Ritt's fiasco turns out to be a success

Even though Ritt Bjerregaard only succeeded in building 12 cheap apartments, the concept turned out to be a success.

Element construction

CHEAP HOUSING
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5000 apartments with a rent of 5000 kroner within five years. Such was the ambitious plan that Ritt Bjerregaard announced during the elections in 2005 and that she, thereafter, as Mayor of Copenhagen Municipality, tried to turn into reality to ensure that school teachers and nurses and others with average incomes in Copenhagen could afford to live in the city. However, only 12 cheap apartments were built. Twelve.

In other words, a thumping fiasco? Not necessarily. Maybe even a success story. It depends on who you ask.

– The concept is still alive: it’s supported by new legislation, and other people are continuing with it. But I’d like to let others decide if it’s a success, says Knud Erik Busk. He was co-creator of the Copenhagen Municipalities’ housing concept with industrialized module buildings, and he remains the director of Fonden for Billige Boliger /Foundation for Cheap Apartments/ that was created for this purpose.

Housing company KAB, though, is not afraid to proclaim the concept a success.

– No doubt about it. The interest is enormous, and we haven’t had any problems renting out the apartments, says Director of Construction Rolf Andersson from KAB. KAB, who has taken over the concept, has received dispensation from public housing law and is already building app. 1000 cheap rental apartments which people with ordinary incomes can afford.

AlmenBolig+

The concept is now called AlmenBolig+ and remains based on pre-fab large-room modules. The low rent is achieved through constructing simple apartments in large numbers, but in smaller units. The concept therefore requires the construction of many buildings of the same type and in close sequence, but in different geographical locations.

Additionally, the low rent is ensured via the residents’ own efforts. There will not be any janitors assigned to the buildings, with residents expected to mow the lawns, trim the hedges and clear the snow themselves. No big common areas are planned, but private terraces and front yards instead.

– We’ve been thinking innovatively about responsible neighbourhoods as a precondition for making it possible to offer spacious apartments with affordable rents. But as it’s turned out, the responsible neighbourhood is an attractive factor in itself. In other words, we’ve tapped into the zeitgeist, says Rolf Andersson.

700 apartments on the way

On 1 April, 83 new rental apartments in the Fuglebakke district close to Frederiksberg will be ready for people to move in to.

Big-room modules are produced at the Kodumaja factory in Estonia. The same company also produced the first 12 apartments for the Fonden for Billige Bolger pilot project in Karens Minde in Valby.

The facades are made from an underlay of wooden constructions covered with dark green fibre cement plates. The roof is covered with two layers of roof felt at a slight angle. Each apartment contains a big-room unit with a fully finished bathroom and a basic kitchen. All installations are built within the outer walls and in the bathroom’s core wall so that residents do not have to work about electricity or plumbing while decorating their apartments. They can move in as is, for example by using furniture to separate the rooms from one another.

They can also choose whether they want to build walls themselves or get workmen to do it for them.

KAB, who has so far launched almost 300 AlmenBolig+ apartments. The rest (app. 700 apartments) are on the way.

Besides Kodumaja, Scandi Byg is also producing big-room modules for KAB.

New legislation

At this point, private developers have started to build new cheap apartments as well.

– They’re getting started, now the new legislation with reduced interest rates and longer loan payback terms has been passed, says Knud Erik Busk.

In Copenhagen Municipality, however, they are thinking of changing the current legislation even more to favour very cheap housing. Today, municipalities are not allowed to build family housing themselves, and they cannot sell municipal land for prices that allow private or public developers to build cheap housing. Moreover, municipalities are not allowed – via local plans – to decide that a particular area should be used for cheap housing.

Fonden for Billige Boliger

This foundation was established in 2006 and has built 12 cheap apartments in Karens Minde in Valby as a pilot project since then. In addition, 86 apartments are being built on the Ullerød housing estate in Hillerød. The foundation has been in a state of hiatus since 2008.

Kuben Byg has acted as Business Manager on the construction of a number of AlmenBolig+ projects.

On 1 April, people will move into the newest KAB AlmenBolig+ project apartments on Grønddalsvænge Allé. (Photo: John Ehbrecht)