

## Community, Activism and Norwegian Satellite Town Stigma

- 1 See Kjersti Gakkestad, "Romsås – en stigmatisert bydel? En studie av territoriell stigmatisering: medias rolle og konsekvenser for beboerne" [Romsås—a stigmatized district? A study of territorial stigmatization: the role of the media and consequences for residents] (Master's thesis, University of Oslo, Oslo, 2003); Ingar Brattbakk and Thorbjørn Hansen, "Post-War Large Housing Estates in Norway – Well-Kept Residential Areas Still Stigmatised?" *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 19, no. 3 (2004): 311–32; Kirsten Danielsen and Ada Ingrid Engebretsen, "Stovner – problemområde eller luttet idyll? Om forholdet mellom statistikk og erfaring" [Stovner—problem area or pure idyll? On the relationship between statistics and experience], *Tidsskrift for velferdsforskning* [Journal for welfare research] 17, no. 3 (2014): 27–40.
- 2 See Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963); Loïc Wacquant, Tom Slater, and Virgílio Borges Pereira, "Territorial Stigmatization in Action," *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 46, no. 6 (June 2014): 1270.
- 3 Examples of aesthetic improvements are the "lamp" at Haugenstua, the "tower" at Stovner, and the underpass at Ammerud. See Per-Øystein Lund, *Innsatser i utsatte byområder: Erfaringer fra Groruddalssatsningen* [Interventions in vulnerable urban areas: Experiences from the Groruddal project] (Oslo: Oslo kommune, 2014), 63.

Children hold an important position in Scandinavian societies today, just as they did in the postwar welfare states policies and planning, when they were, quite literally, considered to constitute the future. This is probably why stories of "children in danger" have such a startling effect: they invert the image of the child in the welfare state—no longer the welfare state's primary subject and protagonist, the child becomes its helpless victim. The alleged crisis of children and young people is currently a ubiquitous topic in Scandinavian discussions of the postwar urban developments connected to the expansive period of the welfare state. In mass media, socioeconomic and cultural challenges concerning juveniles are treated as defining features of these urban areas. In the present-day Norwegian discourse on Oslo's satellite towns, there is a contrast between a negative media portrayal, which focuses on problematic events, and accounts by inhabitants, who defend the satellite towns as non-exceptional, ordinary urban areas—which are lovely places to live.<sup>1</sup> The inhabitants thus present positive perspectives, but even their stories are told as reactions to and in the context of enduring problem narratives. The positive qualities and problems of the satellite town are thus addressed in such a way that they become locked together, bringing into being a dichotomy that contributes to the construction of territorial stigma.

Territorial stigma, building on the sociologist Erving Goffman's model of stigma as "the management of spoiled identity," is a key term that denotes a collective representation of space that, according to Loïc Wacquant, is "equated with social disintegration, racialized through selective accentuation, and it elicits revulsion often leading to punitive corrective measures."<sup>2</sup> The satellite towns' challenges are, as a consequence, often addressed by defending and safeguarding the area's reputation through place branding, brand management, and design measures taken to improve aesthetic attractiveness, as well as the explicit or implicit instruction of inhabitants to speak highly of the area and its facilities (in particular, the school).<sup>3</sup> This plays into the present-day focus on managing public image and reputation, where businesses and institutions expect employees to avoid expressing critique and doubts, which potentially may place the business, the company, or, as is the case for the development of territorial stigma, the place, in a bad light. When based on notions of children in crisis, territorial stigmatization has been used to motivate various social and physical transformations of specific areas to improve their reputation and valuation—in cultural and economic terms. Such discourses work across Scandinavia: the area-based policies for problematic urban areas in Oslo (satellite towns) refer to Danish and Swedish examples of what should be avoided.

- 4 This type of criticism also happened elsewhere, see, for example, the infamous Swedish reports: Olle Bengtzon, Jan Deldén, and Jan Lundgren, *Rapport Tensta* [Report on Tensta] (Stockholm: Pan/Norstedts, 1970); Hans Gordon and Peter Molin, eds., “*Man bara anpassar sig helt enkelt*”: en forskningsrapport om människor i Skärholmen [“One just adapts, quite simply”: A research report on people in Skärholmen] (Stockholm: Pan/Norstedts, 1972); Margareta Schwartz and Suzanne Sjöqvist, *Kvinnoliv. Förortsliv* [Women's life, Suburban life] (Stockholm: Gidlunds, 1978).
- 5 This chapter is based on my PhD dissertation. See Guttorm Ruud, “Sites of Crisis. Histories of the Satellite Town” (PhD diss., The Oslo School of Architecture and Design, 2021), chap. 5.
- 6 Erik Rolfsen, *Generalplan for Oslo: et utkast lagt fram som diskussionsgrunnlag for de kommunale myndigheter og etater og for andre interesserte* [General plan for Oslo: a draft presented as a basis for discussion for the municipal authorities and agencies and for other interested parties] (Oslo: Oslo reguleringsvesen, 1950).
- 7 See Clarence Perry, “City Planning for Neighborhood Life,” *Social Forces* 8, no. 1 (September 1, 1929): 98–100; Lewis Mumford, “The Neighborhood and the Neighborhood Unit,” *Town Planning Review* 24, no. 4 (January 1, 1954): 256–70.
- 8 The size of Oslo satellite towns has generally been around 10,000 inhabitants. See, for example, Frøde Rinnan, *Lambertseter: en forstad til Oslo med 10000 innbyggere* [Lambertseter: a suburb of Oslo with 10,000 inhabitants] (Oslo: Cappelen, 1950); Frøde Rinnan and Olav Tveten, *Tveita: en forstad til Oslo: 6. km. fra sentrum, 9000 innbyggere* [Tveita: A suburb to Oslo, 6 kilometers from the center, for 9,000 inhabitants] (Oslo kommune ved byplankontoret, 1960); Jon Kojen, “Bort fra sovebyen: Romsås – ny forstad for 8000 mennesker” [Beyond the dormitory town: Romsås, a new suburb for 8,000 people], *Arbeiderbladet*, March 2, 1968.
- 9 “Tokerud – Reguleringsplan for området mellom Trondheimsveien – kommugrensen mot Skedsmo og Hovedbanen” [Tokerud: Regulation plan for the area between Trondheimsveien, the municipal border toward Skedsmo, and Hovedbanen], September 9, 1966, S-1352, Saksnummer 196601316 – Regulerings-sak, Archive of Plan- og bygningsetaten, Oslo.
- 10 Jon Skjeie, *Bolig for folk flest: Selvaagbygg 1920–1998* [Housing for most people: Selvaagbygg 1920–1998] (Oslo: Tano Aschehoug, 1998), 226.

These discourses of place image, territorial stigma, and the often-debated dichotomy of media critique and inhabitant pride must be challenged. To do this, I turn to the history of Norwegian satellite town stigma. Norwegian satellite towns have received critique since the 1950s. At first, the critique faulted a lack of aesthetic and urban qualities; in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a more severe criticism emerged, which questioned social policies, raised psychological issues, and suggested the failure of planning and the welfare state.<sup>4</sup> Crucially, the notion of “children in danger” was at the center of this critique. In this chapter, I challenge this narrative by examining the story of Stovner, a satellite town of Oslo. In 1975, starting with a publication by the magazine *Sinnetts Helse*, it became the epicenter of a nationwide media outcry and critique of children having been let down by society, initiating a stigmatization process that has continued until the present day. However, a closer look at the background and context of this critique reveals other ways of understanding the beginning of this discourse: as a concrete conflict of interest in the satellite town of Stovner, community engagement and political activism. Furthermore, in this analysis, I point to the broader societal problem of a contradiction between the welfare state and the local community and debates on how society should be designed and governed.<sup>5</sup>

## THE SATELLITE TOWN OF STOVNER

From 1950 onwards, the urban expansion of Oslo followed the General plan for Oslo, which described a pattern of distributed housing areas and “sub-centers” according to international planning ideas of neighborhood units.<sup>6</sup> The neighborhood unit was a general planning principle for small, close-knit, integrated, and democratic urban communities. Disseminated by Lewis Mumford, this concept initially stems from Clarence Stein and Clarence Perry, the latter of whom emphasized the school’s central role in creating well-functioning local communities.<sup>7</sup> This was also the case in the General plan for Oslo, which positioned the school as an essential and central part of the neighborhood unit idea upon which the postwar satellite towns were built.

Located at the northern border of the Oslo Municipality, the satellite town of Stovner was planned for about 30,000 inhabitants and was thus (significantly) more extensive than earlier Oslo satellite towns.<sup>8</sup> The area was laid out in Tokerudplanen, which was approved in 1966.<sup>9</sup> Stovner is divided into several precincts or neighborhoods with several schools; the largest is Vestli, which was planned by the private company Selvaag and built between 1967 and 1974 as the pinnacle of Selvaag’s rational housing production effort. A notable feature of this precinct is its signature housing typologies, which consist of terrace blocks and pyramid blocks terraced on two sides, and were allegedly employed to combine the advantages of the housing block and the individual house.<sup>10</sup> The other precincts within Stovner are Forsheimer and Haugenstua, where blocks were built by the cooperative housing company USBL; the areas of Lower Stovner and the Stovner housing cooperative, with terrace housing built by the cooperative housing company OBOS; and the old and new detached houses in the area of old



The Oslo satellite town of Stovner, 1972. The Vestli precinct with its characteristic pyramid blocks on the left, old Stovner on the right, and the Fossumsletta neighborhood in the center.

Housing blocks under construction at Fossumsletta, 1969.







- 11 Oslo kommune Byantikvaren to Oslo kommune Plan- og bygningsetaten [Oslo Municipality Cultural Heritage Management Office to Oslo Municipality Planning and Building Agency], "102/1123 – Smiivegen 255 og 257 – Smedstua og Haugenstua skole – uttalelse til riving av skolebygninger," January 15, 2014, Byggesak 201315123, Archive of Plan- og bygningsetaten, Oslo; Kari Funderud, *Åpen skole: blinkskudd eller bomskudd?* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1975), 44–45.
- 12 Terje Gammelsrud, ed., "Barn i krise" [Children in crisis], special issue, *Sinnets helse: Tidsskrift for mentalhygiene* [Health of the mind: Magazine for mental hygiene], no. 5 (1975).
- 13 Anne Sæterdal and Thorbjørn Hansen, *Ammerud 1: planlegging av en ny bydel*, Rapport 58 (Norges byggforskningsinstitutt, 1969).
- 14 See, for example, Sture Kvarv, "Yrkesroller og fagideologiske brytninger i fysisk planlegging i Norge, 1920–1970" [Professional roles and ideological clashes in spatial planning in Norway 1920–1970] (PhD diss., Arkitektthøgskolen i Oslo, 2003); Thorbjørn Hansen and Jon Guttu, *Oslo kommunes boligpolitikk 1960–1989: fra storskala bygging til frislepp* [Oslo municipality's housing policy 1960–1989: from large-scale construction to liberation] (Oslo: Norsk institutt for by- og regionforskning, 2000); Erling Annaniasen, *Nå bygger vi den nye tid*, vol. 2, *Boligsamvirkets historie i Norge* [Now we're building the new era, vol. 2, The history of housing cooperatives in Norway] (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1996); Elsa Reiersen, *De tusen hjem: Den norske stats husbank 1946–96* [The thousand homes: The Norwegian State Housing Bank 1946–96] (Oslo: Ad notam Gyldendal, 1996); Jon Guttu, "Høyhuset i etterkrigstidens boligdebatt" [The tower block in the postwar housing debate], *St. Hallvard*, no. 1 (2001): 4–25; Jon Guttu, "Den gode boligen": fagfolks oppfatning av boligkvalitet gjennom 50 år" ["The good home": professionals' perception of housing quality through 50 years] (PhD diss., Arkitektthøgskolen i Oslo, 2003); Ane Hjort Guttu, "Å bo i drabantby" [Living in a satellite town], *Byggekunst: The Norwegian Review of Architecture* 87, no. 3 (2005): 20–31; Edgeir Benum, *Byråkratiens by: fra 1948 til våre dager* [The city of bureaucracy: from 1948 to the present day], vol. 5 (Oslo: Cappelen, 1994); Ola Svein Stugu, "Vekst og vendepunkt" [Growth and turning point], in *Norsk byhistorie: urbanisering gjennom 1300 år* [Norwegian urban history: urbanization through 1,300 years], Knut Helle et al. (Pax, 2006), 447–72.

Stovner. Finally, the neighborhood of Fossumsletta in Stovner—which would play a central role in the critique of 1975—was built by the private entrepreneur Nils Stiansen. In contrast to Selvaag's terrace and pyramid blocks, the housing blocks at Fossumsletta are simple prismatic volumes. The layout comprises of five three-story blocks, fourteen four-story blocks, and four nine-story blocks. Some blocks are organized to form open courtyards; others have a linear configuration that follows the site's natural contours. In the plan, small circles between the blocks or in the open courtyards denote playgrounds.

The primary school Smedstua, also central in the 1975 critique, was located south of Fossumsletta and is part of Haugenstua skoleanlegg (the Haugenstua school campus) and was designed by Paul Cappelen and Torbjørn Rodahl. According to the City Heritage Authority, Smedstua was one of only nine instances of a new type of school building, called "open schools," which were built in Oslo between 1968 and 1972.<sup>11</sup> It had an open and flexible "learning landscape" in low, one- or two-story buildings organized around atriums to help learning and cooperation.

## THE OUTCRY

In 1975, the magazine *Sinnets Helse* (Health of the mind) published a special issue entitled "Barn i krise" (Children in crisis).<sup>12</sup> This seemingly small and insignificant booklet played a crucial role in describing and disseminating what was apparently a failure of Norwegian social policy, by posing a critique of the welfare state and the failures of its physical planning. With articles on the Oslo satellite town of Stovner, the special issue was seen as a harsh satellite town critique. It became known as *Stovnerrapporten* (the Stovner report), a name that smacked of trouble and closely associated the magazine issue with a specific site, at the same time attributing this special issue an official, scientific formal status and importance. Labeling the special issue as a "report" on a specific place forged a conceptual link to *Ammerud 1*, a 1969 research publication from Norges byggforskningsinstitutt (The Norwegian building research institute). Formally a report on satellite town planning in general, *Ammerud 1* was soon seen as a report on the place Ammerud and became known as *Ammerudrapporten* (the Ammerud report). This is often considered the first significant critique of the planning of satellite towns from a social instead of an aesthetic or technical perspective.<sup>13</sup> In it, various social aspects of satellite towns and their planning were scrutinized and judged harshly, and the report is often considered a turning point in Norwegian planning history.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, the later, more journalistic report on Stovner is especially notable for its focus on psychosocial factors and its great impact on the public discourse on Norwegian satellite towns. This is evident in its much-quoted introduction, referenced repeatedly in mass media since 1975. It is part of the history of the territorial stigmatization—the attachment of stigma to a place—of Stovner and other Norwegian satellite towns:

- 15 Original quote in Norwegian: "På Stovner, en av Oslos nyeste bydeler, fins mange barn – opp til 11–12 år gamle – som ikke kjenner navnet på sin tommelfinger, ukedagene eller årstidene. De er uvitende om når de er født, og de har dårlig begrep om hvor de bor. En rekke barn ser ut til å ha mistet evnen til å lære å lese, skrive og regne, og de vil sannsynligvis komme til å bli noe bortimot analfabeter. Deres problemer virker ofte utligjengelige og upåvirkelige av kjente behandlingsmetoder." The quote appears in the editor's introduction to "Stovnerreporten" and the first article in "Romsåsrapporten," see Terje Gammelsrud, "Skal vi snakke høyt om det?" [Shall we talk about it out loud?], in "Barn i krise" [Children in crisis], special issue, *Sinnets helse: Tidsskrift for mentalhygiene*, no. 5 (1975): 3; Terje Gammelsrud, "Saken anses som ferdig behandlet" [The matter is considered to have been dealt with], in "Rapport fra Oslo: Barn i krise 2" [Report from Oslo: Children in crisis 2], special issue, *Sinnets helse: Tidsskrift for mentalhygiene*, no. 5 (1976): 4–6.
- 16 Original quote in Norwegian: "den samfunnsplanlegging som tillater at hele bydelene kan bygges og tas i bruk uten hensyn til elementære betingelser for menneskelig tilværelse." Gammelsrud, "Skal vi snakke høyt om det?"
- 17 For the extension to Romsås, see Tone B. Jamholt, "Romsås har tiet om sin sosiale nød" [Romsås has been silent about its social distress] in "Rapport fra Oslo: Barn i krise 2" [Report from Oslo: Children in crisis 2], special issue, *Sinnets helse: Tidsskrift for mentalhygiene*, no. 5 (1976): 8–9.
- 18 See, for example, Øyvind Holen, *Goruddalen: en reiseskildring* [Goruddalen: a travelogue], 2nd ed. (Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2016); Olav Elgvin, Jon Rogstad, and Sarah Fossen Innathambly, "Rurbane møter: deltakelse og samhold blant ungdom og kvinner på Stovner" [Rurbane meetings: participation and solidarity among young people and women at Stovner], *Fafo-rapport* (Oslo: Fafo, 2013), 15.
- 19 The original Norwegian titles are: "Jeg gråt hver dag og var kvalm på veien til skolen," "En skoles bønn om hjelp," "De fleste barn får utilstrekkelig hjelp," "Analfabeter i velferds-Norge," "40% av elevene var lesesvake," and "Et miljø som innbyr til passivitet, hærverk og nederlag." Gammelsrud, "Barn i krise," 2.
- 20 The Norwegian psychologist Helga Eng was a pioneer in the study of mental development using children's drawings, see Helga Eng, *Barnetegning: fra den første streken til farvetegningen* [Children's drawing: from the first line to the color drawing], 2nd ed. (Oslo: Cappelen, 1959).
- 21 The drawing "Drøm" (Dream) on the front is by a fourth-grade boy, and the drawing "Hvem er jeg" (Who am I) is by an 8-year-old girl. See Gammelsrud, "Barn i krise," cover, 2, 6, 12.

In Stovner, one of Oslo's newest city districts, there are many children—up to 11–12 years old—who do not know the words for their thumb, the days of the week, or the seasons of the year. They are ignorant of when they are born, and have a poor concept of where they live. Several children seem to have lost the ability to learn to read, write, and do maths, and they will probably become almost illiterate. Their problems often seem inaccessible and impervious to known treatment methods.<sup>15</sup>

This quote describes what psychologist Anne-Marit Duve, in the special issue, argues is a previously unseen "welfare-induced disease" found among the children in this area. The introduction of the special issue thus characteristically linked ominous descriptions of children in crisis with the failures of the welfare state and the satellite town environment by criticizing "the planning of society that allows entire urban areas to be built and put into use without concern for conditions fundamental to the human existence."<sup>16</sup> The following enormous media coverage of the Stovner report attached a stigma to Stovner. With a second special issue of *Sinnets helse* in 1976, entitled "Rapport fra Oslo: Barn i krise 2" (Report from Oslo: Children in crisis 2), which became known as *Romsåsrapporten* (the Romsås report), this stigmatization was extended to encompass the satellite town Romsås.<sup>17</sup> The two issues of *Sinnets helse* are still considered crucial historical events in the development of contemporary satellite town stigma.<sup>18</sup>

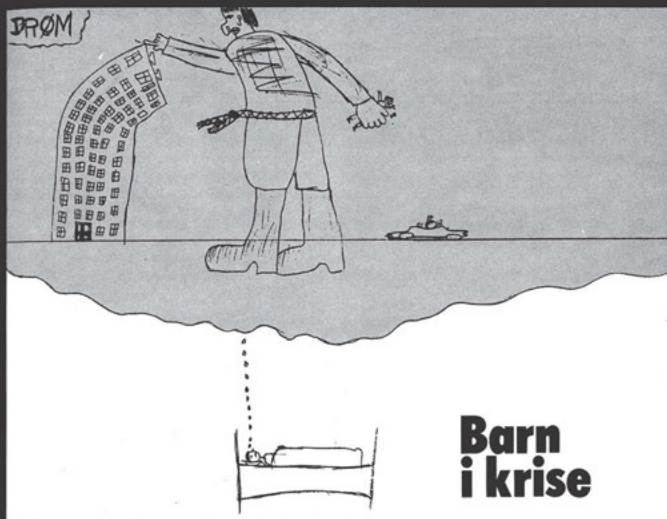
The presentation of the special issue on Stovner has a distinct tone of urgency in the face of acute crisis. Even the table of contents constitutes a short, tragic story. Under the title "Theme: Children in crisis," a teacher's testimony ("I cried every day and felt sick on the way to school") leads to "A school's plea for help." Because "most children get inadequate help," the publication witnesses the rise of "illiterates in welfare-Norway," where as many as "40 percent of the pupils were weak readers"; crucially, this seems to be induced by "an environment that promotes passivity, vandalism, and defeat."<sup>19</sup>

These foreboding titles are accompanied by three children's drawings. While these are left unexplained, they allude to the use of child drawings in psychological analysis of mental development.<sup>20</sup> On the cover of the magazine, a child's drawing depicts a person sleeping in a bed, dreaming that a giant is destroying a tall housing block, with the word *drøm* (dream) in the upper left corner. The title of the special issue—"Barn i krise" (Children in crisis)—is strategically positioned next to the sleeping person. An uncaptioned child's drawing of two human figures illustrates the article titled "Jeg gråt hver dag og var kvalm på veien til skolen" (I cried every day and felt sick on the way to school). Next to the article on illiterates is a drawing with the words *hvem er jeg* (who am I) written across it in large letters.<sup>21</sup>

So, why this dramatic tone? The journalist Terje Gammelsrud had recently become editor of *Sinnets helse*. At the same time, the magazine changed ownership, which meant a new focus on children's mental health. As an editor, Gammelsrud aimed to address essential and sometimes controversial topics of everyday life, and among these were *drabantbyproblemer* (satellite town problems). In tackling this issue, he built on some of his earlier work, notably two reports on playgrounds.



# sinnets helse



## Barn i krise

Tidsskrift for mentalhygiene 5

The cover of "Barn i krise" (Children in crisis), a 1975 special issue of *Sinnets helse* (Health of the mind).

"Analfabeter i velferds-Norge" (Illiterates in welfare-Norway) published in "Barn i krise" (Children in crisis).

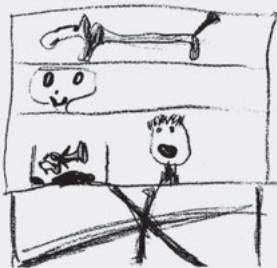
behov for spesiell hjelp. Men det fins sikkert fortsatt en del som vi ennå ikke har oppdaget. Siste skoleår rakk skolene tverrfaglige råd bare å diskutere hjelpeplan for 50 av disse elevene. Veldig mye må derfor gjøres på sparket — uten skikkelig vurdering av hvilke tiltak som er best skikket i hvert enkelt tilfelle.

For Smedstua skole betyr dette at det allerede er i gang en utstrakt integrering, men uten det nødvendige minimum av ressurser. Fra skoleadministrasjonen er det henvendt at Smedstua har lagt opp til en integrering av et omfang som det ikke fins dekning for i budsjettet. Til det vil jeg si at det ikke er skolen som har valgt å ville ha alle disse vanskeligstilte elevene. Det er vanskeligheten som er slik. Integreringen går automatisk. Barna begynner på normalskolen, og fordi hjelpeapparatet er så dårlig utbygd, tar det lang tid å påvise og fange opp de barn som trenger spesiell behandling. Lærerne oppdager nok tidlig at det er noe galt, men de får sent hjelp til å diagnostisere problemet, og de får sent hjelp til å søke om nødvendige hjelpetiltak.

Situasjonen for Smedstua skole er alvorlig og dystert, men jeg tror ikke den er håpløs. Betingelsene for at tilstanden kan bedres er imidlertid at det stilles til rådighet en del ekstra ressurser, og at skoleoppfølger forandres slik at det får utgangspunkt i elevenes virkelighet.

Cecilia Trøse er skolepsykolog ved Smedstua skole. Hun har tidligere skrevet om Smedstua skole.

## Hvem er jeg.



Tegnet av Jørn, 10 år.

## Analfabeter i velferds-Norge

Av Anne-Marit Duvø

— Det ser ut til at store grupper barn på Stovner kan komme til å bli noe bortimot analfabeter. En rekke barn synes å ha mistet evnen til å lære å lese, skrive og regne. Deres problemer virker utliggende og upåvirkelige av kjente behandlingsmetoder.

Jeg tror ikke jeg tar munnen for full når jeg påstår at et skremmende antall av Stovner-området barn må regnes som pedagogiske risikobarn, skriver psykolog og barnepsykiatrik spesialpedagog, Anne-Marit Duvø i denne artikkelen.

Jeg er som barnepsykiatrik spesialpedagog i det siste halvåret blitt oppmerksom på Stovner-områdets store pedagogiske problemer. Jeg har fått til behandling et ganske stort antall Stovner-barn med skole- og læreproblemer, og har også drevet aktiv oppsøkende virksomhet på Stovner.

De læreproblemene jeg ble konfrontert med syntes å være ekstremt alvorlige. Jeg har i min tidligere praksis ikke opplevd problemer av tilsvarende art og omfang.

Det var særlig to forhold ved barnas læreproblemer som var påfallende. For det første så problemene ut til å være absolutt massive. Barn i ti- og elleveårsalderen sto læremessig simpelt hen på nullpunktet. Den lærer som man kunne se konturer av, var aldri av en slik karakter at den ble sitende, og vi fant hos disse barna ingen vanlig lagring og overføring av læring. Tall, bokstaver og kombinasjoner så ut til å være uforståelige og nye hver gang barna ble konfrontert med dem.

For det andre syntes problemene å være utliggende og upåvirkelige av kjent metodikk. Psykoterapi, barnepsykiatrik spesialpedagogikk, fysioterapi, legopedisk hjelp og annen spesialomsorg så ut til å være uten nevneverdig virkning.

### Vanlig og utbredt fenomen

Jeg trodde først at det bare var noen få, enkelte barn som var i denne alvorlige situasjon, men jeg har etter hvert truffet på så mange slike tilstander at jeg til en viss grad tør å si at dette er et mer vanlig og utbredt fenomen enn hva man skulle tro. Jeg må tilstå at det har vært et menneskelig sjokk, men også en enorm pedagogisk utfordring å møte denne læringsproblematikken i et så stort omfang.

Stikkprøver har vist at det ikke er noe unormalt med barnas intelligens. Deres intelligensfunksjoner er intakte, men det ser ut til å være intrulset en tilstand der lærerens er rammet nærmest fundamentalt. Det virker som om en rekke barn har mistet evnen til å lære helt nødvendige og grunnleggende ferdigheter som læring, skremsing og regning.

### Andelig mangelsykdom

Jeg mener å ha dekning for å si at

- 22 See Hanne Frobenius and Terje Gammelsrud, *Barnet, leken og lekeplassen: en utredning om kommunale lekeplasser for barn fra syv til fjorten år* [The child, play, and the playground: an investigation into municipal playgrounds for children aged seven to fourteen] (Oslo: Forbruker- og administrasjonsdepartementet, 1973).
- 23 Kåre Tarjem, "Fossumsletta-under-søkelsen: Barnas behov kolliderer med 'voksne' oppfatninger" [The Fossumsletta survey: Children's needs clash with "adult" perceptions], *Dagbladet*, September 26, 1974.
- 24 "Krav om bedre bo-miljøer: Fossumsletta borettslag utfordrer Oslo kommune" [Demand for better living environments: Fossumsletta housing association challenges Oslo municipality], *Aftenposten*, January 29, 1975.
- 25 Sissel Benneche Osvold, "Miljø – hva er det?" [Environment: What is it?], *Dagbladet*, January 29, 1975; Sissel Benneche Osvold, "500 barn og fire sandkasser: Forsøk med utvikling av bedre lekemiljø på Stovner" [500 children and four sandboxes: Experiments with the development of a better play environment at Stovner], *Dagbladet*, January 29, 1975; "På Fossumsletta er det få barn som leker ute! Undersøkelser viser nedslående resultater" [At Fossumsletta, there are few children who play outside! Surveys show disappointing results], *Arbeiderbladet*, January 29, 1975; Tone B. Jamholt, "Lekemiljøet sjokkerende dårlig i flere bydeler" [The play environment is shockingly bad in several districts], *Arbeiderbladet*, January 30, 1975.
- 26 Odd Aksum et al., "Stovnerboere spør stovnerboere: En undersøkelse om res[s]urser, behov og Stovner sentrum" [Stovner residents ask Stovner residents: A survey about resources, needs and central Stovner], *Arbeidsrapport 1* (April, 1972).
- 27 "Jeg gråt hver dag og var kvalm på veien til skolen," in "Barn i krise," special issue, *Sinnets helse: Tidsskrift for mentalhygiene*, no. 5 (1975): 4–7.
- 28 Eli Aanjesen, "En skoles bønn om hjelp," in "Barn i krise," special issue, *Sinnets helse: Tidsskrift for mentalhygiene*, no. 5 (1975): 8–10.

The first of these reports, by Gammelsrud and Hanne Frobenius, was published by Forbruker- og administrasjonsdepartementet (the Ministry of Consumer Affairs and Administration) in 1973 and presented to Oslo Municipality as a public demand for better living environments. Crucially, the report comprised of a study of Swedish and Danish playgrounds. It dismissed the park playgrounds introduced in the 1930s as compensation for lost natural playgrounds in urban environments and especially favored the Danish *skrammellegepladser* (junk playgrounds).<sup>22</sup> The second report on playgrounds was initiated by the inhabitants of Stovner and carried out by the authors of the later article in the special issue of *Sinnets Helse*.<sup>23</sup> With Fossumsletta as a test site, the report was used actively to challenge the municipality to act at Stovner.<sup>24</sup>

Gammelsrud's dramatic language was meant to serve as an activist call to action. In mass media, this playground research was used as part of the residents' fight to improve the living environment in the satellite towns, by enhancing the environment for play.<sup>25</sup> This agenda needs to be seen in the context of a 1972 report on the initiatives taken by inhabitants in Stovner, *Stovnerboere spør stovnerboere* (Stovner dwellers ask Stovner dwellers), which described problems but also argued that the community had many resources for dealing with them.<sup>26</sup> Rather than dismissing Stovner and its inhabitants, Gammelsrud aimed to serve as a source for empowerment and community engagement at Stovner and get the municipality and school authorities to take action. Or, at least, this was the idea.

## A MIX OF PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS AND AGENDAS

The special issue, however, included other contributions and perspectives. The first two articles came from the staff at Smedstua school. The two anonymous teachers behind the "I cried every day ..." article described disheartening classroom experiences of struggles with discipline and feelings of shortcomings. They claimed that the problems were caused by a shortage of institutional resources, a lack of parental cooperation, and failing support from Nic Waals Institutt (the leading psychiatric clinic) and the school's psychology team. They also suggested that the parents were simultaneously insecure and in denial about the problems, keeping their children from being assessed by the school psychologist or from consulting a psychiatric clinic.<sup>27</sup> The teachers still admitted, however, that social, organizational, and pedagogical adaptations made with school resources had already helped, thereby pointing to possible solutions to the crisis by continuing such efforts. This note was, however, overshadowed by the dramatic descriptions of problems.

Eli Aanjesen's "En skoles bønn om hjelp" (A school's plea for help) was a central contribution to the special issue.<sup>28</sup> Aanjesen was the principal of the open school of Smedstua from 1971. She described the situation as a "tragedy," dramatically warning of a school system that is more likely to create failure than learning and self-respect. This crisis, Aanjesen argued, was a problem that would not diminish if it wasn't spoken about. Nevertheless, she understood the unwillingness to speak out about the issues in the



- 29 Aksum et al., "Stovnerboere spør stovnerboere."
- 30 Original quote in Norwegian: "en del av de vanskelighetene som må oppstå når man presser så mange mennesker sammen uten at de har muligheter til å løse sine egne problemer." Aanjesen, "En skoles bønn om hjelp," 9.
- 31 Original quote in Norwegian: "en ny åndelig mangelsykdrom i velferdssamfunnets kjølvann." Anne-Marit Duve, "Analfabeter i velferds-Norge" [Illiterates in welfare-Norway], in "Barn i krise," special issue, *Sinnets helse: Tidsskrift for mentalhygiene*, no. 5 (1975): 13–15.

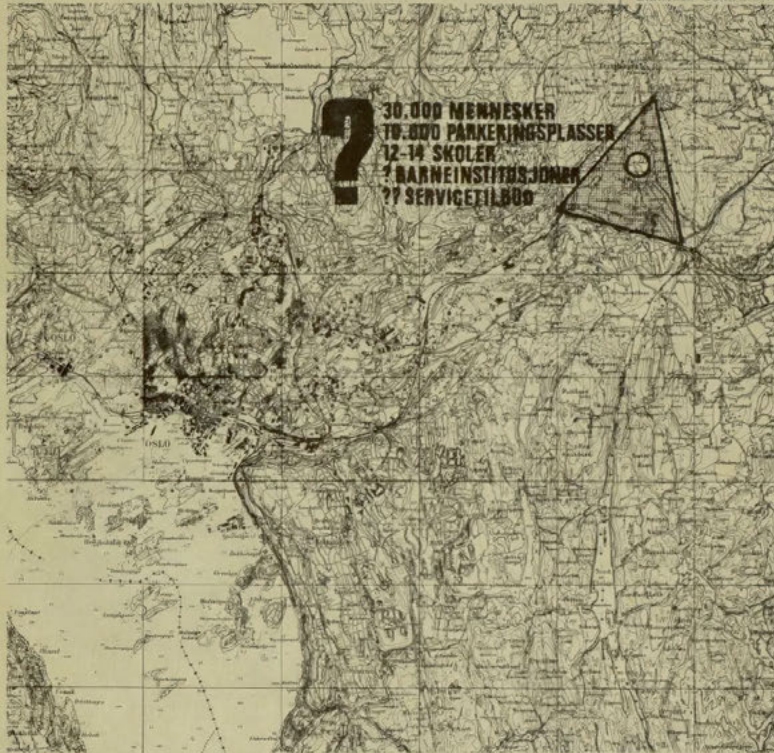
satellite town: professionals feared that drawing attention to social inequality by describing the different social compositions, milieus, housing typologies, and allocation criteria could stigmatize inhabitants, framing them as second-rate humans. Aanjesen nevertheless argued that stigma is created when moralist perspectives are used to blame individuals for their problems; thus, stigma can be avoided by placing responsibility on society instead. In avoiding focusing on parts of the population, she consequently directed her critique at the municipal school administration, society as a whole, and the total environment.

In placing the responsibility on society at large, Aanjesen referred to the report from the inhabitants of Stovner, "Stovnerboere spør stovnerboere."<sup>29</sup> She pointed to larger structural causes, arguing that the situation in the school described in the special issue were "some of the difficulties that have to arise when one pushes so many people together without possibilities for solving their problems."<sup>30</sup> At Stovner, she argued, there was a high concentration of families whose housing allocations were based on social criteria (meaning that most of the population had been struggling economically even before moving in), the average age of mothers was unusually low, there were many small children, and there were many households with two or more working family members. The Fossum neighborhood, Aanjesen added, had the largest share of struggling families and the worst school situation: many children had to change schools several times—a situation which, according to her, was not only causing tremendous strain, considering the many pre-existing problems, but also anxiety and aggression among families and children that was quickly directed against the school.

In contrast to the inhabitants' report, which emphasized their own resources and interests, Aanjesen—possibly inadvertently—depicted the population as passive victims of the welfare state system and the environment. Furthermore, in broadening the issue to avoid stigmatization of the children, she effectively defined it as an environmental problem, thereby allowing for the social construction of a territorial stigma instead of an individualized stigma. Crucially, the system critique from the school institution—represented by Aanjesen and the anonymous teachers—implies that the *total* environment causes the problems they experience in the school.

Two articles in the special issue were written from a psychological perspective. While school psychologist Camilla Voss, writing in the article "De fleste barn får utilstrekkelig hjelp" (Most children get inadequate help), described the severe work overload on her team and lack of resources, psychologist Anne-Marit Duve's article entitled "Analfabeter i velferds-Norge" (Illiterates in welfare-Norway), outlined a more dramatic story, strongly emphasizing the severity of the learning problems encountered, for which psychotherapy, child psychiatry, special needs pedagogy, physiotherapy, speech therapy, and other specialized methods were apparently without effect. Since the children were of normal intelligence, she proposed that there existed a widespread failure in the ability to learn; she referred to this as "a new *spiritual deficiency disease* in the wake of the welfare society."<sup>31</sup> Duve referred to English and American research in order to describe this "disease," which was allegedly caused by a psychologically confusing and unstable environment in which the child cannot organize its mental, emotional, and intellectual life.

# STOVNERBOERE SPØR STOVNERBOERE



EN UNDERSØKELSE OM RESURSER, BEHOV OG STOVNER SENTRUM  
**ARBEIDSRAPPORT NR.1** **APRIL 1972**

"Stovnerboere spør Stovnerboere," a 1972 report from the inhabitants of Stovner describing problems but also the community's resources, opinions and ideas.

- 32 Original quote in Norwegian: "vår tids egentlige sykdom er et nær sagt utdødd følelsesliv." Christian Norberg-Schulz, "Fra gjenoppbygging til omverdenskrise" [From reconstruction to environmental crisis], *Byggekunst* [The Norwegian Review of Architecture] 6 (1970): 202.
- 33 See Anne-Marit Duve, "Fremmedgjøring" [Alienation], in *Barn* [Children], ed. Kari Bruun Wyller and Thomas Chr. Wyller, *Motforestillinger* 4 (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1978), 11–22.
- 34 Ivar Blomfeldt, Terje Gammelsrud, and Rigmor Vesje, "Et miljø som innbyr til passivitet, hærverk og nederlag" [An environment that promotes passivity, vandalism, and defeat], in "Barn i krise," special issue, *Sinnets helse: Tidsskrift for mentalhygiene*, no. 5 (1975): 16–20.

For Duve, the situation at Stovner was an example of fundamental problems of civilization processes that arose not in developing countries but inside the modern welfare state. Earlier, Duve and her husband had claimed that modern society's distress is not caused by physical and material deficiencies but by the absence of spirituality and consciousness. Duve's arguments thus have affinities with those of the Norwegian architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz, who dismisses politicized discourses of social and economic structures and instead emphasizes that the environment crisis of the 1970s is a mental problem and that "the real disease of our time is an almost extinct emotional life."<sup>32</sup> For Duve, the modern welfare society is especially to blame for an alienating environment for children.<sup>33</sup> In her contribution to the special issue, Duve thus dramatically asserts that the welfare state has a human responsibility to address these problems, regardless of the cost.

The report's final article, "Et miljø som innbyr til passivitet, hærverk og nederlag" (An environment that promotes passivity, vandalism, and defeat) describes several physical factors that allegedly create an inferior environment for children based on Gammelsrud's two earlier reports on playgrounds. Like these two reports, the final article in the special issue on Stovner used the notion of crisis as a call for action, presenting a series of arguments also made in the earlier report from Ammerud. These arguments correlate the problems in the area to physical attributes that result from architecture and physical planning: there are too many children, so playgroups do not form; buildings with more than four floors mean that children have less outdoor time; one-sided flats do not allow for contact between the flat and the playground, so parents and children alike become insecure and nervous. The article describes the outdoor area as monotonous and unchangeable, with building orientations and materials creating adverse local weather conditions and acoustic environments in which children's play is both unsheltered and disturbing to other inhabitants. Other problems include the danger of traffic accidents, a lack of common indoor space for children, a lack of social interaction between adults in the area, and vandalism as a logical consequence of creating a "forgotten youth." In conclusion, the authors warned of a constant risk for physical and mental damage, which called for immediate action.<sup>34</sup>

This article was the part of the report where the claim of a crisis was most explicitly connected to the physical environment. In this way, the final article conflates the complexity of the problems of the school and neighborhood with faults in the physical environment, and this spatial determinism effectively became the conclusion of the special issue.

## EDITORIAL ACTIVISM

Gammelsrud's strategy for gaining attention for a seemingly obviously good cause by calling it a "crisis" is characteristic of the special issue as a whole, and it was enabled by the editorial synthesis of the diverse contributions, where the focus was on the most alarming aspects. The editorial work consisted of combining different types of professional criticisms and popularizing them. The first

and most obvious example is the combination of statements in the introductory quote, which synthesizes Duve and Voss' contributions and utilizes Aanjesen's "Should we speak about it out loud?" to create a greater impact.

Another example is that by concluding with the focus on the physical environment, Gammelsrud helped synthesize the school environment, learning environment, mental environment, institutional environment, play environment, and housing environment into one, to pose a critique of the total physical environment of the neighborhood in the satellite town. Gammelsrud strategically used expert voices to support his activist endeavor to improve the physical space on behalf of the inhabitants, with the consequence that the special issue removes nuances to emphasize a general crisis.

While the authors and the editor would be right in suggesting that the problems are interlinked and complex, the links that they all make to the physical environment of the satellite town as a major source of the problems make it hard to grasp the specificity of the problems and how to handle them—the discourse becomes vague and abstract. They argue that one needs to speak openly about problems, yet many aspects remain unclear or merely hinted at in their generalizing descriptions. Aanjesen's attempts to avoid stigmatizing the school and school children added to the confusion: by sidestepping steps that might address the problem at scales other than that of the society as a whole, the article instead contributed to establishing territorial stigma.

The persuasive but somewhat speculative editing of the different contributions also involves the visual presentations in the special issue—for instance, the cover image, a children's drawing used to enforce the psychological "crisis" of children—which were used to affect rather than clarify or illustrate arguments. Furthermore, the concluding analysis of playgrounds at Stovner is built on the premise that the central error, according to Gammelsrud, was thinking that adults could design an environment for children: the children needed to create their environment for themselves. The welfare state efforts for and on behalf of children thus become problematic in a way that essentially finds fault in welfare state architecture.

## MASS MEDIA AND TERRITORIAL STIGMA

Gammelsrud's journalistic methods were immensely successful in drawing attention. Under the nickname "Stovnerrapporten," the special issue was debated on national television and in hundreds of articles published in national and regional newspapers across Norway. This mediation displayed different—and contradictory—explanations for the nature and possible causes of the crisis. It introduced additional agendas, such as the critique of the architecture of open schools. Debates and discussions abounded, and the reports did produce new political engagement in Stovner and elsewhere. It also led to political decisions that resulted in the distribution of more resources to Stovner, and were thus at least partly successful in generating the desired change: securing resources for the school.

Nevertheless, the intense mass media exposure was even more efficient in creating lasting stigma, almost completely dismissing the environment and the inhabitants in newspapers, and



- 35 For the radio interviews, see *EKKO*, "Stovner-rapporten: Intervjuer på bakgrunn av artiklene i tidsskriftet *Sinnets helse*" [The Stovner report: Interviews based on articles in the journal *Sinnets helse*], with Inger Johanne Agerup and Rolf Børke, aired September 11, 1975, on NRK (the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation).
- 36 Original quote in Norwegian: "Fattigdom på impulser, fattigdom på opplevelser og nærmiljø, fattigdom i det miljø hvor barn skal leke og utfolde seg, er de hovedårsakene som rapporten peker på. Den fattigdommen tar barna med seg inn i skolen, og da kan det være for sent." *EKKO*, "Stovner-rapporten."
- 37 Bernt H. Lund, *Beretning om Oslo kommune for årene 1948–1986* [Report on Oslo municipality for the years 1948–1986] (Oslo: ProArk, 2000), 305.
- 38 "Foreldrene forsvaret skolen: samfunnet har ansvar for barna" [Parents defend the school: society has a responsibility for the children], *Dagbladet*, August 15, 1975.
- 39 Else-Beth Roalsø, "Usikker framtid for Stovner-barna" [Uncertain future for the Stovner children], *Dagbladet*, August 20, 1975.
- 40 "Krav om bedre bo-miljøer: Fossumsletta borettslag utfordrer Oslo kommune."
- 41 "Smedstua skole innkaller til foreldremøte" [Smedstua school invites to a parents' meeting], *Arbeiderbladet*, August 20, 1975.
- 42 "Smedstua-lærerne utsetter streiken" [Smedstua teachers postpone strike], *Arbeiderbladet*, September 5, 1975; "Smedstua-lærere: Fossum må ha en ny 6-årig skole" [Smedstua teachers: Fossum must have a new 6-year school], *Arbeiderbladet*, September 23, 1975; "Streik blant Smedstua-lærerne" [Smedstua teachers on strike], *Klassekampen*, October 15, 1975; "Fossum bygd på rekordtid – Åpner den med streik?" [Fossum built in record time—Will it open with a strike?], *Arbeiderbladet*, August 11, 1976.

on television and radio. One example is the vagueness in describing the problems in any straightforward way in the radio interviews in the program *Ekko*—instead, the "satellite town problem" was apparently so well-known that it didn't need analysis, only descriptions of its consequences.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, in contrast to the focus on the inhabitant's resources in *Stovnerboere spør Stovnerboere*, the repeated use of the word *fattigdom* (poverty) in the television presentation of "Stovner-rapporten" is notable for creating a sense of absolute impoverishment:

Poverty of impulses, poverty of experiences and the local environment, poverty in the environment in which children should play and develop are the main reasons pointed out in the report. The children bring this poverty with them into school, and then it may be too late.<sup>36</sup>

With this type of melodramatic mediation, it could be easily missed that the special issue of *Sinnets Helse* had at its core a more pragmatic aim, as a particular activist call for action. It concluded with a small note: a demand from the parents and the school, which, beyond more resources for the Smedstua school, comprised of the construction of a new school for the Fossumsletta community.

According to the historian Bernt H. Lund, the goal for schools in satellite towns was that they be constructed at the same speed as housing; this was seldom achieved, however, and provisional solutions were attempted, to which parents protested significantly. Lund saw the situation of Fossumsletta as an example that such strong reactions led the municipality to allocate funds to new schools, even if the problem of local school capacity was temporary.<sup>37</sup> Here, Lund's argument takes on a pragmatic and supposedly objective perspective, seeing the school institution's capacity as a matter for governmental bodies and long-term planning (accepting short-term problems) rather than recognizing it as the source of problems with significant, immediate local implications. The parents, however, were concerned with the essential function of the school in the community.<sup>38</sup> In correspondence with Perry's emphasis on the school's important role in the neighborhood unit, they demanded a school specifically for the Fossum neighborhood.<sup>39</sup> Crucially, Gammelsrud had already presented this demand in the 1974 playground report.<sup>40</sup> With the special issue on Stovner, this playground report was justified anew. Aanjesen and the Smedstua school called for a parent meeting at which they could present the demands to the municipality, and the parents and the school agreed that a strike would ensue if the municipality did not meet their demands.<sup>41</sup> The combined efforts from Stovner were a success: the new school was constructed and opened in the autumn of 1976 as a direct result of the struggles.<sup>42</sup>

This cooperation between parents and the school appears to be a realization of community power in line with the neighborhood unit idea, but in confrontation and struggle rather than in line with the harmonic and orderly system of the satellite town plans. This conflict could easily be seen as a failure of planning, but it could just as well be interpreted as a prerequisite for creating political and social awareness. As the journalist Tone B. Jamholt emphasizes in a newspaper interview with local politicians, the special issue on

43 Tone B. Jamholt, "Selvoppgivelse er ingen løsning – Vi går løs på problemene" [Self-abandonment is not a solution—We tackle the problems], *Arbeiderbladet*, August 19, 1975.

Stovner should not be a cause for despair but rather a motivation to take up arms and lead to community initiatives.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, the special issue is more than a mere description of errors, mistakes, or failures in planning satellite towns as physical and social environments. Instead, it represents several different facets of a complex discussion: on one side, passive inhabitants and children under the state organization, administration and (architectural) design, and the neighborhoods and playgrounds as compensations for modernity's ills. On the other side, resourceful communities with agencies fighting for their neighborhoods and playgrounds but also creating them. Here, active, creative, autonomous inhabitants and children are presented as ideals. It is, however, unclear if this ideal was part of the development of a new community focus or rather a sign of an emerging neoliberal, individualist ideology: The social and ideological aspects inherent in the planning critique were hardly communicated in the special issue or the mass media. Instead, the critique was simplified and conflated with the physical environment, constructing a stigmatizing image of the satellite town: an image that still lingers.

In the present day, this type of simplified and superficial discourse is deeply embedded in the ideas for improving these areas. In Norway, this is formulated in area-based policies for hindering *utenforskap* (outsiderness), with explicit reference to apparently worse conditions in Denmark and Sweden. In this way, the discourses are connected across Scandinavia, and the Danish "ghetto laws," with their own territorial stigma, become part of Norwegian imaginations and conceptualizations of such places. It is these perceptions that area-based initiatives have sought to change through a focus on rebuilding reputation. From this point of view, the special issue—*Stovnerrapporten*—was an irresponsible, destructive act.

Crucially, however, such discourses tend to avoid a system critique of central topics, including inhabitants' political power and influence, social inclusion, and community autonomy and agency. Instead, they transform the two special issues of *Sinnets Helse* into generalizing "reports" on places and, by extension, specific social issues that require political solutions into horror stories that provoke fear-based reactions. As such, these activist attempts to generate discussion and political action become superficial arguments for urban redevelopment—linking social issues to urban environments through the mechanisms of territorial stigmatization. In this transformation, the child is a central figure, but not in the role of the primary welfare state subject carrying intrinsic value: conceptualized as a victim, the child becomes an instrument for other agendas. Similar stories exist across Scandinavia: The tales of children in crisis in today's satellite towns, instead of becoming starting points for discussing and acting on structural social challenges, all too often become mere devices to propel urban transformation processes.



Stills from the NRK (Norwegian Broadcasting Company) television coverage of "Stovnerappen."



The opening of a new school in the Fossumsletta neighborhood, built in 1976 as a result of school strikes and community activism.

