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The Perforated Welfare Space: Negotiating Ghetto-Stigma in Media, Architecture, and Everyday Life

The Danish postwar social housing developments originally epitomized the dawning welfare state, promoting ideals of equity and community. Today, a number of these neighborhoods have come to occupy the reverse role and are publicly represented as “parallel societies,” “ghettos” or even “holes in the map of Denmark,” thus perforating the welfare state as a socially coherent space. Based on a media analysis and field studies in the so-called “hard ghettos,” this paper relates current media representations of disadvantaged Danish neighborhoods to architectural and residential ways of coping with territorial stigma. We argue that media representations of these housing developments contribute to rendering them spatially and socially detached from the surrounding society and that the architectural attempts to open up these housing developments may, in some cases, reinforce the stigma, further perforating the neighborhoods. Residents contest the stigma, yet those who can do so tend to detach themselves from the stigmatized neighborhoods.

Keywords: disadvantaged neighborhoods, architecture, media, place reputation, territorial stigma, residents’ perspective.

Introduction

Since 2010, the Danish Government has each year launched a list of social housing developments characterized by a high share of residents with non-Western ethnic backgrounds; low employment, education, and income; and high criminal conviction rates.¹ The list was introduced with the stated political intention to combat so-called parallel societies in the Danish social housing sector. It is colloquially known as the ghetto list, although the current Minister of Housing has recently suggested using the term “parallel societies” instead.² Both “parallel societies” and “ghettos” have been hot topics in the Danish public and political debate for the past decades, and in 2018, new legislation was passed. Since then, housing developments that have been on the ghetto

list for five successive years are categorized as “hard ghettos” and are consequently subject to new measures, such as evictions, tenure mix, and targeted demolition, in order to “transform and open up the ghetto areas towards the surrounding society.”³ Shortly before introducing the new legislation “One Denmark without Parallel Societies: No Ghettos in 2030,” the prime minister at the time described the housing developments on the ghetto list as “holes in the map of Denmark:”

Across the country, we find parallel societies. People with the same kind of problems situate themselves in enclaves. [They] do not participate, do not use the opportunities we offer. They place themselves on the outside. Holes have been made in the map of Denmark.⁴

This article focuses on this “holing” as a metaphor of the perforation of the welfare state as a socially coherent space. We are interested in how this metaphor moves from the discursive level of the public debate to the local reality of physical architecture and everyday life. We therefore analyze media representations of the so-called hard ghettos and explore how architectural transformations and people living in these housing developments cope with negative neighborhood reputations.

The empirical basis of the analysis is the project Regeneration of Danish Disadvantaged Neighborhoods: Long-term Evaluation (2019–2028), which includes case studies of the fifteen housing developments on the 2018 list of hard ghettos. Eight of these housing developments will form the basis for the present article’s analysis: Vollsmose, Gellerupparken, Mjølnerparken, Tingbjerg, Taastrupgård, Motalavej, Bispehaven, and Finlandsparken.⁵

In all eight cases, we have studied documents and plans and have registered the original architectural layout and the planned or ongoing transformation. The media analysis was based on a database search of Infomedia (infomedia.dk) in local, regional, and national newspapers over twelve months. Each article was first identified as either unconditionally positive, negative, or ambivalent, then categorized according to the

scope of the story (event, transformation, crime, etc.). In addition to this, we conducted qualitative interviews with housing organizations, architects, and municipalities, as well as ten to fifteen interviews with residents in each area. Interviewees were recruited through an on-site outdoor survey among 200-300 people staying in or passing through the housing development. The last question of the survey was whether we could contact them again for an in-depth interview. Among those who agreed, we selected interviewees of various ages, genders, and ethnic backgrounds.

In the first part of the article, we briefly account for the key concepts of place reputation, territorial stigma, and residential and architectural responses. Afterward, in the media analysis, we show how the media detaches disadvantaged neighborhoods from their surroundings. The next section focuses on residents' responses, demonstrating that though they contest and negotiate the negative place reputation, some also escape the stigmatized housing developments. Subsequently, we present the architectural attempts to open up the housing developments by piercing blocks with new gates and openings. In the concluding discussion, we relate the media representations to architectural and residential responses and argue that the attempts to open up these housing developments may reinforce the stigma of the perforated welfare space. (Figure 1 near here)

Place Reputation and Territorial Stigma – Residential and Architectural Responses

A place's reputation is intricately linked to its relationship with other places and its position in the "housing hierarchy."⁶ According to Matthieu Permentier, place reputation refers to "the meaning and esteem that residents and other involved parties attribute to a neighborhood. Reputation also refers to the relatively stable image a neighborhood has among city residents and to its place in the urban hierarchy."⁷

Disadvantaged neighborhoods typically have remarkably strong place reputations, albeit negative ones. Most people know them and tend to have clear ideas about them, even though they have never been there themselves.⁸ Several studies have shown that such neighborhoods are ranked lowest in surveys of where people prefer to live and that negative place reputation is reinforced by the media's tendency to portray these housing developments as scenes of crime, rioting, and violence.⁹

This phenomenon is typically conceptualized as a matter of negative “place reputation,” “image,” or “territorial stigma”.¹⁰ Loïc Wacquant argued that place of residence can be “one of the ‘disabilities’ that can ‘disqualify the individual’ and deprive him or her from ‘full acceptance by others.’”¹¹ Advanced marginality, according to Wacquant, is characterized by the functional disconnection of dispossessed neighborhoods and the reconfiguration of the welfare state in the polarizing city: “Rather than being disseminated throughout working-class areas, advanced marginality tends to concentrate in isolated and bounded territories increasingly perceived by both outsiders and insiders as social purgatories.”¹² This process of territorial stigmatization pulls places from “fixed stable arenas” into “potential voids,” according to Wacquant.¹³ In this article, we focus on the production of such voids in the spaces of the welfare state, and how they are negotiated through media, architecture, and everyday life.

Several studies suggest that the media plays an important role in place reputation, especially in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and that a negative place reputation is a significant worry for residents.¹⁴ Some researchers have found an emerging critical awareness among residents trying to contest media representations.¹⁵ Nevertheless, numerous studies show that residents internalize negative representations of their neighborhood.¹⁶ According to Wacquant, the results of territorial stigmatization are lateral denigration and mutual distancing among residents.¹⁷ However, this theory

has been criticized as underestimating residents' ability to cope with the negative image imposed by an outside dominant or authoritative actor, such as the state or the media, leaving little room for local pride and individual agency.¹⁸

Furthermore, although several authors have argued that the physical appearance of a neighborhood can contribute to its stigma,¹⁹ little research has explored the role of architecture and urban design in processes of territorial stigmatization, including the current architectural attempts to improve a negative image. The built environment has played a pivotal role in the welfare state, yet sociological theories of the welfare state have only recently been related to studies of postwar architecture.²⁰ Similarly, the large body of social science research focusing on the current challenges of the welfare state emerging in disadvantaged neighborhoods is only rarely linked to studies of the architectural transformation of postwar social housing developments.²¹ This article aims to fill this gap and contribute to the existing body of research by providing insight into the perforated welfare space and how architectural transformations and people living in the housing developments cope with territorial stigma.

Media Representations: Detaching and Disconnecting Housing Developments

Our categorizing of newspaper articles according to how they portray the specific housing developments, shows that Danish media predominantly takes a negative perspective when writing about these places. On average, forty-three percent of all screened articles in our study are unconditionally negative, with articles about Motalavej at the top with seventy three percent, and Tingbjerg at the lowest with twenty-seven percent. The average percentage of positive articles is nineteen percent, where Tingbjerg has the highest score of forty-one percent, Motalavej with only six percent. There is a slight tendency for national media to be more negative than the local

media, and though there are some differences between newspapers, the negative approach is dominant across various political and ideological standpoints of the media.

(Figure 2 near here)

The largest contributor to negative stories is the high number of articles on negative events such as violence, vandalism, gang crime, drugs, and suspicion of terror. Reports of these events are often published in several newspapers and distributed as continuing stories over a long period of time. An example is from Motalavej, where a shooting through a window led to thirty-nine articles (out of 313 in total) over a period of several months and in different newspapers. Many of these stories are only loosely related to the neighborhood with such phrases as “Five Motalavej-youths sentenced to seven years in prison for violence,”²² or “Immigrant disturbance requires a police presence at Motalavej.”²³ Yet, by reducing the spatial context to a name or empty location, such representations disregard the nuanced experiences of the residents and associate a neighborhood with a certain kind of non-normative behavior, such as violence and crime. Stories like these deploy what has been conceptualized as “pathological explanations”²⁴ as they relate a group’s aberrant norms to a specific neighborhood. Rather than socioeconomic structures or psychological factors, the neighborhood becomes an explanation or even a cause of the problematic behavior²⁵.

Even though regeneration and architectural transformations also generate an increasing number of positive or ambivalent articles, many seemingly positive or ambivalent stories still reinforce a negative place reputation with short, stereotypical contextual descriptions. An example is article portraying Taastrupgård beginning in this way: “The concrete facade bordering Taastrupgårdvej is massive and unbreakable like a prison, holding the world out and life in.”²⁶ Such descriptions reduce the actual local context to a set of easily recognizable characteristics of disadvantaged neighborhoods.

They set the scene in which the specific story is to be understood. With the pathological explanations of non-normative behavior, this spatial generalization paints a picture of these housing developments as something that both socially and architecturally differs from the norm. Furthermore, the annual release of the ghetto list draws media attention to the neighborhoods. By officially determining which neighborhoods are on or off the list, the ghetto list generates a deluge of critical media posts and debates on the fairness of the stigma in the announcement – often from local perspectives and voices. For areas with relatively low media coverage, being on the list considerably fuels their public notoriety. An example of this debate is from an interview with residents from the housing development Rønnebergparken. After a year on the list, Rønnebergparken was taken off the list as it no longer fulfilled the criteria for being considered a ghetto: “A number of years ago it was said that Rønnebergparken was . . . equivalent to Vollsmose due to its immigrants and drunkards, but that is no longer the case.”²⁷ In this and similar articles, the images of Rønnebergparken and Vollsmose are solely related to the ghetto list and the formal hierarchy of comparable socio-demographic descriptions. From this perspective, the ghetto list detaches housing developments from their local contexts, lifting them off the ground and placing them in a denigrated hierarchy of Danish ghettos and disadvantaged neighborhoods. In particular, housing developments with a high number of articles and a high degree of national awareness become symbols of what a ghetto or a parallel society is. This phenomenon emerges in the media coverage of Vollsmose, Gellerupparken, Tingbjerg, and Mjølnerparken. All four neighborhoods have been on the ghetto list for years, and some of the new measures have been explicitly developed for them. The above example demonstrates how these housing developments – in that case, Vollsmose – often play a more subtle role. Another example is this quote from a media-interview: “Still I don’t think one can compare

Resedavej and Lupinvej with ghettos like Gellerupparken in Århus. It is not as bad here, and the neighborhood doesn't look like a ghetto.”²⁸ The promoted place reputation of Gellerupparken is here, as in the above quote mentioning Vollsmose, indirect and nonspecific. It does not relate to specific incidents or verifiable descriptions of context or architectural characteristics, relatable ghetto criteria, or political judgments. Instead, Gellerupparken itself is a negative reference. In the public mindset produced by media coverage, these disadvantaged neighborhoods serve as negative archetypes defining all other housing developments remotely similar to them. Conventional media coverage in Danish newspapers thus contributes to the production of “spaces of differences” or in Wacquant’s words; “potential voids,” which are discursively disconnected from the surrounding welfare state. On this basis, local, regional, and national newspapers reinforce the public and political discourse of “holes” in the map of Denmark, adding new layers to the territorial stigmatization of disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Residents’ Responses: “It Is Also Just Denmark”

When asked about their neighborhood’s reputation, most interviewed residents immediately mention the negative effect of the media. Even those who think that there are actual problems in their housing development, typically stress that the media is an essential part of the problem. The interviewed residents find it difficult to recognize media descriptions of their neighborhood, and they explain that stories in the media tend to exaggerate and relate all negative incidents in the surrounding district to their respective housing developments. For instance, the chairman of the tenants’ board in Mjølnerparken stated that he receives calls from journalists when trouble occurs anywhere in the northwest district of Copenhagen: “The media call me and tell me that there has been shooting in Mjølnerparken, but I walk around, and nothing is going on here. . . . If something happens in [the] northwest, they think they necessarily have to

mention Mjølnerparken.”²⁹ Several residents are frustrated with how such stories dominate outsiders’ views of their neighborhood. For instance, a man with Somali background explained how his colleagues react when he tells them where he lives: “People say, ‘Oh, you live in Taastrupgård. . .’ and then the bad stories follow. I ask them, ‘Have you been there?’ No, but they’ve read about it in the media.”³⁰

Many residents feel that they are “labeled” along with their neighborhood and are “looked down on.” Some regard their address as an obstacle when applying for a job or taking out insurance; others feel it as a hindrance in their everyday social life: “It is almost like having a virus, when you tell people that you live in Mjølnerparken,” ³¹said a man interviewed during the pandemic. As Wacquant noted, it therefore matters little whether the neighborhoods they live in are in fact dilapidated and dangerous, as the prejudices suffice to set off socially noxious consequences.³²

Nevertheless, it is also clear from our interviews and observations that many residents do not passively accept the stigma. In the interviews and their everyday lives, the residents are eager to contest and negotiate media representations of their neighborhood: A series of violent conflicts between two families in Motalavej in the provincial town Korsør made headlines over several months. This prompted the Housing Minister to argue that Motalavej proved the existence of parallel societies in Denmark. In interviews during the conflict, several residents agreed that the neighborhood suffered under the domination of two conflicting family clans. However, they also stressed that “Korsør is a part of Denmark; Motalavej is a part of Denmark” and that “it isn’t a ‘mini-state’ within Denmark – it is also just Denmark.”³³ The residents did not deny the problems in their neighborhoods but still insist on being a coherent part of Denmark with no void, parallelism, or break dividing them from their surroundings.

Some residents also oppose the negative reactions to their address in their everyday life by similarly stressing the connectedness and central location of the neighborhood. A woman with Danish ethnic background who has lived in Gellerupparken for 20 years gave the following account:

I was in a furniture store, and the sales clerk was all amazed that I actually chose to live here. Sometimes people are like: ‘Well, do you like it?’ They get curious, but then I tell them all the good stuff: that I love how bright the flats are and that I love the diversity – so many beautiful people here – and that it’s centrally located only 5 km from central Århus.³⁴

By stressing the housing qualities and nearness to the central city, this woman negotiates essential parts of a place’s reputation: namely, its position in the local housing hierarchy and its relationship to other places.³⁵ The comparison with other places is also deployed by residents mourning the pending transformations of their neighborhood, which they see as a direct result of the negative representation in the media. A man living in Bispehaven in Århus for instance stated:

People in the rest of the city have a different view of us. So, they think it’s ok to do this [demolitions]. I read an article that called it Århus’ plague bubo . . . but you wouldn’t talk about the whole city when something happened down there or say, now there was a rape, or there was a fight, so you don’t suddenly tear down blocks, but that’s what they do here.³⁶

A woman in Vollsmose argued similarly by relating Vollsmose to Nørrebro borough in central Copenhagen: “I think Vollsmose is seen as a particularly bad place. You know, vandalism, shooting, crime. You never consider demolishing Nørrebro just because there is some trouble every now and then, right?”³⁷ By relating their neighborhood to other places not included in the ghetto list, residents stress that their neighborhood is comparable to such places that would hardly be considered a place to demolish.

The negative place image makes certain residents, especially young and well-educated residents, prone to leaving the neighborhood, even if they like living there. A young

man from Finlandsparken, for instance, stated that he actually does not care about negative stories in the media, yet they may affect where he would live in the future: “My fiancé doesn’t want to live here. She has it from the news. I don’t mind what they say in the news, but in that case, we will just live somewhere else.”³⁸

Most residents do not passively internalize negative media representations but contest and negotiate damaging place representations to reconnect their neighborhood discursively to the surrounding society. Still, despite this contestation, those who have the opportunity may leave solely to avoid the territorial stigma of living in a neighborhood on the ghetto list.

Architectural Responses: “A Tooth That Has Been Knocked Out”

A key vision in the ghetto legislation is the physical transformation of all housing developments defined as hard ghettos. Their share of social housing must be reduced from hundred percent to forty percent before 2030; to accomplish this, extensive regeneration projects involving demolition, densification, and transformation of the housing blocks have been planned or carried out in most places. Furthermore, the ghetto legislation states that “focused demolition shall contribute to transform and open up the ghetto areas towards the surrounding society.”³⁹

In many housing developments, this vision has resulted in demolition as well as in establishing new paths and infrastructural connections through the area, and new gates and openings in previously massive housing blocks. Although the listed neighborhoods vary in size and architecture (see Figure 1), most are suburban social housing developments built in the 1960s to 1980s. They are typically characterized by relatively monotonous multistory residential blocks of family housing and the separation of traffic, rendering the housing developments enclaves in the suburban fabric. As pointed out elsewhere, this spatial layout may prevent outsiders from entering

the housing development and reinforce a vicious spiral where deprived neighborhoods acquire an increasingly worse reputation.⁴⁰ (Figure 3 near here)

While counteracting negative place reputation is not an explicit element of the ghetto legislation, the official résumé suggests that the purpose is to change how these housing developments appear.⁴¹ Building a better reputation is also a critical issue in many local development plans and architectural transformations of the housing developments. Gellerupparken in Århus has been the first housing development to undergo major transformations and has been a model of inspiration for the entire ghetto legislation. This makes it particularly relevant to study, as it is not just the first, but also the leading example of the architectural implications of the Danish ghetto legislation. In Gellerupparken new infrastructure, new housing types and new office buildings have been established alongside with the demolition of several housing blocks. A large gate has been established in one block to serve as a new landmark for the renewed housing development. The gate is six stories high in an eight-story block and its inside is clad with a golden material displaying colored lights at night, which catches the eye even from a long distance (Figure 3). When asked about the gate, the project manager in the housing association stressed the architecture's impact on place reputation:

It gives a new identity. . . . At night when it is illuminated, it can be seen all the way from the rooftop of Salling [an exclusive shopping center in the central city]. I think that will have an impact. . . . Whether it is the club of retired people, the money people, or the architects, it makes you say, "Wow, a change has happened here!" . . . When the tenants and the board see that this is what they [the media] start writing about, rather than our problems, I think it will create more pride in the housing development.⁴²

As this quote illustrates, partial demolition is an architectural transformation aimed primarily at communicating to the outside world – including media, stakeholders, and the wider public – about the opening up of the housing development.

If modernist architecture broke with the Renaissance's central perspective, arranging everything to be seen from one particular point, namely the *emperor's eye*, the quote above interestingly reveals another central perspective reemerging in the current transformations: that of the middle class in the city's center taking a break from shopping on Salling's rooftop. One of the architects responsible for the transformation was somewhat ambivalent about the gate, yet recognized its symbolic effect:

I have actually not been the biggest fan of plowing through with that road. . . . I always thought it was a bit negative, like "now, let's rip a hole in it." But I have actually become fond of it because it is also a symbol that you open up these long blocks. . . . It's the symbolic effect in that something is going on in Gellerup.⁴³

Such a merging of architecture and place branding seems to be effective.

Gellerupparken is one of the housing developments with a relatively large share of positive media stories in our media analysis due to stories on the architectural transformation (see Figure 2). [\(Figure 4 near here\)](#)

However, many residents still do not experience this as a positive development, as it reminds them that the transformation is not for them. A young woman, whose family had been relocated to a new flat next to the gate in Gellerupparken, described the gate as a mere "hole:"

You can't really use the gate for anything. It can glow and blink in colors and stuff like that. . . . In our situation, it doesn't make sense that they made a hole. . . . My parents were told that they cannot live here: "We need to get someone else in."⁴⁴

Her experience of the gate was overshadowed by the fact that the family was forced to give up their flat when it transformed into a "town house" with the aim of attracting new, socioeconomically advantaged residents. Other residents are more positive about the gate and other elements of the transformation, and some think that it can help improve Gellerupparken's reputation. However, the idea of opening up and redesigning

a housing block to attract outsiders often makes them feel unwelcome in their own neighborhood. (Figure 5 near here)

Similar openings are planned or underway in several other places, though the physical transformations are not as advanced as those in Gellerupparken. In Taastrupgård, the long block shielding the housing development from the surroundings has been partly demolished to open up the neighborhood. In Finlandsparken, a new gate has also been established in one block by demolishing two ground floor flats in an outer block (Figure 5). Similar to Gellerupparken, a new pathway through the block and Finlandsparken's green areas has been created: the purpose being to create a shortcut between the neighboring housing areas and shopping facilities on the other side of Finlandsparken. The interviewed representative from Finlandsparken's housing association explained how their plans of a new tenants' house were also aimed at attracting outsiders, yet at the same time he revealed his misgivings about the effect of establishing the gate:

The idea of a new tenants' house is to open up so that we get people from the outside into the housing development. We also want to work with the infrastructure to open up [the development]. That opening has already been established . . . but it is also a bit like a tooth that has been knocked out – a symbol that you're [in] a ghetto!⁴⁵

The background for his doubt is that today the new, green pavement of the pathway ends abruptly in a parking lot outside of Finlandsparken (Figure 6), as residents in the neighboring area were reluctant to connect their neighborhood to a ghetto-listed housing development like Finlandsparken.

(Figure 6 near here)

Concluding Discussion: The Perforated Welfare Space

The preceding analysis demonstrates that the Danish ghetto list formalizes the bottom of the housing hierarchy, which is further denigrated by media coverage detaching housing developments from their local surroundings and rendering them negative “voids.” This is an unintended effect of residents publicly trying to defend their neighborhood by arguing that it is not as bad as the most notorious hard ghettos, thereby cementing *their* negative place reputation. Such kicking downwards to escape the void at the bottom of the housing hierarchy confirms Wacquant’s point about lateral denigration and mutual distancing.⁴⁶

However, this point applies primarily to the relationship between housing developments, whereas most of the interviewed residents in each housing development defended their own neighborhoods and were eager to contest negative media representations. In interviews and their everyday lives, they seek to lift their neighborhoods up in the housing hierarchy. They relate and reconnect them to other places, arguing that it is “also just Denmark” or that they are very close to the city center.

The Scandinavian welfare state may indirectly play a role in this relative absence of internalized territorial stigma.⁴⁷ For years, local Danish welfare state policies and area-based regeneration projects have focused on supporting pride and dignity of place among the residents. Social workers and other local state agencies have actively campaigned against negative place reputation.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the egalitarian Scandinavian welfare state has historically been influenced by organization from below, thus ascribing a positive value to the culture of the less privileged classes.⁴⁹

However, this particular point appears to be the crux of the matter in current regenerations prompted by the ghetto legislation. By no means do the current regenerations ascribe value to the culture or places of the less privileged. The gates,

openings, and paths established to open up the housing developments to the surrounding society cement the developments' status as holes in need of reconnection to the surroundings. Such architectural transformations may be considered materializing pathological explanations rather than attempts to support pride and dignity of place among residents.

As other authors have argued, regeneration can thereby paradoxically worsen the existing stigma.⁵⁰ The ambivalence expressed by the interviewed architects and housing association representatives illustrates that they aim to redesign the housing developments to make them more attractive to outsiders – epitomized by the middle class in the city center – yet struggle to legitimize that this is also for the benefit and pride of the residents. As suggested by the media coverage of Gellerupparken, regeneration projects merging place branding and architecture may succeed in causing a larger share of positive media attention focusing on the spectacular transformation of the built environment. Nevertheless, as with other seemingly positive media stories about housing developments on the ghetto list, the problem-solving scope still requires an implicit focus on problems, paradoxically reproducing a negative place reputation.⁵¹

Furthermore, architectural transformations explicitly directed at outsiders may also further stigmatize residents because they perceive transformations as attempts of “getting someone else in” or – when combined with rehousing – even replacing them with someone else. As Steffen Jensen and Marie-Louise Johansen have argued, the architectural and structural changes are entangled with state-driven processes of social change.⁵² From the viewpoint of the residents in Gellerupparken, the state-initiated regeneration projects appear to be solely about social exclusion: “they want us out,” as one of their interlocutors has stated.⁵³ The physical regeneration and architectural transformation mediates the residents' relationship to the welfare state or, as the authors

phrased it, “They are the human form of those buildings that need to go to . . .”⁵⁴ As argued above, quite a few of the residents, particularly the younger and better educated, find that leaving is the only way to escape the stigma. Symbolically, the opening in the housing development becomes a gateway for leaving rather than for arriving.

By linking architectural ways of coping with negative neighborhood reputation to media representations and residential experiences, we suggest that architecture is not an accomplished object or artefact that can be understood independently from the socio-political context it emanates from. The impact of new gates and openings is intricately entangled with ghetto-lists and media stories that perforate the Danish welfare space.

The very same housing developments that materialized the success of the welfare state thus seem to contain the seeds of its failure: the mass housing that established the welfare state as a savior have revealed that it can also be an oppressor.⁵⁵ Johansen and Jensen point out that while ghettos and slums in other parts of the world are perhaps abandoned in a neoliberal withdrawal of the state, the Danish welfare state intervenes and “lavishes money and expertise on the problem at hand.”⁵⁶

However, the current logic of such interventions rests on the very perforation of the welfare space. Holes are marked in the map of Denmark, originally viewed as a socially coherent space, and then these metaphorical holes are counteracted with other holes in the form of gates and openings. Whether such gates, openings, paths, and connections actually connect the so-called hard ghettos to their surroundings and make more outsiders take shortcuts through the housing developments is too early to determine. The architectural impact of the ghetto legislation is so far only visible in a few places. However, stories from Finlandsparken and other places testify that when officially marked as the bottom of the housing hierarchy, neighboring areas are often

reluctant to be spatially and socially connected. Instead of the solution, the gate may be revealed as an empty symbol or “a tooth knocked out.”

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Captions:

Figure 1: The eight housing developments included in the analysis are all on the list of so-called “hard ghettos,” but vary in scale, population and architecture. Illustration by the authors.

Figure 2: Negative, positive and ambivalent articles during twelve months for each housing development. In average forty-three percent of all media coverage is negative. Illustration by the authors.

Figure 3: Rendering of the new gate in Gellerupparken. With its size and inside golden facing displaying colored lights at night, it can be seen from the city center. Illustration by JCN Bolig/MOE/Vandkunsten/Transform

Figure 4: According to some of the rehoused residents the gate is a mere “hole,” whereas the transformed park and lake are much more appreciated. Photo by the authors.

Figure 5: The gate in Finlandsparken was established to create a path leading through the housing development, but residents in the neighboring housing areas were reluctant to connect to a ghetto-listed neighborhood. Photo by the authors.

Figure 6: So far, the path through Finlandsparken ends abruptly on the parking lot. A redesign of the pavement aims at completing the connection. Photo by the authors.

¹ The criteria defining developments included on the list have been changed several times, but are per 1st December 2020 defined as developments that have more than 1000 residents, of which over fifty percent of residents have non-Western nationality or heritage and adhere to two of the following four criteria: 1) Over forty percent of adults aged 18-64 are not engaged in employment or education (average over two-year period) 2) The share of residents aged 18 or over convicted for criminal, weapons or narcotics crimes is three times the national average (average over two-year period) 3) The share of residents aged 30-59 with only basic school education or lower (includes undeclared education) is over sixty percent 4) Average pre-tax income for adults aged 18-64, not including unemployed, less than 55 percent of pre-tax income for administrative region (Transport og Boligministeriet: Liste over ghettoområder pr. 1. december 2020)

² Indenrigs- og Boligministeriet, Blandede Boligområder - Næste Skridt i Kampen Mod Parallelsamfund. København: Indenrigs- og Boligministeriet, 2021.

³ Translation by the authors. Regeringen. Ét Danmark Uden Parallelsamfund – Ingen Ghettoer i 2030 (2018).

⁴ Translation by the authors. <https://www.regeringen.dk/aktuelt/statsministerens-nytaarstale/lars-loekke-rasmussens-nytaarstale-1-januar-2018/>

⁵ The eight cases were selected in order to cover the largest and most stigmatized Danish housing developments, yet also representing different geographical locations, different levels of national notoriety and different scales and architectural layouts (see figure 2).

⁶ Frank Wassenberg, “Renewing Stigmatized Estates in the Netherlands: A Framework for Image Renewal Strategies,” *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 19 no. 3 (2004): 292.

⁷ Matthieu Permentier, “Neighbourhood Reputation,” in *International Encyclopedia of Housing and Home*, ed. M. Permentier, (2012).

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⁹ Annette Hastings, “Stigma and Social Housing Estates: Beyond Pathological Explanations,” *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 19, no. 3, (2004): 233–254; Sune Qvotrup Jensen and Dorte Christensen, “Territorial Stigmatization and Local Belonging,” *City*, 16, no. 1–2 (2012): 74–92; A. Haynes, E. Devereux, and M. J. Power, “Media Representations, Stigma and Neighbourhood Identity,” in *Social Housing, Disadvantage and Neighbourhood Liveability. Ten Years of Change in Social Housing Neighbourhoods*, ed. M. Norris (London & New York: Routledge, 2014), 192-234.

- ¹⁰ Loïc Wacquant, “Territorial Stigmatization in the Age of Advanced Marginality,” *Thesis Eleven* 91, no. 1 (2007): 66–77.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Ibid.
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- ¹⁷ Wacquant, “Territorial Stigmatization,” 68.
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- ²⁰ Mark Swenarton, Tom Avermaete, and Dirk van den Heuvel, ed., *Architecture and the Welfare State* (London: Routledge, 2014).
- ²¹ Claus Bech-Danielsen, Marie Stender, and Mette Mechlenborg, eds., “Architectural Transformation of Disadvantaged Housing Areas,” *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* 31, no. 1 (2019): 5-8.
- ²² Translation by the authors. ”Fem Motalavej-unge idømt over syv års fængsel for vold,” *Sjællandske Nyheder*, 5. Nov, 2019

- ²³ Translation by the authors. "Indvandreruro trækker politikræfter til Motalavej," *Sjællandske Slagelse*, 29. Aug, 2019
- ²⁴ Haynes, Devereux, and Power, "Media Representations, Stigma and Neighbourhood Identity."
- ²⁵ Hastings, "Stigma and Social Housing Estates"
- ²⁶ Translation by the authors. "Betonfacaden ud mod Taastrupgaardsvej står massivt og uigennemtrængelig som et fængsel, der holder verden ude og livet inde." *Berlingske* 2. Dec, 2018
- ²⁷ Translation by the authors. "Familien Bæk Bydsø: 'Man føler sig tryk,'" *Uge-Avisen Ribe*. October 23, 2018.
- ²⁸ Translation by the authors. "På besøg på Resedavej og Lupinvej: Bor du i en ghetto?" *Midtjyllands Avis*, December 5, 2018.
- ²⁹ Interview with resident, Mjølnerparken, May, 2020
- ³⁰ Interview with resident, Taastrupgaard, May 2019
- ³¹ Interview with resident, Mjølnerparken, May, 2020
- ³² Wacquant, "Territorial Stigmatization," 68.
- ³³ Interview with resident, Motalavej, June 2020
- ³⁴ Interview with resident, Gellerupparken, February 2019
- ³⁵ Wassenberg, "Renewing Stigmatised Estates."
- ³⁶ Interview with resident, Bispehaven, June 2019
- ³⁷ Interview with resident, Vollsmose, June 2019
- ³⁸ Interview with resident, Finlandsparken, August 2020
- ³⁹ Translation by the authors. Regeringen. Ét Danmark Uden Parallelsamfund.
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- ⁴¹ The official resume of the 2018 ghetto legislation has the following headline: "Ghetto Areas Must Look Different" (translated from Danish: "Ghettområder skal se anderledes ud"), <https://www.regeringen.dk/nyheder/2018/ghettoudspil/fysisk-forandrede-parallelsamfund/>
- ⁴² Interview with project manager in housing association, Gellerupparken, March 2019
- ⁴³ Interview with architect, Gellerupparken, March 2019
- ⁴⁴ Interview with resident, Gellerupparken, February 2019
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- ⁴⁶ Wacquant, "Territorial Stigmatization," 69.

⁴⁷ Jensen and Christensen, “Territorial Stigmatization.”

⁴⁸ Ibid., 88.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 89.

⁵⁰ Ibid.; Mette Louise E Johansen and Steffen B Jensen, “They Want Us Out”: Urban Regeneration and the Limits of Integration in the Danish Welfare State,” *Critique of Anthropology* 37, no. 3 (2017): 297–316.

⁵¹ Johansen and Jensen, “They Want Us Out,”

⁵² Johansen and Jensen, “They Want Us Out,” 301.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 314.

⁵⁵ Swenarton, Avermaete, and van den Heuvel, “Architecture and the Welfare State,” 17.

⁵⁶ Johansen and Jensen, “They Want Us Out,” 299.