

Dense-Low Homes Models and Realizations in Denmark (1947-1988). Building Standardization, Neighborhood Design and International Acculturations

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[PhD](#)

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Research theme

[1. Decors, monuments, landscapes: global approaches to heritage](#)

[4. Actors, institutions, networks: socio-cultural conditions of artistic activity](#)

[5. Materials, techniques, crafts: theoretical and practical approaches to artistic making](#)

Thesis

Summary

This dissertation explores the architectural, urban, and theoretical genealogy of dense-low housing (*tæt-lav boligbebyggelse*), a movement of neighborhood design that emerged in Denmark during the 1960s as an alternative to both detached single-family homes and multi-storey, high- or medium-rise dwellings. The research investigates the motivations of the movement's key actors—primarily architects—who sought to recreate modes of living and forms of 'community' (*fællesskaber*) in response to the multiple social, political, and architectural crises identified within the postwar welfare society.

The development traces the historical evolution of the dense-low housing model, from its origins up to the mid-century, to the first patio-house neighborhoods during the 1950s, and later, to research in flexible prefabrication which led to architectural experimentation based on horizontally self-growing housing structures. It further examines the epistemological transformation of the concept of community, particularly through the influence of sociological research and the cohousing (*bofællesskab*) movement of the late 1960s. Finally, the dissertation addresses the subsequent development of dense-low housing from the 1970s onward, marked by the rise of mass-planned, neo-traditional and picturesque forms and their subsequent critiques.

This dissertation reconsiders the historical significance of the idea competition 'Dense-Low - A Housing Form', organized in 1971-1972 by the Danish Building Research Institute (*Statens Byggeforskningsinstitut*, SBI), by recontextualizing it within a broader trajectory of research into alternative housing models. Rather than treating the SBI competition as a point of origin, the study argues that no singular definition of the dense-low form can be established. Instead, it highlights the adaptive character of this concept in responding to the historical challenges of successive periods, shaped through the multifaceted contributions of national and international models—ranging from the garden city, the functional tradition and the neighborhood unit to the later experiments of the latest CIAM congresses, Team 10, and beyond. Central to this trajectory is the growing polarization between two housing typologies with divergent functions: the courtyard house and the front-and-rear garden house.

This dissertation situates dense-low housing within the history of 20th-century Danish community planning and sheds light on the insufficiently documented, specific study undertaken by Danish

architects in examining vernacular dwellings and urban forms as resources for designing dense-low neighborhoods. Specifically, the complex, two-way architectural transfers with Mediterranean, North African, and Muslim countries—focusing in particular on the importation into Denmark of inward-looking homes enhancing privacy, and the ideas of balance with communitarian socialization. It also traces the later programs carried out by architects in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in the context of early Danish developmentalism from the 1960s. Ultimately, this dissertation concludes with a theoretical explanation of the significance of the community, defined by the proponents of dense-low housing as a means of improving the condition of human life through habitat.

PhD jury

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