in cramped conditions Assessment of housing cost burdens: Percentage of people who say housing costs are a big burden Fallen behind on mortgage or rent: Percentage of people who have been unable to pay their mortgage or rent on time
Work-life balance	Parental leave: indicator is under development Non-traditional working hours: Percentage of people working non-standard working hours Working hours per week: Number of working hours people report they have worked in their main and secondary jobs
Democracy	Participation in parliamentary elections: Voter turnout by gender Participation in municipal elections: Ratio of votes cast to number of people on the electoral roll Trust in political parties: Indicator under development Confidence in parliament: Percentage of people with a lot of confidence in the Icelandic parliament (<i>Alþingi</i>)
Education	Children in kindergarten: Number of children in kindergarten School attendance in secondary school: Percentage of students attending secondary school by age School attendance at university: Percentage of students attending university by age
Security	Accidental deaths: People who have died from illness and accidents Security in the local environment: Percentage of people who experience crime in their local area
Environment	Noise in the local environment: Percentage of people inconvenienced by noise in their local environment Pollution in the local environment: Percentage of people inconvenienced by dirt and pollution in their local environment
Wellbeing	Adult happiness: Percentage of adults who rate their happiness at least 8 on a scale of 1–10 Life satisfaction: Indicator under development

Source: Statistics Iceland, 2023

The list of indicators in Table 13 includes both quantitative indicators compiled by Statistics Iceland and more qualitative indicators taken from the yearly living standards study, also conducted by Statistics Iceland. The latter study (Statistics Iceland, 2023) has been carried out annually since 2004 using a sample of up to 5,000 people selected from the national register, and is part of the European

Union's coordinated living standards study. Participants are asked to participate for four years in a row, making it a longitudinal study capable of providing a broader picture of how living standards change over time and are distributed between different groups of people. Most of the study's questions concern housing, finances, health and labour market status, with the resultant data providing an important source for the monitoring of social wellbeing.

In 2019, the first report providing a comprehensive statistical overview of immigrants in Iceland was published, focusing especially on the state of their finances, education, employment, housing, democracy, work-life balance, environmental quality and safety (Statistics Iceland, 2019b). While the report, which used social indicators and data dating back up to ten years, did provide new insights into the socio-economic conditions of immigrants, the information collected was less detailed compared to that gathered for Icelandic nationals. Moreover, wellbeing and social relationship indicators were not considered due to irregular measurements. Nonetheless, the report did reveal various disparities between immigrants and Icelandic nationals.

Among other things, the results showed that the majority of immigrants in Iceland are of working age and have been in the country for a relatively short period of time. They also tend to have a lower birth rate than Icelandic nationals and are predominantly male. Interestingly, most immigrants come from countries with good healthcare, education and financial systems. Overall, immigrants in Iceland have good access to the labour market and they are more likely to be overeducated compared to nationals. In addition, comparatively few immigrants have a higher total income than nationals. Also, the school attendance of immigrant students in secondary school at the age of 16 is lower than that of nationals – a gap that widens as they get older. Another observation was that immigrants are more likely than nationals to live in cramped conditions and be in a rented property (Statistics Iceland, 2019b).

Other research in Iceland has shown that immigrants tend to have less trust towards public institutions, including those relating to the labour market (Skaptadóttir et al., 2020), and that immigrants typically less engaged in Iceland's civil society – for example, through participation in union activities and politics (Eythórsson & Gudmundsson, 2020).

One important issue relating to segregation, integration and social inclusion concerns the rental market for housing in Iceland, which is almost exclusively private and regarded as expensive, insecure and congested (Anundsen et al., 2021). The fact that Iceland's population has grown significantly over the past decade – mainly due to immigration – has placed further strain on the housing market. Although Iceland has the highest share of owner-occupied dwellings among the Nordic countries, privately owned housing is far less common among immigrants than nationals (OECD, 2023).

Another point worth noting is that migration to Iceland, in contrast to the other Nordic countries, mainly consists of labour migrants. As such, the unemployment rate among immigrants has historically been relatively low – often lower than that of the native-born population before the COVID-19 pandemic (Sánchez Gassen et al., 2022)

In sum, with migrants now beginning to settle in Iceland in larger numbers, greater attention is being paid to questions of social inequality. This includes looking beyond the economy and employment to consider aspects such as social welfare, wellbeing, segregation and social inclusion. Although there are not yet indicators directly relating to these thematic areas in use when it comes to supporting policy and planning, initiatives to develop and incorporate such indicators are currently underway.

4.5.3 Reykjavík takes the lead

Although formal guidance or policies addressing segregation and social exclusion are lacking at the national level, these topics have gained greater prominence in a number of the City of Reykjavík's policies and planning strategies. As discussed in section 3.5, Reykjavík has prioritised the development of socially mixed, inclusive neighbourhoods served by public transport and green-blue areas, where services and social institutions are in close proximity. Reykjavík's master plan further states that social mixing and diversity should serve as a guiding principle when planning new neighbourhoods. More specifically, this means including housing for all social groups; that 25% of new apartments should be run by non-profit housing associations; and that special attention should be paid to the housing needs of young people and those entering the housing market for the first time (City of Reykjavík, 2020, 2022).

The City of Reykjavík has also done substantial work on integrating social inclusiveness into various plans and policies, both from the point of view of the organisation being an employer and a service provider. This can be seen, for example, in educational plans and cultural- and sports-related affairs, as well as policies relating to immigration and integration, social and educational policy, and human rights policy (City of Reykjavík, 2012, 2016, 2017c, 2021c).

Like at the national level, the City of Reykjavík's segregation- and social inclusion-related policies tend to be sectoral plans, with the relevant topics integrated into various policy documents that serve to guide policy development. Again, given that there is no specific policy addressing segregation and social inclusion, indicators of these themes are not directly used in policy-making. Nevertheless, the administration does make use of indicators in targeting areas and neighbourhoods in need of particular attention.

Figure 13. Housing construction in central Reykjavík



Source: CC BY-SA 4.0, Yadid Levy, Norden.org

The relevant data reveals an uneven geographic distribution of population groups – based on socio-economic characteristics or proportion of people with a foreign background – across different neighbourhoods. In 2019, immigrants comprised 18.6% of Reykjavík's overall population. However, in some neighbourhoods immigrants accounted for only 4% of the population, compared to 35% elsewhere (Statistics Iceland, 2020). Statistics such as these have been used on an informal basis to guide the planning of services, as needs can vary significantly from one place to another based on background, demographic and labour market characteristics (Slätmo et al., 2022, 2023). For example, such data has been used to identify where best to locate service centres, although this is not yet subject to a formal process, nor has the data made it into any official policy work as yet (Interview 20, 2023).

Nonetheless, there are expectations that many of the indicators already available or under development – such as those measuring more qualitative topics like social wellbeing, quality of life or social participation – will before long be used in a more formalised manner in planning, policy-making and implementation (Interview 5, 2023; Interview 6, 2023).

4.5.4 Key takeaways

Various societal changes have taken place in Iceland over the past two decades, as a result of which the issues of social inclusion and segregation have risen up the policy agenda. This can be observed at national level in the form of sectoral plans that indirectly address these issues, and in key education, equality and human rights legislation that imposes obligations on the state to combat segregation. In addition, more concrete initiatives linked to these policy themes are being pursued in Reykjavík and the wider Capital Area, especially in relation to developing more socially mixed, inclusive neighbourhoods. In the Capital Area, public transport infrastructure is also viewed as a means of increasing equality, reducing segregation and promoting diversity in urban development

In this context, Iceland has developed a comprehensive social indicator system that encompasses dimensions such as education, employment, housing, security, wellbeing, health, social connections, democracy, and environmental quality. While these indicators are not yet fully integrated into formal policies, they are nevertheless being increasingly used to assess people's status and situation.

Going further than this, the City of Reykjavík is making strategic use of indicators to guide service planning and assess needs based on the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of different areas. Meanwhile, at the national level, policy attention is now shifting towards addressing social inequality, rather than simply dealing with economic factors. This is evidenced by the ongoing development of indicators concerning social wellbeing, quality of life and social participation.

Overall, Iceland finds itself having to navigate the challenges of increased diversity, housing shortages and the need for inclusive urban planning. In this respect, the development of social indicators reflects a commitment to better understanding the complex dynamics of social wellbeing, and in turn segregation and inclusion.



Source: Umeå Municipality, Sara Stenberg

5. Participatory planning for socially inclusive cities and communities

The notion of participatory planning, whereby citizens and key stakeholder are involved in the planning process, is often seen as crucial for strengthening social inclusion, trust and democracy in local communities. This chapter therefore explores how participatory planning approaches are used in Nordic cities to strengthen inclusion in both newly built and existing neighbourhoods.

The text first sheds light on how participation is emphasised in key legislation and guidelines steering spatial planning and the governance of municipalities in the Nordic countries. Having done so, it focuses in on five cities – Tampere (Finland), Copenhagen (Denmark), Sandnes (Norway), Umeå (Sweden) and Reykjavík (Iceland) – in order to shed light on the participatory approaches adopted, and how such processes are organised at the city and neighbourhood level.

More specifically, the chapter posed the following three questions:

- What types of participatory planning approaches and processes are used in the Nordic countries and in Nordic cities?
- How are these participatory processes organised at the local (city and neighbourhood) level?
- What opportunities and challenges do these methods present?

5.1 Finland

This section addresses participatory planning aimed at achieving more socially inclusive cities and neighbourhoods in Finland. Here, two main geographical levels are examined. Firstly, the section examines how participation is emphasised in various national policies and programmes, as well as in key planning legislation and guidelines used to steer spatial planning and local self-government.

Having done so, it hones in on Tampere, where counteracting segregation and strengthening social inclusion are clear political priorities for the city authorities. As such, a wide range of participatory methods and approaches are used to engage residents and other key stakeholders in different stages of policy-making and planning.

5.1.1 Participation in national planning legislation and policies

In Finland, the notion of participation is prominent in various legal and national policy frameworks. While some of the key policies and relevant planning legislation have already been touched on in sections 3.1 and 4.1, the focus below is specifically on how they deal with participation and citizen/stakeholder engagement.

Legal frameworks

Finland's main planning law, the Land Use and Building Act (132/1999) (*Maankäyttö- ja rakennuslaki/ Markanvändnings- och bygglag*), has a strong focus on ensuring everyone can participate in the planning process (Ministry of the Environment, n.d.-b). Specifically, Section 62 states that planning procedures must be organised such that residents, landowners and other stakeholders can participate in preparing the plan, estimate its impacts, and state their opinions on it. It also specifies that when a plan is drawn up, a participation and assessment scheme must be prepared in good time (Land Use and Building Act, 1999).

Another relevant legal framework strongly emphasising participation is the Local Government Act (410/2015) (*Kuntalaki/Kommunallag*), Section 22 of which states that municipalities must ensure residents have diverse, effective means for participation. While the law does not specify exactly how this should be implemented, several possible ways of organising participation are mentioned, such as organising discussion and consultation meetings; seeking the views of residents before decisions are taken; developing services in cooperation with service users; and enabling participation in the planning of the municipality's finances (Local Government Act, 2015).

National policies, programmes and strategies

Besides legislation, various national policies, programmes and strategies are important for guiding urban planning and development work, and thus influencing how participatory planning is implemented in Finnish cities. One relevant example is the 2019 Government Programme, in which a key objective was to strengthen democracy, participation, and trust in societal institutions (Finnish Government, 2019).

The programme acknowledged that levels of participation and inclusion vary considerably depending on an individual's socio-economic status and place of residence, and as such many people feel they lack the power to influence decisions concerning them. Given this, the programme strongly emphasised the need to actively promote versatile opportunities for participation. Concrete approaches mentioned in the 2019 Government Programme include citizens' juries, youth councils and participatory budgeting, along with finding ways to make political participation easier through, for instance, pop-up events.

Participation is also at the core of Finland's various urban policy programmes and strategies. For instance, the National Urban Strategy 2020–2030 (Ministry of Finance, 2020) contains a priority area titled 'wellbeing for everyone', where civic engagement and resident cooperation were highlighted as crucial to reinforcing local identities and a sense of belonging. Similarly, in the Urban Programme 2018–2022, participation and active citizenship through cooperation between cities and the private, third and fourth sectors was emphasised in relation to social sustainability (Urkankangas & Voutilainen, 2018). Digitalisation was also highlighted as having the potential to enable new types of participation, as was the need to closely consider certain population groups – particularly those most difficult to reach, such as children, young people not in education or training, the unemployed, immigrants and older people – in the planning of neighbourhoods and their services.

Furthermore, the Sustainable City Programme (2019–2023) had a strong emphasis on measures designed to reduce inequality between communities and people, with participation considered central to strengthening residents' commitment to their neighbourhoods (Sustainable City Programme, n.d.).

Finally, the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme (*Lähiöohjelma* 2020–2022) emphasised the need for new and diverse channels for direct citizen participation, and for such processes to be as equal and transparent as possible (Lähiöohjelma, 2020). Throughout its duration, the programme – which funded numerous regeneration projects in Finnish suburban housing estates – maintained a strong focus on involving residents and local organisations in neighbourhood development, as well as the planning and implementation of local activities.

5.1.2 Participation as a means of strengthening social inclusion in Tampere

In Tampere, the city administration applies a variety of participatory approaches to its planning and urban development projects, and to strengthening social inclusion. With a population of around 250,000 in the city itself and 422,000 in the wider urban region, Tampere is the urban region in Finland (after Helsinki metropolitan region) and the third most populous municipality.

In recent years, there has been a strong emphasis on participation in many of the city's policies, with various approaches used to engage residents and other key actors and stakeholders. With this in mind, the following sets out the city administration's key policy frameworks and how it implements relevant participation processes.

Figure 14. Aerial view of Tampere



Source: City of Tampere, Laura Vanzo

City strategies

Over the past decade, social inclusion and participation have become core priorities in the City of Tampere's strategies. The city strategy – prepared at the beginning of a city council's period of office every four years – defines the administration's key strategic goals and specifies which indicators will be used to measure progress towards them.

The current strategy, titled 'The City of Action' (*Tekemisen kaupunki*) – launched in 2021 and updated in 2023 – sets out goals for the city's development up to 2030 (City of Tampere, 2023a). The strategy has four main thematic focus areas, of which 'active communities' is the most closely linked to participation and social inclusion. The city states it will work to bring people together; strengthen the conditions allowing different associations to operate; act as a partner and platform for co-creation; and support engagement with communities and residents in local neighbourhoods.

The two preceding city strategies also emphasised participation as a means of strengthening social inclusion. A key priority in the 2017 strategy concerned 'working together', which emphasised increased social participation and activity (City of Tampere, 2017). Similarly, the 2013 strategy highlighted the strengthening of participation in service development and decision-making, and enabling self-determination (City of Tampere, 2013). The latter strategy also raised concerns about segregation, stating that the most important challenges facing the city were unemployment, growing welfare disparities and future demographic changes.

Given that the city strategies are fairly broad in scope, their priorities are further specified in various policies, programmes and action plans. Participation is a core principle embedded in key spatial planning documents, such as the Master Plan for the City Centre (City of Tampere, 2016) – which is updated during each four-year council term – and the Programme for Local Detailed Planning (City of Tampere, 2023b), which presents comprehensive spatial plans for the city's most important development projects. In addition, the city's Guidelines for Housing and Land Use Policy 2022–2025 (City of Tampere, 2022c) endorses a resident-centred approach to strengthening participation, and it also includes a separate Annex dedicated to the topic (City of Tampere, 2022b).

Participation and inclusion plans

The more specific goals for participation and how they are to be achieved are laid out in the city's participation and inclusion plan (*osallisuus- ja yhteisöllisyysuunnitelma*). In recent years, these action plans have been drawn up at the start of each city council term in order to concretise how the city intends to deal with inclusion and participation over the coming years (City of Tampere, 2023g).

The first such plan was formulated in 2016 with key focus areas including participation at the city and neighbourhood levels; partnerships with civil society organisations and businesses; and voluntary activities (City of Tampere, 2018). The priorities set out in the most recent participation plan, published in 2023 (City of Tampere, 2023f), include increasing the impact of participation; creating new ways of supporting communities and people's autonomy; and enhancing leadership and skills relating to participatory approaches.

Key focus areas

Digital participation has been a particular focus for the City of Tampere in recent years. Here, specific actions include the construction of a digital platform capable of hosting all relevant information about ongoing participation- and citizen engagement-related initiatives (Interview 18, 2023), as well as the recent updating of the Tampere.Finland mobile app (City of Tampere, 2023h) in order to provide residents with a direct route to relevant surveys and participation opportunities. The app can also be used to make suggestions for city improvements, for instance concerning the maintenance of streets and parks, or to report defects in the built environment.

Another of the administration's focus area has been finding ways to strengthen civic engagement opportunities, such as through financial support, cooperation networks, training and advice. The role of civic engagement is particularly pronounced in the city's vibrant third and fourth sectors, where civil society organisations play an important role in promoting social inclusion and wellbeing through bringing in external funding (Interview 18, 2023).

Strengthening opportunities for volunteering represents yet another focus area, with such opportunities considered important for promoting the wellbeing of individuals and communities. According to the evaluation of the city's participation model (City of Tampere, 2018), there remains plenty of untapped potential in relation this.

Key approaches for participation in Tampere

The City of Tampere has adopted several public participation approaches aimed at engaging residents in spatial planning, as well as planning of the city's activities, services and finances. These actions are implemented at various stages, from preparation of policies and plans, to decision-making and implementation.

As previously discussed, while participation in Finland is often stipulated by law or strongly encouraged by national policies, it is the municipality that ultimately determines which participatory processes are selected and how they are executed.

Councils and interest groups for specific population groups

The Local Government Act states that municipalities must ensure residents have the opportunity to participate and exert influence. Towards this end, the law requires that municipalities establish councils to represent specific population groups, including young people, older people and people with disabilities. The City of Tampere has also established an immigrant council, a Roma working group and a children's parliament (City of Tampere, n.d.).

The purpose of these councils and interest groups is to ensure the voices of those they represent are considered in the preparation of policies and plans, and in decision-making. Here, there is a strong focus on engaging children and youth.

Alongside the Tampere Children's Parliament, which is a channel for primary school children to have their say in decision-making, the Tampere Youth Council plays an important role in organising events, launching initiatives and preparing statements on matters concerning young people (City of Tampere, n.d.).

Surveys

According to the experts interviewed for this study (Interview 18, 2023), surveys are the most widely used participatory method employed by the City of Tampere, largely due to the fact that they are an effective way of reaching many people and relatively easy to implement. Some surveys are addressed to all Tampere residents, while others are targeted at more specific population groups.

Regularly recurring surveys include those on wellbeing and health, as well as surveys targeting families with children aged four years old, or alternatively those with a six year old (City of Tampere, 2023c). In addition, surveys are also used to further develop forms of participation. For instance, in 2022, the city carried out a survey on the experiences, views and wishes of residents concerning participatory approaches.

GIS-based surveys, where respondents share their perspectives on a specific topic through an online map survey, have also grown in importance. One such example is a large map-based survey on safe and sustainable mobility in the Tampere region, conducted in 2023 (Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, 2023). Surveys are also frequently used in land use planning, especially when it comes to the preparation of detailed and comprehensive plans (Interview 18, 2023).

Dialogue-based approaches

The City of Tampere also engages with residents through citizen dialogue and discussion-based methods. This may take place face-to-face, digitally or in hybrid form. Some methods are based on verbal communication, while others are chat-based and so take a written form.

Various projects and initiatives have been launched with the objective of developing new forms of dialogue-based participation. One example is the Digital Citizens' Panel (*Digitaalinen kansalaispaneeli*), conducted in Tampere City Region as part of the nationwide Well Said (*Hyvin sanottu*) initiative, which sought to create safe discussion environments (City of Tampere, 2022a). The panel involved participants sharing their views on a specific issue under the guidance of a trained moderator.

In 2022, a 'Large Regional Discussion' (*Suuri seutukeskustelu*) was organised as part of the project, focusing on mobility issues in the Tampere region (Tampere City Region, 2022). Here, the aim was not to seek consensus or find concrete solutions, but gain a general overview of the topic based on the perspectives of the 400 participants. The event was organised into two phases, the first of which involved groups of 5–10 people sharing their experiences of everyday mobility (walking, cycling, public transport, car) and perspectives on mobility issues. In the second

phase, a written discussion was arranged on an online platform, attracting many older participants in particular. According to the event organisers, arranging it digitally enabled new, wider-scale ways of contributing to the development of common issues (Interview 18, 2023).

Participatory budgeting and crowdfunding

The popularity of participatory budgeting has grown in Finland over recent years, with around a third of the country's municipalities currently making use of it. The increased use of this citizen engagement approach is related to the 2015 reform of the Local Government Act, which placed increased emphasis on municipalities enabling residents to participate in the planning of municipal finances (Ylä-Tuuhonen, 2022). Essentially, participatory budgeting involves the municipality allocating a sum of funding that residents – having engaged in discussions – can allocate to specific actions and interventions, typically related to a pre-defined theme.

Two parallel projects implemented in 2013–2015 with national funding from the Neighbourhood Development Programme sought to move forward participatory budgeting practices in Tampere (ARA, 2016a). Firstly, a University of Tampere-led research project, Participatory Budgeting in Community-Driven Urban Planning (*Osallistuva budjetointi asukaslähtöisessä kaupunkisuunnittelussa*), explored participatory budgeting as a tool for neighbourhood development and citizen-led urban planning (TaSSu, n.d.). The project aimed to identify well-functioning European experiences of participatory budgeting and then test these practices in the accompanying *OmaTesoma* project (ARA, 2016b).

Since 2020, two city-wide rounds of participatory budgeting have been carried out in Tampere, each with a specific thematic focus: children and young people's wellbeing (2020–2021) and safe everyday life (2022–2023). Each cycle saw €450,000 allocated to participatory budgeting, distributed evenly across the city. The City of Tampere coordinated the process, while residents, associations, organisations and other actors proposed projects and decided which ones should be implemented (City of Tampere, 2023d).

In 2020, over 380 initial suggestions were submitted by Tampere residents. These were assessed by the city administration, with those deemed feasible to implement taken forward to a second, workshop phase. Here, participants refined the suggestions down to 120 concrete proposals, following which experts from the city put together a cost estimate for each plan. In the subsequent voting phase, every Tampere resident aged 12 and over was given two votes (City of Tampere, 2023e). This was the first time minors in the city had the opportunity to influence the use of common tax resources on an equal footing with adults at such a scale. Voting was possible online at the *Mun Tampere* website and at four voting events across the city. Nearly 3,000 people exercised their right to vote, resulting in 12 projects in different parts of the city going ahead. The final, implementation phase started in early 2021, with the chosen projects realised by the City of Tampere, sometimes in collaboration with partners.

Among the projects realised in the 2020–2021 participatory budgeting cycle were the launch of a digital youth centre to provide support for mental wellbeing; the construction of various recreational facilities, including skate parks; and the upgrading of facilities at public beaches and school yards (City of Tampere, 2023e). Many of the projects realised in the 2022–2023 cycle, meanwhile, focused on recreation and sport, as well as on engaging young people (City of Tampere, 2024). In addition to the funding provided by the City of Tampere, parishes in the Tampere region have their own participatory budgeting projects, with a total of €51,000 allocated in 2022 to activities strengthening the wellbeing of children and young people (Tampereen seurakunnat, n.d.).

The city also supports resident- and community-based action in Tampere through crowdfunding. This was first tested in 2019, when €20,000 was reserved for piloting campaigns that would contribute to revitalising the city, promoting a sense of community, supporting residents' participation, and strengthening the distinctiveness of local neighbourhoods (City of Tampere, 2019). The funding was distributed to the best-performing resident and non-resident organisations that met certain criteria.

Box 7 elaborates on the implementation of participatory planning approaches Tampere's Hiedanranta district.

Box 7. Participatory approaches in the development of Hiedanranta

The Hiedanranta district in western Tampere is a former industrial area currently undergoing large-scale transformation, which upon completion will see 25,000 new residents and 10,000 jobs brought into the area (Hiedanranta, n.d.-a). While the physical reconstruction process only began in 2024, the transformation of Hiedanranta was initiated a decade earlier and involved various development projects with a strong participatory focus. These included a project started in 2015 whereby the City of Tampere leased buildings at a reduced cost in order to enable community activities. The city's cultural services played an important role in this, while associations and civic organisations could apply for support from the city to organise free events. The overarching intention was to encourage new forms of citizen participation in the early stages of redevelopment (Tapio, 2019).

Several concrete initiatives were implemented as part of the 2016–2019 Dwellers in Agile Cities research project, which focused on citizen-led urban development and temporary spaces. The project was led by Tampere University in close collaboration with various partners, including the Hiedanranta Development Programme, the City of Tampere, and students from Delft University in the Netherlands (Tampere Universities, n.d.). One

representative initiative was the construction of the Hiedanranta sauna, which began as an idea put forward by a group of local sauna activists and was implemented collaboratively by the actors involved. The sauna was completed in 2019, and since then local community members have been centrally involved in its operation and organising various related activities (See Figure 15).

In addition, several other projects have been undertaken in Hiedanranta in collaboration with various actors and organisations. Examples include KIERTO, which had a circular economy focus; Hiedanranta MaaS; which involved experimenting with new kinds of mobility services in the area (Hiedanranta, n.d.-b); the construction of Finland's largest indoor concrete skate park, carried out by a local skateboarding association; and the establishment of a legal graffiti wall. According to the City of Tampere, Hiedanranta is a meeting place for a wide range of cultural activities. As such, a future challenge is ensuring civic activities and activism remain in the area once construction is completed and the new residents arrive (Hiedanranta, n.d.-a).

Figure 15. The community-based sauna in Hiedanranta



Source: City of Tampere, Laura Vanzo

5.1.3 Organisation and implementation of participatory processes

Tampere's participation team plays a central role in organising and implementing public participation-related work in the city (Interview 18, 2023). This includes, among other things, guiding preparation of the city's participation and inclusion plan; supporting various units within the city organisation; steering cooperation with stakeholder groups; providing information about ongoing participation activities to the general public; and coordinating participatory budgeting.

The city administration does not, however, have a hierarchical structure, meaning the team does not lead on all the city's participation activities. In fact, the participation team is relatively small, and its work relies largely on collaboration with other city administration units, which operate quite independently (Interview 18, 2023). For instance, the city's urban planning unit has its own experts working to find more coherent, participatory ways of working on urban planning and development projects.

Informants highlighted the importance of identifying which actors and stakeholders should be involved at the different stages of a project (Interview 18, 2023). For instance, engaging with the main residents' associations and other organisations, as well as businesses and any potential future actors, was highlighted as key to urban development projects. While the involvement of specific actors and stakeholders is considered on a case-by-case basis, the city also has ongoing, more formalised engagement with stakeholders through a variety of networks.

As previously outlined, participation is emphasised in various Finnish legal and national policy frameworks concerning planning and urban development. According to interviewees, these undoubtedly impact the work carried out by the City of Tampere, although they do not typically provide concrete guidance on how participation should be realised.

In relation to spatial planning, the Land Use and Building Act (1999) defines the minimum level of participation. Particularly for larger projects, however, the city goes far beyond what is required by law when engaging with residents and other stakeholders (Interview 18, 2023). Moreover, the Local Government Act (2015) sets out a legal framework in which participation is strongly emphasised. While the act does not specify exactly how participation and engagement should be organised, it has led to participatory budgeting becoming increasingly popular in Finnish municipalities, including Tampere. This exemplifies how national legislation influences the participation work carried out in cities and neighbourhoods.

According to interviewees, national policy also impacts local-level activities through specific programmes that set the parameters of urban policy, including the types of state funding available to city authorities (Interview 18, 2023). For instance, many of the Tampere initiatives discussed in this chapter have relied on funding from national policy programmes. Interviewees noted, however, that the current government programme (Finnish Government, 2023) does not make any concrete mention of measures targeting specific neighbourhoods, which may lead to Finnish cities initiating fewer such projects than has been the case in past years (Interview 18, 2023).

Nevertheless, given the priorities set out in its city strategy, the Tampere administration has decided that area-based regeneration efforts will continue with funding from the city. This demonstrates that while national policies may influence city-level policy and planning measures, it is ultimately the municipalities that set the direction of actions carried out locally.

5.1.4 Key takeaways

When it comes to strengthening inclusion in local communities, Finland's national policy landscape is characterised by a strong focus on participation. This can be seen in key legislation steering spatial planning and the governance of municipalities, as well as in various urban development-related national policies and programmes. Among other things, the latter have sought to engage local residents (especially difficult-to-reach groups) in the planning of neighbourhoods and their services, and strengthen cooperation between municipalities and the private, third and fourth sectors. Several of these national programmes have provided funding to urban development projects, thereby concretely contributing to the adoption of new approaches aimed at strengthening social inclusion and counteracting segregation in Finnish cities.

The City of Tampere's evaluation of its participation model reports that existing participation channels in the city are generally regarded as well-established and effective (City of Tampere, 2018). Even so, new approaches and methods are continually being developed in order to engage with a broader range of people. This is driven by concerns that some citizens remain uncertain about the actual impact of their involvement once decisions are made and plans realised.

Another mechanism highlighted in the evaluation are the various district networks, which are regarded as strengthening a neighbourhood's sense of community. According to interviewees, local residents have appreciated city employees being

more frequently on the ground and closer to the population in neighbourhood-level projects (Interview 18, 2023).

On the other hand, both the interviewees and the City of Tampere's own evaluation call for more effective city-level governance structures, as well as improved internal coordination of citizen participation processes, particularly given that citizen engagement is a core element of the work carried out in both city-wide and neighbourhood-level projects. Better integration of participation into existing activities and functions – a key principle of the city's current participation and inclusion model – can help contribute to this (City of Tampere, 2023g). Here, interviewees pointed to the need for a cultural shift among city employees on how their everyday work can strengthen participation and inclusion (Interview 18, 2023).

5.2 Denmark

Public participation has been central to Danish spatial planning since the 1970s, when the country's planning system underwent substantial changes. These changes were linked to extensive reforms of municipal and regional structures and functions; decentralisation of the planning authority; and extensive modifications made to the built environment in the wake of the 1969 Urban Renewal Act, which were frequently met by protests from citizens who felt excluded from the decision-making process (Gottschalk, 1984).

Over the ensuing decades, municipalities have sought to improve not only how planning-related information is given to the public, but the conditions for local-level debates. Thus, despite being a key feature of the national Planning Act, public participation is today mainly managed and regulated at the local level. As noted by (Galland & Enemark, 2015): 'Together with local plans, planning proposals at the local level must be submitted for public debate, inspection and objection for at least eight weeks before they are finally adopted. Public participation is thus regarded as a significant democratic means through which objectives for economic development and environmental improvement are to be met.'

A 2005 survey conducted by Sørensen et al. (2005) revealed that planning authorities at both the regional and municipal level use public participation to gather ideas from the public and identify potential problems. Thus, there is an important 'bottom-up' component – evidenced by the Senior Friendly Copenhagen initiative (explored below) – whereby local- and neighbourhood-level participation can provide a relevant knowledge base for upper-level decision-making processes.

5.2.1 The role of participation in national policies and planning

Legal frameworks

At the national level, public participation is emphasised in various Danish policy and legal frameworks. Of particular importance is the Danish Planning Act, which regulates spatial planning at different territorial levels and sets the minimum requirements for public participation. Denmark, however, is strongly decentralised when it comes to spatial planning, with municipalities assuming primary responsibility for land use, and public participation generally implemented through local-level tools and practices (Danish Ministry of the Environment, 2012). For instance, local planning authorities decide how discussion materials should be distributed, how citizens' meetings are arranged, and which specific tools should be used. While several municipalities have developed community democracy policies, others have experimented with more informal approaches prior to the commencement of formal planning processes (Danish Ministry of the Environment, 2012).

As noted by Marzuki (2015), there are two main levels of public participation in Denmark: firstly, submitting ideas and proposals before plans are prepared; and, secondly, expressing opinions and objections through hearings and consultations once a plan has been published. Legislative reforms have meant participation has become increasingly digitalised since 2011. Now, in the interests of ensuring transparency in the planning process, all planning documents – including consultation responses – are published on the online public consultation portal (Høringsportalen, 2024). Furthermore, in 2018, the Danish parliament introduced a new tool for direct democracy called 'Citizen's Initiative', which enables Danish citizens to place an item of interest on the parliamentary agenda if at least 50,000 people support it (Danish Parliament, 2018).

The Act on Urban Renewal and Development of Cities (*Byfornyelsesloven*), which aims to stimulate development and transformation of Denmark's most disadvantaged urban areas, is also relevant to public participation. It is a prerequisite for area renewal that local stakeholders are involved in the planning process. Towards this end, the relevant municipality must not only prepare an urban renewal programme setting out the initiatives involved, but establish binding cooperation with the affected citizens and parties (Danish Ministry of Social Affairs, Housing and Elderly, 2003).

Engagement of diverse population groups

Another area pertinent to public participation is the work promoting local sustainable development carried out under Local Agenda 21 (LA21). As Agger (2010) observes, LA21 schemes appear to pursue more bottom-up approaches compared to traditional methods of promoting environmental policies. In Copenhagen especially, LA21 schemes have been shown to promote participatory processes, with local authorities actively involving citizens. Particular attention has been paid to

including people with different ethnic backgrounds, as well as generally less active citizens, in sustainable development decisions (Agger, 2010). Within the LA 21 framework, Agger (2010) has identified three main participatory approaches:

- *The network approach*, which aims to connect LA21 activities to existing networks, even those not necessarily involved with environmental issues;
- *The integrated approach*, which aims to expand discussions about sustainable development to different issues and policy areas (travelling, lifestyle, food production, education, health and community empowerment), thereby cross-sectorally involving a broader range of stakeholders; and
- *The canvassing approach*, which aims to increase direct involvement by soliciting target groups typically less engaged in environmental issues.

In Denmark, particular emphasis is placed on the public participation of children and young people. Here, the National Council for Children (*Børnerådet*) is responsible not only for identifying which aspects of society impact on children's rights, but ensuring children's voices are heard. When it comes to involving youth in policy-making, however, the process is consultative rather than legally binding (European Commission, 2022). Even so, youth panels – typically consisting of a group of young people from a specific target group – are widespread at the national level. Meanwhile, at municipal level, the consultation of young people relies on local youth councils.

Finally, three key initiatives have been launched by the national Association of Municipalities (*Kommunernes Landsforening*) – which represents Denmark's 98 municipalities – under the umbrella of local welfare and democracy. First, the Adult Assessment Method 2.0, which seeks to improve the quality of social services by involving citizens with disabilities (Social Welfare Agency, 2022). Second, an approach named 'better citizens' dialogue' (*bedre borgerdialog*), which aims to enhance face-to-face dialogue between citizens and institutions, thereby ensuring citizens feel heard at a time when participation processes are becoming increasingly digitalised (Komponent, n.d.). Third, an approach called 'co-created governance' (*samskabt styrning*), which aims to de-bureaucratise the public sector (Samskabt Styrning, n.d.).

5.2.2 Public participation in Copenhagen's urban development projects

As discussed, municipalities enjoy considerable autonomy when it comes to deciding how public participation in urban development should be implemented. In the case of Copenhagen, there is no strict approach for involving its citizens, and therefore little clear framework or systematic coordination of such work at the municipal level. Instead, the methods employed to realise participation vary according to the particular project and which branch of the city administration is involved.

Figure 16. Superkilen park In Copenhagen's Nørrebro district of Copenhagen, designed to bring people together and promote unity



Source: CC BY-SA 4.0, Lorie Shaul

One interviewee reported that, having initiated a project in Copenhagen, the municipality tends to commission consultants to develop and concretise the participatory process (Interview 15, 2023). Sometimes the parameters are already outlined by the municipality, while in other cases the consultants have more room to manoeuvre in determining which participation methods to use and how to implement the process.

Local citizens' committees are also important to public participation in Copenhagen. In 2005, a system of 12 local committees, each with 23 elected members, was introduced in the municipality. These committees provide important support for civil society activities, as well as to citizens applying for community project funding (Engberg, 2018).

Since 2015 especially, the City of Copenhagen has sought to strengthen citizen involvement via better internal collaboration and knowledge sharing across its seven municipal committees (Employment and Integration; Children and Youth; Culture and Leisure; Social; Health and Care; Technical and Environmental; Economic) (City of Copenhagen, 2019). This focus arose from a recognition that common municipal principles on how citizens should be involved in city planning and development were needed (Municipality of Copenhagen, 2016). The process began with the municipal initiative 'Together for the City' (*Sammen om*

Byen), which laid out the following five principles/requirements for engaging with residents (City of Copenhagen, n.d.-b):

1. Dialogue is a core task of urban development;
2. Early dialogue (occurring in the early stages of the decision-making process);
3. Clear dialogue (through clear information);
4. Engaging dialogue (through the creation of opportunities to meet and discuss); and
5. Diverse dialogue (engaging different population groups).

The principles were drawn up following a dialogue-based consultation approach involving a survey, interviews with citizens, and consultations with local committees with local citizens and committees. Approximately 2,200 citizens participated in the survey, which revealed a number of challenges. These included a need for strengthened cooperation and dialogue with the municipal administration; inadequate opportunities for city involvement and lack of clarity concerning how Copenhagen residents can engage in dialogue with the municipality (City of Copenhagen, 2016).

While relevant as guidelines, the principles are not legally binding and fail to specify how they are to be translated into practice. Thus, at the city level, participation is framed more as a vision than as structured guidelines. On the other hand, the city administration does offer six relevant initiatives that can be pursued with relatively limited financial resources (Borgerrepræsentationens Sekretariat, 2019):

1. Open meetings at the city hall;
2. Talks on specific issues between citizens and politicians (four talks annually in the form of morning or evening meetings);
3. Better information for citizens (online calendar of events, municipal websites);
4. Open meeting times (open meetings with politicians, e.g. in libraries);
5. The mobile 'Copenhagen unit' (meetings organised in buses, caravans, minivans, cargo bikes), designed to reach busy residents who do usually not participate in other forms of meetings; and
6. English-language information for international residents.

One important way the City of Copenhagen seeks to facilitate public participation is through its various websites, apps and other digital platforms. These are used by the municipality to engage residents and provide information about ongoing projects, while citizens can use them to provide feedback and access relevant documents. The city website also includes a section that allows citizens to not only comment on existing projects, but directly engage with politicians and propose new

projects under the 'Co-create Copenhagen' initiative (City of Copenhagen, n.d.-b). In attempting to harness active citizen involvement in the advancement of environmental objectives, the initiative also offers a means of raising awareness around consumption habits. Despite the City of Copenhagen's assertion that such digital methods are effective in reaching a wide range of people, however, they in practice tend to favour resourceful digital users (Borgerrepræsentationens Sekretariat, 2019).

As the 'Co-create Copenhagen' initiative demonstrates, public participation is considered a crucial element in achieving the city's environmental goals, particularly Copenhagen's stated aim of becoming the world's first climate-neutral capital by 2025. Towards this end, various area-based initiatives have been implemented across the city, including several so-called 'Integrated Urban Renewal' projects. These involve the preparation of neighbourhood plans for climate adaptation, developed via a bottom-up process of public meetings and citizen working groups before being submitted for approval by the city council (Copenhagen Technical and Environmental Administration, 2012). The crucial role played by citizen involvement in these initiatives has led to stronger feelings of commitment and ownership by residents.

Figure 17. 'Walks and talks' carried out within the Senior Friendly Copenhagen project



Source: Lars Haugen Grenaker

Although all the city's initiatives seek to engage as wide an audience as possible, the difficulties of involving diverse groups in public participation are highlighted as a key challenge both in local participation documents (Borgerrepræsentationens Sekretariat, 2019) and by interviewees (Interview 15, 2023; Interview 16, 2023). Concerted local efforts have therefore been made to actively involve groups that may find it harder to participate in public meetings, and so urban development decisions. One example of this is the participation programme launched under the 'Senior Friendly Copenhagen' initiative, which targets the city's older citizens (see Box 8).

Box 8. Senior Friendly Copenhagen

In 2019, the City of Copenhagen's Health and Care Administration set in motion the Senior Friendly Copenhagen project by engaging private consultancy company COurban to map the needs of older people across all the city's neighbourhoods. The project – part of a wider campaign named 'A City For All' – aimed to improve the physical accessibility and liveability of Copenhagen's urban areas by actively involving the seniors living there (Health and Care Department of Copenhagen Municipality, 2022). More specifically, Senior Friendly Copenhagen revolved around eight main themes: 1) benches; 2) accessibility; 3) health and age friendliness; 4) public transport; 5) free time; 6) recreational activities; 7) community; and 8) identity.

The project was conducted as a public-private partnership between COurban and the Health and Care Administration, working in tandem with the Technical and Environment Administration. COurban was mainly responsible for engaging senior citizens through interviews, 'walks and talks' (see Figure 17) and focus group meetings, while the municipality set up an online participatory mapping tool allowing seniors to offer their opinions on their neighbourhood via a digital map. Towards this end, the GIS-based citizen engagement platform Maptionnaire was employed. However, the platform does not allow parameters to be imposed in terms of users, meaning that in the case of Senior Friendly Copenhagen only 60 of the 300 inputs received came from the target group (i.e. seniors).

More generally, the project relied on a variety of flexible approaches. For instance, when the COVID-19 pandemic put an end to collective in-person participation activities, the project turned to telephone interviews or one-on-one outdoor meetings. In-depth interviews with older people from across the city focused on local neighbourhoods, including their identity; access to public transport; meeting places; functions; accessibility; community; neighbourhood changes (such as gentrification); and whether the area could be considered senior friendly or not. These interviews together with information gleaned from focus groups and elderly council meetings – formed the basis of a

qualitative study produced for the project (Health and Care Department of Copenhagen Municipality, 2022).

Public participation approaches are often hampered by a lack of diversity among those engaging in such processes. While this is partly due to the methods used by the initiating actors when spreading information about the process, it also relates to the fact that participation works on a voluntary basis. Thus, although engagement for Senior Friendly Copenhagen achieved a diverse spread in terms of gender and age (participants were aged 60–90), as well as degree of functional impairment or disability, the participants were mainly resourceful, active seniors of Danish origin. Nevertheless, according to a COurban employee, one of the most valuable aspects of the participatory process was working with people with disabilities, as this provided entirely different views on how neighbourhoods are experienced and the challenges a lack of physical accessibility can create (Interview 15, 2023).

Inputs gathered from participatory processes were translated into concrete interventions. Most notably, around 500 senior-friendly benches – four different types were designed in order to meet the different needs of senior citizens – were installed across the city (City of Copenhagen, n.d.-a). It is also anticipated that the inputs gathered by the project will feed into development of the City of Copenhagen's senior strategy (Interview 15, 2023).

5.2.3 Key takeaways

Denmark employs a multifaceted approach to participatory planning that is reflective of its decentralised planning system. This allows municipalities to tailor their approaches to local-level circumstances, with methods ranging from public hearings to digital platforms enabling remote participation. Moreover, urban renewal programmes often seek citizens' involvement in shaping the future of their neighbourhoods, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility.

Significant emphasis is placed on participation in Denmark's national strategies and policies, with, for instance, the national Planning Act stipulating minimum requirements for public participation. The introduction of the 'Citizen's Initiative' tool in 2018 has further empowered citizens to actively engage with parliamentary agendas, demonstrating a clear commitment to direct democracy. On top of this, the Act on Urban Renewal and Development of Cities has underscored the perceived importance of involving stakeholders in shaping the future of Denmark's urban areas.

At the local level, Denmark's municipalities enjoy considerable autonomy when organising participatory processes, including the flexibility to choose methods suited to their specific projects and objectives. Thus, while some municipalities may opt for consultancy-led projects initiated by the public, others may assume a more direct role in managing participation, particularly in urban renewal programmes. Local citizens' committees also play a vital role, serving as intermediaries between residents and municipal authorities.

Senior Friendly Copenhagen serves as an example of an initiative that has successfully promoted social inclusion, actively involving seniors – including those with disabilities – in early planning stages. Such initiatives empower citizens to have a say in decisions affecting their daily lives, ultimately leading to more inclusive, accessible urban environments. Nevertheless, challenges persist in ensuring diverse groups are adequately represented in participation endeavours, with ongoing efforts needed to address this issue.

The participatory planning methods and examples explored in this section highlight the numerous opportunities available for increasing citizen engagement, ensuring more informed decision-making, and addressing specific community needs. Through leveraging digital tools and platforms, municipalities can expand their reach and involve a broader audience. On the other hand, ensuring participation is truly inclusive may not always be straightforward, as some citizens face particular barriers, such as limited digital access. Additionally, translating participatory inputs into concrete interventions can be complex, requiring effective communication and follow-through. As Copenhagen's experiences demonstrate, achieving consistency in participatory methods across different projects remains an ongoing challenge, necessitating the development of systematic guidance.

5.3 Norway

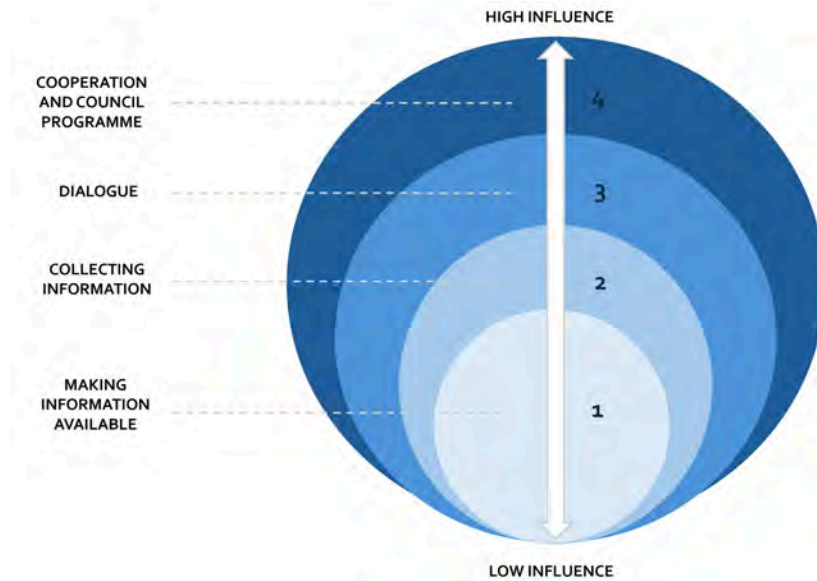
Since the 1990s, public participation has played a key role in spatial planning in Norway (Gohari et al., 2020). This is exemplified by the national Planning and Building Act (*Plan- og bygningsloven*), which dedicates a full section to the topic and its importance for local democracy (Planning and Building Act, 2008). In particular, the act states that anyone putting forward a planning proposal must ensure participation takes place, with municipalities being the main authorities responsible for ensuring the relevant requirements are met. Moreover, section 5.3 of the act highlights the importance of regional forums – arenas where the regional planning authority is required to map national, regional and municipal interests, coordinating them via regional and municipal plans (PBA §5.3).

Another relevant example is the government's 2014 national guide on public participation (Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, 2014), which stresses the importance of planning for community development. More specifically, it lays out four areas crucial to flexible, consistent public participation processes:

1. *Transparency*, to ensure everyone affected by a plan has equal access to the information necessary to protect their interests.
2. *Efficient management*, to facilitate good coordination between the multitude of actors and interests involved, as well as ensure the public is adequately involved and conflicts well facilitated.
3. *Universal design*, to ensure more inclusive, democratic communities. Here, there are several national-level initiatives and goals aimed at not only making communities more physically accessible, but enhancing information and communication technology (ICT) access through the digitalisation of various services (Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2015).
4. *Equality*, to ensure all the entities involved and affected by planning processes can participate on equal terms. In particular, equal involvement from the very start of the planning process is highlighted as central to inclusive planning.

The guide (Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, 2014) also lays out a number of participation methods that municipalities can implement, ranging from the traditional (e.g. public hearings) to more complex approaches, such as collective mapping, workshops and citizen panels. These methods are classified according to four levels of participation, as shown in Figure 18.

Figure 18. Circle of influence in planning showing different levels of participation



Source: Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, 2014

In Figure 18, the smallest circle (1) represents the lowest level of influence, referring to the distribution of information that can be made available without any further facilitation measures. The second circle encompasses knowledge collection as a broader basis for decision-making, thereby necessitating an open process and greater opportunities to participate. The third circle, which concerns dialogue-based participation, incorporates a multitude of methods (e.g. conferences, workshops, future methods) aimed at expanding opportunities to exert influence. Finally, the fourth circle – the highest level of influence – refers to cooperation and council programme, includes concrete negotiations between stakeholders and other actors impacted by the planning process (Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, 2014).

As discussed below, despite the stress placed on equal participation in national strategies, ensuring such participation in a planning process's early phases has become a hotly contested topic in Norwegian planning debates.

5.3.1 The role of participation in national policies and planning

Legal frameworks

The principles of consultation and public scrutiny are highlighted in both the older 1985 Planning and Building Act and its 2008 replacement. In particular, two requirements are emphasised:

1. Planning proposals shall be circulated for comments within an agreed time limit to the government, regional and municipal authorities, as well as other public bodies, private organisations and institutions affected by the proposal.
2. Planning proposals shall be presented for public scrutiny, meaning at least one copy must be easily accessible in order to allow everyone to familiarise themselves with its contents.

As noted in Falleth et al. (2011), these principles constitute the two central pillars of participation in Norwegian planning. Nevertheless, translating them into planning practice is far from straightforward, especially when it comes to detailed local planning. The changes undergone by Norwegian planning over recent decades has shaped how participation actually takes place, as well as how the various obstacles to public participation are regarded. Neoliberal trends have led to the increased presence of private actors in urban development, with powerful developers now responsible for initiating the majority of Norway's detailed zoning plans (Stjernström et al., 2023).

The initial, informal stage of zoning plan proposals has been subject to particular criticism in national planning debates, with local authorities (i.e. municipalities) and developers coming together in closed meetings to discuss proposals and ideas. In this phase, the statutory requirements for consultation and participation do not formally apply (Stjernström et al., 2023). Instead, the only legal requirement is that beginning of the plan implementation should be announced, although the timing of this is 'legally unclear and unknown in practice' (Falleth et al., 2011). As such, actual participation only takes place once plans have been drafted by developers and considered by the local authorities, thereby limiting the scope for public involvement in the planning process.

Implementation of participation

A survey conducted by DOGA (Design and Architecture Norway) on municipalities' experiences with participation in planning suggests that a lack of participation in the early phase (municipal plan) leads to higher levels of conflict during the zoning plan process (DOGA, 2017). Moreover, the survey showed that there is more public engagement in comprehensive municipal plans than in detailed zoning plans. This may be because traditional participatory methods (such as consultations and public hearings, which are the most widely adopted approaches in Norway) are more widely employed in comprehensive planning than zoning planning. The survey concluded that the type of participation promoted in Norwegian planning is generally geared towards informing, not involving, citizens.

Turning to the case of Sandnes, explored below, it should be noted that Norway's national guidelines for public participation, as well as the 2008 Planning and Building Act, place great emphasis on involving children and youth in planning

matters. While such involvement is not legally binding at the national level, the 2019 revision of the Local Government Act made it mandatory to have formal consultative youth bodies or councils at the municipal and county level. In addition, article 3 of the UN Convention on the Right of Children, as well as the Norwegian constitution, stipulate that children's perspectives should be reflected in municipal planning strategies (Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, 2020).

5.3.2 Sandnes: Involving children and youth in urban development

While most Norwegian municipalities tend to mainly use more traditional participatory methods (DOGA, 2017), some have tested and gone on to adopt more innovative approaches. The municipality of Sandnes – located in Rogaland County in Southwestern Norway, with a population of approximately 83,000 – represents an interesting case from this perspective. Sandnes is located near the larger city of Stavanger and, together with their surrounding municipalities, the two cities make up the Stavanger-Sandnes urban region. With a total population of approximately 240,000, Stavanger-Sandnes is the country's third largest urban region (Statistics Norway, 2024).

Figure 19. Aerial view of Sandnes



Source: CCO 1.0, Alexey Topolyanskiy

Sandnes's municipal authority has a long tradition of participation when it comes to planning and policy-making, and is particularly committed to involving children and youth beyond the minimum requirements set down in law.

More generally, the municipality must consider following key legal frameworks when considering matters of participation:

- The Planning and Building Act (2008) states that the municipality is responsible for ensuring any actor responsible for a planning proposal – whether public or private – facilitates a participatory engagement process. In particular, the municipality should ensure active participatory engagement with groups requiring special facilitation or attention, such as children and youth. Those unable to participate directly must be given other ways to participate.
- The Local Government Act (*Kommuneloven*) (Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, 2018) states that residents of a municipality or county can put forward proposals concerning the activities of the relevant authority. The municipal or county council itself is obliged to respond to a proposal if at least 2% of residents support it.
- The White Paper 15 (2022–2023) presenting the National Strategy for Equalising Social Health Conditions (*Folkehelsemeldinga – Nasjonal strategi for utjamning av sosiale helseforskjellar*) highlights the importance of participation, especially when it comes to children and young people, and public health work (Department of Health and Care, 2023).
- Regional planning guidelines and the societal part of municipal plans are developed in collaboration with citizens, civil society, businesses and other public organisations. Politically agreed-upon objectives and strategies are addressed in financial planning and other planning documents.

Sandnes's current municipal plan (Sandnes Municipality, 2023) includes a strategic focus on 'strengthening diversity and citizen involvement'. When preparing the plan, the municipality arranged open meetings and open office days at the city hall, to which children and young people were invited. The city also has elderly councils (required by law) and an immigrant council to help ensure the voices of diverse groups are heard during planning processes. In order to ensure equal opportunities to participate, arrangements are made to involve the relevant parties and interests early in planning processes – including private planning proposals.

While digital participation solutions are widely used, groups unable to participate directly or use such digital means are given opportunities to participate in other ways (e.g. information disseminated via mail or local newspapers). Efforts are also made to ensure the Sami population and national minorities are appropriately consulted and given the opportunity to participate in any planning processes affecting them.

In 2020, youth councils became a state requirement for all municipalities in Norway. In Sandnes, however, a youth council has already been in existence since 1997, setting a long tradition and high standards for the participation of young people. The council's main task is to raise matters and set goals on topics of particular concern to children and young people, such as mental health. Aside from the youth council, the municipality offers a number of other more informal participation opportunities, such as a panel for young people and a youth club (Interview 21, 2023).

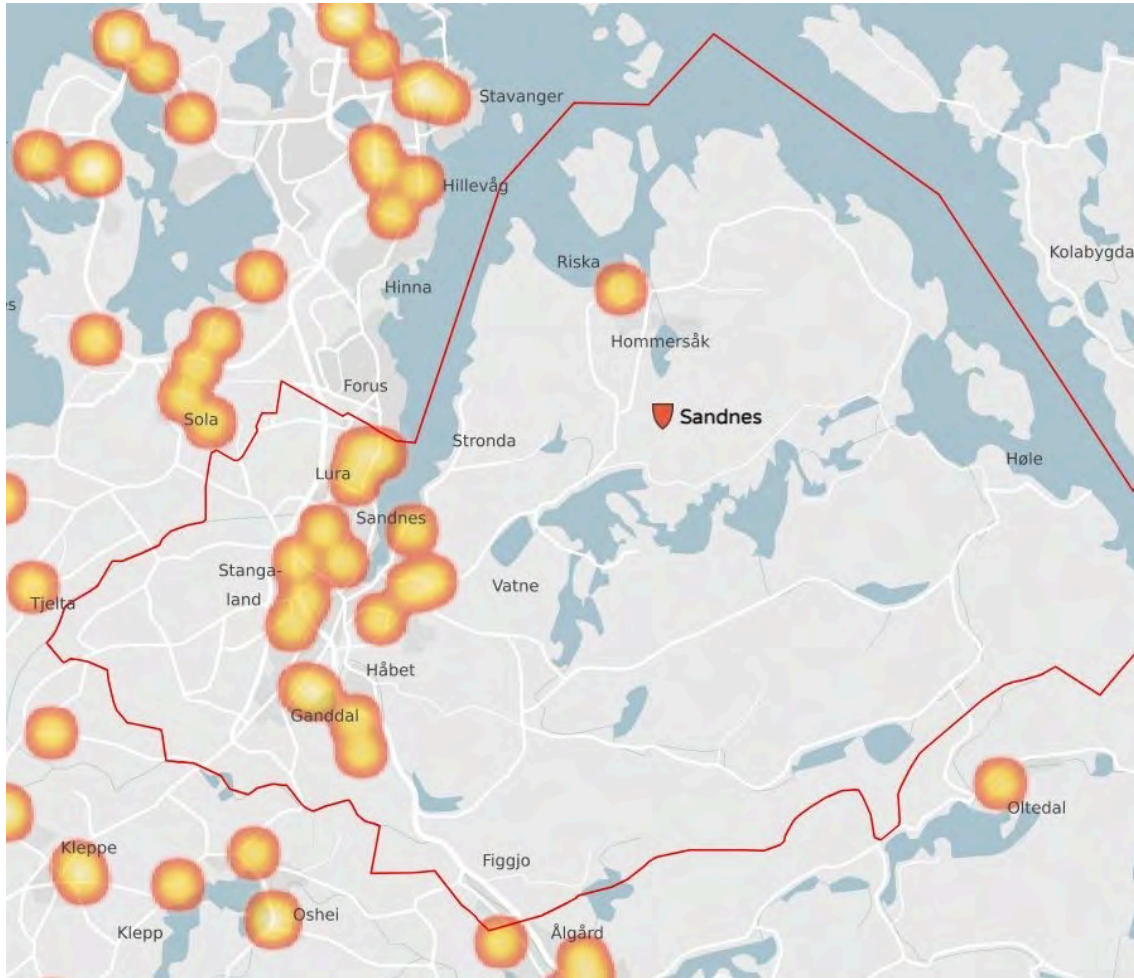
Sandnes's strong focus on child and youth participation can also be seen in the arena of urban development. One relevant example is the Children's City (*Barnas by*) project, initiated in 2008 when Sandnes was a European Capital of Culture. Children's City is an annual event based on three main themes: 1) cultural activities; 2) participation; and 3) urban development (Sandnes Municipality, 2022).

The *Barnetråkk* (Childrens' Track) approach is an important element of how Children's City is run. Essentially, *Barnetråkk* is a digital participation method that utilises an interactive web map to collect children's and young people's perspectives on how they use their local environment, which is then used to support municipal planning (Norsk Form, 2010). *Barnetråkk* was originally developed in the 1990s by Vestfold's county governor, but it was only in 2014 that the method was further refined by DOGA through the *Barnetråkk - barn i byen* project (DOGA, 2017). The purpose of this project was to increase the use of *Barnetråkk* in implementation; enhance knowledge about alternative participation measures; and obtain input from children and young people (Pedersen, 2019).

Section 5.1 of the Planning and Building Act specifies that municipalities must ensure active participation from groups in need of special follow-up, 'including children and young people' (Planning and Building Act, 2008). However, adopting *Barnetråkk* as a participation tool goes beyond the minimum requirements of the law – as such, it is voluntary act for municipalities.

The first efforts to implement *Barnetråkk* were made in 2006 through a collaboration between the Foundation for Design and Architecture in Norway (*Norsk Form*) and the Norwegian Mapping Authority (*Kartverket*). In 2009, it became possible to integrate *Barnetråkk* into the online web map (Map in the School) and since 2014 the tool has been available to use on both computers and mobile devices. Through placing a variety of symbols onto the interactive map, children can indicate their perspectives on their local environment, as well as plot the roads they use (*Barnetråkk*, n.d.). Gathering the preferences of children and young people in this way provides the basis for better political decision-making and planning. In this respect, interviewees (representatives of Sandnes municipality working on the participation of children and young people) observed that *Barnetråkk* and its interactive map are a key component of start-up meetings for local plans (Interview 21, 2023).

Figure 20. Schools in Sandnes Municipality adopting Barnetråkk



In Sandnes, considerable attention has been devoted to involving youth in urban development (Sandnes Municipality, 2015, 2023). For example, when Sandnes's municipal plans were being put together in 2015, the city's youth council participated in a so-called 'future workshop' (*fremtidsverksted*). This involved attendees – specifically citizens not typically involved in decision-making – expressing their opinions on what contributes to good urban living environments, as well as which areas of the municipality could be improved (DOGA, n.d.-a). More generally, future workshops are organised according to the following four main phases:

1. *Criticism phase*: Challenges and negative aspects of a place or initiative are highlighted.
2. *Positive phase*: Positive aspects are highlighted.
3. *Dream phase*: Participants formulate ideas on how a particular place, local environment or community should look and be.
4. *Specification phase*: Participants prioritise tasks/measures for which an action plan is then prepared.

The results of these workshops are reproduced onto maps, with green, yellow and red patches indicating opportunities or challenges of different degrees. The results are also summarised by the local Council for Children and Young People (BUBS) and used in preparatory work for the municipal masterplan. However, as noted by Bringeland (2017), there are challenges in meaningfully integrating the future workshops results into planning practices. For instance, the results are usually reported in the 'community' section (*samfunnsdel*) of the municipal masterplan, which is poorly anchored with the legally binding 'area' section (*arealdel*). Relatedly, it has often proved difficult to translate the workshop results into concrete planning recommendations.

Box 9 looks at two other participation-related initiatives in Norway – Folketråkk and Urban Living Labs – that utilise a variety of methods to engage relevant actors and stakeholder groups in urban development.

Box 9. Folketråkk and Urban Living Labs

Folketråkk is an approach currently being developed to integrate citizens' needs into planning processes, including both comprehensive municipal planning and detailed planning. It is based on the previously explored *Barnetråkk* tool, which as a pure mapping tool does not allow for deep involvement in decision-making. It is envisaged that *Folketråkk* will provide a national digital platform to support municipalities, planners and other actors attempting to involve citizens in community development. The goal is also to reduce conflicts provoked by citizens not feeling involved, particularly in the zoning plan phase. There are currently two pilot versions of *Folketråkk* available in the municipalities of Drammen and Flesberg. When completed, *Folketråkk* will consist of four main features (DOGA, 2020):

1. A *toolbox* (for planners) that recommends which methods and tools should be used in different plan types and phases;
2. A *knowledge base* (for citizens, municipalities and developers) built up gradually throughout participation processes, including data relevant to specific interventions;
3. A *planning and progress tool* (for residents), which provides the population with information about ongoing projects and which priorities are being set in different phases;
4. A '*say your opinion*' section (for residents) where citizens can access information, express opinions and get feedback from municipalities.

Urban Living Labs is an experimental platform designed to explore, co-create and implement new ideas, technologies and policies that can help improve the quality of urban life, sustainability and the overall urban environment. Urban Living Labs offers a means of handling multi-dimensional challenges in urban areas, often with a multi-level perspective provided by citizens, academics and actors from the public, private and voluntary sectors. Although no Norwegian city currently uses Urban Living Labs in a systematic, holistic way, several have adopted a number of the methodology's main points in their work – for instance, in connection to smart city projects.

In Norway, the Research Centre on Zero Emission Buildings has developed a variety of pilot projects that function as Living Labs in different cities (e.g. Trondheim, Bergen, Larvik, Oslo). The purpose of these pilot projects is to investigate interactions between different user groups, materials and technologies in CO₂-neutral buildings. The Norwegian Research Council is helping to finance the initiative, while the Norwegian University of Science and Technology and the research institute SINTEF are key research partners and developers. Various private companies are also contributing to the projects.

5.3.3 Key takeaways

In Norway, minimum requirements for public participation within spatial planning and building are set at the national level in the Planning and Building Act. Even so, municipalities enjoy considerable freedom when it comes to choosing specific participation tools and methods.

In general terms, the survey conducted by DOGA (2017) points to a situation whereby a lack of participation in the early phases of municipal plans leads to more frequent conflict in the zoning plan phase, which often occurs behind 'closed doors'. Furthermore, municipalities mostly adopt traditional participation methods geared towards informing rather than involving citizens. One reason for this is that more innovative methods – such as *Barnetråkk*, workshops or Living Labs – often require vast resources, including in terms of competence, which municipalities do not always have.

Nevertheless, more innovative approaches have been pursued in some contexts. In the municipality of Sandnes, for example, particular attention has been paid to engaging children and youth – a population group that often goes unheard. Here,

Barnetråkk and other youth involvement approaches have been adopted by the municipal authorities in order to include, inspire and engage people from a young age.

Such methods hold their own challenges, however. Generally, there appears to be more citizen engagement at the municipal plan level than in detailed zoning planning, which can provoke conflict among actors later in the planning process. Moreover, engaging young people in planning can be a complex task, as their perspectives are often varied and subject to change. From a young people's point of view, the main challenge is to be heard, which requires involvement at an early stage of the decision-making process, not simply commenting on decisions already taken.

Overall, the participatory approaches examined in this section demonstrate that advances have been made in overcoming barriers to engagement among segments of the population that have often proved difficult to involve. Among the benefits reaped by the municipal authorities in Sandes is that it has become easier to incorporate the needs and perspectives of the city's diverse population into spatial plans. Such knowledge is invaluable when it comes to implementing interventions that better correspond to the wishes of residents and other relevant actors, and moreover allows for the more efficient use of public funds.

5.4 Sweden

A progressive decentralisation of planning from the late 1980s onwards has seen public participation become a core element of spatial planning in Sweden (Rodela & Norss, 2023). While Swedish municipalities bear primary responsibility for physical planning, various national-level legislative and policy frameworks are in place to steer local-level development of the built environment.

Of particular importance in this context is the Planning and Building Act (PBL) (*Plan- och bygglagen*) (2010:900), which stipulates that municipalities must consult citizens in planning processes. Towards this end, national authorities are tasked with providing local and regional authorities with guidelines on how to implement appropriate public participation processes. Municipalities are also required to take into account a number of national objectives and international conventions.

Sweden's key national policies and legislative frameworks concerning spatial planning are laid out below, with particular attention paid to their public

participation and citizen engagement elements. Following this, the section focuses in on the Municipality of Umeå, where sustainability is held up as a key principle in all urban development work carried out, extensively supported by citizen dialogue and other public engagement approaches. In addition, the section sheds light on how participatory processes have been used in Uppsala's disadvantaged Gottsunda district, especially in relation to the challenge of imbalanced power relationships between planners and citizens.

5.4.1 The role of participation in national policies and planning

Legal frameworks and national objectives

Sweden's Planning and Building Act (PBL) (Boverket, 2023c) states that municipalities are responsible for the planning of land and water areas within their geographical boundaries, and bear sole authority when it comes to adopting relevant plans and pursuing implementation. This is usually referred to as the municipal planning monopoly (*Kommunalt Planmonopol*, 2023). The law also obliges municipalities to organise formal consultations when new comprehensive plans (*översiktsplaner*) and detailed development plans (*detaljplaner*) are being drawn up, or when changes are made to existing plans (Boverket, 2022d; Interview 22, 2023). Sweden's shift towards a decentralisation of spatial planning began in the late 1980s, driven by a desire to bring decision-making closer to citizens (Interview 22, 2023). Today, considerable weight is placed on citizen involvement in this arena, exemplified by various national objectives emphasising the importance of public participation in spatial planning processes (Interview 22, 2023).

Despite Sweden's high degree of decentralisation when it comes to planning processes, municipalities are nevertheless bound by a number of national-level objectives and conventions. Particularly relevant for social inclusion is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which highlights the built environment as an important factor in shaping the identity and self-image of children (Boverket, 2020). Since 2020, it has been a legal requirement in Sweden to include children and youth in spatial planning (Rodela & Norss, 2023). Relatedly, Boverket has developed guidelines on how the convention's principles can be applied to physical planning and urban development. In doing so, Boverket has sought to provide knowledge on how to create more equitable physical living environments and ensure children's rights throughout the planning process (Boverket, 2022a).

Also important in this context are the UN Agenda 2030's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 11 concerning sustainable cities and communities, and its target 11.3 of enhancing 'inclusive and sustainable urbanisation and capacity for participatory ... planning' (Global Goals, 2023). Towards this end, the government established the Swedish Council for Sustainable Cities (*Rådet för hållbara städer*), a partnership of authorities set up in 2017 to strengthen the capacity of municipalities in relation to SDG 11 (Boverket, 2023d; Hållbar stad, n.d.).

Implementation of participation

Swedish municipalities employ a variety of citizen engagement methods at different planning stages, with some authorities going significantly beyond what is required by law. More generally, Sweden's 290 municipalities have diverse ways of operating, shaped by their respective resources and opportunities, political leadership and organisational structure (Interview 22, 2023).

Boverket – as the central national authority on issues concerning physical planning, urban development, buildings and housing – offers guidelines and recommendations to the country's municipalities and regions. One relevant example here is Boverket's PBL Knowledge Bank, a compilation of approximately 1,800 web pages aimed at supporting those working on physical planning in Sweden (Boverket, n.d.). The PBL Knowledge Bank is divided into subject areas and includes guidelines on, among other things, regional, comprehensive and detailed planning. Boverket also provides guidance on fostering active citizen involvement in urban development, including soliciting participation among a range of actors – from professionals to future users of a place (Boverket, 2022b).

Another relevant governmental authority is the Swedish Agency for Participation (*Myndigheten för delaktighet*), which also issues guidance on planning-related issues, particularly in terms of making the built environment more physically accessible to all citizens regardless of age or physical capability (Swedish Agency for Participation, n.d.).

As part of its mission, Boverket showcases various examples of participatory planning methods used in Swedish municipalities (Interview 22, 2023). Here, it should be noted that innovative public participation approaches to planning are not limited to large municipalities. For instance, Borlänge municipality, in Dalarna County, has an architecture programme aimed specifically at children and young people (Boverket, 2024b), including camps for children where they can learn about designing their living environment (Interview 22, 2023). Umeå, explored in further detail below, is another medium-sized Swedish city with a strong focus on citizen engagement in physical planning, particularly when it comes to targeting children and young people.

5.4.2 Citizen dialogue and public engagement in Umeå

In Umeå – a municipality in Västerbotten County with a population of approximately 134,000 – citizen dialogue and other participatory approaches are well established within spatial planning and urban development. Moreover, sustainability is a core principle in all urban development work carried out in Umeå, from pursuing social wellbeing to climate neutrality. When it comes to development processes, the municipality utilises various initiatives and activities to gather

resident feedback. The resultant data is then used to create roadmaps or plans setting out concrete actions for improving the city (CrAFt, n.d.).

The role of culture in urban sustainability has been strongly emphasised in Umeå, which was designated a European Capital of Culture by the EU in 2014 (North Sweden, n.d.). This focus is reflected in a range of community engagement and empowerment initiatives – one example being the 2016 Frizon project, which involved working collaboratively with young girls from the city to transform a riverside space into a safe, inclusive environment (Umeå Municipality, 2024). Another relevant initiative is the Umecom programme (Umecom, n.d.), which aims to provide new ways of bringing Umeå residents into urban development processes, including through workshops or other gatherings.

Figure 21. Riverfront and Rådhusparken in Umeå



Source: Umeå Municipality, Sara Stenberg

Umeå is also one of 60 European cities participating in the EU-funded CrAFt (Creating Actionable Futures) project (North Sweden, 2022). Initiated in 2022, this three-year project is part of the EU's New European Bauhaus initiative, created with the intention of encouraging climate-neutral, beautiful and inclusive cities. Key focus areas include engagement with a wide range of stakeholders (e.g. citizens and communities; property owners and tenants; cultural, artistic and creative sectors; universities and schools of arts and design; students and youth communities) and testing collaborative local governance models (CrAFt, 2022).

A particularly noteworthy example of how the Municipality of Umeå has worked to engage residents in recent years can be seen in the neighbourhood dialogue (*stadsdelsdialog*) approach it carried out in 2019. This involved assorted forms of citizen dialogue across Umeå's different neighbourhoods, with the objective of better understanding what people appreciate or dislike about their local living environments, as well as what improvements they would like to see going forward (Municipality of Umeå, 2020). Another important aim was to build trust with the population around in urban development issues (Interview 23, 2023).

The initiative relied on various data and methods. First, a preliminary analysis of the socio-economic characteristics of different areas within the municipality was carried out using Statistics Sweden's Key Code System (NYKO) classification of sub-areas. More specifically, the analysis used demographic and socio-economic indicators on age groups, households, income and education levels, employment, and number of sick days reported (Municipality of Umeå, 2020). This was followed by workshops focused on Umeå's different city districts, which brought together professionals from a variety of fields, including architects, urban planners, landscape architects and traffic planners, as well as experts on gender equality, crime, culture, leisure, water issues and education. Subsequently, a number of participatory methods were employed, including a large-scale online survey of the population, street interviews (with 700 participants), digital dialogue (with 1,300 participants), and activities in local schools (Municipality of Umeå, 2020).

The street interviews involved municipality officials using a 'dialogue bicycle' (*dialogcykel*) to visit as many of Umeå's neighbourhoods as possible in order to solicit residents' perspectives on their local living environments and inspire dialogue on urban development. In total, 12 visits were carried out, resulting in over 700 conversations (Municipality of Umeå, 2020). Special attention was paid to the type and location of the interviews, which were conducted close to local shops in order to reach a broad range of people. The dialogue was initiated with short, simple questions designed to make people feel comfortable and encourage them to expand on their thoughts and wishes regarding urban development (Municipality of Umeå, 2020).

Figure 22. 'Dialogue bicycle' used to engage residents in Umeå



Source: Umeå Municipality, Emil Sandström

Further dialogue using the same questions took place on a digital platform, enabling direct interaction in a way that complemented the face-to-face dialogues. Here, participants could mark the places they liked or disliked on an interactive map, before adding comments to elaborate on their answers. Residents were also asked what they hoped for in their neighbourhoods over the coming 20 years, and what they would miss if they moved away. From the municipality's perspective, these inputs provided valuable knowledge that could then be fed into the future development of the city and its neighbourhoods. In its report evaluating the neighbourhood dialogue approach, the municipality asserted that the combination of face-to-face and digital meetings, along with quantitative analysis, had proven to be a resource-efficient way of working, contributing to broad insights and valuable collaborative learning experiences (Municipality of Umeå, 2020).

Another urban planning initiative carried out by the Municipality of Umeå was a collaboration with Dragonskolan, an upper-secondary school. Launched in 2017, the initiative was premised on the notion that it is often challenging to reach young people through more traditional forms of dialogue and participation. The collaboration, linked to urban planning courses carried out at the school, was therefore designed to better incorporate youth perspectives into the municipality's urban planning processes. The students conducted interviews and surveys, participated in socio-economic analyses, and contributed neighbourhood descriptions and their own plan ideas. These contributions were then published in two e-book volumes (Municipality of Umeå, 2020).

Ultimately, it is not possible to determine how and to what extent the Municipality of Umeå's neighbourhood dialogue approach directly contributed to greater social inclusion in the city. Nevertheless, one study interviewee claimed the approach had not only helped bring the municipality and its citizens together, but raised public awareness in Umeå around urban planning and neighbourhood development (Interview 23, 2023).

The municipality's experiences demonstrate that the neighbourhood dialogue approach offers an effective way of obtaining a socially and geographically diverse array of resident perspectives. At the same time, many within the municipality felt there was scope to engage people on an even wider scale, and reach an even greater diversity of areas across the city. In this respect, one advantage of the approach is that it would be relatively straightforward to complement the information collected thus far using follow-up rounds of data collection and new types of methods (Interview 23, 2023).

Box 10, which spotlights urban redevelopment initiatives in the Uppsala's suburban district of Gottsunda, provides further insights into the issues discussed above.

Box 10. Urban redevelopment initiatives in the district of Gottsunda, Uppsala

Gottsunda is a suburban district in Uppsala, Sweden's fourth largest city. The area was developed as part of the so-called 'Million Homes Programme' (*Miljonprogrammet*) – a large public housing programme implemented in 1965–1974 with the aim of constructing a million dwellings (T. Hall & Vidén, 2005). Although in close proximity to nature, Gottsunda features a homogenous built environment consisting mainly of high-rise housing, and has limited connectivity to its surrounding areas (Uppsala Municipal Board, 2019).

Over time, the area has become associated with socio-economic segregation, and is characterised by high levels of exclusion, poverty, overcrowding, crime and a socially vulnerable population. As a consequence, Gottsunda has spent several years on the Swedish Police's 'vulnerable areas' list (*utsatta områden*) (see section 4.4.1). However, it should be noted that while Gottsunda was classified as an especially 'vulnerable area' (*särskild utsatt område*) in the 2017 list, it was re-classified as a 'risk area' (*riskområde*) in 2023, indicating the district is now less associated with severe socio-economic disadvantage and crime than it was a few years ago. This improvement appears related to the various regeneration initiatives launched to improve the area in recent years (Uppsalahem, 2023).

Uppsala's 2016 comprehensive plan set out a strategy to develop Gottsunda into a major hub as part of the city's objective of gaining 340,000 new inhabitants and 70,000 new workplaces by 2050 (Uppsala Municipal Board, 2019). A comprehensive urban development planning programme for Gottsunda was subsequently launched in 2019, featuring plans for at least 5,000 new homes, new workplaces, parks and squares, and a new urban route with a tramway (Uppsala Municipal Board, 2019).

In order to integrate local residents' needs and perspectives into these redevelopment efforts, the municipality organised a variety of engagement activities. A strong emphasis was placed on participation, especially integrating citizen dialogue into local events as a means of reaching people on the move and including those who might otherwise not engage in urban development dialogue. This resulted in over 200 viewpoints being gathered from Gottsunda residents, including perspectives on the importance of preserving natural areas; concerns about potential rents increases following renovations; and hopes for improved safety, architectural quality and better services in the area. The participants' ideas were then incorporated into the planning programme (Uppsala Municipal Board, 2019).

Seeking to better understand its own role and power relations in the participatory process, Uppsala municipality's planning department also engaged in a collaboration with an academic research team. This led to the publication of a study by Westin et al. (2021) drawing attention to the so-called 'following from the front' dilemma (referring to the issues arising from the planner's role in allowing citizens to participate in planning processes) (see Moore, 2012). In Uppsala, city planners were aware of how their power to shape participatory process dialogues could restrict citizens' equal participation and willingness to address an issue (Westin et al., 2021). This points to the inherent power inequalities in participatory processes that supposedly empower citizens but whose proceedings and outcomes are ultimately controlled by the planners.

5.4.3 Key takeaways

Following significant revisions to planning legislation in 1987, spatial planning became increasingly decentralised in Sweden, with primary responsibility for related activities shifted from the state to the municipalities (Rodela & Norss, 2023). At the same time, greater emphasis was placed on giving citizens a say in decision-making. Public participation is currently a core principle in the country's

spatial planning, as stipulated by the Planning and Building Act (PBL), which requires municipalities to take adopt a participatory approach when consulting local populations. Thus, while municipalities are responsible for planning and can select whichever participatory methods they deem appropriate, national authorities also set broad strategic planning goals and advise regional and local authorities on their implementation.

In Umeå, the citizen dialogue and other public engagement initiatives launched by the municipality have helped provide a better understanding of the local population's needs regarding urban development. While the effects of the dialogue on social inclusion are difficult to measure, the municipality anticipates that better adapting the physical environment to its citizens' aspirations will enhance inclusivity across the city's various neighbourhoods (Interview 23, 2023). Overall, the approach adopted in Umeå appears to provide good opportunities for building trust within the community, although it requires significant efforts to reach a broadly representative sample of the population.

The example of Gottsunda in Uppsala, meanwhile, draws attention to the challenges of participatory planning in areas characterised by social exclusion, where it may be difficult to engage residents in urban planning processes. In the case of Gottsunda, integrating citizen dialogue into other activities, such as local events, appears to have been an effective way of reaching citizens who are typically more difficult to engage. At the same time, Uppsala's municipal authorities have acknowledged the challenges posed by power imbalances between planners and citizens (Westin et al., 2021), and have sought to address the issue via a collaboration between its city planners and researchers.

Overall, the participatory processes examined in this section can be seen to reinforce social inclusion through taking into consideration the neighbourhood development needs and wishes of residents, as well as actively encouraging participation among marginalised groups.

5.5 Iceland

This section focuses first on the role participation has played in Iceland's national policies and key legislative frameworks, and how these in turn guides local implementation. Having done so, the City of Reykjavík is examined, with a particular focus on the municipality's Democracy Policy and its diverse strategies on fostering public engagement.

Despite a scarcity of national-level policies addressing neighbourhood-level social

segregation, the City of Reykjavík has taken the initiative in developing its own measures. In doing so, it stands as an exception among Iceland's municipalities. Nevertheless, as the country's primary administrative authority, Reykjavík has spearheaded discussions and actions pertaining to segregation and social inclusion. To broaden the perspective on how public participation is implemented and promoted at local levels within Icelandic municipalities, the example of Akureyri is briefly addressed.

5.5.1 The role of participation in national policies and planning

Iceland's National Planning Strategy (*Landsskipulagsstefna*) has a substantial focus on cooperation and consultation in relation to planning (Planning agency, 2016a). In addition, several other sectoral laws place specific obligations on authorities regarding public consultation. Along with the national strategy, these provide a broad framework for how to cooperatively engage citizens when developing policies, implementing plans or making decisions. At the same time, they provide little specificity as to how, and to which extent, citizen engagement should be organised.

Legal frameworks

One of the Icelandic Planning Act's (*Skipulagslög*) (No. 123/2010) stated objectives is to ensure the public is consulted on and given the opportunity to influence spatial planning decisions. The form of public consultation during different planning phases is determined by the subject and scope of the plan in question. According to the Planning Act, planning work must be publicly announced, with citizens then given the opportunity to observe and participate in the formulation of proposals concerning the arrangement of settlements and shaping of the environment. Similar provisions can also be found in the Act on Environmental Assessment of Projects and Plans (*Lög um umhverfismat framkvæmda og áætlana*) (No 111/2021), and the Act on the Planning of Ocean and Coastal Areas (*Lög um skipulag haf- og strandsvæða*) (no 88/2018). Moreover, the Aarhus Convention (1998) stipulates access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to fair procedures in environmental matters.

Meanwhile, the Icelandic Local Government Act (*Seitastjórnarlög*) (No. 138/2011) mandates that locally elected officials prioritise the general interests and concerns of municipality residents. As well as setting out the governance structure of municipalities, the legislation outlines their authority to involve the public in municipality management and policy preparation. Options for engagement include providing information to residents and consultation via citizen meetings, resident assemblies or elections. The law also allows for the establishment of resident or user councils to facilitate cooperation and support residents wishing to participate directly in municipal activities. While national laws define this framework, municipalities are not obligated to utilise all the available methods of public engagement.

Furthermore, the Act on the Affairs of the Elderly (*Lög um málefni aldraðra*) (No. 125/1999) includes a provision that each municipality should have a council of elders, while the Municipalities' Social Services Act (*Lög um félagsþjónustu sveitarfélaga*) (No. 40/1991) stipulates that users of social services must be actively consulted in a participatory manner. Finally, the Act on the Affairs of Disabled People (*Lög um málefni fatlaðs fólks*) (No. 59/1992) details requirements for extensive consultations with the interest organisation representing disabled people.

National policies and strategies

Although the National Planning Strategy (*Landsskipulagsstefna*) emphasises consultation and cooperation on the part of local authorities – as well as other authorities and public institutions – it does not explicitly focus on public participation (Planning agency, 2016b). Also relevant in this context are a number of other national plans that help steer planning issues in Iceland, including the Regional Plan (*Svæðisskipulag*), the Framework Plan for the Protection and Energy Use of National Areas (*Rammaáætlun*), the Transportation Plan (*Samgönguáætlun*), and several other plans that may become relevant in specific circumstances. Again, while some of these plans recommend the use of public consultation, they do not impose any legal requirements to do so.

More recently, however, the National Planning Agency proposed an amendment to the National Planning Strategy containing new guidelines for public participation in planning projects, along with the establishment of a consultation and information portal (Planning agency, 2021b). As a result, a digital tool called the Planning Portal (*Skipulagsgátt*) was launched in 2023 with the aim of enhancing information dissemination around ongoing plans and promoting planning project consultation (Planning Portal, 2023).

The portal – which provides one-stop access to all planning proposals, environmental assessments and permits being presented in Iceland at any given time – is used by municipalities, government institutions and developers for, among other things, presenting data and environmental assessment consultations. In doing so, the platform streamlines communication between planning authorities and the public, enabling the latter to contribute to issues of interest and fostering transparency through visible comments and reviews (Ísland.is, 2023).

In practice, however, government officials have limited responsibilities, with laws imposing only minimal obligations regarding public consultation. Although the Planning Act stresses early-stage consultation with residents and interested parties, it often employs vague language such as 'in consultation with the parties concerned' (No. 123/2010). Consequently, the public's right to access information and actively participate in plan or policy development is subject to interpretation. Authorities are obligated to provide information, but there are few requirements concerning public consultation beyond that. Moreover, despite Iceland's laws,

policies and strategies offering numerous examples of consultation processes – such as stakeholder analysis and opinion polls – municipalities are not mandated to implement them.

5.5.2 Reykjavík: Increasing citizen participation across municipal sectors

This section delves into the City of Reykjavík's efforts to increase citizen engagement, a key element of which is the Democracy Policy 2021–2030 (City of Reykjavík, 2021b). While the participatory tools and approaches set out in the policy are not specifically targeted at urban development or social inclusion, they are designed to be used across a wide range of policy areas.

Figure 23. Street view in Reykjavík



Source: Mats Stjernberg

One of the Democracy Policy's key goals is to empower residents to engage in decision-making processes – towards this end, it stresses the importance of accessible information and diverse public input. The policy is also aligned with the city's Human Rights and Service Policies (City of Reykjavík, 2016), which translates into a focus on non-discrimination, equal rights and service alignment with resident needs. Ultimately, the aim is to foster broad participation and inclusivity across societal groups in city matters.

The City of Reykjavík has developed various ways of consulting residents and other stakeholders on fundamental issues. More specifically, the Democracy Policy (2021b) outlines several key channels by which residents can engage with the city, including:

- The *Suggestions Portal*, which allows residents to submit comments on various issues via the city's website;

- The *Better Reykjavik* consultation website, where residents can contribute ideas and express opinions on policy-making and ongoing projects;
- The *My District (Hverfið mitt)* initiative, which allows residents to propose and vote on smaller projects within their neighbourhoods every second year;
- *Neighbourhood Plans*, a relatively new planning approach focused on sustainable, environmentally conscious urban development, based on the Reykjavik Municipal Plan 2010–2030; and
- *Residents' Councils*, which operate in all city districts as a means of strengthening communication between residents and the city administration.

The Democracy Policy also highlights other, more general, ways of participating in policy development and governance, such as communicating directly with elected city officials via email or making use of the city's website, which is meant to serve as a hub for participation, consultation and information-sharing by offering live streams, recorded videos of council meetings and social media interaction. In addition, the city's service centres – which provide welfare services, specialist services for children, day care advice, recreation guidance, and general information on city operations to residents and families – are cited as an essential conduit for direct communication between the city and its residents (City of Reykjavik, 2021c).

Another important means by which the City of Reykjavik engages with different segments of the public, as well as stakeholder groups, is through the numerous advisory councils and committees that operate in the city. The Democracy Policy (2021b) highlights the following channels for consultation on specific issues:

- The *Accessibility and Consultation Committee for Disabled People*: Comprised of nine representatives advising the city council on matters concerning disabled people, with members appointed by different organisations;
- The *Intercultural Council of Reykjavik*: Consisting of five representatives advising on issues concerning residents of foreign origin, with members appointed by various associations;
- The *Culture, Sport and Leisure Council*: Made up of observers from the relevant associations providing insights and proposals on their respective subject areas;
- The *Violence Prevention Committee*: Collaborates with stakeholder associations on behalf of the city council to address community violence;
- The *Education and Youth Council*: Comprised of representatives from student, parent, teacher and school employee associations, offering input on matters concerning education, school-related activities and youth-related issues; and

- The *Elderly Affairs Council*: Stakeholder observers participate in various Reykjavík councils, committees and working groups, advising on matters concerning residents aged 67 or older and contributing to relevant policy-making (City of Reykjavík, 2021c).

To aid implementation of the Democracy Policy, the City of Reykjavík developed an accompanying Action Plan covering the years 2021–2024, which included more specific, measurable targets (City of Reykjavík, 2021a). The Action Plan was overseen by the city's Human Rights and Democracy Office and contained 21 specific actions, including the creation of a 'Democracy Compass' to support consultation processes and guide residents. The compass is essentially as a tool capable of showing the available consultation methods and how they work, thereby helping those involved choose whichever method is best-suited to each decision-making process. Another of the proposed actions was a thorough assessment of the current methods by which the city tries to engage residents, stakeholders and consultation committees in policy and decision-making processes.

In addition, the Action Plan called for more active dissemination of the city's efforts around social engagement and participation opportunities, including targeting youth and adapting content for non-Icelandic speakers. There were also actions related to arranging annual Citizens' Assemblies and a Residents' Panel, with the aim of fostering direct engagement with residents, especially youth. Moreover, the plan sought to strengthen direct dialogue between the city administration and residents through city surveys designed to gather public views on various issues.

Another key focus area was digital participation. Here, the Action Plan stated that platforms such as My Neighbourhood and the Suggestion Portal should be optimised to provide better online interfaces for resident consultation. Alongside this, the plan emphasised open and transparent governance, highlighting initiatives such as the Open Finance Platform and the City Residents' Dashboard, which displays a range of useful information about city operations.

Yet another focus area was enhancing democratic engagement in the workplace. This included increasing transparency through the use of platforms such as *Gagnsjá*, and increasing democratic engagement among children and youth via school visits and the strengthening of youth councils. In terms of planning and public participation, commitments involved adopting updated consultation tools and improving information provision on construction and zoning changes. Finally, the Action Plan contained a range of measurable objectives concerning democratic engagement, including voter participation, resident satisfaction, and awareness of democratic tools.

Although the Human Rights and Democracy Office was tasked with overseeing the Action Plan, implementation involved close collaboration with various city departments and offices, including the Office of the City Council; the School and

Recreation Department; the Office of the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer; Services and Innovation Sector; Environmental and Planning Sector; the Department of Finance and Risk Management; Services and Innovation; and the Communications and Branding Team. A dedicated democracy advisor managed the daily execution, conducted training, and provided guidance to elected representatives and the administration.

Box 11 spotlights the case of Akureyri municipality in northern Iceland. With a population of 19,847, Akureyri is the largest town outside Reykjavík Capital Region (Statistics Iceland, 2024). Despite its relatively small size compared to Reykjavík, Akureyri has attracted national attention in recent years for its engagement in urban development issues and public participation.

Box 11. Participatory approaches in Akureyri

In Akureyri, the recent adoption of a Resident Participation Policy (2022–2026) has underscored the municipality's commitment to engaging residents in decision-making, policy formation and service development (Municipality of Akureyri, 2022). The policy emphasises that a variety of methods should be employed to involve communities, including traditionally less engaged population groups.

One key aspect discussed is the role of '*Hverfisnefndir*', or neighbourhood committees, which have been active in Akureyri since 2002. The committees – the role of which has evolved over time – provide residents with a platform to express their views on local matters, although opinions vary on their effectiveness as a forum for resident engagement. As such, the policy indicates the need for a review of how the committees are structured and function, with alternative methods (e.g. regular neighbourhood meetings) potentially introduced to enhance their effectiveness (Municipality of Akureyri, 2022).

Inspired by the Association of Icelandic Municipalities' *Handbook on Resident Participation in Municipalities* (Association of Icelandic Municipalities, 2017), the Resident Participation Policy seeks to introduce a new participation ideology to Akureyri. In practice, this involves the municipality drawing on the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions' extensive experience in resident participation and going beyond the nationally-mandated legal requirements for participation.

The policy explores opportunities for improvement in both the legal and non-legal aspects of participation, emphasising involvement in the early stages of planning and decision-making, and establishing clear objectives for resident participation. The following specific points are highlighted:

1. Increasing residents' influence, strengthening community connections and encouraging active participation, with a focus on amplifying diverse voices across the community;
2. Enhancing elected officials' working environment and decision-making processes via informed discussions, increased support, knowledge and closer ties with residents; and
3. Enhancing resident participation in decision-making processes, strengthening residents' trust in governance systems, reducing errors and enhancing municipal service efficiency.

With the above in mind, the policy promotes proactive consultation methods, such as establishing a robust online platform as the primary digital forum for sharing ideas, while at the same time pursuing more traditional methods such as focus groups and face-to-face interviews in cases where digital approaches are unsuitable. Inclusivity is also important, especially in terms of ensuring diverse segments of the community – particularly groups with unique needs and characteristics – are considered when planning and executing consultation processes.

In addition, the policy sets out clear guidelines for providing feedback to participants at the start of each consultation project. Personalised feedback should be provided whenever possible via such means as the municipality's digital platform, emails or phone calls.

Overall, the policy reflects a strong commitment to advancing resident participation in local decision-making. It should be noted, however, that many of these consultation processes are currently pilot programmes, meaning the fate of the data gathered, strategies developed and decisions made as part of these processes is yet to be defined. Thus, elected officials are under no obligation to implement or even consider what these participation processes produce. Even so, the policy demonstrates a willingness to go beyond legal obligations when it comes to ensuring more in-depth resident involvement in policy development and planning (Municipality of Akureyri, 2022).

5.5.3 Key takeaways

In order to understand how participatory planning approaches are implemented in Iceland, especially Reykjavík, it is necessary to delve into the legal frameworks and national policies guiding them. Reykjavík aligns its practices with legislation such as the Local Government Act and National Planning Strategy, along with specific laws

addressing consultation in sectors such as education, youth affairs and social services.

Although the Planning Act (no. 123/2010) and Local Government Act oblige authorities to engage the public in planning processes, the language used is often vague, allowing for divergent interpretations and minimal two-way communication. The fact that terms such as 'consultation,' 'public interest' and 'participation' can be defined in different ways raises critical questions concerning the depth and nature of citizen involvement (Sheppard et al., 2019). Of particular concern is that this may lead to a somewhat passive approach being taken to consultation processes, rather than encouraging active participation.

The Icelandic Planning Agency's study (Gústafsdóttir et al., 2021) on public consultation reveals a significant gap between the perceived importance of citizen input and public knowledge about consultation processes. Despite a strong desire among the public to participate, effective engagement is hindered by limited understanding and awareness. Moreover, there are disparities in knowledge regarding consultation between demographic groups, highlighting the need for targeted training and outreach efforts (Institute of Social Sciences, University of Iceland, 2021). Financially powerful parties exert influence on planning decisions, raising concerns about whether consultation processes are equitable.

Despite these challenges, there are positive signs of progress, such as the City of Reykjavík's Democracy Policy (City of Reykjavík, 2021c), which has introduced participatory tools such as the Citizens Assembly and Democracy Compass. Nevertheless, local authorities continue to wield significant discretion in decision-making, potentially undermining public input. While current initiatives, such as a proposed accessible consultation tool, display recognition of the barriers to public engagement, their effectiveness ultimately depends on local authorities' willingness to go beyond legal requirements.

In conclusion, although Iceland's participatory planning landscape faces challenges rooted in legal ambiguity and the historical neglect of local democracy discussions, there is growing recognition of the need for more active citizen participation. This requires re-evaluating legal frameworks; fostering more inclusive, transparent consultation processes; and bridging the knowledge gap among the public. Initiatives such as Reykjavík's Democracy Policy are a step in the right direction, but sustained efforts are needed to ensure meaningful engagement and democratic practices.



Photo: Juho Luomala, Unsplash.com

6. Interventions in improving physical and social living environments

This chapter focuses on how the physical living environment of neighbourhoods impacts social inclusion. More specifically, it explores the role of architecture and built environment design in addressing urban segregation and social inclusion challenges.

In each country case, the chapter first examines the relevant national policies and planning frameworks, before turning to a city-level analysis of the interventions being pursued to improve local communities' physical and social living environments. In this instance, the cities under the spotlight are Lahti (Finland), Aarhus (Denmark), Bergen (Norway), Gothenburg (Sweden) and Reykjavík (Iceland).

Throughout, the analysis is guided by the following questions:

- How, and to what extent, are physical living environments and their impacts on social inclusion and/or segregation emphasised in national policies, programmes and planning guidelines/legislation?
- How can different planning interventions improve the quality of physical living environments, thereby fostering social inclusion, wellbeing, trust and community?
- What are the key aspects to consider in local governance aimed at maintaining local living environments?

6.1 Finland

As outlined in the previous chapters, issues concerning segregation and social inclusion have assumed increased attention in Finland over recent years. This is also reflected in the country's policies dealing with physical living environments, which emphasise the connection between the built environment and social sustainability in cities and neighbourhoods.

Below, Finland's relevant national policies in this area are examined, followed by a closer look at how the City of Lahti works to counteract segregation and create more socially inclusive neighbourhoods through interventions in the physical living environment.

6.1.1 Physical living environment and social sustainability in national policies and planning

One of Finland's key national policies concerning the built environment is the National Architectural Policy Programme 2022–2035, titled 'Towards Sustainable Architecture' (Finnish Government, 2022b), which was developed as a part of the Government Programme launched in 2019 (Finnish Government, 2019). The policy, abbreviated Apoli 2022–2035, sets Finland's long-term objectives and measures for developing the quality of its built environments in a sustainable, comprehensive manner.

The new policy builds on a previous architectural policy programme from 1998, which was the country's first such national policy (Finnish Government, 1998). The original policy's key objectives included improving the quality of construction, as well as promoting the principles of sustainability, openness and interaction in planning and construction processes (Finnish Government, 1998). Internationally, Finland was considered something of a pioneer in national architectural policy, with the 1998 policy programme – which was published in five languages – serving as a model for similar policies in several European countries (Finnish Government, 2022b). Domestically, meanwhile, the 1998 policy was credited with raising the profile of architecture and the built environment in public debate.

The 1998 policy also prompted many Finnish regions (e.g. Uusimaa, Häme, Satakunta, Southwest Finland, Eastern Finland) and municipalities/cities (e.g. Helsinki, Tampere, Vantaa, Oulu, Jyväskylä, Lahti) to create their own architectural policy programmes (Finnish Government, 2022a; Finnish Government, 2022b). The multitude of regional- and local-level architectural policy programmes developed since the early 2000s eventually prompted calls for an updated architectural policy

programme that better reflects contemporary challenges. Thus, a key starting point for developing the new programme was considering how architecture can help address challenges related to sustainable development; health and wellbeing; equality and inclusion; demographic changes; and digitalisation (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022).

Apoli 2022–2025 was drafted by a 21-person working group appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of the Environment, with Archinfo Finland – the Finnish information centre for architecture – acting as secretary. The working group members all had relevant built environment expertise, while other experts and stakeholders were also consulted in the process. The National Architectural Policy Programme is also linked to international initiatives for the built environment, such as the Davos Declaration and the New European Bauhaus, as well to national architectural policy frameworks in other Nordic and European countries (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022).

Apoli 2022–2025 is premised on the notion that high-quality built environments can both immediately improve the quality of life enjoyed by all Finns and address future challenges, such as the climate crisis (Finnish Government, 2022b). Towards this end, the programme stresses the importance of good planning and cooperation in developing well-functioning living environments. Among the core principles emphasised are that a well-planned built environment can promote inclusion and reduce inequality, and that such environments should be developed in conjunction with residents and users, while anticipating potential future needs (Finnish Government, 2022a).

Overall, the principles underlying the Finnish national architectural policy appear closely aligned to other relevant national policy frameworks concerning social inclusion and urban segregation (see section 3.1). Apoli 2022–2025 and the international policy frameworks it is connected to are realised concretely at the local level, which highlights the importance of city-level policies, strategies and initiatives when it comes to implementation.

6.1.2 Addressing the built environment, social inclusion and segregation through policy and planning in the City of Lahti

Lahti, located in Päijät-Häme region in southern Finland, has around 121,000 residents, making it the country's ninth most populous municipality, while the wider urban region has a population of approximately 204,000 (City of Lahti, 2024f). Social sustainability – including promoting social inclusion and tackling segregation – is an important strategic focus for the City of Lahti (City of Lahti, 2023e). It is against this backdrop that the sections below examine how the administration is working to enhance the vitality of the city and its local neighbourhoods through physical living environment interventions.

Figure 24. Aerial view of Lahti



Source: City of Lahti, Juha-Pekka Huotari

Regional and local architectural policy

The 2007 Häme architectural programme, developed for Kanta-Häme and Päijät-Häme regions, was one of Finland's first regional architectural policies (Hämeen arkkitehdit SAFA, 2007). This visionary document applied the 1998 national architectural programme's objectives to the regional level; assessed the state of the built environment within the two regions; defined goals for future development; and proposed measures for achieving them. Throughout, a core element was on how architecture and the built environment can contribute to wellbeing. The programme itself was fairly general in nature, as it was intended to provide municipalities and other relevant actors involved in developing the built environment with a framework for incorporating the programme's objectives into their own activities and initiatives (Hämeen arkkitehdit SAFA, 2007).

In 2010, seeking to further concretise the priorities set out in the previously discussed national and regional architectural policies, the City of Lahti published its first local architectural policy programme: *Apoli Lahti* (City of Lahti, 2010). The overall aim of *Apoli Lahti* 2010 was to enhance the city's competitiveness and its residents' quality of life by improving the aesthetic quality of the built environment. The programme stipulated that good architecture, along with well-executed living environments and landscapes, was essential to a high-quality built environment

(City of Lahti, 2023a). Moreover, the programme complemented the city's strategic aim of growing in a sustainable way, and becoming an ever more attractive, vibrant city (City of Lahti, 2010).

Apoli Lahti also provided an overview detailing the historical development of the city's built environment, highlighting its key features. Finally, although the programme defined a number of objectives related to the development of the built environment up to 2020, it stated the exact measures used to achieve them should be decided on annually and defined more concretely in a specific programme of measures (City of Lahti, 2010).

According to the City of Lahti, Apoli Lahti 2010 has had a demonstrable influence on subsequent urban development plans and projects, especially from an aesthetic perspective. Other concrete impacts include the establishment of a cityscape advisory board and appointment of a cityscape architect tasked with overseeing the city's most important construction and urban development projects. (City of Lahti, 2024b).

A new architectural policy building on Apoli Lahti 2010 was published in 2022 with the title 'A Good Environment Creates Wellbeing' (City of Lahti, 2022a). This new policy reflects the city's current strategy, including its goal of making Lahti a frontrunner in sustainable development, and defines measures for developing Lahti's architecture and urban image. Compared to the original policy, it lays greater emphasis on the need to consider potential climate change impacts on the built environment (City of Lahti, 2022a). The city's suburban districts are also now highlighted as a central thematic focus.

More generally, the new programme stresses the importance of good planning and ensuring sufficient time for implementation, as well as the role of participation and communication – particularly in terms of having a shared understanding among the actors and stakeholders involved. The programme presents general guiding principles for the work it envisages being carried out, such as strengthening the identity of Lahti's neighbourhoods; improving urban greenery; highlighting the importance of quality in architecture competitions; emphasising the significance of the early design phase; and strengthening a people-centred approach to built environment planning.

The City of Lahti has received both national and international recognition for its work in this area. For instance, in 2023, the Finnish Association of Architects presented the city with an award for promoting sustainable and good living environments, and taking action towards climate neutrality (City of Lahti, 2023c). The city's architectural policy was cited as a key reason behind the award, as it had contributed to sustainability becoming a cross-cutting theme within the city

organisation. Moreover, in 2021, Lahti became the first Finnish city to receive the European Commission's European Green Capital Award (European Commission, 2021).

Social sustainability and segregation as a key strategic focus

As in many other Finnish cities, questions concerning segregation have assumed increased strategic importance in Lahti over recent years. The perceived need to take action stems from developments observed in other Nordic and European countries, where urban segregation has become associated with various societal problems (Berg, 2023). In addition, Lahti is characterised by high unemployment, comparatively low educational levels, and relatively high marginalisation among young people compared to other Finnish cities (Alho, 2021).

According to a senior housing policy expert working at the City of Lahti (Interview 25, 2023), while there has long been a policy focus on good living environments, it is only more recently that a more explicit focus on segregation and social inclusion has emerged in key strategies and policies. This includes the city strategy – Lahti 2030 – which is centred around sustainability (City of Lahti, 2022d) and places strong emphasis on ensuring Lahti is an inclusive city where everyone can participate in the development of their community. In this context, promoting wellbeing and taking a proactive approach to preventing exclusion are highlighted as key.

To support implementation of the city strategy, a number of more specific programmes have been created to address different policy areas, with segregation and social inclusion central to several of these. This includes the City of Lahti's Wellbeing Plan for 2020–2025 (City of Lahti, 2022b), which contains an objective concerning knowledge acquisition around segregation processes and trends, and creating structures for counteracting these developments.

Similarly, the City of Lahti's 2023–2028 programme for housing policy and land use emphasises the prevention of segregation, together with ensuring wellbeing, safety and social sustainability (City of Lahti, 2023b). In particular, the programme highlights the importance of ensuring housing of different sizes, types and tenure forms are available throughout the city (Ojanperä, 2023). Towards this end, the policy states the city will, if necessary, restrict the construction of small dwellings in areas with numerous small apartments, and that the proportion of one-room dwellings must not exceed 30% in any part of the city.

Moreover, the housing and land use programme for the first time contains a specific goal of restricting the proportion of social rented housing to a maximum of 30% in certain neighbourhoods (Berg, 2023). Here, the city administration has the authority to turn down applications to construct state-subsidised rental housing in neighbourhoods where the proportion is already high. Another way to diversify the

residential area housing stock is to plan for more detached and semi-detached housing in areas that predominantly consist of multi-family homes (Berg, 2023).

Greater focus on segregation and social inclusion is also evident in spatial planning. For instance, sustainable wellbeing is a core theme in Lahti's city master plan for 2021–2025, under which preventing segregation is a specific objective (City of Lahti, 2021). When it comes to comprehensive planning, the City of Lahti has adopted a unique approach whereby the city master plan is revised at the start of each four-year city council term (City of Lahti, 2024g). While some other Finnish municipalities have since adopted a similar approach, Lahti was among the first to introduce a so-called 'continuous masterplan' (*jatkuva yleiskaava*) (covering the 2009–2012 period) (Honkanen, 2019). Among the benefits of a continuous masterplan is that it allows for longevity, better connecting spatial plans with the city's strategic aims over a four-year cycle (Interview 25, 2023).

Participatory approaches to addressing segregation and social inclusion

One important avenue for the city to promote social inclusion is through participatory approaches pursued at various stages of decision-making and planning. In this respect, the City of Lahti's participation model constitutes a key strategic document (City of Lahti, 2024e), as it describes the administration's principles, main approaches and goals concerning participation, along with common guidelines for city employees to follow.

One important approach used by the city to engage residents is so-called 'partnership tables' (*kumppanuuspöydät*). In 2022, four partnership tables were set up in different districts across the city. Residents and other community representatives were invited to apply for a two-year membership, following which the municipal board selected 15 members and 15 substitutes for each partnership table (Suomi, 2023). The partnership tables are non-political and do not have any decision-making power. Nevertheless, they provide a forum for representatives to offer their opinions on major plans, make proposals to the city, and help organise local residents' meetings together with the authorities (City of Lahti, 2024a).

Similarly, as is the case in several other Finnish municipalities, the City of Lahti makes use of participatory budgeting (see section 5.1). An earmarked budget of €200,000 is divided equally between city districts, with residents then tasked with deciding how the funds should be spent. The overarching aim is to strengthen local democracy, develop stronger communities and make public budgets fairer and more efficient. In 2023, a total of 956 initial ideas were put forward, which were then refined down to 171 final ideas in the voting phase. Approximately 4% of Lahti residents exercised their right to vote (City of Lahti, 2024c).

As previously mentioned, participation and citizen engagement are core principles of the key legal frameworks steering spatial planning in Finland. According to an

interviewee, however, the City of Lahti has actively sought to go beyond what is legally required to engage residents and other key stakeholders (Interview 25, 2023). This has, claims the interviewee, led to more inclusive planning processes and fewer complaints about plans.

Interventions in physical living environments

Carrying out interventions in physical living environments is crucial to strengthening the vitality of Lahti's neighbourhoods and combating segregation. Particularly relevant here are the area-based interventions that have been carried out in suburban housing estates associated with socio-economic disadvantage. State funding from national programmes targeting post-war housing estates has been important for several of these projects, which have been carried out in Lahti since the 1990s.

The most recent national Neighbourhood Renewal Programme (*Lähiöohjelma 2020–2022*) funded several local projects in Lahti (City of Lahti, 2022c). One of these targeted the Rakokivi-Nastolanharju area in eastern Lahti, where the local multi-purpose centre's surroundings were upgraded through the renovation of underpasses, improved lighting, new and better green spaces, and the building of a cultural park. Meanwhile, specific actions in the suburban district of Mukkula – carried out through close interaction with residents – included refurbishing play areas, improving a disc golf range, upgrading community allotment gardens, and improving green spaces to strengthen biodiversity (Ministry of the Environment, 2022).

The Neighbourhood Renewal Programme also funded two parallel research projects focused on the Mukkula district (City of Lahti, 2022c) led by the Lappeenranta-Lahti University of Technology (LUT) and implemented through collaboration with the city authorities. One of the projects gathered in-depth knowledge on the current state of Mukkula through experimental development pilots and the close involvement of local residents (LUT University, 2020). The work was oriented towards preventing segregation, increasing wellbeing and inclusion among residents, and promoting neighbourhood vitality. The second research project concerned carbon neutrality, and sought to generate knowledge on the carbon footprint of local residents and how it might be reduced (Halonen et al., 2023). According to an interviewee (Interview 25, 2023), these two projects have helped push the topics of segregation and inclusion up Lahti's policy agenda.

As mentioned, participatory budgeting is an important approach for engaging residents in Lahti. One interviewee, however, raised concerns about the funding allocation for participatory budgeting (Interview 25, 2023). The five districts across which the reserved budget is distributed are all relatively large, which to some

extent has led to many projects being carried out in relatively affluent areas where residents are more likely to participate in formal processes (Interview 25, 2023). Conversely, some of the more socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods have seen fewer projects carried out using participatory budgeting funds due to less active participation among residents.

Another noteworthy approach has been the construction so-called 'multi-purpose community centres' (*monitoimitalo*) in various parts of the city (City of Lahti, 2023d), with the intention of upgrading both services levels and the local physical living environment. These centres incorporate combined local facilities for learning, leisure, culture and public services (e.g. schools, kindergartens, sports facilities, libraries, health and dental care services, and resident meeting places) (City of Lahti, 2024d). Through such investments and measures, the city aims to promote the liveability and viability of targeted neighbourhoods and ensure key public services are available locally (Interview 25, 2023).

Lahti's population size has remained relatively unchanged in recent years: between 2018–2023, it grew only marginally from 119,951 to 120,693 (Statistics Finland, 2024). As one interviewee highlighted, Lahti's preconditions for urban development are therefore different to cities experiencing significant population growth. The city has limited need for new housing construction, while infill development – a commonly used approach to revitalising post-war housing estates in cities such as Helsinki where housing demand is high (see section 4.1) – is not a viable option in Lahti.

Moreover, Lahti's architectural programme recognises several suburban housing estates constructed in the 1960s and 1970s as important cultural environments (City of Lahti, 2022a). This means the strategic demolition of housing to make way for new construction – an approach adopted in some Finnish municipalities – is not always possible (Alho, 2021).

Ultimately, the city has limited influence on local housing market development, as developers' investment decisions are determined by market demand. Nevertheless, one way the City of Lahti can influence construction is through local plans that impose conditions on developers regarding, for instance, the layout and appearance of buildings; the size distribution of dwellings; or environmental criteria. Given Lahti is a low-demand housing market, however, it is not possible to set criteria as restrictive as those seen in higher-demand housing markets (e.g. Helsinki capital region), as doing so would risk steep increases in construction costs increasing, potentially hindering the realisation of housing development projects (Berg, 2023).

6.1.3 Key takeaways

When it comes to addressing social sustainability and segregation, an interviewee at the City of Lahti stressed that the high priority now placed on data and knowledge to support policy-making had proven to be extremely valuable (Interview 25, 2023). Particularly useful has been the collection of detailed spatial data, analysis of which has become more synchronised with the city's policy and planning interventions. For example, in preparing the 2023–2028 housing and land use policy, such data was used for the first time to analyse segregation patterns and trends across the city (Kangas, 2021).

From the perspective of spatial planning, the City of Lahti's use of a continuous master plan – updated at the beginning of each four-year council term – appears to be a well-functioning model (Interview 25, 2023). The approach offers both greater flexibility and a better way of connecting spatial planning to the administration's strategic aims (City of Lahti, 2024g). More generally, closer alignment between relevant policy and spatial planning frameworks is considered advantageous for addressing complex issues such as segregation and social inclusion, which require a holistic approach.

The City of Lahti seeks to promote social inclusion and counteract segregation through various participatory approaches. One interviewee mentioned this as a core strength of the city organisation, which deploys many well-functioning and effective practices despite the relatively limited resources available (Interview 25, 2023). In this context, Lahti's participation model (City of Lahti, 2024e) has helped streamline ways of working towards shared goals, while the city's planning officers – who specialise in participation and have clearly defined roles – were also mentioned as an important asset. Nevertheless, as is commonly the case in pursuing participation, Lahti continues to face challenges in engaging difficult-to-reach population groups.

The state-funded Neighbourhood Renewal Programme 2020–2022 was also highlighted as important for addressing segregation and social inclusion. The projects carried out in Lahti using funding from the programme not only resulted in new knowledge and concrete measures, but contributed to better organisation around these issues within the city administration (Alho, 2021). Also relevant is the ongoing collaboration – involving research projects and student assignments – between the City of Lahti and the city's university, which has provided new knowledge in support of policy and planning across a number of thematic areas (Interview 25, 2023).

As a medium-sized city, Lahti has a comparatively small city organisation, which, according to an interviewee (Interview 25, 2023), offers the advantage of reducing

the level of administrative hierarchy. Thus, organisational silos are perhaps less evident than in larger cities, making cooperation between different branches easier. Nevertheless, there remains scope for improved coordination within the city organisation to deal with segregation in a more cross-cutting way (Alho, 2021). Here, the interviewee (Interview 25, 2023) underlined the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the various actions carried out city-wide and more locally in neighbourhoods.

Another example of where improved coordination within the city is needed concerns the sharing of information between different administrative branches. Despite the increased focus on gathering data to support planning and decision-making, there still appear to be organisational barriers hindering access to information gathered by other administrative units. From this perspective, the interviewee called for a more clearly delineated home base tasked with overseeing actions related to segregation and social inclusion, as responsibilities are currently somewhat fragmented across the city organisation.

Addressing segregation and social inclusion requires both political will and sufficient resources. As touched upon, the city organisation often has to work within the constraints of relatively limited resources, which limits the actions open to it. Nevertheless, what is encouraging from the city's perspective is that segregation and social inclusion have gained increased prominence in key city-level strategies and policies over recent years, which may provide better preconditions for dealing effectively with these complex issues. Moreover, according to an interviewee (Interview 25, 2023) there is currently a greater sense of optimism in the city. Positive recent developments include the announcement of industrial investments, the establishment of a new university in 2019, and Lahti being designated a European Green Capital in 2021.

6.2 Denmark

In Denmark, planning and design of the physical living environment is strongly linked with planning for more socially inclusive cities. This can be seen, for instance, in the City of Copenhagen, where there has long been a strong focus on designing public spaces and buildings that put people first (Souza, 2022). As a result, Copenhagen is currently considered to have one of the highest quality-of-life satisfaction levels in the world. Urban architect Jan Gehl, whose philosophy of 'Life, space, buildings – in that order' has guided Danish urban planning and development over recent decades, has been instrumental in this transformation (Souza, 2022).

Denmark's approach to architecture regards public spaces as crucial to urban life, providing a venue for meetings between different cultural and social groups, and both planned and spontaneous social interactions. Alongside this, there has been an enduring emphasis on socially inclusive building design. For instance, when it comes to architectural provision for an older population, Denmark is currently seen as leading the way in creating environments that break away from the sanitised environments of nursing homes (Peters, 2014).

As will be explored below, however, creating cities and urban spaces that are inclusive of different population groups is a challenging task that requires considerable policy and sectoral coordination. Against this backdrop, the City of Aarhus, and to a lesser extent Copenhagen, are spotlighted in order to demonstrate the policy and planning interventions available to create inclusive, assessable physical living environments.

6.2.1 Physical living environment in national policies and planning

The Danish Planning Act regulates planning at various levels across the country, including spatial plans implemented at the national, municipal and local levels. In addition, there are several national policies relevant to built environment planning and social inclusion.

One such policy framework is Denmark's 2014 architectural policy, titled 'Putting People First' (Danish Government, 2014). The policy was an extension of the first national architecture policy presented in 2007 (Schubert, 2024) and provides guidance on the regulations laid out in the Danish Planning Act. Throughout, strong emphasis is placed on architecture's role in promoting social sustainability and preventing ghettoisation and social imbalances in urban areas. The policy takes a holistic view of architectural quality, incorporating aesthetic quality, sustainability, social inclusion, accessibility, and flexibility in construction (Danish Government, 2014).

Through the 2014 policy, the government committed itself to promoting sustainable, high-quality, people-centred architecture, highlighting the potential environmental, economic and societal benefits of investing in architectural quality. This commitment was particularly directed at public construction and development projects, with the aim of encouraging private developers to adopt similar practices. Overall, the policy underscored the idea that architecture – which fosters opportunities for communities and urban life – can play a crucial role in preventing segregation and other urban problems.

The Danish government utilises urban renewal and area renewal funds to engage in development projects that involve both the public and private sectors (Danish Government, 2014). The overarching objective is to promote architecture that strengthens communities and security through the creation of diverse, accessible and socially sustainable urban and rural environments. In doing so, the policy

recognises the potential of architecture to repurpose empty buildings and homes for the benefit of citizens.

Furthermore, the architectural policy has a broader aim of building on humanist traditions by stressing community, social ideals and democratic values in the development of cities, housing and urban areas. In essence, the policy envisions that good architecture aligned with humanistic principles can contribute to the wellbeing and inclusivity of Danish society. As of 2024, a new national architecture policy was under development. Core focus areas of the work being undertaken include dealing with the climate crisis and sustainability from a holistic perspective, providing public housing, ensuring active city centres, and revitalising villages (Danish Government, 2014).

Also relevant in this context is the previously mentioned 2018 Ghetto Strategy (see sections 3.2 and 4.2), at the core of which is a commitment to reduce the number of areas classified as ghettos. As part of this, the strategy endorses substantial transformation of the built environment, with one focus area being the demolition of outdated housing units and redevelopment of targeted areas, thereby creating a more diverse, integrated housing environments. However, despite being launched to counteract segregation, the Ghetto Strategy has proven to be somewhat controversial due to its association with discrimination, stigmatisation, eviction and displacement of vulnerable groups (Alves, 2022; Open Society Justice Initiative, 2021, 2024).

The principle of universal design is another factor relevant to the national policy landscape concerning physical living environments. Essentially, universal design is about taking account of human diversity when designing and shaping environments, thus allowing everyone to use them regardless of body, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, culture or age (Danish Architecture Centre, n.d.). With this in mind, the 2018 Danish Building Regulation (BR18) includes various regulations ensuring accessibility for all individuals, including those with disabilities (European Accessibility Resource Centre, 2023). Meanwhile, the Danish Road Directorate plays a role in evaluating traffic and transport accessibility, and in 2017 published a handbook dealing with the universal design of streets, urban spaces and other traffic areas (Danish Road Directorate, 2017).

Another relevant document is a 2011 report published by the Ministry for Urban and Rural Affairs centred around the universal design of public spaces in neighbourhoods. The report was influenced by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, with universal design viewed as crucial to the creation of inclusive urban spaces that accord with these conventions. Towards this end, the report contains guidance, inspirational examples, information on disabilities, and tools for public and private actors involved in urban development and design (Sigbrand & Pedersen, 2021).

Finally, the Danish Building Research Institute and 'Design for All' network contribute through their websites, offering inspirational examples, advice and recommendations on accessibility and universal design (Tunström & Löfving, 2020).

6.2.2 Built environment and social inclusion in Aarhus

Aarhus is the second-largest city in Denmark, with a population of approximately 373,000 inhabitants as of 2024 (Statistics Denmark, 2024). The city's population has grown markedly over the past decade, with projections suggesting further substantial population growth in the years to come. While population growth is generally regarded as positive for the municipality, it has led to challenges related to rapidly rising housing prices, which have made it increasingly difficult for lower- and middle-income households with ordinary incomes – including families with small children – to settle in the city (Colliers, 2024).

Figure 25. Aerial view of Aarhus



Source: Unsplash, Andreas Jensen

Municipal policies and strategies

The overarching vision presented in the city council's so-called 'Aarhus Goals' is for Aarhus to be a good city for everyone. Examples of objectives that correspond with this vision include being a sustainable city with good urban and local communities, and a place where everyone thrives and is healthy (City of Aarhus, 2023a).

Architecture, urban design and housing policy are all regarded as key tools in working towards becoming an inclusive city. This is reflected in both the 2017 municipal plan, which stresses urban quality and liveability for all (City of Aarhus, 2017), and the City of Aarhus's integration policy, which focuses on equal opportunities for all (City of Aarhus, 2023b). A relevant point in this context is that

Aarhus is becoming an increasingly diverse city in terms of ethnic composition and youth presence – the city is currently the youngest in Denmark, with a high presence of students (Kildall Rysgaard, 2019). Thus, the city's urban development must answer the needs arising from these demographic changes.

The City of Aarhus's Policy for Urban Quality and Architecture (*Politik for Bykvalitet og Arkitektur*) (City of Aarhus, 2022) serves as a visionary framework for ensuring high-quality urban development and inclusive architecture. Rooted in the Aarhus Goals, the policy outlines eight guiding principles that emphasise the uniqueness of the city's diverse areas, from the city centre to new neighbourhoods. The policy objectives include establishing a common management tool; promoting sustainability; highlighting architectural potential and unique qualities; clarifying expectations for construction; fostering a culture of dialogue; and providing direction for ongoing development projects.

The City of Aarhus's urban planning and architecture division is led by a single politician and an administrative leader (Interview 24, 2023). The city council sets the political direction and votes to approve significant projects. This distinctive leadership model extends throughout the organisation, shaping the approach to urban planning and development. Within the city administration, separate divisions handle various aspects of community life – for instance, a planning and environment division deals with the physical aspects of the urban landscape, while another division oversees social relations. Each division operates under the guidance of a political leader. This means the city's urban planning and development activities are intertwined with a political agenda that evolves with each election cycle, reflecting the work's dynamic nature (Interview 24, 2023).

Three main topics emerge when analysing how the City of Aarhus utilises architecture and built environment planning as means of promoting social inclusion: 1) social mixing and counteracting segregation; 2) design and planning of inclusive public spaces; and 3) public participation.

Social mixing and counteracting segregation are particularly emphasised within Aarhus's architecture policy (City of Aarhus, 2022), as well being a central part of the Danish approach to urban planning and architecture more broadly. The Aarhus architecture policy stresses the importance of physical accessibility, universal design, and a mixture of housing tenures and price ranges (Aarhus Kommune, 2023). In addition, emphasis is placed on enhancing social interaction when designing new buildings, including their common spaces. Here, the policy cites the housing development Aarhus Ø as a successful example, as it contains not only a variety of apartment typologies but several shared spaces. Moreover, a wide range of activities and services are made available to all residents, which is seen as contributing to an active urban environment (City of Aarhus, 2022).

Figure 26. Aarhus Ø, an urban development site in central Aarhus on the city's former container port



Source: Unsplash, Kristian Egelund

When it comes to neighbourhood social mixing and achieving social diversity, the provision of a varied housing supply (in terms of type, size, tenure form and pricing) emerges as perhaps the most crucial aspect (Nielsen & Haagerup, 2017). This is reflected in the City of Aarhus housing strategy (City of Aarhus, 2016), which seeks to make urban areas more socially diverse. Danish housing associations are non-profit, with two-thirds of the rent they collect going into a national building fund, which is then used to pay off the mortgages covering construction of the dwellings (Housing Europe, n.d.). Over time, as the mortgages are paid off, the rental income pot can be used to finance new social housing or renovate existing stock. In Aarhus, this has allowed housing associations to upgrade their stock to modern energy standards without imposing significant rent increases.

Approaches and initiatives

The municipality has also employed various tools to counteract division, with efforts have been made to uplift vulnerable housing areas through comprehensive initiatives. In Gellerup (Eriksson & Nielsen, 2022) and Viby Syd, for instance, regeneration is ongoing. Ensuring a diverse housing stock across the city is crucial, as it enables residents to remain in their local communities should altered life situations or finances cause their housing needs to change.

Overall, Aarhus's social housing sector offer a significant tool for ensuring diverse housing supply and mitigating segregation, ensuring all social groups can access a home that meets certain standards at a reasonable price. Additionally, it is an integral part of Aarhus's overall housing supply, with many residents preferring the flexibility of renting. Thus, both problem-prone housing areas and traditionally attractive urban areas end up with a more diverse population composition, reducing division.

The *design and planning of inclusive public spaces* is another key element in the City of Aarhus's architecture policy. The city's approach not only aims to enhance the overall wellbeing of the community, but foster active community involvement in maintenance tasks, thereby providing employment opportunities and creating a sense of responsibility, especially among those who are homeless or otherwise vulnerable. Furthermore, the city's streets are designed to be as inclusive as possible (City of Aarhus, 2023c), with particular attention paid to accommodating various modes of urban mobility. Alongside this, the thoughtful distribution of urban furniture – such as benches – aims to create welcoming spaces for all residents, including children, older citizens and individuals with reduced mobility (City of Aarhus, 2023c).

Public participation is regarded as essential by the municipality. In 2022, the City of Aarhus established a new unit tasked with devising participatory approaches and extending their application to smaller-scale interventions. Citizen-driven initiatives feature prominently in some projects, showcasing a robust grassroots approach. In addition, a municipal board devoted to universal design has been given responsibility for ensuring the inclusion of individuals with diverse handicaps, while

other boards are dedicated to – among other things – advocating for LGBTQ+ rights and catering to the needs of youth and students (Interview 24, 2023).

One concrete initiative for engaging the local community in maintaining public spaces is the so-called 'SydhavnsPedeller' initiative, which operates in Sydhavnen – historically a working-class neighbourhood in southern Aarhus (Gadeliv, n.d.). Launched in 2018, SydhavnsPedeller operates as a working community that seeks to involve vulnerable residents of Sydhavnen in cleaning and maintenance tasks. The initiative also performs ad hoc tasks in the neighbourhood, continually expanding its area of operations due to high demand for employment opportunities among the area's homeless and vulnerable population.

An overview of the Buens Torv project in Copenhagen is provided in Box 12, presenting an example of the co-creation of public spaces based on feminist architecture principles.

Box 12. The Buens Torv project in Copenhagen

The Buens Torv project is a pioneering initiative aimed at advancing understanding of gender in urbanism and promoting social sustainability within the local community. The project places great stress on the connection between built environment planning and social inclusion, both in terms of the public spaces produced and the active involvement of residents in the process (COurban, n.d.). In doing so, it underscores the importance of inclusive design processes and community engagement, including democratic participation in decision-making processes.

The focal point of the project is the area under Bispeengbuen, a highway bridge situated on the border of Copenhagen and Frederiksberg municipality. The physical interventions involved encompass a wayfinding initiative, an art installation and the creation of a new semi-public indoor space known as the 'greenhouse'. The ultimate goal is for the area to attract a greater diversity of activities and people, and particularly for more women and girls to spend time in the space (Werner & Gammelgaard, 2022).

The project has sought to address the area's historically undesirable reputation through a variety of interventions and new facilities (e.g. street sports facilities). Adopting a feminist approach to architecture, the Buens Torv project actively involves women, non-binary individuals and marginalised groups in the design and co-creation of spaces. Throughout the process, Buens Torv is mindful of the dynamic interconnections between urban space and social structures such as race, gender and class. The project serves as an example of how to implement feminist urban design in Denmark, highlighting the importance of continuous dialogue, relationship building and citizen participation (Interview 15, 2023).

6.2.3 Key takeaways

A strong focus on architecture and urban planning for social inclusion is evident in Denmark, particularly in cities such as Aarhus and Copenhagen. The philosophy of putting people first in design, championed by urban architect Jan Gehl, has shaped Danish cities into some of the most liveable in the world. Nevertheless, challenges and opportunities for improvement remain.

At the national level, Denmark has implemented progressive policies aimed at promoting social inclusion in urban development. This is exemplified by inclusionary zoning laws, which ensure a portion of social housing is reserved for marginalised communities, thereby fostering diversity and equal access to housing opportunities (see section 3.2). Moreover, the 2014 national architecture policy emphasises architecture's role in advancing social sustainability, preventing ghettoisation, and creating diverse, accessible environments. On top of this, the principle of universal design is strongly endorsed in Danish policy and legislative frameworks dealing with the built environment.

In Aarhus, these principles are put into practice, with the city's policy for urban quality and architecture laying out a set of principles designed to ensure urban planning responds dynamically to community priorities. A focus on social mixing and combating segregation is evident in the approaches adopted by the City of Aarhus. Through prioritising physical accessibility, universal design and diverse housing options, Aarhus aims to create socially inclusive neighbourhoods.

Various initiatives demonstrate a commitment to fostering social interactions through shared spaces, micro-shops and community activities. Moreover, public spaces are designed to be inclusive for diverse users across the city. From accounting for various urban mobility modes to the strategic distribution of urban furniture, the city strives to create welcoming environments for all, including children, senior citizens and those with reduced mobility.

Active citizen participation is also considered crucial. In this respect, the City of Aarhus has established a unit dedicated to devising participatory approaches, and more broadly encourages grassroots involvement in smaller-scale initiatives. Initiatives such as SydhavnsPedeller underscore the city's commitment to providing employment opportunities and fostering a sense of community responsibility.

Nevertheless, challenges remain, particularly concerning affordable housing. First, as already discussed (see section 3.2), Denmark's national strategy against the formation of parallel societies, has thrown up difficult issues related to loss of public housing, displacement and gentrification. Second, the recent trend of

developers building private rental housing has made entering the housing market difficult for many people, especially young individuals. This trend is fuelled by tax incentives favouring rental housing construction, raising concerns about housing affordability once tax benefits expire. Additionally, existing national laws limit a municipality's ability to mandate more diverse housing types (e.g. co-housing), hindering efforts to create inclusive neighbourhoods.

Overall, though, Denmark's holistic urban planning strategies – encompassing both national policies and local initiatives – provide valuable models for promoting community wellbeing. Nevertheless, future attempts at addressing challenges such as affordable housing will require meaningful, ongoing collaboration between the government, developers and communities.

6.3 Norway

Norwegian architecture has historically been characterised by a strong emphasis on nature, encompassing aspects such as topography, landscape features and views. The model of an equitable society also undeniably shapes contemporary Norwegian architecture and planning of physical living environments. In addition, especially over the past couple of decades, issues such as climate change and social sustainability have introduced important new considerations to the planning of built environments (DOGA, n.d.-b).

A number of aspects must be considered when attempting to understand the connections between architecture, built environment planning and social inclusion in the Norwegian context. At the national level, Norway's comprehensive approach to built environment planning places strong emphasis on issues of sustainability and social inclusion, drawing on universal design principles in doing so. Combined, Norway's national and local architecture policies, coupled with state-funded area-based regeneration initiatives, seek to holistically address a range of living condition challenges in disadvantaged urban areas.

Having elaborated on the above, the text hones in on the City of Bergen, and to a lesser extent the Municipality of Trondheim, spotlighting the range of initiatives being implemented to create inclusive local urban environments and neighbourhoods. These encompass municipal strategies and planning policies, as well as various international and national programmes that have been instrumental in guiding local interventions.

6.3.1 Physical living environment in national policies and planning

Norway's comprehensive approach to the built environment and social inclusion incorporates numerous initiatives, policies and strategies. Here, the Norwegian Planning and Building Act (*Plan- og bygningsloven*) (2008) – the primary legal framework that municipalities must adhere to in physical living environment planning – plays a central role. The act is driven by a commitment to promote the wellbeing of individuals, society and future generations through sustainable development.

One of the act's underling principles is the notion of designing for universal accessibility. This must be considered in both planning and individual building projects, and includes a specific focus on the living conditions of children and young people, as well as the aesthetic design of a project's surroundings (Planning and Building Act, 2008). The act also underscores the necessity of upholding the universal design principle via the accessibility requirements applied to housing. On top of this, the act sets out clear directives on architectural quality, referencing aesthetic design of surroundings, visual qualities, architectural design and building practice.

Another important national policy framework is the Norwegian architectural policy, titled 'architecture.now'. Although the policy does not have any regulative power, it provides guidance for Norwegian municipalities in matters concerning architecture and built environment planning (Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs, 2009). Developed through cooperation between 13 ministries, the policy was launched in 2009, with Design and Architecture Norway (DOGA) playing a key role in its implementation. The policy aims to promote architecture in a broad sense, including encouraging the consideration of new challenges arising from climate change, growth and transformation. It also stresses the importance of architectural quality – encompassing functional, technical and formal aspects – in the planning and construction of buildings.

The following six focus areas constitute the foundations of the national architecture policy (Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs, 2009):

1. Architecture should be distinguished by eco- and energy-friendly solutions;
2. Cities and population centres should be developed using good-quality architecture;
3. The government should safeguard the cultural environment and building heritage;
4. Architecture should be promoted by knowledge, competence and dissemination;
5. The government should be a role model; and
6. Norwegian architecture should be visible internationally.

As the above focus areas imply, the national architectural policy lacks specific emphasis on the interconnections between physical living environments and social inclusion. Nevertheless, the notion of universal design is prominent in Norwegian policy frameworks. This builds on a long history: the principle of accessibility for people with disabilities was introduced into legislation in 1976, and over the ensuing decades the government has pursued a range of legislation, comprehensive strategies and specific initiatives addressing accessibility for people with disabilities (Tunström & Löfving, 2020). Norway's commitment in this area is further underscored by the country's 2013 ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, together with its adherence to additional EU and Nordic requirements.

In recent years, the Norwegian government has sought to enhance inclusion by applying the principles of universal design to all relevant national policies, from the 2015 Government Action Plan for Universal Design to guides for cultural heritage, and road and street infrastructure (Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2015). The government's comprehensive approach to universal design extends to a range of sectors (e.g. transport, ageing, healthcare, higher education), taking the form of funding, knowledge dissemination, networking and mapping.

Nevertheless, the action plan acknowledges an ongoing need for concerted, systematic efforts. In this regard, the plan highlights a variety of good practices and measures incorporating universal design, encompassing technological development; standardisation; strategic planning; financial support for home improvements; skills training; improved planning processes; urban design; information dissemination; and networking. These measures have been implemented by various actors, in many cases through collaboration between ministries, other governmental agencies, businesses and NGOs.

The action plan also emphasises the importance of maintaining and monitoring completed work, as well as ensuring universal design aspects are taken into consideration in national plans and strategies. In doing so, it acknowledges the persistence of various challenges, including the need to disseminate knowledge more widely and enhance the systematic implementation of measures (Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2015).

Housing is a hotly debated topic in Norway, especially when it comes to social inclusion (Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, 2021). At the national level, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (KDD) oversees housing and building policy, while the Norwegian State Housing Bank, *Husbanken* is responsible for financing public housing for the most disadvantaged (Husbanken, n.d.).

Norway has a dual housing system whereby public housing is strongly means-tested and only constitutes about 4% of housing stock, while the remainder is

governed by the free market (Sandlie & Gulbrandsen, 2017). Historically, Norway has displayed a strong tendency towards homeownership, and this remains the case today: about 80% of households own homes. This strong orientation towards homeownership combined with a lack of affordable housing initiatives poses significant challenges when it comes to making the housing offer more inclusive—especially in Oslo, where there are strong housing market pressures (Cavicchia, 2023).

Area-based regeneration initiatives constitute an important approach for addressing urban areas facing living condition challenges. Here, the state and municipalities collaborate extensively through long-term agreements designed to revitalise the targeted areas (see also section 3.3). The resultant initiatives aim to enhance services and uplift local environment quality in areas facing socio-economic difficulties through simultaneously tackling both physical living environment and social environment challenges. The state has established agreements with the cities of Oslo, Bergen, Drammen, Stavanger, Trondheim, Sarpsborg, Fredrikstad, Kristiansand and Skien, and in 2024 agreements were established with the municipalities of Gjøvik, Halden, Indre Østfold, Larvik and Tromsø.

The government's commitment to fostering socially sustainable urban communities is outlined in a 2023 white paper titled 'Good Urban Communities With Small Differences' (*Gode bysamfunn med små skilnader*) (Meld. St. 28, 2022–2023) (Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, 2023). This policy seeks to bolster good living conditions, enhance quality of life, and cultivate local environments conducive to growth and wellbeing. Area-based initiatives address a broad range of topics, such as enhancing living and neighbourhood environments; fostering community spaces and cultural activities; promoting immigrant integration; improving educational outcomes; increasing employment rates; reducing crime; and bolstering public health.

Collaboration between the state and municipalities is crucial to the implementation of national strategies and policies, and as such is underpinned by multi-level agreements. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (KDD) plays a central role in coordinating state efforts, with involvement from the ministries of Labour and Social Inclusion; Children and Families; Health and Care Services; Justice and Public Security; Climate and Environment; Culture and Equality; and Education and Research. In addition, several directorates are involved in specific cities and areas, including the directorates of Labour and Welfare; Higher Education and Skills; Health; Integration and Diversity (IMDi); and Education and Training; as well as the State Housing Bank.

It should be noted that area investments are intended to supplement rather than replace regular municipal operations, fostering innovation, service development and job creation while enhancing both the physical and social aspects of the local environment.

6.3.2 Urban design and inclusive communities in Bergen

Bergen, situated in Vestland County on the west coast of Norway, has a population of approximately 292,000 (as of 2024), making it the second-largest city in the country. Bergen is known for its cultural diversity, with its economic opportunities, education, tourism and vibrant arts scene attracting people from a range of backgrounds (Eurocities, n.d.).

Figure 27. Aerial view of Bergen



Source: CC BY-SA 4.0

Urban planning and city strategies

Notably, Bergen distinguishes itself from other Norwegian cities by employing a city architect (*byarkitekt*). Operating under the city council's Department for Climate, Environment and Urban Development since 2016 and functioning as an advisory body, the city architect has a pivotal role in elevating the quality of built environments throughout the municipality. In doing so, the city architect takes a comprehensive approach to urban development, emphasising sustainability, quality of life and spatial relationships. Additionally, they are responsible for steering the municipality's architecture policy, which places great stress on the importance of built environment characteristics when it comes to social inclusion (Interview 27, 2023).

Planning of Bergen's architectural landscape is organised into strategies and tools at different levels, which each address particular aspects of social sustainability and inclusion (Interview 27, 2023). At the foundational level, Bergen's overarching city vision unfolds through two comprehensive strategic documents: namely, the social part of the municipal masterplan and the Green Strategy.

The municipal masterplan, which sets the direction for Bergen's long-term development, consists of two parts: firstly, a social part (*samfunnsdel*), which describes how the city wants to develop, along with long-term goals and focus areas for enhancing inclusivity within the built environment; and, secondly, a land use part (*arealdel*), which provides an overview of – among other things – where it is permitted to cultivate land or to build roads, homes and other buildings (City of Bergen, 2024).

The social part of the masterplan is regularly renewed to reflect the city council's priorities and focus areas during its term in office. In 2024, development of a new social part of the masterplan began. Meanwhile, the existing plan – approved by the city council in 2015 – contains the following key objectives (City of Bergen, 2015):

- Facilitate social meeting places that can foster connections, strengthen social networks and promote community health;
- Cultivate openness, inclusion and good living conditions for all, irrespective of social differences;
- Ensure nurseries and schools offer quality environments that promote diversity, social mobility and integration, taking a proactive stance against discrimination and bullying;
- Provide varied, high-quality housing within accessible living environments; and
- Emphasise universal design principles that cater to diverse user groups, and integrate municipal housing seamlessly into urban structures. Here, the municipality should play an active role in ensuring adequacy.

Another relevant policy is the Green Strategy 2022–2030 (*Grønn strategi – Klimastrategi for Bergen 2022 – 2030*) (City of Bergen, 2022). While the strategy's primary focus is on environmentally sustainable development, it also incorporates a number of social goals, such as:

- Integrate a climate strategy that addresses social sustainability, enables environmentally friendly choices and envisions a universally designed city;
- Emphasise quality densification in neighbourhoods, creating social meeting places that foster a sense of belonging, wellbeing and good health; and
- Proactively work to prevent social and economic inequalities through developing methods for assessing and mitigating the social and economic consequences of climate measures.

In addition, there is a second tier of policies that encompass the physical and regulatory part of the municipal masterplan (City of Bergen, 2019a). These include various sub-strategies, notably the city's cultural heritage strategy and architecture strategy, which collectively address diverse facets of social sustainability.

The 2019–2023 strategy dedicated to conserving Bergen's culture heritage (*Kulturminnestrategi* 2019–2023) actively sought to foster a profound sense of community belonging (City of Bergen, 2019), and was premised on the notion that cultural monuments are central to a city's culture heritage and identity. They are also a resource that cannot be renewed if lost, meaning cultural heritage must be carefully managed in order that monuments can be passed on to future generations in good condition. This is especially important in a dynamic city such as Bergen, where vast development and construction is taking place across the municipality. Cultural heritage forms part of these processes, and so must carefully be considered when it comes to enabling sustainable urban development (City of Bergen, 2019).

Also key is Bergen's architecture and urban design strategy, named *Architecture+ (Arkitektur+)* (City of Bergen, 2020), which focuses on the urban environment, meeting places, and living and neighbourhood environments. In doing so, it provides recommendations on ensuring an active, attractive pedestrian city. The strategy's foundational underpinning is that the design of built environments, encapsulated in architecture, exerts a profound influence on individuals and communities. Thus, architecture represents an invaluable tool for crafting an inclusive, distinctive, attractive and environmentally conscious city.

Social inclusion carries considerable weight in the strategy, with streets, squares and buildings envisioned as spaces for social interactions. The guiding principle is to pursue construction in an inclusive manner, eschewing segregation or the promotion of specific groups over others. This approach is not tailored towards any specific target groups, but rather advocates universal participation in public life – encapsulating the ethos of 'inclusion for all' (City of Bergen, 2020).

Collaborative projects and initiatives

Various international and national programmes constitute a third tier of policies. Among the most prominent in this group is Future Built, a pioneering national initiative designed to foreground innovative, sustainable architectural solutions. Originating in Oslo, the programme has now expanded to include Bergen (City of Bergen, 2023). At its core, the programme aims to support collaboration between developers and architects via a comprehensive quality programme that articulates the envisioned outcomes of projects. It is hoped that doing so will help push the boundaries of sustainability and encourage novel solutions.

In particular, Future Built serves as a conduit for steering the private sector towards the cutting edge of architecture innovation. By actively engaging with developers, architects and stakeholders, the programme acts as a catalyst for the creation of new solutions aligned with economic and social sustainability objectives. Overall, the initiative represents a concerted effort to alter the private sector's trajectory towards more sustainable, socially responsible practices (City of Bergen, 2023).

Another relevant initiative is the international Dignity by Design programme, which focuses on the intersection of human rights and dignity within the built environment (IHRB, 2019). This collaborative initiative – led by the Institute for Human Rights and Business and backed up by other global human rights organisations – holistically examines how built environment design can uphold human rights and dignity throughout the construction process, encompassing all stakeholders and phases. Bergen was actively involved in a pilot project whereby the principles set out in the programme were used to develop an Inclusion Centre (see Figure 28) for newly arrived migrants and refugees, as part of the municipality's wider commitment to being a human rights city (IHRB, n.d.).

Figure 28. Bergen Inclusion Centre



Source: City of Bergen, M. Rousse

The process of transforming a former teacher-training college of some 17,000 square metres into an Inclusion Centre started in 2019, with the municipality investing more than €90 million in redeveloping the facility (Council of Europe, 2024). The centre opened in 2024 and now serves as a hub for newly arrived immigrants, providing educational, health and language services, as well as activities fostering inclusion and intercultural interaction. Throughout the project, meticulous attention was given to ensuring the building's design, construction and utilisation aligned with the overarching goal of promoting human rights and dignity (Interview 27, 2023).

Also worth highlighting is the 2018–2022 Bopilot initiative, a collaborative research project involving various research institutions and the municipalities of Trondheim and Bergen (City of Bergen, 2020b). The project explored how municipalities can stimulate housing sector innovation, specifically through the promotion of co-housing and shared spaces within neighbourhoods. The initiative also addressed societal challenges related to loneliness – a prevalent concern in Norway, particularly among the young and elderly populations. Notably, Bopilot attempted to combat the scarcity of affordable housing in Norway by introducing smaller flats and communal areas.

Municipalities traditionally have limited influence over housing innovations provided developers adhere to legal frameworks. With this in mind, Bopilot sought ways to empower municipalities to take a more proactive role in fostering diverse, innovative housing options. Essentially, the project revolved around encouraging private sector developers to introduce new housing construction concepts that cater to different target groups. Addressing the perplexing question of why there is limited construction of, for example, co-housing for older individuals or estates designed to appeal to a diverse mix of residents, developers cite a perceived lack of market demand.

In response, the project sought to establish mechanisms connecting potential buyers with developers, thereby facilitating a participatory process. This allows buyers to actively engage in the design and programming of their future homes, encouraging a sense of community. Through such means, Bopilot supported efforts to connect people and counter social disconnection in contemporary housing developments, as the while promoting community-based housing as a tool for socially sustainable neighbourhoods (City of Bergen, 2023).

Area-based regeneration

As discussed in section 3.3, area-based regeneration initiatives are important for dealing with segregation and living condition challenges in Norwegian cities. In Bergen, there have been *Områdesatsing* initiatives (see section 4.3.3) targeting disadvantaged neighbourhoods, including the areas of Solheim, Slettebakken, Loddefjord and Olsvik (City of Bergen, 2018). An important knowledge base for deciding which geographical areas to target are the public health reports regularly published by the City of Bergen. These divide Bergen into 57 living conditions zones, casting useful light on the differences between areas. Based on this, the city council decides which interventions to apply to which areas. These initiatives fall under the remit of the city's urban development department, but involve collaboration with both the state via the Norwegian State Housing Bank and the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, and local communities in the designated areas (City of Bergen, 2018).

Area-based initiatives are overseen by local coordinators responsible for internal and external coordination, development facilitation and community engagement. At the same time, the appropriate city departments and agencies are responsible

for measures falling within their jurisdiction. As such, interdisciplinary collaboration is crucial when it comes to ensuring comprehensive, cohesive efforts in prioritised investment areas. Of particular importance is collaboration with the local population, private entities, businesses, voluntary organisations and other public bodies is emphasised. Here, diverse participation methods are encouraged in order to ensure a holistic, inclusive approach to community development (Interview 27, 2023).

Insights into how area-based initiatives are implemented in Trondheim Municipality are provided in Box 13.

Box 13. Area-based development in Trondheim

As discussed, area-based investments are a commonly used approach in Norwegian cities with concentrated socio-economic challenges. In Trondheim's case, there have been several area investment initiatives over the years, including currently ongoing efforts (Municipality of Trondheim, 2022). In particular, the municipality's commitment to area-based initiatives was underscored in 2021 when city policy-makers designated Lademoen and Tempe/Sorgenfri as priority areas (Municipality of Trondheim, 2024a).

One of Trondheim's most recent area-based initiatives was launched in Lademoen. In this case, priority endeavours included improving social and physical meeting places as a means of nurturing better relations between groups residing in the district. Here, an essential first step was building mutual understanding among all the involved parties (Municipality of Trondheim, 2024b), as a guiding principle of the initiative was to identify pertinent measures through active dialogue with a range of residents and stakeholders.

One key early action involved establishing a local resource group that could harness the perspectives of community members and local stakeholders, garnering their input on how the neighbourhood should be shaped going forward. These networks were envisioned as stimulating greater cohesion and involvement among diverse resident groups – for example, encouraging the participation of children and youth in initiatives to renovate local schools.

Such initiatives are integral to the city's strategy to cultivate inclusive, vibrant local communities. The pursuit of area-based initiatives is

informed by various indicators, including the 2011 Trondheim Standard of Living Report, which delineates the geographical distribution of social inequality within the city. Additionally, the 2019 Trøndelag Health Survey (HUNT) provides invaluable insights into residents' self-perceived wellbeing, shedding light on which local environmental qualities are most pivotal for public health and overall wellbeing.

At the national level, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (KDD) coordinates collaboration between state and municipal entities in area initiatives across Norway. Trondheim municipality is actively working to secure a decade-long agreement with the state in order to ensure sustained project funding for investments in Lademoen and Tempe-Sorgenfri.

In 2022, Trondheim municipality received NOK 8.2 million (around €740.000), in state funding to kick-start the initiatives, with the municipality's own contributions earmarked for programme management. Moving forward, it is anticipated that the municipality, state authorities, and local public and private actors will collectively contribute measures to advance these area initiatives (Municipality of Trondheim, 2022).

6.3.3 Key takeaways

Norway has for some time displayed a strong commitment to inclusive, sustainable architecture, driven by the influence of nature, climate change considerations and the vision of an equitable society. The examples investigated above, particularly from Bergen, provide insights into both the successes and challenges seen at the national and local levels in planning inclusive physical living environments.

Norway's comprehensive national approach to the built environment places strong emphasis on sustainability and social inclusion. The Planning and Building Act serves as a robust legal framework, mandating universal design principles in planning and building measures. Also relevant is the national architecture policy, 'architecture.now', which emphasises eco-friendly solutions and architectural quality. Even so, it does not specifically deal with social inclusion, indicating an opportunity for refinement.

Meanwhile, area-based regeneration initiatives – widely used in Norwegian cities to address living condition challenges in disadvantaged urban areas – provide a holistic approach for addressing both the socio-economic conditions and physical living environments of local neighbourhoods. Overall, Norway's dedication to accessibility and inclusivity is underscored by its strong commitment to universal design principles, guided by international conventions and national policies.

Norway is characterised by a strong focus on homeownership, a limited share of public housing and a dual housing system. Especially in areas experiencing pressured housing markets, such as Oslo, this backdrop is not conducive to improved social inclusion. Even so, the case of Bergen exemplifies the positive strides made in municipal-level policies and initiatives. One example is the city architect role, whereby the individual in post helps steer municipal architecture policy, reflecting a commitment on the part of the city council to elevating the quality of built environments.

The social part of the city masterplan and the Green Strategy also demonstrate a holistic approach in their focus on social meeting places, diversity and universal design. On top of this, various sub-strategies related to the municipal masterplan address – among other aspects – cultural heritage and architecture, emphasising their role in creating attractive, inclusive urban spaces.

In addition, various international and national programmes and frameworks are relevant to interventions carried out in Norway's cities. For example, the Future Built initiative addresses sustainability and social considerations in collaboration with developers, while the Dignity by Design programme – focused on the intersection of human rights and the built environment – has been instrumental in guiding the development of the Bergen Inclusion Centre.

Similarly, the Bopilot initiative has helped create new approaches to stimulating innovation in the housing sector, while promoting community-based housing as a tool for socially inclusive neighbourhoods. The City of Bergen's active engagement in these initiatives demonstrates a commitment to innovation, sustainability and social responsibility, including finding new ways of addressing these issues in planning for the physical living environment.

Nevertheless, a persistent housing-related challenge in Norway – particularly in high-pressure urban areas – is the country's strong focus on homeownership and limited public housing options, which hinders inclusivity. Going forward, ongoing efforts are needed to disseminate knowledge, enhance systematic implementation and address the lack of market demand for diverse housing options.

6.4 Sweden

National policy in Sweden stresses the role of architecture and design in creating inclusive living environments. Of particular importance in this regard is the Policy for Designed Living Environment, which seeks to reduce segregation and improve living conditions through the creation of safe, inclusive environments.

At the municipal level, the City of Gothenburg has developed a strategy for implementing the national policy's goals. Here, the construction of a cultural centre in Bergsjön – a secluded district suffering from segregation and lack of functional diversity – offers a successful example of improving inclusiveness through architecture and design. In this case, the cultural centre strengthened social cohesion by giving residents the opportunity to come together and improve the area's attractiveness.

6.4.1 Physical living environments in national policies and planning

Over recent years, a key issue concerning Sweden's national authorities has been ensuring neighbourhood-level planning of physical living environments contributes to social inclusion and less segregated cities. This aim is reflected in the country's legal frameworks and various national policies and strategies. For example, the Swedish Planning and Building Act (*Plan- och bygglag 2010:900*) states that spatial planning should promote good, equal social living conditions – both for the people of today and future generations (Planning and Building Act, 2010).

Elsewhere, the 2018 Strategy for Living Cities (Ministry of the Environment and Energy, 2018) regards addressing segregation as vital to creating more sustainable cities. More specifically, it refers to the role that architecture, urban form and the design of physical living environments can play – along with laying the groundwork for achieving national climate and environmental goals – in reducing segregation and strengthening social cohesion. The strategy highlights that urban areas should be designed so as to be accessible to everyone, which requires paying attention to such aspects as disability, gender equality, and the rights and perspectives of children and older residents. Moreover, accessibility in the built environment is described as a prerequisite for increased safety and crime prevention.

The connection between the physical and social living environment is also emphasised in the government's 2018 long-term strategy to reduce and counteract segregation (see section 3.4). The strategy recognises segregation as a complex phenomenon involving a number of closely related dimensions, including housing,

education, labour market, democracy and civil society, and crime (Ministry of Culture, 2018). As such, the strategy is clear that efforts to counteract segregation must address the issue at a structural level. This encompasses planning of neighbourhood physical living environments, along with measures targeting housing stock, employment conditions and integration.

Relevant here is Boverket's 2023 report, 'Tools to Reduce and Counteract Segregation', which explores how physical planning, design and housing development can help address residential segregation (Boverket, 2023e). The report highlights the influence exerted by spatial organisation and built environment design on how we use and move around in a physical environment. For example, the physical living environment affects how we experience mental and physical barriers, while urban spaces can be designed in such a way that people from different groups are more likely to meet. Moreover, the report stresses the importance of giving everyone affected by measures targeting their living environments the opportunity to participate in planning processes. Such an approach is crucial for combating residential segregation and creating physical environments that enhance community.

Also highly relevant is Sweden's 2018 Policy for Designed Living Environment (*Politik för gestaltad livsmiljö*), which sets out national objectives for architecture and design policy (Ministry of Culture, 2018). More specifically, the policy states that architecture and design should be used to help create a sustainable, equitable, less segregated society, in which everyone can influence the development of their shared environment. Several key principles related to this goal are set out, including that sustainability and quality should not be subservient to short-term financial considerations; environments are to be designed according to universal design principles; and cooperation and collaboration between actors is to be actively cultivated.

National authorities – notably the Swedish national architect at Boverket – provide guidance on architectural strategies related to ensuring a healthy living environment (Boverket, 2024c). Alongside Boverket, ArkDes, the National Heritage Board and the Public Art Agency Sweden are also tasked with promoting policy development in this area (ArkDes, n.d.). ArkDes serves as a knowledge source and platform for exploring, monitoring and disseminating information about relevant policy, especially in the fields of architecture and design.

Similarly, Boverket disseminates information on good practices, collecting research on – among other things – the role of the built environment in social integration; social aspects relating to health; and the importance of green space and daylight. Particularly important in this regard is the scientific research conducted at Chalmers University of Technology and the University of Gothenburg concerning how planning for physical and social living environments intersect (Interview 22, 2023).

Overall, the importance of physical environment planning in alleviating social segregation and reinforcing social integration is widely acknowledged at the national level (Interview 22, 2023). Essentially, a core goal of Sweden's national policies is creating physical environments that allow the inhabitants of every neighbourhood to gain fair access to urban amenities and equal opportunities. This is an important yet ambitious goal in light of the current, somewhat unfavourable situation, especially in neighbourhoods characterised by socio-economic disadvantage.

Against this backdrop, the following section focuses on the interventions taking place in Gothenburg to revitalise physical living environments and strengthen social inclusion in disadvantaged areas.

6.4.2 Counteracting segregation and revitalising neighbourhoods through physical living environment interventions in Gothenburg

Gothenburg, located in Västra Götaland County on Sweden's west coast, has a population of 610,000 in the city proper and 1.1 million in the wider urban region (as of 2024), making it the country's second-largest city and the fifth largest city in the Nordic region (City of Gothenburg, n.d.-b). A rise in socio-economic and ethnic segregation in the city over the past few decades has prompted greater political focus on the issue in recent years (Andersson et al., 2009; Östh et al., 2015).

Figure 29. Aerial view of Gothenburg



Source: Göteborg & Co, Per Pixel Petersson

Given that socio-economic status is closely linked to health status and quality of life, addressing segregation and socio-spatial inequalities is viewed as particularly pressing in Gothenburg, where – as of 2020 – there is an almost nine-year difference in average life expectancy between the city's most advantaged and disadvantaged neighbourhoods (City of Gothenburg, 2023). Life expectancy is lowest in areas characterised by low income and educational levels and a high share of foreign-born residents. Here, Bergsjön, explored later in this chapter, stands out as having the lowest average life expectancy among both men and women.

The most socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods are primarily suburban districts in northern Gothenburg, whereas higher status neighbourhoods are mainly located in the city centre or in the southern and western suburbs. Alongside increased residential segregation, Gothenburg has experienced rising school segregation (City of Gothenburg, 2023).

Policies to strengthen social inclusion and revitalise disadvantaged areas

The City of Gothenburg's 2018–2026 Programme for an Equal City (*Göteborgs Stads program för en jämlik stad 2018–2026*) (City of Gothenburg, 2018b) is a cross-cutting policy covering all branches of the city administration, with cross-sectoral collaboration highlighted as a key implementation principle. The programme, which acknowledges working for equality as a long-term endeavour that may take years to yield tangible results, has four defined priority areas: 1) a good start in life and good conditions for growing up; 2) employment conditions; 3) sustainable and equitable living environments; and 4) participation, influence and trust.

The creation of accessible, inclusive social and physical living environments is also reflected in the Age-Friendly Gothenburg (*Åldersvänliga Göteborg*) policy programme, which has been ongoing since 2016 (City of Gothenburg, n.d.-c). The programme seeks to make Gothenburg a better city to age in, improving older people's living conditions by strengthening self-determination and evening out health and wellbeing differences (Stjernberg, 2019b). The goal of becoming an age-friendly city is also tied to various other initiatives that have been launched to promote social sustainability, inclusion, human rights, public health and equal life opportunities.

Another strategy relevant to counteracting segregation is titled Development Strategy Göteborg 2035 (City of Gothenburg, 2014), which states that Gothenburg is segregated in several ways, and that physical planning should be used as a tool for promoting a more connected city. In particular, it calls for good physical links within and between all parts of the city. The strategy also points out that many areas in Gothenburg have insufficient services and shops, and that constructing new housing in these neighbourhoods can provide more equal conditions for accessing services.

One current policy goal is to ensure that, within the next few years, the city's 'especially vulnerable neighbourhoods' are no longer classified as such on the Swedish Police's list of vulnerable areas (see section 5.4) (Brorström & Styhre, 2024). As present, six of Gothenburg's neighbourhoods feature on the list: Bergsjön, Biskopsgården, Hammarkullen, Hjällbo, Lövgärdet and Tynnered. The city council has therefore tasked Framtiden Group – owned by the City of Gothenburg and currently the country's largest public housing organisation – with carrying out targeted interventions aimed at removing these areas from the list.

Framtiden owns and manages over 74,000 apartments across Gothenburg, with every fourth resident living in housing owned by the company (Framtiden, n.d.). It is also a major property owner in all the city's vulnerable areas, and therefore seen as playing a potentially significant role in increasing safety and breaking structural segregation. Towards this end, a wide-ranging strategy for revitalising the city's vulnerable areas has been drawn up, encompassing such issues as safety and crime; construction and refurbishment housing; affordability; employment and job creation; and creating more activities for young people (Framtiden, 2023).

The original goal stated in the city council's 2020 budget was for there to be no Gothenburg neighbourhoods on the list of vulnerable areas by 2025. However, this was adjusted in the 2023 budget to a goal of no 'especially vulnerable' areas by 2030, and no 'vulnerable areas' at all by 2035 (Framtiden, 2023). One area targeted by these interventions is Bergsjön, explored in further detail below.

Targeted interventions in Bergsjön

Bergsjön, a suburban district in north-eastern Gothenburg hosting some 18,313 residents (as of the end of 2023) (Statistics Sweden, 2025), was developed as part of Sweden's 1965–1974 Million Homes Programme (*Miljonprogrammet*) (T. Hall & Vidén, 2005). The district is located approximately 30 minutes from the city centre by public transport, and is serviced by two tram lines and one main bus route. Bergsjön mainly consists of densely populated, multi-storey concrete residential buildings, and offers few functional services to the many young people looking to spend their free time outdoors (City of Gothenburg, 2016).

Figure 30. Gothenburg's suburban Bergsjön district



Source: CC BY-SA 3.0, Alicia Fagervig

Ever since the Swedish Police's list of vulnerable areas was introduced in 2015, Bergsjön has been classified as an 'especially vulnerable area' (*särskilt utsatt område*). The area is associated with various problems and has long had a very low socio-economic status related to its location far from the city centre, monotonous built environment, lack of functional diversity, and vulnerable population. Thus, in 2013, Familjebostäder – part of the Framtiden Group – decided that Bergsjön was in need of long-term, proactive revitalisation work. A initial strategy document was developed for the period 2014–2021, with a revised strategy focused on measures aimed at removing the area from the list of vulnerable areas subsequently approved in 2020 (City of Gothenburg, 2020).

Social sustainability and integration are at the core of the current redevelopment of Bergsjön. In the first phase, around 2,500 homes – both rented and owner-occupied units – are to be built, mainly at a smaller scale in order to offer an alternative to the massive housing complexes that currently exist. In order to attract people from other neighbourhoods, there will be a particular emphasis on student housing and co-building. Another key focus is improving connectivity between Bergsjön's various sub-areas, and between Bergsjön and its surrounding districts.

Although Bergsjön is surrounded by large green areas, a major ring road currently restricts access to them. The regeneration efforts are therefore seeking to not only make these green areas more accessible, but create new and better parks and meeting places. As was common in the 1960s and 1970s, the area was built based on a car-centric model. Now, however, the City of Gothenburg has switched focus to encouraging public transport and giving the area a more intimate character through densification, narrowing of the ring road and the creation of better cycle paths (Interview 30, 2023). Here, improving bus connectivity represented a first step in ensuring better connections with Gothenburg's city centre (City of Gothenburg, n.d.-d).

A number of policies and research projects have been used to support these various revitalisation efforts. For example, the City of Gothenburg's architecture policy (City of Gothenburg, 2018a), which is based on the national Policy for Designed Living Environment (Ministry of Culture, 2018), states that architecture, form and design should contribute to a sustainable, equal and less segregated society, where everyone can influence the development of their shared environment (City of Gothenburg, 2018a). More specifically, the policy lays out how architecture can contribute to an inclusive, attractive city where all residents enjoy proximity to services, green spaces and public transport (City of Gothenburg, 2018a).

The Divided City research project, initiated by the City of Gothenburg and carried out during 2013–2016, also provided valuable knowledge that has since been used in Bergsjön's redevelopment initiatives (Interview 30, 2023). The research, largely conducted at the KTH School of Architecture, examined how segregation and social sustainability relate to the built environment and urban form, and how architecture and urban design can contribute to a less segregated city (Mistra Urban Futures, n.d.). One study with a significant focus on Bergsjön explored how living conditions across Gothenburg differ based on built environment characteristics (Legeby, et al., 2015).

The most important project realised in the area thus far has been the establishment of Culture House Bergsjön (*Kulturhuset Bergsjön*) (see Figure 31). This new cultural centre offers, among other facilities, a music studio; a ceramics studio; an exhibition hall; a stage for music, dance and theatre; and a library with story rooms, study areas and group rooms (City of Gothenburg, n.d.-a). The project was initiated in 2008, when various stakeholders (associations, companies, organisations and citizens) came together to form a cultural centre association. The city council became involved in the project in 2011, with its 2013 city budget including a decision to invest in the new cultural centre, which was eventually opened in 2022. The Culture House is located on Rymdtorget, one of Bergsjön's main squares, which has been subject to series of a renovations that began back in 2000–2005, when the surrounding buildings were upgraded and premises for a library, preschool, and maternity and childcare centre, along with a new bus stop, were built (City of Gothenburg, 2016).

Figure 31. Kulturhuset Bergsjön



Source: CC BY-SA 4.0

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The Culture House has been at the heart of efforts to transform Bergsjön, not only in terms of improving the quality of the physical living environment, but also through fostering social inclusion, wellbeing, trust and community. The centre was intended to be both a meeting place for local residents, particularly children and young people, and a means attracting visitors from other areas (City of Gothenburg, 2016).

Given that overcrowded accommodation is a common issue in Bergsjön, the Culture House offers a welcoming place for people to meet or study outside of home, including during evenings and weekends. By contrast, the previous library shut on weekends (Interview 29, 2023). The venue also addresses the previously faced issue of local school pupils having to travel outside Bergsjön for cultural activities. Moreover, the centre provides facilities for people to learn about – among other things – organising events and activities; contracting and agreements; and applying for grants. Finally, the exhibition hall offers a space for local artists to showcase their work.

Overall, in simultaneously addressing multiple issues, Culture House Bergsjön has contributed to a sense of belonging among the local community, with citizen involvement as a cornerstone of the project since the early planning phase (Interview 28, 2023). Nevertheless, this project alone cannot resolve the many built environment challenges faced by Bergsjön. Issues such as the monotonous design of the area's housing stock, a lack of multifunctionality, and the surrounding ring road all contribute to negative perceptions of the neighbourhood.

In order to attract more functional diversity and encourage employers to establish themselves in Bergsjön, better connections to neighbouring areas are necessary, as are significant efforts to improve the physical living environment (Interview 28, 2023). The City of Gothenburg has already launched interventions with these objectives in mind – for instance, by redeveloping Rymdtorget square. More broadly, creating attractive, accessible areas is seen as an effective means of promoting local service development by attracting businesses and establishing new workplaces (Interview 30, 2023).

6.4.3 Key takeaways

In Sweden, urban segregation has been recognised as a complex, multifaceted phenomenon encompassing such factors as housing, education, employment, democratic participation and crime. Against this backdrop, architecture, urban form and design are seen as having an important role to play in creating more socially inclusive, less segregated cities, with various key national policy frameworks emphasising the connection between physical living environments and social environments.

At the city level, Gothenburg is characterised by high levels of segregation. As such, counteracting socio-spatial disparities in living conditions constitutes an important policy goal in several city-wide strategies and programmes. The case of Bergsjön – a district of Gothenburg designated as 'especially vulnerable' – exemplifies how national and municipal policy goals are implemented at the local level, and how improvements in the physical environment can contribute to better living conditions in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. It also highlights the importance of adapting development initiatives to local needs through the close, early involvement of local associations and other key actors.

At the same time, Bergsjön illustrates the limits of localised action when it comes to reducing segregation. While the opening of Bergsjön Culture House has been

successful up to a point, it cannot on its own solve the area's challenges, particularly in terms of accessibility and connectiveness. Moreover, the construction of a cultural centre with a library as a focal point is not necessarily a replicable approach in other disadvantaged areas. Rather, what is most important is to take into account the context-specific conditions when identifying potential drivers of change. Here, Bergsjön has a long history of strong local commitment, which led to many small associations becoming engaged in the development process for the Culture House (Interview 28, 2023).

One important factor underling the success of Bergsjön Culture House is that the initiative was originally driven by local actors, who joined forces to promote the idea of building a new cultural centre in the area. This ultimately led to a political decision in favour of the idea a few years later (Interview 31, 2023). As such, the case highlights the importance of meaningfully involving local residents and actors in planning of their local physical environments, and using this as the basis for the priority-setting of local interventions.

6.5 Iceland

Iceland's policy framework places strong emphasis on integrating sustainability, inclusivity and social cohesion into urban planning and design. This is reflected in the comprehensive scope of the National Planning Strategy and its related policies and laws, including the Icelandic Planning Act, which serves as a foundational pillar for urban planning (Interview 8, 2023). While the relationship between urban planning, the built environment, and socio-political measures designed to combat segregation and promote inclusivity is a relatively recent topic in Iceland, these issues have received increased policy attention in recent years, particularly in Reykjavík and its surrounding region (Interview 20, 2023).

In this light, the text below examines how Iceland's national policies and planning legislation emphasise the interconnections between the physical living environment and social life. Having done so, the focus turns to the various policies and initiatives pursued in the City of Reykjavík and its wider region, which stress the development of urban living environments that foster social inclusion and – more indirectly – counteract urban segregation.

6.5.1 Physical living environment in national policies and planning

Iceland's National Planning Strategy (*Landsskipulagsstefna*) articulates a unified spatial planning policy focused on sustainable development, environmental protection and the enhancement of life quality (Planning agency, 2016b). This is to be achieved by supporting competitiveness, flexibility and resilience to socio-environmental changes. The strategy is primarily implemented through municipal-level planning, with the relevant authorities required by the Planning Act to build on the national strategy when drawing up spatial plans. This comprehensive planning strategy spans the entire country and all territory types, including urban areas, rural areas, central highlands, and marine and coastal areas (Ísland.is, n.d.). Particular emphasis is placed on housing development; diverse modes of transportation; nationally significant infrastructure; climate change planning; wind energy; energy transition in transportation; and land use and landscape conservation.

The Planning Act (*Skipulagslög*) (no. 123/2010) is central to managing land use in Iceland, including ensuring that growth in urban and rural areas is sustainable and in harmony with the environment. Besides the Planning Act, Iceland has no specific laws on architecture and the built environment, except for a law concerning publicly owned buildings (*Lög um listskreytingar opinberra bygginga og Listskreytingasjóð ríkisins*, 1998).

In addition, as mentioned previously (see section 3.5), there are no specific laws on counteracting segregation and promoting inclusion. Rather, the National Planning Strategy, together with a number of sectoral policies, contain indirect references to fostering inclusivity and combating urban segregation through thoughtful built environment planning and design. These laws and policies set the foundation for the primary legal framework and policy goals that municipalities must adhere to in their plans (Interview 20, 2023; Interview 26, 2024).

New additions to the National Planning Strategy drawn up in recent years include new chapters on climate-conscious planning, spatial planning and landscape protection, and on healthy settlements and land use. Some of the key areas of emphasis contained in them are:

- **Climate-conscious urban planning**, key aspects of which include reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing carbon sequestration, as well as mitigating risks that disproportionately affect marginalised communities. The focus on climate change adaptation underscores the necessity of resilient infrastructures that protect all community members, while at the same time fostering social cohesion and addressing urban segregation.
- **Connectivity and mobility**, which encompasses the promotion of climate-friendly transport options, including active and public transportation. By

reducing the need for long commutes and encouraging sustainable mobility options, the policy aims to knit communities more closely together. The vision of compact, mixed-use communities – epitomised by the '20-minute city' model – in which everyone's daily needs are within a comfortable walking or cycling distance, further exemplifies this aim. Such an approach encourages social interaction, contributing to a more cohesive community fabric.

- **Inclusive public spaces and infrastructure**, which emphasises the importance of public area and housing design in supporting climate-conscious mobility, meeting community needs, fostering inclusivity and building social cohesion. In particular, taking account of community identities when enhancing public spaces is highlighted as an effective means of cultivating a sense of belonging among residents.
- **Local governance and community engagement**, which encompasses the active engagement of local communities and governance structures in planning processes. This translates into development initiatives being reflective of and responsive to the unique needs of community members, particularly those who have historically been marginalised or excluded. Community engagement can thus become a cornerstone for creating inclusive, vibrant and resilient urban environments.
- **Health, wellbeing and social life**, which builds on the notion that there is an indissoluble link between physical environments and public health. Encouraging active lifestyles through urban design not only addresses physical wellbeing, but enhances mental health by cultivating community interaction and accessibility. Such an approach requires a holistic view of health and wellbeing, encompassing its social, physical and environmental aspects – all of which are also seen as important for addressing urban segregation and social inclusion.

Overall, Iceland's approach to urban planning and design presents a forward-thinking model that emphasises sustainability and inclusivity. This is exemplified by the 2023 National Guidelines Concerning Sustainable Planning and Ecological Transport in Urban Areas, Focusing on People, Settlements and Urban Spaces (*Mannlíf, byggð og bæjarrými – Leiðbeiningar um sjálfbært skipulag og vistvænar samgöngur í þéttbýli*), a collaborative endeavour between the Icelandic National Planning Agency and the Association of Municipalities in the Capital Area (SSH) (Planning Agency and Association of Municipalities in the Capital Region (SSH), 2023).

The guidelines not only address the physical configuration of cities and neighbourhoods, but the intimate connections between urban living environments and social life. In doing so, they spotlight the critical role of local governance and active community involvement in creating more inclusive local living environments. By fostering collaboration among elected officials, municipal workers, urban

planners, designers, residents and developers, the guidelines aim to nurture a collectively shared vision for sustainable and inclusive urban areas (Interview 8, 2023). Such an approach is crucial to managing community-driven initiatives supportive of diverse populations (Planning Agency and Association of Municipalities in the Capital Region (SSH), 2023).

Central to these national guidelines is the previously mentioned '20-minute city' concept, which is seen as not only a way of reducing dependency on cars, but of enhancing local services and amenities, thereby promoting social cohesion. Here, a focus on dense but human-scale urban spaces is regarded as facilitating diverse, vibrant communities where various groups can interact more seamlessly. Through emphasising walkability, accessibility and mixed-use development, and in turn better integrating different social groups within shared spaces, the approach is highly relevant to matter of urban segregation (Interview 7, 2023). Additionally, by prioritising public transportation and ensuring streets are conducive to walking and biking, the guidelines support the creation of more inclusive built environments.

6.5.2 Urban planning and social inclusion in Reykjavík

In Reykjavík and its wider Capital Area, a number of initiatives and plans aimed at creating more sustainable, equitable urban environments are being implemented. Some of these have a cross-municipal focus, while others focus exclusively on the City of Reykjavík.

Figure 32. Street view in Reykjavík



Source: Mats Stjernberg

One significant approach in this regard is the transformation of local transportation so that it aligns with the holistic urban development perspective outlined in local plans and regional visions. Both the Green Steps of Reykjavík City and the 20-minute neighbourhood concept – which is referred to in collective regional plan for Reykjavík Capital Area – emphasise the importance of introducing transport modes supportive of sustainable development (City of Reykjavík, 2022; SSH, 2015).

The collective regional plan, which covers the period up to 2040, also focuses more broadly on preserving urban green spaces and promoting sustainable development (Lidmo et al., 2024). As part of this, equity loans – introduced in 2020 by the government's national strategy – are available to assist first-time homebuyers (HMS, 2020). The loan system has, however, been criticised for potentially limiting access to housing areas and pushing particular groups to city outskirts (see section 3.5.1) (Lidmo et al., 2024).

Despite such challenges, the Green Plan of Reykjavík City (City of Reykjavík, 2020) and the active promotion of 20-minute city principles point to the council's ongoing commitment to inclusive, environmentally, socially and economically sustainable urban development.

6.5.3 Key takeaways

Iceland's National Planning Strategy focuses on both the physical elements of urban environments and the social fabric they support. Through climate-conscious planning, inclusively designed public spaces, local governance and community engagement, the strategy sets a clear framework for fostering urban environments conducive to social cohesion, trust and wellbeing.

Through prioritising active mobility and public transportation, advocating for compact, mixed-use communities, and fostering local governance and community engagement, Iceland is – at least at the policy level – working towards the realisation of 20-minute neighbourhoods. By its very nature, this vision has inclusivity at its core, as it involves ensuring daily needs are accessible to everyone, irrespective of social or economic status.

The City of Reykjavík exemplifies the practical application of these policies at the local level. In preserving green spaces, introducing equitable housing policies and promoting sustainable development, Reykjavík is spearheading efforts to mitigate

urban segregation and champion social inclusion. Here, however, it should be noted that combating segregation with promoting social inclusion are considered byproducts – as opposed to specified objectives – of a planning system that prioritises community diversification and sustainable development.

In conclusion, although Iceland's approach to urban development appears to lack initiatives that explicitly address inclusion or segregation, the country's urban planning guidelines nevertheless promote inclusivity and cohesion by prioritising sustainability, community engagement and flexible, responsive planning.



Source: City of Helsinki, Taru Pajukallio

7. Discussion

Over recent decades, socio-spatial disparities between population groups in many Nordic cities have become more pronounced, manifesting as greater socio-economic and ethnic segregation. This has prompted growing concerns about the societal implications arising from urban segregation and exclusion. The urban policy agendas drawn up in response to such concerns contain a wide range of pertinent policy measures and planning interventions. Against the above backdrop, this study has examined how Nordic governments and cities are both seeking to reduce urban segregation and foster greater social inclusion.

The driving purpose of the report has been to provide a comparative Nordic outlook on relevant policy-making and planning at different territorial levels. Governments in the Nordic region have introduced various national policies and strategies aimed at preventing segregation and increasing social inclusion in cities, while responsibility for policy implementation and planning interventions often rests at the city or neighbourhood level. A particular focus of the study has been to unpack how policy-making and planning roles are allocated across different levels of governance, especially in terms of interactions between the central state and municipalities, and how public sector organisations and other actors work together to tackle urban segregation and foster social inclusion.

In addressing these aims, the report has examined all five Nordic countries and focused in on 13 different Nordic cities. Throughout, four main themes have shaped the analysis, expressed through four overarching research questions, each of which has been addressed in a dedicated chapter (see Table 1 in section 1.1). Below, the research findings arising from these four questions are discussed in turn, followed by some brief final reflections.

7.1 Policies for counteracting segregation and promoting socially mixed and inclusive neighbourhoods

The first of the study's core themes, addressed in Chapter 3, concerned national policies designed to counteract urban segregation and promote social inclusion. Here, the aim was to set out the relevant national policy landscape in all five Nordic countries and illustrate the kinds of initiatives and tools governments have employed in this regard. The following section sums up the main policy approaches taken in each country, followed by analysis of the similarities and differences apparent in a cross-Nordic comparison.

7.1.1 Nordic national policies targeting and promoting social inclusion in cities

What does the national policy landscape concerning strategies preventing segregation and promoting social inclusion in Nordic cities look like?

A common feature of the policies pursued in the five Nordic countries is that they are being formulated amid a context of growing concerns about societal segregation and inequality. Overall, the findings show that Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden all share a commitment to fostering cohesive communities and reducing disparities. Nevertheless, the approach taken by each country to achieving these objectives often involve divergent methods and policy frameworks.

Here, the Swedish Government's 2018 long-term strategy to reduce and counteract segregation stands out due its wide-ranging focus – encompassing factors such as education, the labour market, democracy and civil society, and crime – and holistic view of residential segregation as a complex phenomenon. The strategy framed urban segregation as a relational phenomenon that can only be fully understood in a wider city- or region-wide context, with development in one neighbourhood inevitably impacting that of other residential areas. Building on this, the strategy's primary focus was on addressing the aspects of segregation that most negatively impeded people's rights, preconditions and possibilities.

The Nordic national policies examined by the study are premised on various closely related concepts, with many focusing – whether explicit or implicit – on broader notions of social sustainability. For instance, Finland's national policies refer to social sustainability in relation to ensuring equality between people. Here, participation and trust among individuals and other actors are emphasised as preconditions for achieving this. Overall, promoting wellbeing and reducing inequalities are clear priorities, while supporting key services is underlined as something that can reinforce social sustainability, everyday safety and community spirit.

Finnish national policies also highlight the role of urban planning in strengthening inclusion and countering social inequality. Coupled with other targeted actions and measures, thoughtful urban planning can create pleasant, functional, green living environments that contribute to neighbourhood vitality. Another prominent policy area at the national level is housing, especially when it comes to ensuring urban areas feature a mix of housing tenure forms and infill development, thereby helping prevent segregation.

Norway's national policies have a strong focus on addressing social challenges that are spatially concentrated in certain residential areas. Such policies apply the concept of social sustainability to a variety of issue areas, such as ensuring more equal education and employment opportunities; promoting good living conditions; and creating more integrated local communities.

Norwegian policies and strategies also address the importance of immigration and integration for local development, in parallel with holistic urban planning processes. In the latter respect, considerable emphasis is placed on ensuring a city's physical design contributes to strengthening social inclusion, with parks, open spaces and other publicly accessible meeting places (e.g. libraries, cultural centres, sports facilities) enjoying particular prominence.

Iceland differs from the other Nordic countries in that issues of segregation and social inclusion have only relatively recently appeared on the policy agenda. The country thus has comparatively few national policies addressing these issues, although some relevant initiatives concerning integration, education and housing have been launched in the past few years. In terms of preventing segregation, however, it is the City of Reykjavík that has been responsible for Iceland's most notable policies and plans. Creating more socially inclusive, mixed neighbourhoods is a clear priority of the city's masterplan and housing policy. This objective is also supported by the *Borgarlína* public transport project, while the integration of immigrants is the main focus of Reykjavík's immigration policy.

The Danish context for segregation-related policies differs significantly from the other Nordic countries. In recent years, the main national policy in this area has been the 2018 'Ghetto Strategy', which seeks to eradicate 'parallel societies' through a broad range of policy and planning measures, addressing such issues as housing, integration, education, welfare, crime and punishment, and the transformation of physical living environments in targeted areas. The strategy has proven controversial, largely because it involves the strategic demolition of housing and is designed to change the residential composition of targeted areas, which some regard as planned gentrification.

Another aspect that sets the Ghetto Strategy apart from most other Nordic policies is its emphasis on non-Western immigrants, whom the government wants to prevent from residing in the targeted areas. It is also noteworthy that the Danish strategy barely addresses the issue of employment, whereas many of the other

Nordic national policies point to work and employment as key elements in creating less segregated cities.

Generally speaking, the Nordic policies, strategies and plans examined by the study aim to create less segregated cities and more socially mixed neighbourhoods. This objective is premised on the notion of diversity, which according to Fainstein (2014) can refer either to variety in the urban landscape (housing, public spaces and multifunctionality) or to social mix in terms of class, ethnicity and gender. Here, several of the study's case studies demonstrate a particular focus on using urban planning interventions or tenure mixing policies to achieve greater variation in the built environment and housing stock of neighbourhoods, leading in turn to greater diversity among the area's population.

It is also noteworthy that many of the national policies examined encompass a number of policy areas related to broader notions of social sustainability. For instance, creating less segregated, more socially inclusive cities and neighbourhoods is an explicit aim of several policies, to be achieved through – among other means – fostering equality between people; promoting participation and trust; and ensuring inclusive services and vibrant community spaces. Numerous policies also stress inclusive spatial planning and improved public services as vital tools for enhancing overall quality of life. Overall, this resonates with the notion of 'just sustainability', defined by Agyeman et al. (2003) as an individual's or a community's ability to enjoy a good quality of life in a just, equitable manner.

Despite a strong focus on integration and immigration policies across the Nordic countries, clear differences can be observed in this regard. For example, while Denmark is planning for fewer immigrants going forward and so is placing greater demands on incomers, Sweden and Norway are actively looking to settle newly arrived refugees away from immigrant-dense areas in order to facilitate successful integration.

Education emerges as a central pillar in the quest for social equity and integration in all the Nordic countries. Finland, for instance, prioritises inclusive educational opportunities for all, irrespective of background. Elsewhere, Sweden and Norway similarly emphasise the role of schools in promoting equality and inclusion, with a focus on addressing the needs of diverse student populations.

Although urban planning plays a pivotal role in creating inclusive communities across the Nordic region, widely divergent approaches have emerged between countries. In Sweden, initiatives focus on reducing residential segregation and ensuring good-quality housing and accessible social services for all, while Denmark's controversial Ghetto Strategy (cf. Alves, 2022) seeks to combat segregation through urban regeneration and the strategic demolition of public housing. In Iceland, the overriding priority is on ensuring accessibility through improved public transport and sustainable land use planning.

Many of the interventions designed to counteract urban segregation have taken the form of area-based regeneration projects targeting particular residential areas, often with state funding. Denmark's above previously mentioned Ghetto Strategy is directed at areas designated as disadvantaged based on various demographic criteria (e.g. socio-economic composition, criminal histories of residents); several national programmes in Finland have targeted post-war suburban housing estates; and state-led initiatives in Norway have sought to enhance the vitality of areas facing a concentration of welfare challenges.

Although the Danish approach to area-based interventions differs noticeably from the other examples, all five countries are seeking to address interconnected physical environment and housing stock problems while considering the social environments and residential compositions of the areas in question. Thus, the programmes can be viewed as aiming for both place- and people-based results.

7.1.2 Characteristic features, similarities and differences of Nordic policy approaches

How can the policies and strategies examined be characterised in terms of design, implementation, aims and objectives, and what similarities and differences are discernible between countries?

When it comes to implementing effective strategies addressing social inclusion and segregation, all the Nordic countries regard cross-sectoral collaboration between government agencies, local authorities, civil society organisations and residents as key. Even so, each Nordic country has a distinctive policy approach. For example, whereas Sweden and Norway seek to strengthen individuals facing structural obstacles, Denmark imposes benefit reductions on those living in 'hard ghettos', alongside targeted crime prevention measures.

Moreover, while Sweden, Norway and Finland have adopted broad, structural approaches to segregation, Denmark's strategy focuses on immigration from non-Western countries as the primary driver of segregation. Sweden's strategy encompasses various life aspects (e.g. housing, education, labour market) in seeking to address socio-economic inequality over time. Similarly, Norway's focus is on work and education initiatives, coupled with housing subsidies, while the Finnish approach to combating segregation is also actively holistic.

National policies are subject to political shifts within a given country. For example, while the Finnish government's 2019 programme had a clear emphasis on preventing segregation, increasing neighbourhood vitality through areas-based interventions, and promoting resident wellbeing and participation opportunities, the more recent 2023 government programme has much less focus on these issues.

A reorientation of national policy has also been seen in Sweden since the 2022 change in government. Although counteracting social exclusion remains a clear

policy objective, the focus and prioritisation of the strategies employed appears to have shifted. While previous strategies had an explicit focus on counteracting socio-economic segregation, current policies are more oriented towards addressing social exclusion, with greater emphasis on individual responsibility. Also observable over recent years in both Finland and Sweden is a greater focus on dealing with gang crime as part of policies dealing with urban segregation and social inclusion.

All in all, it is important to acknowledge that the policy landscape in each of the Nordic countries is constantly evolving, and while more recent policies often build on previous ones, priorities can nevertheless shift in different directions over time.

7.2 Indicators for assessing urban segregation and social inclusion

The second of the study's four main themes, explored in Chapter 4, concerned the role of indicators in supporting interventions towards more socially inclusive cities in the five Nordic countries. In each case, the chapter set out which national-level indicators are being used or are in development, and how the respective national policies treat the role of data, indicators and research-based knowledge. Moreover, honing in on the city level, the chapter looked at how Helsinki, Odense, Oslo, Örebro and Reykjavík utilise data and indicators to support policy and planning interventions.

A key interest of the study was uncovering what the governance of indicators looks like at different territorial levels, including which actors are involved in the collection and assessment of data. Below, the report discusses the general role of indicators in supporting policy and planning interventions in Nordic countries and cities, as well as some of the more specific areas of use, before setting out the benefits and potential risks involved.

7.2.1 The role of indicators in supporting policy and planning interventions

What role do indicators play in the Nordic countries in supporting policy and planning towards more inclusive cities, both at the national level and in different cities?

Across the Nordic region, indicators are used at both the national and local level to reduce segregation and increase social inclusion, with varying levels of success.

In Denmark, the main indicators affecting segregation-related policies and physical interventions are those informing the so-called 'ghetto lists', which specify the areas considered vulnerable or at risk of becoming vulnerable based on levels of income, education, employment, criminal convictions and concentration of non-Western immigrants. While these lists, as well as the legislation informing the pre-emptive

and transformation measures attached to them, are national, it is local actors – particularly municipalities and housing associations – that make the greatest use of the indicators in setting up area-based initiatives, as exemplified by the case of Vollsmose, in Odense.

Several challenges arise in relation to the use of these indicators, including the risk of further stigmatising areas on the publicly available ghetto lists. The indicators have also been used to help decide where interventions should be carried out, leading to controversial outcomes, including the displacements of households. On the other hand, using indicators as monitoring tools to prevent areas becoming vulnerable could halt drastic physical and social transformation, and a consequent increase in urban segregation.

In Sweden, comprehensive data and analysis are seen as key to effectively addressing segregation. As such, the Segregation Barometer has been developed in order to monitor, understand and combat segregation trends across the country. The tool is also deployed at local levels – for instance, in Örebro, it has been used to assess the effectiveness of municipal initiatives, including spatial plans designed to foster mixed communities and reduce segregation.

Despite the Segregation Barometer's numerous strengths, including the fact it is an open-access tool that can be used at multiple territorial scales, certain limitations should also be acknowledged – for example, the categorisation of neighbourhoods is not always in line with local perceptions. Overall, though, the lessons learned from this Swedish tool offer valuable insights for other countries facing similar challenges. In fact, the Segregation Barometer has been mentioned as a source of inspiration in Norway and Finland, where initiatives are underway to create national-level segregation indicators.

In Norway, while numerous municipalities have access to demographic, socio-economic and socio-cultural indicators, their use varies depending on the resources available and strategic goals involved. No comprehensive national system for monitoring segregation trends is currently available, although such a system is on the government agenda. Should such a system come to fruition, the wealth of comparative data it would yield could be used to assess efforts at different levels and inform the selection of areas for state–municipal investments. It could also assist municipalities in their day-to-day tasks, such as distributing welfare funds between administrative districts.

It should be noted, however, that a number of area-based initiatives in Norwegian cities already use quantitative and qualitative indicators to gain a holistic understanding of challenges in specific neighbourhoods. In particular, statistical data is used to identify areas that score poorly compared to the city average on several socio-economic indicators.

In Finland, there are currently no common indicators for urban segregation and social inclusion, and no established way of following up on these issues at a

national scale. Given this, several municipalities have independently created their own monitoring systems. In Helsinki, for example, various indicators have been used for decades, with segregation monitored since the 1990s. The majority of Finland's smaller municipalities, however, lack such indicators, due in part to a lack of necessary resources and expertise. At the national level, this has led to a somewhat fragmented situation in which different municipalities employ their own system of indicators (or no system at all).

In recent years, however, there have been more concerted efforts to develop national indicators for monitoring segregation. One relevant example is a current initiative being undertaken as part of the monitoring of the MAL agreements on land use, housing and transport entered into by the state and Finland's largest urban regions.

Iceland, for most of its history an extremely homogeneous nation, has over the past couple of decades experienced a significant increase in immigration. Consequently, issues of segregation and inclusion have gained political traction, with steps now being taken to develop a comprehensive social indicator system. Although they are not yet fully integrated into formal policies, these indicators are being used to assess people's status and situation.

At the city level, Reykjavík strategically uses indicators to guide the planning of services and assess needs based on local demographic and economic characteristics. Meanwhile, at the national level, policy attention in Iceland is shifting towards social inequality, reflected in the ongoing development of social wellbeing, quality of life and social participation indicators.

7.2.2 Purpose and areas of use of indicators

To what extent, how and by whom are indicators used to support policies and strategies at the national, city and neighbourhood level?

A common characteristic of the indicator systems examined in Chapter 4 is that they are used to support policy-making and planning aimed at counteracting urban segregation and fostering social inclusion. Here, two main areas of use can be observed: firstly, monitoring the status and development of local areas; and, secondly, supporting implementation of specific policy initiatives, planning interventions or strategic goals.

For instance, Danish indicators linked to the Ghetto Strategy are used both to assess how the situation in vulnerable areas evolves year on year and as a pre-emptive means of ensuring areas at risk do not fall into further decline. The indicators also inform policies designed to physically transform disadvantaged areas where there is a high presence of public housing and vulnerable groups. Meanwhile, Sweden's Segregation Barometer provides comprehensive, comparable insights on segregation patterns and trends across the whole country, meaning it can be used to support municipal- and neighbourhood-level planning interventions.

Area-based regeneration of disadvantaged neighbourhoods is a widely applied approach in Nordic cities. Such projects often rely on up-to-date data, especially concerning an area's housing stock and the socio-economic and demographic composition of its population. Here, indicators may be used to identify which areas should be targeted with what types of measures, and for following up on previous or ongoing interventions.

Often, quantitative indicators are complemented by qualitative indicators to gain a more holistic understanding of local challenges. In Helsinki, for instance, various surveys are used to monitor perceptions of security and wellbeing.

7.2.3 Key benefits and potential risks concerning indicators

What benefits and opportunities do indicators offer, and what are the potential risks and challenges?

The most important benefit of the various national- and municipal-level indicators appears to be the contribution they make to better understanding segregation and social inclusion in the five Nordic countries. The indicators highlighted in the study were for the most part created as tools for analysis in support of policy-making and planning. To this end, their main added value is providing a more nuanced understanding of development patterns and trends, while shedding light on place-specific challenges.

Sweden's Segregation Barometer especially stands out as a well-designed, harmonised system for monitoring segregation patterns at the national, regional, municipal and sub-municipal levels. Finland and Norway, by contrast, currently lack harmonised national segregation indicators, although there are current initiatives to develop something reminiscent of the Swedish tool. Such systems could prove invaluable in enhancing knowledge concerning segregation, especially when it comes to identifying vulnerable areas at risk of further decline.

A number of potential challenges arise regarding the use of data and indicators for policy and planning purposes. From the perspective of monitoring segregation, it is crucial that knowledge is gathered at a granular level in order to detect which challenges are characteristic of local areas. The geographical borders of statistical units also matter, as standard units may not correspond with actual neighbourhoods, obscuring differences that play out locally. More generally, ensuring access to data on multiple scales is important for assessing different efforts and policies directed at the municipal, district or neighbourhood levels.

A key risk when using indicators to support interventions is the potential for misinterpretation or wrongful application – for instance, applying indicators to purposes outside their intended scope. When dealing with a complex issue such as segregation, there is a very real possibility of oversimplified conclusions being arrived at, including a misdiagnosis of cause and effect. As such, a solid

understanding of the issues at hand is critical, as is the institutional ability to accurately interpret data when seeking to make well-informed decisions.

Another important issue highlighted by the study concerns the potential unintended consequences of indicators. For instance, publicly available information generated by indicators identifying highly disadvantaged neighbourhoods risks further stigmatising those areas. In this respect, previous research (e.g., Dean & Hastings, 2000; Power, 1997) has demonstrated that it can be difficult for neighbourhoods to rid themselves of public stigma once it has developed. As such, indicators should be designed and deployed in ways that avoid any potential for reinforcing residential segregation.

In terms of policy goals, one question to consider is whether the ultimate aim is to reduce segregation or, for instance, improve the living conditions and wellbeing of those living in more disadvantaged areas. In terms of policy and planning, these are two quite different objectives, each of which may require their own set of indicators. A recognised dilemma in this regard arises when area investments are justified by existing welfare disparities, yet their primary objective is not necessarily to resolve these disparities. Hence, it is vital that the selected indicators align with realistic goals and ambitions, and that the benefits derived from such indicators outweigh their associated costs.

Regarding area-based interventions specifically, while quantitative indicators can be useful for the initial detection of areas with complex challenges, they are unlikely to reveal noticeable changes within the relatively short duration a programme typically operates. Given that social structures and segregation patterns tend to develop slowly, indicators are most useful for monitoring changes over longer periods of time, and so should be treated with caution when determining cause and effect in the context of time-limited projects.

7.3 Participatory planning for socially inclusive cities and communities

Chapter 5 addressed the third of the study's four main themes, namely the participatory planning approaches used in the five Nordic countries when seeking to create more socially inclusive cities and neighbourhoods. Having first shed light on how participation is emphasised in national policies and programmes, as well as in key legislation guiding spatial planning and the governance of municipalities, the respective sections turned to the use of participatory approaches at the city and neighbourhood level – specifically, in Tampere, Copenhagen, Sandnes, Umeå and Reykjavík.

The following sections summarise the various participatory planning approaches used in the examined Nordic countries and cities, how they are implemented, and the key opportunities and challenges arising.

7.3.1 Nordic participatory planning approaches and processes

What types of participatory planning approaches and processes are used in the Nordic countries and their cities?

In all five Nordic countries, participation as a means of strengthening social inclusion in local communities is strongly emphasised at the national level. This is reflected both in the legislation steering spatial planning and the governance of municipalities, and in various other national policies and programmes.

In terms of legislation, Finland's Land Use and Building Act emphasises that everyone should be able to participate in planning processes, while the country's Local Government Act states that municipalities must ensure residents are granted diverse, effective means of participation. Similarly, Denmark's Planning Act mandates minimum requirements for public participation, reinforcing the country's stated commitment to democratic decision-making in spatial planning. Elsewhere, participation is spotlighted as a core principle of spatial planning in key Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish national legislation.

More generally, public participation has gained increased prominence across the Nordic region over recent decades, prompting a number of legislative reforms. For instance, Denmark and Sweden have both sought to decentralise spatial planning in order to bring decision-making closer to the citizens affected.

In terms of national strategies and policy programmes, all the Nordic countries place considerable emphasis on participation. In Finland, for instance, there is a strong focus on engaging with local residents when planning neighbourhoods and their services, especially groups regarded as difficult to engage through conventional approaches. For example, in several Nordic national policies, there is a strong emphasis on engaging children and youth. This can be seen, for instance, in the Norwegian National Strategy for Equalising Social Health Conditions, which highlights the importance of participation, especially when it comes to children and young people. Another example, from Denmark, is the 'Citizen's Initiative' tool, which was introduced in 2018 as a new way of direct democracy by empowering citizens to actively engage with parliamentary agendas.

Although national legislative frameworks generally define minimum levels of participation, and, in some cases, national policies play an important role in guiding how policy and planning measures are implemented locally, it is municipalities that bear ultimate responsibility for how participation is realised at the city and neighbourhood level. Moreover, the language used in the legislative frameworks is often vague on the specifics of participation, allowing municipalities considerable freedom when it comes to choosing which tools and methods in targeting different population and stakeholder groups. In several of the city cases, it emerged that the municipality often goes far beyond what is required by the legal frameworks when promoting public engagement.

7.3.2 Implementation of participatory approaches

How are participatory processes organised at the local (city and neighbourhood) level?

To better understand how participatory planning approaches and processes are implemented at the local level, cities of various sizes across the Nordic region were examined.

In the Finnish city of Tampere, social inclusion and participation have been highlighted as key strategic priorities for the past decade, prompting several municipal action plans and policies related to these issues. A variety of public participation approaches have been used to engage residents in both spatial planning and planning of the city's activities, services and finances. Here, participation is sought at different stages, from the preparation of policies and plans all the way to decision-making and implementation. Specific tools include surveys, dialogue-based approaches, participatory budgeting, and initiatives focused on citizen-led urban development. Alongside this, various citizen councils and interest groups play an important role in ensuring the voices of different population groups are fully taken into consideration.

Likewise, in Reykjavík, increasing citizen participation across various policy sectors has also emerged as a clear political priority. This is evidenced by Reykjavík's Democracy Policy and its accompanying action plan, which aim to introduce various participatory approaches into the city's governance practices.

In Sweden, the City of Umeå, has launched an extended consultation of the population through citizen dialogue and other public engagement initiatives. The inputs gathered through these processes have provided a better understanding of the local population's urban development needs, which are being incorporated into the municipality's future urban development strategies. Elsewhere in Sweden, the case of Gottsunda in Uppsala draws attention to the challenges of participatory planning in socially excluded areas. In this example, integrating citizen dialogue into other activities, such as local events, appears to have been an effective way of reaching potentially difficult-to-engage citizens.

In the Norwegian city of Sandnes, the municipality is seeking to engage children and young people – a population group that often goes unheard – through an innovative digital participation method named *Barnetråkk*. *Barnetråkk* uses an interactive web map to collect children's and young people's perspectives on how they use their local environment. This data is then used to support municipal planning.

Finally, the Danish case draws attention to the Senior Friendly Copenhagen initiative, which has successfully promoted social inclusion by involving seniors – including those with disabilities – in early planning stages.

7.3.3 Opportunities and challenges relating to participation

What opportunities and challenges do the participation methods being used present?

Many would argue that participation is a prerequisite for democracy, enabling a redistribution of power so that citizens can be involved in making decisions both for their own good and in the public interest (cf. Fainstein, 2014). Overall, the participatory processes examined represent different means of reinforcing social inclusion. This is achieved by taking into consideration citizens' needs and wishes concerning neighbourhood-level development, and includes active efforts to reach marginalised residents or those whose interests might otherwise be overlooked. As highlighted in several of the examples, however, challenges remain, particularly in terms of engaging with more silent, passive or marginalised groups.

The Icelandic case draws attention to the fact the while there is generally a strong public desire to participate, limited understanding and awareness of the processes involved can hinder effective engagement. Given the differences in knowledge about and interest in participating between demographic groups, this necessitates targeted outreach efforts. In Finland, meanwhile, the case of Tampere identified that some citizens remain uncertain about the actual impact of their involvement once decisions are made and plans realised, indicating that new, ongoing ways of engaging different segments of the population are needed.

More generally, the city cases show that digital tools and platforms are becoming increasingly important, and that these types of approaches can potentially draw in a broader audience. Such methods also come with challenges, however – for instance, some citizens may face barriers in the form of limited digital access or literacy.

Another issue that emerges at the municipality level concerns limited resources for implementing participatory activities. While *Barnetråkk* in Sandnes represents an innovative approach, Norwegian municipalities mostly adopt more traditional methods geared towards informing rather than involving. This is likely due at least in part to the considerable resources innovative approaches often require, as well as a shortfall in competence at the municipality level. In Norway, there appears to be less participation in the early phases of municipal plans, leading to more conflict in the zoning plan phase, which often occurs behind 'closed doors'. Given this, a lack of sufficient resources can be seen as hindering the implementation of effective participatory processes.

A number of governance- and implementation-related challenges to participatory processes were also identified by the study. In Copenhagen, for instance, concerns have been expressed over how best to translate the inputs gathered from participatory processes into concrete plans and interventions. Doing so can be

complex and requires effective coordination, communication and follow-through. More generally, achieving consistency in participatory methods across different projects is a recurring challenge that many municipalities across the Nordic region are grappling with.

All this points to the need for systematic guidance on participation processes. The City of Tampere, for example, has developed participation and inclusion plans aimed at concretising its approach in this regard. Even so, there remains scope for more effective city-level governance structures, as well as improved internal coordination of citizen participation processes. Here, the Tampere case study identified a need for city employees to undergo a cultural shift that involved towards better integrating participation and inclusion into their existing activities and functions.

Despite their differences, all five Nordic countries are ultimately seeking to promote democratic decision-making and inclusive urban development. While addressing challenges such as legal ambiguity, resource constraints and the engagement of marginalised groups requires ongoing efforts at both the national and local levels, the participatory approaches discussed in Chapter 5 demonstrate the important advances made to date in overcoming barriers to engagement.

7.4 Interventions in improving physical and social living environments

Chapter 6 took a deep dive into how physical living environments – particularly in terms of architecture and urban design – affect neighbourhood-level social inclusion and segregation. As with the preceding two chapters, this involved analysis of the relevant national policies and planning frameworks for each of the five Nordic countries, as well as case studies exploring interventions initiated by at the city level. More specifically, the cities spotlighted in relation to physical living environments were Lahti, Aarhus, Bergen, Gothenburg and Reykjavík.

Below, the report summarises how the physical environment of neighbourhoods relates to social inclusion and segregation in the Nordic country's national policy frameworks. Having done so, it discusses how these types of physical interventions can help foster social inclusion, before touching on the key aspects to be considered when seeking to implement them.

7.4.1 Physical living environments and social inclusion in national policy frameworks

To what extent and how are physical living environments and their relationship to social inclusion and/or segregation emphasised in national policies, programmes and planning guidelines/legislation?

All five Nordic countries have launched national policies in recent years emphasising the connection between built environment planning and social inclusion. One noteworthy example is Sweden's 2018 Policy for Designed Living Environment, which promotes the creation of safe, inclusive environments as a means of reducing segregation and improving living conditions. The policy underlines the role architecture and design can play in nurturing more sustainable, equitable and less segregated societies. In Finland, the 2022 National Architectural Policy Programme similarly stresses how high-quality built environments can foster inclusion and reduce inequality, as well as the importance of close cooperation with residents and users when planning and developing built environments.

In Norway, the strong national commitment to inclusive, sustainable architecture is driven by the influence of nature, climate change considerations and the vision of an equitable society. Here, the country's Planning and Building Act serves as a robust legal framework, mandating universal design principles in planning and building measures.

Meanwhile, Iceland's National Planning Policy explicitly links the physical elements of urban environments with the social fabric they support. Spotlighting climate-conscious planning, inclusively designed public spaces, local governance and community engagement, the policy sets a clear framework for fostering urban environments conducive to social cohesion, trust and wellbeing.

In Denmark, several progressive national policies aimed at promoting social inclusion in urban development have been implemented. For instance, inclusionary zoning laws mandate that a portion of social housing be reserved for marginalised communities, thereby fostering diversity and equal access to housing opportunities. Moreover, the country's architecture policy shares a number of common features with its Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish equivalents, including an emphasis on the role of architecture in advancing social sustainability and creating diverse, accessible living environments. One distinct feature of the Danish policy, however, is its emphasis on preventing ghettoisation.

7.4.2 Fostering social inclusion through built environment interventions

How can planning interventions improve the quality of the physical living environment and help foster social inclusion, wellbeing, trust and community?

The city case studies draw attention to a variety of municipal strategies, policies and planning interventions that seek to enhance both the physical and social living environments of neighbourhoods. Common to many of these policies is the overarching aim of creating more inclusive built environments, where the planning and design of public spaces, housing and transportation grant diverse population groups equitable access (cf. Fainstein, 2014). This draws on the notion that built environment design can both create welcoming spaces for diverse groups or alternatively impede access to such spaces, particularly for vulnerable social groups (Schindler, 2014).

In the Swedish city of Gothenburg, counteracting socio-spatial disparities constitutes a key objective of several city-wide strategies and programmes. The case study in this instance focused in on the disadvantaged neighbourhood of Bergsjön, where various measures have been implemented aimed at strengthening social inclusion and community, including the planning of a new cultural centre. The case highlights the importance of adapting development initiatives to local needs through the concerted, early involvement of local associations and other key actors. The example also points to the limits of localised action in reducing segregation – while the cultural centre has proven to be a success, it cannot on its own solve the area's more general problems of accessibility and connectiveness.

The architectural policy programme being pursued in the Finnish city of Lahti – alongside a number of related policies and measures – illustrate a strong local commitment to strengthening social inclusion and counteracting segregation. This is reflected in the city's housing and land use policies, which stress the importance of evening out socio-spatial disparities between neighbourhoods by having a mix of housing types and tenure forms within any given area. The city's unique approach can also be seen in its use of a continuous master plan, updated at the beginning of each new four-year city council term. This apparently well-functioning model allows greater flexibility when it comes to connecting spatial planning with the council's strategic aims.

Various neighbourhood regeneration projects have been carried out in Lahti's post-war housing estates, with participatory approaches playing a central role. At the same time, the case of Lahti reveals a number of context-specific challenges standing in the way of policy implementation. For instance, while infill development is a widely applied practice for revitalising neighbourhoods in larger, growing cities, in Lahti – where population growth is more or less stable, and there is low demand for housing – new-build construction is not generally a realistic approach for regenerating the city's most disadvantaged areas. This demonstrates how local conditions can shape the types of measures implemented in each instance.

The principle of universal design is strongly endorsed in Danish legislative frameworks as a means of ensuring physical living environments are inclusive and assessable for all. Such principles are put into practice in the City of Aarhus's Policy for Urban Quality and Architecture, which not only places a clear stress on social

mixing and combating segregation, but seeks to ensure that urban planning responds dynamically to community priorities. More generally, Aarhus's urban strategy seeks to cultivate socially inclusive neighbourhoods by prioritising physical accessibility, universal design and diverse housing options.

Nevertheless, Aarhus continues to face a number of challenges, including a lack of affordable housing. This has been exacerbated by the loss of public housing, displacement and gentrification caused by the national Ghetto Strategy. Overall, while Denmark's holistic urban planning strategies provide valuable models for promoting community wellbeing, addressing challenges such as affordable housing requires strengthened collaboration between different levels of governance, as well as with the various other actors involved.

In Norway, the city architect's role in steering Bergen's architecture policy demonstrates the importance attached to elevating the quality of the city's built environments. At the same time, the societal part of the municipal masterplan and the city's Green Strategy exemplify a holistic approach that encompasses social meeting places, diversity and universal design. There are also various sub-strategies that address such aspects as drawing on cultural heritage to help create inclusive, attractive urban spaces. Various international and national programmes have also had a hand in the interventions carried out in Bergen, for example, promoting community-based housing as a tool for socially inclusive neighbourhoods.

Despite the many positive strides made in Bergen's municipal-level policies and initiatives, however, challenges persist when it comes to housing. Here, Norway's strong focus on homeownership and its limited public housing hinders inclusivity, highlighting the need for more diverse housing options.

In Iceland, particularly Reykjavík, attempts to create more inclusive urban communities largely centre around public transportation; compact, mixed-use communities; and local governance and community engagement. The concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods is key in this regard, as it points to an inclusive vision of daily needs being accessible to everyone, irrespective of social or economic status. Through its focus on green spaces, equitable housing policies and sustainable development, the City of Reykjavík is spearheading efforts that can help mitigate urban segregation and champion social inclusion.

On the other hand, the Icelandic approach to urban planning and development is largely lacking in initiatives that explicitly address inclusivity and segregation. Nevertheless, by prioritising sustainability, community engagement and flexible, responsive planning, the various interventions currently underway do address a number of challenges related to urban segregation, albeit indirectly.

7.4.3 Key considerations concerning physical interventions

What aspects should be considered in the local governance of local living environments?

Addressing segregation and social inclusion requires both political will and sufficient resources. In terms of the latter aspect, a lack of resources with which to carry out interventions is an issue many Nordic municipalities are confronted with. This, inevitably, places constraints on the possibilities open to municipal authorities.

A challenge faced by a number of municipalities is that there is not always a clear, comprehensive overview available of relevant actions that might be carried out either city-wide or more locally in neighbourhoods. This indicates a need for improved coordination within municipalities, including better information-sharing between administrative branches. Based on some of the examples explored, there may be a case for having a more clearly delineated home base tasked with overseeing segregation and social inclusion issues, as responsibilities often appear to be dispersed across departments.

It is important to acknowledge not only the strengths of the approaches discussed in Chapter 6, but their limitations. In general terms, the case studies show that physical living environment interventions can have a number of positive effects when it comes to improving local living conditions and neighbourhood vitality, particularly if local residents and actors are engaged in co-planning processes. When it comes to addressing the more complex issue of urban segregation, however, the effects of physical interventions can appear rather limited, requiring accompanying interventions in other policy fields.

7.5 Concluding remarks

This report has drawn attention to a wide range of policy and planning approaches used to counteract urban segregation and promote social inclusion across the Nordic region. In doing so, it has discussed the relevant national policies of all five Nordic countries; the use of indicators in supporting policy and planning interventions; participatory planning approaches; and interventions for improving physical and social living environments in urban areas.

Throughout, a multi-level governance lens has been applied in order to unpack the interactions between the central state and municipalities, as well as demonstrate how public sector organisations and other actors work together to address urban segregation and social inclusion issues. Overall, the findings show that Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden share a commitment to fostering cohesive communities and reducing disparities, although the approaches pursued vary widely depending on the national or municipal context involved.

As the study has demonstrated, policy interventions in Nordic cities often have a strong territorial focus, especially in the case of area-based regeneration projects in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. While these types of interventions can help improve living conditions and the attractiveness of the local environment, as well as strengthen local engagement, their ability to address the more complex, underlying causes of segregation appears to be somewhat limited. Increased segregation is tied to widening social inequalities caused by – among other factors – global economic and labour market restructuring; changes in welfare and housing regimes; and immigration. Hence, tackling segregation necessitates cross-cutting efforts, encompassing such policy areas as housing, education, employment, social policy and integration, alongside targeted measures designed to improve local living environments.

Thus, is a risk that a purely area-based approach will merely address the symptoms of segregation in a specific area, rather than the more complex root causes that shape the development of neighbourhoods. This may in turn lead to inequalities being exacerbated as the underlying problems are offloaded to other areas, potentially leading to gentrification or exclusion. Overall, while area-based approaches should not be dismissed as ineffective, the limitations of such methods should be borne in mind. In this respect, some of the examples explored in this report indicate a shift towards a more holistic, cross-cutting approach to dealing with segregation in the Nordic region. Several national policies and strategies emphasise the importance of counteracting inequalities at a broader, societal level, and call for focused policy interventions in areas such as employment, education and integration. Moreover, many of the area-based interventions now being pursued appear to place much greater emphasis on simultaneously addressing both physical and social challenges.

It is important to stress that this report is not intended to be a catalogue of best practices. Rather, the objective is to constructively interrogate a range of policy and planning approaches for creating more socially inclusive cities and communities. Although inclusion strategies differ depending on the contextual setting and local conditions, the common aim of all the examples discussed has been to counteract the negative effects of inequality and segregation, while improving the terms on which individuals and different population groups engage with both their local communities and wider society. In seeking to do so, many of the measures highlighted simultaneously focus on both the physical and social aspects of neighbourhood development.

Above all, what emerges from the study is that counteracting segregation and creating more socially inclusive cities is a complex, challenging task. No universal blueprint for ensuring more inclusive cities and neighbourhoods exists, as each approach carries with it advantages and disadvantages. Nevertheless, it seems evident that inclusion cannot be pursued in isolation, with considered planning and continuous efforts necessary for long-term success.

Box 14. Key learnings from the study's four thematic areas

Policies for counteracting segregation and promoting social inclusion

- **Key learning:** A holistic, multi-sectoral approach is essential for effectively tackling urban segregation. While policies across the Nordic countries aim to reduce segregation, their emphasis on factors such as housing, employment, education and integration vary significantly. *The most effective strategies treat segregation as a complex, relational phenomenon, rather than just a localised issue.*

Indicators for assessing urban segregation and social inclusion

- **Key learning:** *Indicators are crucial for monitoring segregation and guiding policy and planning interventions, but must be used carefully to avoid stigmatising disadvantaged areas.* While indicators provide valuable insights, there is a risk of misinterpretation and oversimplification. As such, quantitative data should be complemented by qualitative insights.

Participatory planning for socially inclusive cities and neighbourhoods

- **Key learning:** *Effective participatory planning enhances social inclusion but requires targeted outreach.* Despite Nordic cities emphasising democratic engagement, challenges remain in reaching marginalised groups and translating public inputs into tangible policy actions. Digital tools and innovative methods can improve participation, but must be inclusive to all demographic and socio-economic groups.

Interventions for improving physical and social living environments

- **Key learning:** *Although urban design and physical environment characteristics play a crucial role in fostering social inclusion, built environment interventions tend to have only limited impacts on deeper socio-economic inequalities.* Thus, while well-planned public spaces, diverse housing options and accessible infrastructure can enhance community cohesion, broader structural issues such as employment, education and economic inequality must be addressed in parallel.

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Interviews

Interview 1. (2023). Project manager, co-housing and co-building advisory unit, Danish Building and Planning Authority. March 2023.

Interview 2. (2023). Consultants for the plan "Vollsmose Fremtidens Byen", City of Odense. March 2023.

Interview 3. (2022). Group interview with Housing Program Manager, City of Helsinki and Research Director, City of Helsinki. December 2022.

Interview 4. (2023). Leading Expert, City of Helsinki/ Assistant professor, University of Helsinki. January 2023.

Interview 5. (2023). Independent consultant, former Departmental manager of data service at Hagstofa Íslands (Statistics Iceland). March 2023.

Interview 6. (2023). Expert in methodology and research at the department for education at the City of Reykjavík. March 2023.

Interview 7. (2023). Department manager for housing at Reykjavík City. April 2023.

Interview 8. (2023). Specialist at Skipulagsstofnun (Planning Agency Iceland). April 2023.

Interview 9. (2022). Senior Advisor, City Council, Department of Urban Development, City of Oslo. November 2022.

Interview 10. (2022). Group interview with Senior Advisor at Ministry of Local Government, and Regional Development and Senior Advisor at the Norwegian State Housing Bank, December 2022.

Interview 11. (2022). Advisor from the Norwegian State Housing Bank. December 2022.

Interview 12. (2023). Group interview with Team leader/Planning officer, Urban planning division, Örebro Municipality and Housing strategist, Social administration, Administrative division, Örebro Municipality. April 2023.

Interview 13. (2023). Investigator, Boverket – the Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning. February 2023.

Interview 14. (2023). Analyst, Regional development, Region Örebro County. March 2023.

Interview 15. (2023). Project Manager at CoUrban and responsible for the project Senior Friendly Copenhagen. June 2023.

Interview 16. (2023). Local Committee Secretary, City of Copenhagen. August 2023.

Interview 17. (2023). Planner and consultant for citizens' engagement, City of Aarhus. August 2023

Interview 18. (2023). Group interview with Planning Officers, Development Coordinator and Public Participation Designer at City of Tampere. June 2023.

Interview 19. (2023). Head of The Unit for Innovation at Hagstofa Íslands (Statistics Iceland). May 2023.

Interview 20. (2023). Team leader for performance measurement at the Department for Welfare at Reykjavík City. May 2023.

Interview 21. (2023). Group interview with two advisors at the political secretariat in the Municipality of Sandnes. August 2023.

Interview 22. (2023). Group interview with planning architect and project leader at Boverket and Head of unit at Boverket. September 2023.

Interview 23. (2023). Urban planner at the Municipality of Umeå. May 2023.

Interview 24. (2023). City architect, Aarhus. November 2023.

Interview 25. (2023). Housing specialist, City of Lahti. December 2023.

Interview 26. (2024). Team leader at the City of Reykavík, Welfare Department with focus on housing. January 2024

Interview 27. (2023). City architect, Bergen. November 2023.

Interview 28. (2023). Professor of Applied Urban Design at KTH and urban planner at Sweco. December 2023.

Interview 29. (2023). Head of Unit Library and Cultural Centre Bergsjön. December 2023.

Interview 30. (2023). Planning architect at Göteborg Stad. December 2023.

Interview 31. (2023). Architect at Sweco in charge of the project of Culture House in Bergsjön. December 2023.

About this publication

Beyond segregation: Nordic approaches to socially inclusive cities

Authors: Mats Stjernberg, Rebecca Cavicchia, Ágúst Bogason, Alix Vuithier

Contributors: Lumi Tomren, Linnea Löfving, Diana N. Huynh

Nordregio report 2025:7

ISBN (digital): 978-91-8001-159-4

ISBN (pdf): 978-91-8001-160-0

ISSN: 1403-2503

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.6027/R2025:7.1403-2503>

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Maps: Daniel Pils, Nordregio

Layout: Publii

Cover Photo: City of Helsinki, Jussi Hellsten

This report, published in April 2025, is an outcome of the project 'Planning for Socially Mixed and Inclusive Neighbourhoods', carried out as part of the work of the Nordic Thematic Group for Green and Inclusive Urban Development (TGA) during 2021–2024. TGA has been formed by the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Regional Policy (EK-R), under the Nordic Council of Ministers for Sustainable Growth. Members of TGA consist of representatives from relevant ministries, national, regional and local authorities as well as cross-border cooperation committees.

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Holmamiralens Väg 10

Skeppsholmen

Stockholm, Sweden

www.nordregio.org