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MAKING WELFARE “SUSTAINABLE”: THE LANGUAGE, POLITICS, AND ETHICS OF  
SCALE-MAKING IN A NORWEGIAN NEIGHBORHOOD

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## TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

=	overlapping speech
((words))	pseudonym
(words)	paralinguistic information
(.)	pause
[word]	clarifications
V:	elongated vowel
SYLLABLE	added stress

## INTRODUCTION

For several decades, critics including not only social scientists, but also politicians, journalists, and activists, have been debating the future of the nation-state in a world that is increasingly aware of the planetary and the global. In the face of global capitalism (Tsing 2005) and planetary climate change (Masco 2010), what scales are relevant to political action? In this dissertation, I am interested in how people come to understand a future influenced by global change through their everyday interactions and experiences. I am interested in the relationship between what are seen as two “global forces” in particular: the changing climate and transnational migration. Much of the attention on the relation between these two forces focuses on the ways that a changing climate will lead to sea level rise, drought, and violent storms, pushing migrants away from their places of origin. While this is an important issue, I am instead concerned here with how understandings of climate and the environment more broadly influence the reception of migrants and imagination of the host country’s future.

Norway is a compelling place to ask these questions. Although most Americans, if they think about Norway at all, tend to see the country as one of the wealthiest, racially whitest, and environmentally conscious places in the world, that exterior image hides a number of important contradictions. Norway’s reputation as a leader in environmental issues comes from its steep carbon taxes and having the most electric vehicles per capita. Central Oslo is well on its way to becoming car-free. Along with the rest of Scandinavia, most Norwegians place an importance on spending time out in nature (Frykman and Löfgren 1987; Gullestad 1989b), and on many Sundays it is more crowded on some of the popular trails in the woods around the edge of Oslo than it is in the city center. Yet at the same time, oil and gas production is Norway’s most

profitable industry (Norwegian Petroleum Directorate 2021). Although there is a sizable group of Norwegians demanding the end of the Norwegian oil industry, many unions and otherwise progressive organizations are more accepting of Norwegian resource extraction policies than their equivalents are in other countries. The newest offshore oil field in the North Sea began production in 2019, and whether to allow new exploration in the scenic Northern Norwegian island regions of Lofoten, Vesterålen, and Senja continues to be a contentious topic of debate in parliament. When justifying these decisions to continue to increase oil production, politicians frequently invoke the Norwegian welfare state, arguing that the generous welfare services on which all Norwegians rely, including parental and sick leave and free education through university would not be able to exist if it were not for oil revenues generated by the state-owned oil company, Equinor. Yet even the staunchest supporters of Norwegian oil production know that demand for oil will not continue forever, and politicians are increasingly discussing what the welfare state will look like in a world without oil revenues.

At the same time, although Norway cultivates an image of “Norwegian goodness” to the outside world, both through its national welfare state and its commitment to the United Nations and foreign aid, that goodness falls short when it comes to foreign migrants and their children (McIntosh 2015). Ten years on, Norwegians are still struggling with the fallout of the July 22, 2011 attacks on government buildings and the Labor Party summer camp, which remain the deadliest instance of white extremism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The third-largest national political

party,<sup>1</sup> the Progress Party, is strongly anti-immigrant, and openly Islamophobic organizations like Human Rights Service receive governmental support.

Although there is a long history of Sami, Jewish, Romani, and Finnish minorities in Norway, these histories are frequently erased in popular discourses, which paint immigration as a recent phenomenon, and imagine pre-WWII Norway to have been ethnically homogenous. When most Norwegians speak of immigration (*innvandring*), they are generally speaking about migration from outside of Europe, which began in the 1950s–60s with the arrival of primarily Pakistani guestworkers. Their children make up the largest group of second-generation migrants in Norway today. It is now more difficult for non-Europeans to migrate to Norway for labor reasons, but, as part of the European Economic Area (EEA), Norway, with its relatively good economy and low unemployment rate, attracts many Europeans, the majority coming from Poland, followed distantly by Lithuania and Sweden. Waves of political refugees have also arrived over the past 50 years from various parts of the world, and Somalis are the largest group of migrants from outside of Europe in Norway today. As of January 2021, immigrants and those born in Norway to two immigrant parents, an official statistical and bureaucratic category, account for 18.2% of the total Norwegian population of just under 5.4 million (Statistisk sentralbyrå 2021). Most live in Oslo (total population 690,000), where, in 2018, 33.1% of the city’s inhabitants were first- or second-generation immigrants (Oslo kommune 2018). They tend to live on the historically working-class eastern side of the city. The populations of some of those

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<sup>1</sup> There are nine political parties in the Norwegian Parliament and Oslo City Council. From farthest left to right, they are: Red (R), Socialist Left (SV), Labor (Ap), Green (MDG), Center (Sp), Christian Democratic (KrF), Liberal (V), Conservative (H), and Progress (Frp).

neighborhoods are almost entirely immigrants and their children, while areas of western Oslo remain almost entirely white, ethnic Norwegians.

Innvandrere og norskfødte med innvandrereforeldre i bydelene i Oslo per 1.1.2015, som andel av bosatte. I ruter på 250x250 meter

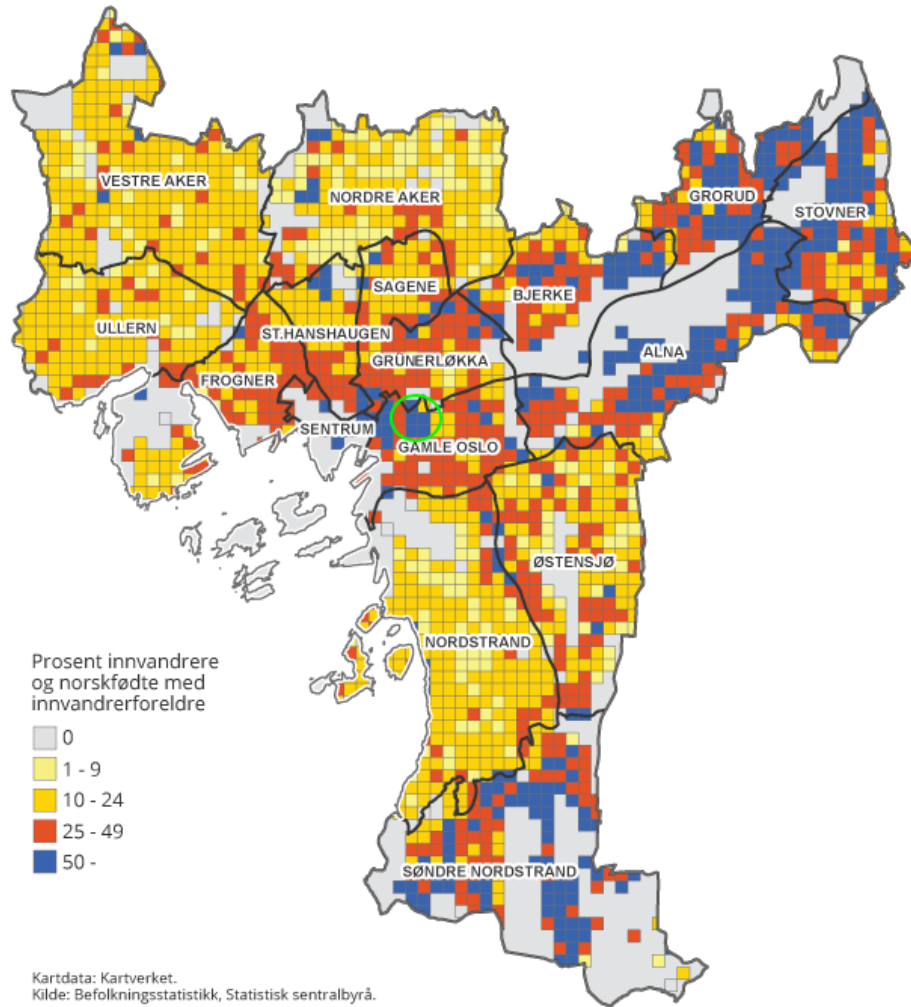


Figure 0.1: Percentage of Oslo inhabitants who are either immigrants or have two immigrant parents, as of January 1, 2015. Each square represents a 250m x 250m area (graphic from Høydahl 2015, 31). Approximate location of Tøyen circled in green.

As anthropologist Marianne Gullestad has pointed out, the word immigrant (*innvandrere*) “oscillates between an implicit code based on ‘Third World’ origin, different values from the majority, ‘dark skin,’ a working-class background (unskilled or semi-skilled work) and a



dictionary definition in which these characteristics are irrelevant” (Gullestad 2006, 175). In common usage, it is frequently opposed to the category of “ethnic Norwegian” (*etnisk norsk*), an expression that lexicalizes the assumption that the category of “Norwegian” is unmarked as white.<sup>2</sup> Religion is also an important aspect of this distinction, as many immigrants and their children are Muslim, while the Lutheran-based Church of Norway was the official state church until a 2012 reform. People of color are frequently called “immigrants,” or even “foreigners” (*utlendinger*), even if they were born and have grown up in Norway. The national media’s style guide has begun to recommend the phrases Norwegian with “minority background” (*minoritetsbakgrunn*) or “immigrant background” (*innvandrerebakgrunn*) instead, but “ethnic Norwegian” is still generally considered to be an appropriate term for the majority of the population (NRK 2014). As these categories point to, Norwegians of color have remained Other within the national imagination even though many have now lived in Norway for multiple generations. As Gullestad argued over a decade ago, even well-intentioned scholars continue to continue to assume a host-guest relationship that prevents Muslims and other Norwegians of color from ever fully becoming Norwegian (2002). Stereotypes of migrant *navers*,<sup>3</sup> the Norwegian equivalent of the American “welfare queens,” who live off of the welfare state without even trying to find a job, circulate even within parts of the political left, as many Norwegians feel that the kind of equality based in perceived sameness that held the welfare state together has disappeared in the face of international migration (Gullestad 1985; 1989a; 2006;

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<sup>2</sup> Several anthropologists have shown how the racial politics surrounding Norwegian whiteness are frequently erased in public discourses, particularly in accounts of extremist Anders Behring Breivik (Eriksen 2011; McIntosh 2014).

<sup>3</sup> This name comes from NAV, the name for the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration, the state agency responsible for administering unemployment benefits, pensions, child benefits, and sick leave payments, among other things.

McKowen 2017). Migrant activists, while rejecting the *naver* stereotype, would still agree that the increasingly diverse Norwegian population has shown weaknesses in the Norwegian welfare model. For example, people who do not speak Norwegian, observant Muslims who cannot buy a house because they cannot take out an interest-based loan, and people living in non-traditional family structures, like single or LGBTQ parents, all struggle to benefit from the same range of welfare services as the “typical middle-class Norwegian” envisioned by the state.

These two perceived “global threats,” climate change and immigration, may seem to operate on different scales, but in Norway they converge not just around concerns about the future viability of the Norwegian welfare state, but also in the language that people use to speak about them. Throughout my fieldwork, I kept hearing all different kinds of people speak about “sustainability.” A concept derived from planetary concerns about the finitude of natural resources, the term is now also organizing debates within Oslo about the long term economic viability of Norwegian welfare in the face of a population that looks different and has different needs from the Norwegians of the welfare state’s heyday following World War II. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 1, the qualifier “sustainable” has not only been taken up by the political right, but it has also become an operating logic for many of the programs and services in the much more left-wing part of Oslo where I conducted fieldwork.

Gøsta Esping-Andersen’s typology of welfare capitalism has become a standard way for scholars to understand the different kinds of welfare state. He sees three different welfare models. In the “liberal,” Anglo-American model, the welfare state is at its most minimal, favoring individualism and the market. Means-tested assistance is targeted at low-income recipients. The conservative model, meanwhile, which exists in much of continental Europe, tends to be influenced by Catholic traditions, encouraging family-based assistance where the

state only steps in when family support is not adequate. The third model, or Scandinavian model, is based in social democracy, universalism, and egalitarianism. Welfare services are decommodified and are universally available to all citizens, without means-testing (Esping-Andersen 1990; Esping-Andersen 2002). Aside from state-funded services, Scandinavian conceptions of what welfare includes are much more encompassing than might be familiar to an American audience. The welfare state includes the policies and bureaucratic institutions that make possible the services we might be most likely to think of as part of a welfare state: unemployment and sickness insurance, parental leave, health insurance, public housing, public childcare, and education. Yet the term *velferd* (welfare) also includes an idea that all people should have access to the middle-class “good life” (*det gode livet*).<sup>4</sup> In this dissertation, I tend to use the word welfare in a similarly broad fashion, to include both the expectations citizens have of the state, as well as the kinds of services that my interlocutors imagine as being necessary to achieving this good life. Although the Norwegian model remains more robust than possibly any other welfare state today, even it has been subject to the same kinds of neoliberal, market-oriented reforms and partial privatization that have occurred in all other twentieth century welfare states. Norwegians tend to refer to this as “New Public Management” (using the English term), the name given to the Thatcher-era reforms aimed at making the British state more efficient beginning in the 1980s. Yet, unlike in many of the other places in the world where the Keynesian welfare state has been dismantled, no mainstream Norwegian political party is against the core tenets of the welfare state, tending instead to frame reforms that would appear to

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<sup>4</sup> This broad conception of welfare has led other anthropologists to study Nordic welfare through what might at first seem to be completely unrelated sites, like furniture design (Murphy 2015).

deconstruct it as techniques for saving it. These discourses work to defer a promise of utopic social democratic welfare to some point in the future.<sup>5</sup>

### **Scaling Practices and Projects**

The Norwegian context allows us to explore more general questions about state projects and scalar practices. Scale has become an increasingly popular object of study across the social sciences, from social geography (Brenner 2019; Marston 2000; Smith 1992a; 1992b; 1996; 2004), to history (Coen 2018), to science studies (Choy 2011; Galison 2016; Helmreich 2009), to sociology (Callon and Latour 1981), to sociolinguistics (Blommaert 2007; 2015; Collins, Slembrouck, and Baynham 2009), to anthropology (Carr and Lempert 2016; Gal and Irvine 2019; Silverstein 2003; Strathern 2005; 2013; Tsing 2000; 2005; 2012). These disciplines frequently employ somewhat different understandings of what scale is. Geographers, for example, have been particularly concerned with the consequences of how spatial scales are produced in relation to global capitalism. In sociology, the question of scale is often connected to questions of “macro” and “micro,” while anthropology has long been concerned with the relationship between particular face-to-face interactions, social institutions, and questions of “humanity” as a whole. Yet across most of these disciplines, there is general agreement that social scientists must not assume that scale is something that exists naturally out in the world. Instead, as Marilyn Strathern has defined it, scale is “the organization of perspectives on objects of knowledge” (2005, xvi). These perspectives are the product of semiotic work (Carr and

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<sup>5</sup> Thank you to Daena Funahashi for this idea of deferred utopia in Nordic welfare states.

Lempert 2016), and approaching an object of study from one perspective over another can result in vastly different assertions of reality (Smith 2004, 195).

Scaling involves language, through which social actors draw on comparisons and distinctions. Speakers point to some sort of quality, which in many languages is expressed by an adjective. Big or small, long or short, old or new, are some of the most common qualities we might think of when we think of scaling, but any quality is scalable. As we will see in the following chapters, my interlocutors scaled qualities that included foreignness, “social goodness,” and “Tøyen-ness.” Objects of scaling are then put into a scalar relationship with morphology (big, bigger, biggest), or other grammatical constructions that, depending on the language, might include verbs, quantifiers, or intensifiers (Gal and Irvine 2019, 218–19). Yet, although scaling is a linguistic practice, sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology have approached questions of scale differently. Sociolinguists, inspired by Wallersteinian world-system theory, have used scale to show how languages are organized not just horizontally in space, but also vertically in hierarchies (Blommaert 2007; 2015; Collins, Slembrouck, and Baynham 2009). Through this understanding of scale, they show how speakers can “jump” scales through language use (Blommaert 2007). In most of this work, scale is a vertical hierarchy that exists “out there” in the world, available for speakers to take up and employ.

Linguistic anthropologists, meanwhile, have taken a different approach to scale, which is affiliated with Actor-Network Theory (Latour 2005), and, to some extent, anthropologist Anna Tsing’s work, which has urged anthropologists to look critically at “ideologies of scale” and scale-making “projects” (2000, 347). A linguistic anthropological approach stresses “how scale is a practice and a process before it is a product” (Carr and Lempert 2016, 8–9). Scales do not exist out in the world until social actors, whether they be individuals, groups, or institutions,

make them. For linguistic anthropologists, scale-making is a semiotic process reliant on intertextual chains of discursive interactions. Seen in this way, scale is also not limited to a vertical hierarchy, but is instead based in all kinds of semiotic comparisons (Gal and Irvine 2019, 217). Scale is not limited to geopolitical scales but can include any aspect of social life.

Thinking of scale through this linguistic anthropological lens, I prefer thinking with verbs like scaling and scale-making over the nominal form of scale. Here, I, along with other linguistic anthropologists, differ from Tsing, who has worried that “*scale* has become a verb that requires precision; to scale well is to develop the quality called *scalability*, that is, the ability to expand—and expand, and expand—without rethinking basic elements” (2012, 505, emphasis in original). “Scale” as a verb can refer to an ideal of limitless growth, and many of my interlocutors shared Tsing’s discomfort with this kind of scalability. Yet that is only one kind of scale. As this dissertation will show, those same interlocutors who were against “scaling” the social businesses they were creating, were also adept at other forms of scale-making, using different forms of evaluative scales to position themselves as a particular kind of ethical citizen. Scaling projects are not always insidious, but integral to how social actors make sense of, and try to make a difference in, the world around them.

Some scales have more authority than others. Aperspectival scales for example, like metric measurements, have centuries of institutional backing and seem to come “from nowhere,” although they of course originated from a particular perspective—the meter for example used to refer to a physical platinum bar sitting in Paris. Other kinds of scales are perspectival. One many of my interlocutors have expressed, that “snobbishness” increases the farther west you travel in Oslo, is clearly based in the perspective of people living, or hoping to pass as someone who lives, in East Oslo. Yet other scales may appear aperspectival to some social actors, but not to

others. For example, as we will see in Chapter 1, while some politicians called for making welfare “sustainable,” others questioned what the scale of sustainability actually meant. What is important are not the exact scalar distinctions themselves, but instead the “pragmatics of scale,” or “the social circumstances, dynamics, and consequences of scale-making as social practice and project” (Carr and Lempert 2016, 9).

### **Welfare and Ethics-thought-Scaling**

This dissertation focuses on how people, in their everyday lives, use scale-making to make ethical and political claims. I think of ethics not as a Kantian moral imperative, but instead a return to Aristotle, focused primarily on ethics through practice and action (Lambeck 2010; Mahmood 2012). Approaching ethics in this way as a linguistic anthropologist, this dissertation focuses on ethics through *interaction* (cf. Keane 2015), more particularly the social interactions through which my interlocutors make kinds of scalar comparisons. Michael Silverstein has already shown how being able to deploy kinds of evaluative scales makes someone into a particular kind of person (2016). Yet while Silverstein was interested in how “wine talk” indexes a person with cultivated sensibilities and good taste, I am interested in how my interlocutors create and take up a variety of evaluative scales, and in so doing, how they create other processes, such as “belonging,” “solidarity,” and the “neighborhood.” Through these practices of scaling, my interlocutors make ethical and political claims about the future of the neighborhood and the welfare state.

Although previous anthropological scholarship on transformations in European welfare states may not have focused explicitly on scale-making, scale has been an important part of the shift from social to ethical citizenship key to neoliberal reconfigurations of welfare (Fassin 2008;

Muehlebach 2012; Rose 2000). Most importantly, there has been a change in the scale on which citizenship, as a way that individuals relate to a larger collective (Fikes 2009; Ong 2005; Petryna 2002), is imagined. Twentieth-century forms of “social citizenship” saw individuals as bound together through Durkheimian forms of social solidarity. “The social” as a statistically knowable unit was solidified in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in large part because of the emergence of the social sciences (Hacking 1990). Members of society were seen as “social citizens” with basic collective rights, including “the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society” (Marshall 1950, 11). Social citizenship relied on the assumption that individuals were mutually dependent, and that it was the state’s duty to manage this interdependence (Donzelot 1993; Rose 1996).

Norway may have one of the most successful welfare states when it comes to controlling forms of social solidarity. Unlike continental European welfare states, the Scandinavian model largely succeeded in making care-oriented social services, like child and eldercare, the domain of the state (Esping-Andersen 1990). Yet the Norwegian welfare model’s success relied in large part on its presumption of a kind of universal, homogeneous social citizen (Gullestad 1989a; Vike 2018), which many of my interlocutors would point out is too rigid a norm to include different systems of family organization, religious belief, or linguistic ability. This tension makes it perhaps unsurprising that it is precisely in some of the most ethnically diverse parts of Norway where care-based “ethical citizenship” (Muehlebach 2012) is rivaling social citizenship most strongly.

Ethical citizenship includes both a “rescaling of governmental functions and institutions” and “a rescaling of citizens’ affective attachments” (Muehlebach 2012, 43). Instead of a



relationship to the state based on collective social and political rights, ethical citizens are bound to each other by moral and affective ties to other individuals, based in a localized politics of intimacy and immediacy. The welfare state becomes a “welfare community,” where ethical citizenship is conceptualized as individualized desire rather than collective action (Muehlebach 2012; Rose 1996). The bonds that hold people together are no longer social and political, but moral and frequently sympathetic, frequently based in a kind of ideal face-to-face local community, even if there are ambitions to “scale up” those affective ties to a larger national or global public (Fassin 2008; Fennell 2015; Ticktin 2011). This view of citizenship was prevalent among my interlocutors, many of whom hoped that the ethical relationships they created with their neighbors would lead to a more ethical and “inclusive” Norwegian nation.

Another domain in the literature on neoliberalism where ethics and scaling are entangled is in the connection between neoliberalism and privatization. A common understanding of neoliberal welfare reforms is that they rely on the privatization of social services, and that private companies are fundamentally less ethical than the state because they rely on profitability and market logics (Bauman 2000). Other anthropologists have complicated this narrative of neoliberalism as privatization, instead questioning how the distinction between public and private comes to be reworked at various moments in time and with various political consequences (Muehlebach 2012; Rofel and Yanagisako 2019; see also Gal 2002; Gal and Kligman 2000). At the same time, as with any abstract quality, public is not inherently more ethical than private, but only comes to be seen as such through ideological work (Chumley and Harkness 2013; Gal and Irvine 2019; see also Goodman 1972). The kinds of ethical citizenship my interlocutors performed rarely fit easily into a public/private binary, with the public considered to be more ethical than the private. Instead, the distinction was fractal (Irvine and Gal

2000; Gal and Irvine 2019), where the opposition between public concern for “social good” and private concern for profit was reproduced within the domain of private businesses. Many of my business-owning interlocutors, from social entrepreneurs to local developers, frequently compared their private businesses as “good” in relation to some other business that were only concerned with profit. At the same time, these interlocutors, even when they were quite far to the left politically, felt ambivalent about the government’s claim to represent an ethical public sphere, instead suggesting that their socially concerned, small private businesses better understood the issues people in the neighborhood face, and could therefore deal with them more ethically. Most of these interlocutors strongly supported the idea of state responsibility for providing welfare services. They only thought that these services could be improved if the state partnered with certain kinds of seemingly private companies.

As others have shown, neoliberal, ethical projects can work as both a depoliticizing tool and open up new political possibilities (Fennell 2015; Holmes 2000; Muehlebach 2012; Ticktin 2011). The same was true of the scalar projects in which my interlocutors were participating. In addition to examining how these kinds of scales around welfare are produced, taken up, and made ethical, this dissertation also looks at a wide array of other scalar understandings my interlocutors create and employ to make sense of, and try to make a difference in, the world around them. These include temporal scales of sustainability, socio-spatial scales of what counts as the neighborhood, linguistic scales of what counts as Norwegian or English, or as a “local” register, and socio-political scales of who and what are seen as “foreign.” As my interlocutors took up some scales but not others, and placed themselves and others on those scales, they were making ethical claims and trying to persuade in policy matters.

## Register Phenomena Mediating a Value Regime of Conflict-Avoidance

Previous anthropological studies of neoliberal changes to the welfare state have tended not to focus on the ways that speech plays a role in how social actors position themselves and their political positions in relation to others. Linguistic registers can most simply be defined as “different ways of saying the same thing.” Through processes of enregisterment, these different forms of speaking can come to be recognized as emblems of particular social identities (Agha 2005; Silverstein 2003). Registers are most obviously distinguished by register shibboleths, frequently lexical items or phonological features that mark speech as belonging to one register instead of another. For example, using long, Latinate nouns may be a shibboleth of an academic register, while diphthongization of some vowels is a shibboleth of a traditional working-class register spoken in eastern Oslo. Registers can also extend to kinds of discourses and non-linguistic practices, like clothing.

Register differences are an important part of how social differences are made and communicated and are thus fundamental to how social actors align with some kinds of people and political positions and differentiate themselves from others. In Gal’s rereading of Muehlebach’s ethnography of Italian volunteers, Gal shows how the different traditions the volunteers are coming from is made apparent through the different linguistic registers these groups use (2018, 12–13). Catholic organizations speak about volunteer work as a sacred “free gift” (*gratuità*), while retired Italian communists speak of their own volunteer labor as “engagement” (*impegno*) and “solidarity” (*solidarietà*). A third group of volunteers instead use English terms like “empowerment” and “self-fulfillment.” These registers, coming from distinct arenas, are a way for people who might seem to be doing the same thing to differentiate themselves.

Familiar with this work on enregisterment, I began fieldwork eager to identify the different groups and perspectives within the neighborhood, and the registers that members of these groups used to distinguish each other. However, while there were a few clear distinctions, like the one many of my interlocutors made between themselves and Western Oslo, I had a harder time learning to hear other kinds of differences. Young Norwegian “hipsters” and members of the social entrepreneurship organization where I spent much of my time both switched frequently between Norwegian and what sounded to me like a business-influenced register of English, yet the social entrepreneurs repeatedly told me and other visitors that they were nothing like these hipsters, or like the tech entrepreneurs down the street who also used these English terms. Private real estate developers deployed lexical shibboleths that made them sound like the Oslo municipality, while opposing political parties would find themselves in conflict over how they were using the same lexical items to make opposing arguments. Eventually, I did learn to hear many of the distinctions different groups were making, but I was not alone in my initial confusion, and as I talked to others, I learned that many people in the neighborhood had trouble keeping track of who exactly they agreed with, and who they should hold responsible for changes in the neighborhood.

As examples in the following chapters will show, sometimes this confusion was calculated. By speaking in the same way as the municipality, developers were able to blur the boundary between their projects and the city’s, thus allowing the blame for negative consequences of gentrification to be passed on to the state instead of having to take responsibility themselves. Sounding like someone else could be a way of legitimating your own actions for a particular audience. Yet perhaps the most important reason to sound like an opposing group has to do with a particularly Norwegian semiotic ideology, or “regime of value” (Gal and Irvine

2019, 13) to deemphasize conflict in favor of a focus on similarity and imagined sameness. Marianne Gullestad has written extensively about this predilection towards emphasizing similarity (1985; 1989a). Yet in her work she does not focus on the semiotic processes through which social actors make claims to solidarity, which are then successfully taken up or rejected by different audiences. That is something I am interested in here. My interlocutors also brought it up frequently, and there was a running joke among participants at public debates about the future of the neighborhood that they were really discussions (*diskusjoner*) more than debates (*debatter*), because everyone largely agreed on the main issues. From what I observed, there was in fact a lot of disagreement about what was happening, and what should happen, in the neighborhood, yet my interlocutors had to find ways to express these disagreements while minimalizing the potential for open conflict. They did so not only through lexical choice and work to “sound like” their opponents, but also through many other linguistic and interactional strategies.

Aside from this Norwegian regime of value around conflict avoidance, these kinds of coherence around ways of talking has also been described as a hallmark of neoliberalism. Scholars have pointed out that polyvocalic terms are prevalent to neoliberal projects, and a way of making them appear to be apolitical, since diverse communities may have different understandings of the meanings of the lexical items they are using, but they argue that the very fact of their using the same words binds them together, if uneasily (Holmes 2000; Irani 2019; Muehlebach 2012). Yet in all of this work, the ability of certain terms to create coherence across political domains is assumed. Instead, as I will show in the following chapters, that coherence was always very tenuous, and depended on the ways that attempts to claim coherence through speaking in a particular way were taken up by various listeners.

## **Why study the “global” through a neighborhood?**

“Approximately one percent of the city’s inhabitants live in Tøyen. In that respect, the attention to the place is out of proportion” (Slettholm 2017).

Catherine Fennell has pointed to the similarities between the ethical citizenship that Muehlebach describes in relation to the Italian welfare state, and emergent forms of urban citizenship, which also rely on a conception of a “local” politics based in immediacy and intimacy (2015). Building from scholarship that distinguishes between citizenship as a formal legal status and citizenship as a normative or aspirational project (Bosniak 2006; Ong 1996; Rosaldo 1997), work on urban citizenship brings together everyday encounters city-dwellers have with people and urban infrastructure, with the political processes that bound and potentially expand forms of citizenship (Holston and Appadurai 1996; Holston 2008; Sassen 2002). These encounters frequently include the social and the material, for example, how the sensory politics of home heating bring together neoliberal demands for individual self-responsibility with subjective senses of bodily comfort (Fennell 2015), or how everyday experiences of infrastructural disrepair become key to citizen-state disputes over redevelopment (Chu 2014). Others discuss the importance of urban public spaces where strangers can meet face-to-face for fostering democratic politics (Harvey 2008; Low 2000; Smith and Low 2006). Urban practitioners and policymakers share this interest in the scalar relationship between urban forms, immediacy, and potentials for citizenship, and cities and neighborhoods have a long history of being seen as experimental laboratories for new forms of democratic governance. This dissertation sees the neighborhood as a lens through which to study the semiotic processes through which social actors come to understand and address “the global” both to follow in this

tradition of urban anthropology and because, as the quotation from journalist Andreas Slettholm that opened this section suggests, people all over Oslo saw one particular neighborhood, Tøyen, as a vision of Norway's future. This future is either utopic or dystopic depending on who is doing the uptaking, and in what context.

Cities are likely not the first thing someone thinks about when they think of Norway. As a foreigner living in Oslo, I got used to people explaining to me that Oslo is not the “real Norway,” when they asked if I had traveled anywhere else in the country. This feeling is due in large part to Oslo's history as the home to a Dano-Norwegian elite while Norway was in a forced union with Denmark from 1397–1814.<sup>6</sup> The city was even renamed Christiania, in honor of the Danish King Christian IV in 1624, a name that it retained until 1924, although it Norwegianized the spelling to Kristiania in the late nineteenth century. The strong nineteenth century romantic nationalist movement further distanced Oslo from Norwegian nationalism (Hult 2003).<sup>7</sup> Yet, as is common across Europe, more and more Norwegians are moving to urban areas. In 2018, the

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<sup>6</sup> Norway was then controlled by Sweden until 1905, when the nation finally became independent.

<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the most well-known example of Oslo's foreignness in relation to the rest of Norway is the Norwegian language itself most visibly in Norway's use of two mutually intelligible orthographic standards, Nynorsk and Bokmål. Philologist Ivar Aasen developed Nynorsk in the nineteenth century based on rural western dialects, while Bokmål is a Norwegianized version of Danish. All children must learn both forms in school, but a shrinking number of Norwegians, as of 2016 only 12%, most of whom live on the western coast, use Nynorsk primarily (Blaker 2017). As Einar Haugen long ago detailed, this situation creates a tension between the urban, elite, yet Danish-influenced Bokmål and the more autochthonous and “authentic,” yet minority, Nynorsk, which is commonly known as the “language struggle” (*språkstriden*) (1966). There have been a number of controversial reforms over the past century, some of which tried to bring the two forms closer together, but Bokmål and Nynorsk remain separate. At the same time, Norwegians who move to Oslo from other parts of the country tend to continue to speak the rural dialects they grew up with. Public figures who do not do so are frequently criticized for *knoting*, a term that refers to speaking unnaturally or affectedly, especially when using urban instead of rural forms.

Oslo metropolitan area reached one million inhabitants, which may seem small globally, but it accounts for almost 20% of Norway's total population and makes Oslo one of the fastest growing cities in Europe (Oslo kommune n.d.). As the city's population grows, the physical landscape has also been changing rapidly, particularly on the east side of the city. Most noticeable are the entirely new neighborhoods being built on previously industrial areas, and on newly filled parts of the fjord. These neighborhoods host many of the city's most important cultural institutions like the now iconic Opera House, and new locations for the Norwegian National Museum, Munch Museum, and public library. They also include the "Barcode" skyscrapers in Bjørvika that house luxury apartments and the offices of international financial and consulting corporations. These new areas, many of which were designed by world-famous architects, are part of an attempt to rebrand the city to an international audience. Although Oslo had been a relative backwater compared to the other Scandinavian capitals of Stockholm and Copenhagen, these new areas of the city, combined with Oslo's proximity to publicly accessible nature, are part of a new image for Oslo as a leading green, cosmopolitan capital. The luxury areas being built on the waterfront are not the only new neighborhoods in Oslo. At the same time, new residential areas are being built in many of the former industrial areas on the east side of the city, like Ensjø and Hovin. Although these neighborhoods are not being built to appeal to outsider tourists, they share much of the same aesthetic of contemporary green architecture, with frequent use of wood and glass, along with tree-lined squares, bicycle paths, and walkways.

Squeezed between these two kinds of new neighborhoods on the east side of central Oslo are the neighborhoods of Tøyen, Kampen, and Grønland. These areas have long histories of being home to working-class residents. Kampen, with its picturesque brightly colored wooden houses, has become a popular area for artists, while Tøyen and Grønland share a similar history



as places of transit for migrants. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these migrants were primarily rural Norwegians and Swedes who came to Oslo to work in the many factories lining the Aker River. In the 1970s, Tøyen and Grønland were where many Pakistani guestworkers first settled. While they tended to move to outer suburbs after their families joined them in Norway, their influence remains in the halal butchers, Pakistani grocers, and sweet shops that remain a destination for Pakistani-Norwegians across the Oslo area. Pakistanis also continue to own many of the apartments in Tøyen and Grønland, serving as landlords to more recent arrivals. Norwegian migration politics are much more restrictive now than they were in the 1970s when most Pakistanis arrived, so these more recent migrants tend to have come to Norway as refugees. Today, migrants and their children make up about half of Tøyen's population of about 13,000 people. The largest group are Somali, although there is also a sizable Syrian community, as well as people from across the Middle East and Africa, most notably Iraq and Iran. Several of the older Somalis I got to know had lived in other parts of Norway before moving to Oslo, so Tøyen and Grønland were not their first introduction to Norway. Tøyen is also known as one of the most economically diverse areas of Norway, with one of the highest proportions of public housing and rentals in a country that overwhelmingly owns their houses, as well as the highest proportion in the country of children who live below the OECD-defined poverty line. At the same time, Tøyen is rapidly gentrifying, and property prices are some of the fastest growing in the country as young, white Norwegians are attracted to Tøyen's central location.



Figure 0.2: Central Oslo. The area shaded in red is Tøyen, as the Area Boost first defined it. The red points indicate where the Munch Museum had been, between the neighborhood and the Botanic Garden, and where it has moved to, on the waterfront.

SOURCE: Tøyen, Oslo, Norway [map]. 2021. Scale undetermined, generated by Janet Connor; using “Google Map”. <<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1fl8NSyvI9XQX1-G0tfsfgfAIZKLA&usp=sharing>> (15 July 2021).

Tøyen and Grønland have now been struggling over their place in the changing city for decades. In the early 2000s, some in Tøyen and Grønland had hoped that Tøyengata, the street that runs almost from the new Opera House, through Grønland, and up along the edge of Tøyen to what was then the Munch Museum, would become the new main cultural thoroughfare in the city (Huse 2011; 2014). However, the municipal government decided to build the new Barcode neighborhood instead, which not only ignores the old neighborhoods, but blocks the low winter sunlight from Grønland. A central symbol of the uncertainty of Tøyen and Grønland’s future has been the Munch Museum, located at the edge of Tøyen. The museum building had been too

small for the art collection from the time it was built in the 1950s.<sup>8</sup> While there was enough space to expand the museum on-site, the Conservative-led municipal government in the 2000s and early 2010s preferred instead to move it to a new location on the waterfront. They saw centralizing all cultural institutions as good for tourism, much of which comes from docked cruise ships in the summer. Yet for many years, the left-wing opposition opposed these plans, since the Munch Museum was the only cultural institution located on the east side of Oslo. After years of uncertainty, in 2013 the Socialist Left party (*Sosialistisk venstreparti*, SV) joined the right-wing parties in approving the museum's move. In exchange, SV asked for the creation of a five-year Area Boost program to improve living conditions in Tøyen. These kinds of targeted investments are common in underprivileged areas of Oslo and usually consist of a mix of aesthetic improvements and social programming, especially for children. The Tøyen Boost, which would receive 25 million NOK/year each from the municipality and the state (about 6 million USD/year in total), planned to include upgrades to the subway station and Tøyen shopping center, a new swimming complex, science center, and green spaces. The agreement also included moving some public housing units, along with psychiatric and drug counseling services, to other parts of the city. These public services were more highly concentrated in Tøyen than elsewhere in Oslo, so the idea had been to spread them across the city more evenly.

Although not everyone was happy that SV negotiated this deal with the center-right, and I frequently heard it disparagingly called a “horse-trade” (*hestehandel*), a majority of people did

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<sup>8</sup> Upon his death, Edvard Munch left his entire collection to the City of Oslo, which built a museum especially for it. According to the final exhibit in the old museum building that was open in Summer 2019, the architects had purposefully made the building too small to display more than a small fraction of Munch's work at once so that the working-class public who lived around the museum would receive “just the right dose of art” (from my field notes taken at the “Exit!” exhibit at the Munch Museum, August 2019).

agree the east side of the city needed improved resources. The Tøyen Boost has also been politically beneficial for the SV politician who led the deal, Marianne Borgen, who became the Mayor of Oslo in 2015.<sup>9</sup> While many Tøyen residents were pleased that the neighborhood would receive more public support it they had been previously, many were upset that they had not been consulted about the kinds of changes the Area Boost would bring about. People in public housing were particularly affected, as they were unable to find alternative housing in Tøyen, and many had to move to other public housing units in other parts of the city. Following their complaints, the initial goals of the Area Boost have shifted somewhat. For example, instead of a new science center, Tøyen is getting an athletic facility, since that is what a majority of families with children preferred. Yet there is still a feeling among many people in Tøyen that the government is trying to force them out. This feeling is strengthened by the ways the neighborhood has gentrified and housing prices have skyrocketed in the years following the Tøyen Agreement.

Middle-class, white Norwegian families had begun moving to Tøyen for several years before the Tøyen Boost officially began. These families tended not to interact much with their Somali neighbors and moved elsewhere as soon as their children reached school-age. They sought larger apartments than what you can usually find in the city center and did not want their children to be an ethnic minority at school—for several years, there had been no “ethnic Norwegian” children in the entering first grade class at Tøyen School. One group of parents, not wanting to move and unable to get permission from the city for their children to attend a different school, came together in the mid-2010s to encourage other middle-class families to

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<sup>9</sup> The mayor only has symbolic power. Oslo has a parliamentary system at the municipal level, where the mayor is like a president in a national system, and the City Council Leader, also called the “Governing Mayor,” is the municipal equivalent of a national prime minister. The City Council Leader throughout my time in Oslo was Raymond Johansen from the Labor Party.

send their children to the local school. They started several initiatives aimed at increasing local pride, including the “5-Year-Olds’ Club,” where children and their parents could meet each other the year before starting first grade. Many of these families, whom I had met during short visits to Tøyen in 2014–2016 had given up on this experiment and moved elsewhere by the time I began long-term fieldwork in 2017.<sup>10</sup> The ones who stayed however, are frequently called “Tøyen Patriots,” seeing the neighborhood as a place where their children will learn to become a better, more inclusive generation of Norwegians. Some call a subset of these “Tøyen Cheerleaders,” for refusing to discuss any of the problems that the neighborhood faces. As time as gone by, the ethnic divisions between neighborhood parents have broken down to some extent, although the two groups still tend to have very different material living situations. White Norwegian families generally own their apartments, the value of which has increased considerably since they bought them, while residents of immigrant background usually live in apartments they rent on short-term contracts from the municipality or on the private market. Through their children, some white Norwegian and Somali parents have developed friendships, and the Tøyen Patriot community organizations, most of which had started out as almost entirely white, middle-class Norwegians, now include several Somali members, several of whom are also active in primarily Somali neighborhood organizations.

As of the end of 2018, the program had spent 210 million NOK (24 million USD), divided evenly between municipal and national funding. Most of that money has gone to renovating the building that houses K1, the Tøyen community center, and to making the after

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<sup>10</sup> This is not only my impression, but has also been documented in studies of white, middle-class families in Tøyen (Andersen, Eline Ander, and Skrede 2020; Kadasia, Andersen, and Dalseide 2020).

school program for children in first through fourth grades (typically up through age 10) free for all students at Tøyen School.

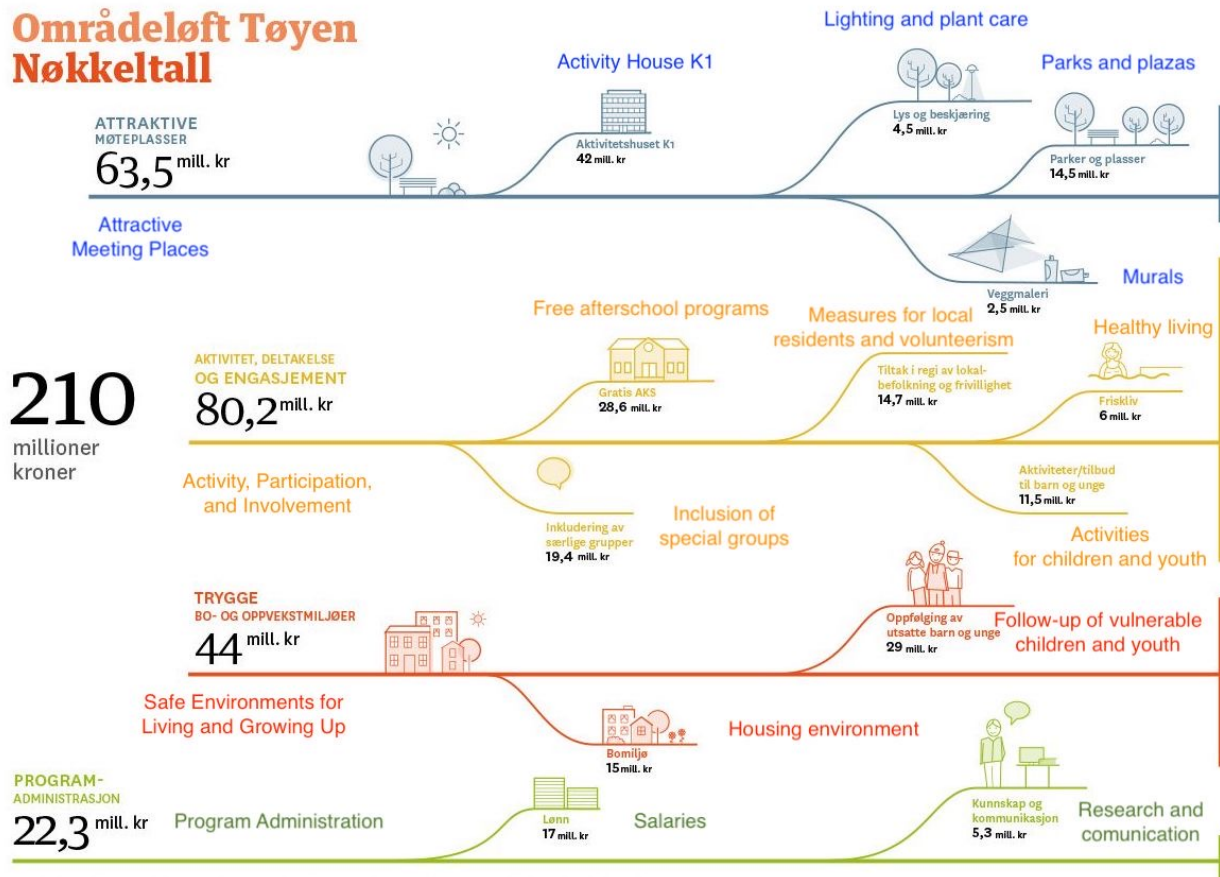


Figure 0.3: Area Boost Tøyen’s expenses through 2018 (graphic from Tjomsland et al. 2019, 6–7 with my English glosses).

As the Area Boost was nearing its end in 2018, the government announced it would be extending it through 2026, as well as expanding the geographic area it covered to include neighboring Grønland. The renewed program would also focus more on some of the underlying reasons why this part of the city has such a high rate of poverty, for example the high unemployment rate. Yet as leftwing politicians have pointed out, the Tøyen Boost came at a time when the municipal government also reduced more normal streams of funding to the district of which Tøyen is a

part.<sup>11</sup> For example, funding for mental health counseling was cut, and I spoke with psychologists working for the city who told me about how their jobs have become more difficult over the past several years due to lack of financial support.

Throughout my time in Tøyen, it felt as though there was a near-constant flow of news articles, think pieces, and documentaries attempting to explain what Tøyen is and what was happening there. These were almost inevitably followed by a series of commentaries from residents, some of whom would agree, while others would complain about how yet another outsider was trying to speak for “us.” I am not interested in presenting my own essentializing image of what the neighborhood of Tøyen is. Similarly, I do not want to judge whether the Area Boost succeeded or failed. Instead, I am interested in the kinds of social and political relationships being imagined through the neighborhood. My approach to “the neighborhood” as object is inspired by Catherine Fennell’s approach to “the projects” on Chicago’s westside, where the goal is neither an evaluation of urban policy with recommendations for improvement, nor is it a community study focused on the neighborhood’s marginalized residents (2015). This is not to say that these approaches to Tøyen are not important, especially in the ways they can tell a wider audience about the everyday experiences of people who, as many of my interlocutors would put it, “are frequently talked *about*, but never talked *to*.” Tøyen has been a popular site of social research over the past decade, and others have done and are continuing to do that important work (Andersen and Brattbakk 2020; Andersen, Røe, and Sæter 2015; Brattbakk et al. 2015; Kadasia, Andersen, and Dalseide 2020; Larsen 2019; Reichborn-Kjennerud and Ophaug 2018; Tormodsgard 2015). Instead, this dissertation is an ethnography of a neighborhood being

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<sup>11</sup> The Tøyen Boost received 25 million NOK/year from the city, while the district’s budget reduced by 21 million NOK (Kriznik 2015).

taken up as a laboratory for rethinking the Norwegian welfare state and the relationships between neighbors and between citizens and the state. It asks how various interests and ambitions are coming together, not always smoothly, to create a local and national community that will be “sustainable” into a future that all agree will not look like the Norwegian welfare state’s past.

With Tøyen’s being such a popular fieldsite for Norwegian social scientists, everyone had their own idea about who the “right” people were for me to talk to. Some Tøyenites were also tired of researchers constantly passing through the neighborhood, asking to speak to them but not obviously giving them anything in return. Many of the people I met were not very interested in being interviewed, either ignoring my requests, or telling me outright that they were tired of talking to researchers. Instead of conducting many interviews, I focused on attending local events, of which there were many. I also spent much of my time sitting in the communal workspace on the first floor of the Tøyen Community Center, with municipal employees, people working in community-focused non-governmental organizations, and members of the social entrepreneurship incubator I call Inspire. The community center was also a place that many people passed through, so I got to meet a large swath of the neighborhood just by spending time sitting on the first floor every day and taking part in events like language and fitness classes that happened in the rooms on the second floor in the evenings. I would never claim to speak “for Tøyen,” or from “the neighborhood’s” singular perspective because, as will hopefully become clear in the rest of this dissertation, that would be an impossible project. Instead, this is an ethnography about how the neighborhood gets taken up from a variety of perspectives, to achieve various political ends.

Who I got to know best was of course influenced by how I appeared to people in Tøyen. Although I was always upfront about being an American with no family connections to Norway,



my blonde hair and blue eyes still made many people assume at first that I was one of the “ethnic Norwegians.” Anyone who had grown up speaking Norwegian would usually know I was a foreigner as soon as I said anything more than a brief greeting, and they would frequently switch into English after I had introduced myself and they had heard the very non-Norwegian /dʒ/ in my first name. Almost everyone I met was certain I must either have Norwegian relatives or a Norwegian spouse, even if I had told them otherwise, because they did not know why else an American would have bothered to learn Norwegian. While I got to know a mix of people in the places where I spent a large amount of time, my Scandinavian looks did sometimes keep me out of some spaces, and there were several times when Somalis would confuse me for a social worker, which likely made them less willing to talk to me.<sup>12</sup> However, in many ways my appearance also worked to my advantage. There is a long history of Norwegian anthropologists studying minorities “at home” (see Eriksen 2009), and I frequently encountered white Norwegians in Tøyen who, familiar with this tradition, assumed that I was doing the same, and that their majority status meant that they could not be potential ethnographic subjects. However, as I explained to them, I was interested in the ways that *all* different kinds of people live together in an urban community. My insider-outsider appearance allowed for productive moments when some white Norwegian interlocutors would slide back and forth between treating me as a foreigner and treating me as someone “like them,” assuming, for example, that I agreed with the generalized claims they were making about categories like “Somali women.”

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<sup>12</sup> The tense relationship between Somalis in Norway and Child Welfare Services is a frequent topic in the media (e.g. Stokke and Olsen 2018). In Tøyen one of the Inspirer social entrepreneurs, a Somali man who had arrived in Norway when he was a child and now has children himself, had originally planned to start a business that would help other Somali parents develop better relationships with child services.

## **Organization of the Dissertation**

The following chapters are divided into two parts. Part I outlines circulating public discourses of climate change and migration, and how the neighborhood became a lens through which politicians, the national media, and residents came to understand these two “global” threats to the Norwegian welfare state. The two chapters show how even the process of understanding something to be “global” requires scalar work and can include several competing perspectival scales. Chapter 1 outlines the perceived finitude of the welfare state in the face of climate change and the imagined collapse of the oil industry, and how “sustainability” has become an authoritative frame for thinking of future good, not just of the planet, but also of the Norwegian welfare system. I focus on the particular authority the concept of sustainability has in Norway, as something that is seen as both inherently Norwegian and an objective, international standard coming from the United Nations, and how a move towards “sustainable welfare” reconfigures the temporal promise of the welfare state. Through an analysis of national political discourses and discussions between municipal employees and Tøyen residents, I show how, through grafting a logic of sustainability onto an understanding of the welfare state, these various social actors attempt to create different spatial and temporal scales as authoritative.

Chapter 2 moves to the ways that Tøyen is frequently taken up by the national media as a place of foreign threats to a Norwegian national identity based in an imagined sameness, and how some residents are twisting that image. The first half of the chapter focuses on a documentary that framed Tøyen as a place of two kinds of “foreign,” African migrant young men and white, anglophone “hipsters,” which were implicitly compared to the “real” Norwegian viewer who lives elsewhere. The second half of the chapter looks at how some residents within

Tøyen used linguistic forms to play with standard boundaries between citizen and foreigner, and east and west Oslo, to create a new, “Tøyenish” attunement to creating an inclusive community across difference. The chapter as a whole considers the importance of semiotic processes of comparison as everyday world-making projects.

Part II of the dissertation explores how actors in the neighborhood reimagine the relationship between individuals and the state, and public and private institutions as they work towards, and sometimes also resist, the move towards “sustainable welfare.” These projects also involve different forms of scale-making. Chapter 3 shows how calls for forms of active citizenship as a way to make the welfare system sustainable, combined with the idea that the welfare state is not as inclusive of difference as it could be, came together in two initiatives to promote altruistic work among Tøyen residents. These initiatives each involved their own ways of measuring “goodness” in relation to economic profit to promote a form of ethical-entrepreneurial citizenship, where minoritized Norwegians were encouraged to perform relational labor for each other while becoming economically self-sufficient themselves. These initiatives, while trying to break down ethnicized boundaries and socio-economic inequalities, continued at the same time to reproduce both.

While Chapter 3 is about reconfiguring the relationship between individual citizens, Chapter 4 moves to the ways the relationship between citizens and government was being reimaged. It focuses on local government initiatives that centered on listening to local inhabitants, and the visions of democracy that were being envisioned by local bureaucrats and the neighborhood residents participating in these initiatives. I see listening as not only an auditory process, but as a site where others’ speech gets translated into material artifacts, including policy reports, photographs, and even physical buildings. Showing that you can listen

to others was a way for members of both groups to legitimize policy decisions, but what exactly that listening looked like, and the kinds of democracy that different forms of listening index, varied greatly.

Chapter 5, discusses the ways that local businesses and developers have taken up discourses circulating between neighborhood organizations and the government around inclusion, participation, and sustainability to push their own agendas. This included redefining the boundaries of who and what counts as a part of Tøyen, and how the neighborhood relates to the rest of the city, and to other parts of the world. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the consequences of when categories like “diversity” and “inclusivity” become commodified through projects of place-branding.

The final chapter of the dissertation returns to many of the linguistic examples from the previous chapters, looking more closely at the discursive strategies my interlocutors employed to express difference and disagreement while also attempting to avoid conflict.

## PART ONE

### CHAPTER 1

#### “NORWAY’S LEGACY AFTER GRO”: SUSTAINABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY IN IMAGININGS OF A POST-OIL WELFARE SOCIETY

“Sustainability” (*bærekraft*) is a word I heard all over Oslo throughout my fieldwork. Oslo was the 2019 European Green Capital, and already beginning in 2018 there were numerous events highlighting Oslo’s environmental initiatives, including closing the city center to private car traffic, turning former industrial areas around rivers and the Oslo Fjord into recreational parks, and building entirely new neighborhoods using the most up-to-date environmental techniques. Norway as a nation is also widely regarded as an international environmental leader, having held leadership positions in the United Nations and praised for its national environmental policies, for example around the high rate of adoption of electric cars.

Yet 2019 was also the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of oil in the Norwegian-controlled part of the North Sea, and so events commemorating the importance of oil to Norway also filled that year. In late 2018, a slew of television shows about the oil industry aired, including a documentary about the start of the Norwegian oil industry, a fictionalized melodrama about the people involved in the beginnings of oil exploration in the city of Stavanger, and a workplace sitcom, similar to American shows like *The Office* or *Veep*, about the managers of the Norwegian oil fund. Oil exploration continues to dominate the Norwegian economy, and in 2019 alone, the state-owned oil company, Equinor, opened four new fields in the North Sea. Yet Equinor describes even these as being a part of a move towards sustainability because they produce considerably less carbon than the industry average (Equinor 2021).

While environmental organizations have long remarked on the dissonance of these two sides of Norway, and international activists like Greta Thunberg have been vocal critics of the new oil platforms, it is also a common opinion among many Norwegians that oil revenues are what allow for the country's relatively generous welfare state. This situation is thus somewhat different from Timothy Mitchell's (2009) discussion of the anti-democratic politics that emerge from oil because, instead of leading to a centralization of power and a move toward a neoliberal trust in the market as he argues oil production does, petroleum revenues, and the investments of the Norwegian "oil fund," as it is commonly called, are popularly imagined to be what will allow Norwegian welfare democracy to continue into the future. Frida Hastrup and Marianne Lien have argued that resource extraction of all types in Norway is entangled with a kind of "welfarist" and egalitarian ethics, both specifically in the Arctic settlements where many resource development projects are located, and in the ways that state-controlled resource revenue is shared as a common good belonging to all citizens, now and into an imagined future (Hastrup and Lien 2020). Yet, similar to Mitchell's account, the kinds of Norwegian welfare institutions that have come to rely on oil revenues are widely seen as fundamentally threatened by oil depletion and climate change. As Norway imagines a future with no, or at least less, oil, Norwegian politicians are also imagining a changed welfare state.

In this chapter, I first discuss the ethics behind calls for sustainability in welfare. I see discourses around sustainability as a scalar project, and I am interested in how the use of the term by international organizations like the United Nations is made authoritative and taken up across scales, from national policy, to neighborhood governance. Previous work on the relationship between the Norwegian welfare state and pan-Scandinavian leadership in the United Nations and other global human rights organizations has focused on the ways the ethical commitments of the

national welfare state are “scaled up” to the global (e.g. Haugestad 2003; Trägårdh 2018). I want to make a somewhat different move here. Instead of assuming an ethical scale where the local can be scaled up to the global, I instead want to show that what is generally seen as the institutionally “global” scale of the UN is made to be especially ethical in the Norwegian context through a dialogic relationship between Norwegian ideas of goodness on one side, and international institutional standards on the other. I argue that it is precisely Norway’s global reputation as a leader in international humanitarian development and environmental initiatives that allows politicians to use this “global” developmental and environmental register of sustainability to legitimate neoliberalizing logics within Norway.

I then outline what I am calling “chronotopes of welfare,” three different time-space configurations of the Norwegian welfare state that are tied to orientations to Norwegian oil production. The first is the pre-oil vision of the welfare state, a period that is frequently idealized as a time of trust in government and strong solidarity between citizens. The second is the imagined limitless growth of the welfare state allowed for through the development of the Norwegian Oil Fund. The third, “sustainable welfare,” refers to a more limited temporal horizon, where an imagined end to the Norwegian oil industry is used to justify neoliberal reforms to the welfare state. Here, sustainability is not only a synonym for environmentalism, but is also expressing an idea of economic viability and self-sufficiency in the face of austerity.

Finally, after tracing the register graftings (Gal 2018) at the national level, I turn to the ways that “sustainable welfare” is being imposed, taken up, and contested by my interlocutors in Tøyen, including the forms of second-order indexicality that talk of sustainability has for some people in the neighborhood, and how these discourses are used to jump scales and bring in different forms of authority. Through an analysis of the implementation of sustainable welfare

policies within a neighborhood, I also point to the temporal ironies within the concept of “sustainability” itself.

### **Ethics of Sustainability: To the UN and back again**

Sustainability is a concept that has come to have authority all over the world, closely related to what Cymene Howe calls “anthropocenic ecoauthority,” a form of authority that is supported through the ethical claims that social actors make on behalf of the human and nonhuman biosphere (2014). Howe shows how ecoauthority is a scalar process, where the good of the planet outweighs the good of the nation or local community. While discourses around sustainability have the same effect in Norway, there are other scales at work in this particular context because sustainability is simultaneously a fundamentally Norwegian concept and an international ethical standard.

While “sustainability” is often equated with the green movement, the concept originated as a way to discuss limitations in the supply of natural resources. The first documentation of the term was the German *Nachhaltigkeit* in a 1713 forestry handbook, where Hans Carl von Carlowitz, the chief mining official of the Principality of Saxony, called for “continuous, steady, and sustaining [*nachhaltende*] use” of the forest in the face of massive deforestation due to demand for fuel for metal smelting (cited in Grober 2012, 83). Yet the first English instance of the word did not appear until 1972 in *The Limits of Growth*, a report (co-written by a Norwegian economist) on a computer simulation of economic and population growth with finite resources. The term then got widely taken up following the release of the 1987 Brundtland report to the UN, officially titled *Our Common Future*. This report introduced the concept of “sustainable development,” which it defines as “development that meets the needs of the present without



compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). This definition focuses not as much on a planetary good as does Howe’s anthropocentric ecoauthority, but it does consider a kind of temporal ethics, where the long-term good of future generations of human beings determines action in the present. The Brundtland report brought together three components of sustainable development: environmental protection, economic growth, and social equity, which have today developed into three interlocking forms of sustainability: environmental, economic, and social. This report has special salience in Norway, since it was named after the woman leading the commission that wrote it, Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland. Brundtland was Prime Minister in 1981, 1986-89, and 1990-96, so while the bulk of the commission’s work was done in between her terms in the early 1980s, she was prime minister when the report was released.

The context in which sustainable development emerged is somewhat different from the discourses of climate crisis in which we live today. Concerns about collapse and the limits of growth emerged in part from the 1960s environmental movement, but they were also very much influenced by the oil crises of 1973 and 1979, which led to the wider realization that society depended on resources that would one day run out. The context of the 1970s and 80s was not as much about the environmental impact of the consumption of fossil fuels and the question of whether we should continue our reliance on them, as much as a concern that our reliance would become impossible due to scarcity.

The Brundtland report’s case for sustainable development continues to inform UN policies today, with the current iteration being the 17 Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs, see Figure 1.1), which address all three components of sustainability. Norway has remained a leader in this area, and the current prime minister, Erna Solberg, is a Co-Chair of the UNSDG

Advocates, a committee that includes politicians, royalty, celebrities, CEOs, and NGO leaders. Pride in Norway's leading role in the UN, international development, and sustainability is not limited to policymakers, but comes up again and again in everyday life for people living there. Children celebrate UN Day at school every October, and events promoting sustainability occur frequently all over Oslo. One Saturday evening in late October, for example, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) organized a night walk in a popular park overlooking the city with the goal of raising awareness about the SDGs. Several thousand people attended this walk, which wound its way up the hill that inspired Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, past large inflated cubes designed to look like one of the UN SDG squares in Figure 1.1. The walk ended at the top of the hill with a free concert, looking out over the dark fjord. NORAD organizes similar walks all over the country, often up mountains popular with hikers. These kinds of events, in bringing together international development and nature, make especially evident the two intersecting valences of sustainability: environmentalism and development.



Figure 1.1: The UN’s official graphic of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.  
 SOURCE: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2015/12/sustainable-development-goals-kick-off-with-start-of-new-year/>

The particularly Norwegian side of sustainability is reinforced at many different scales. The number of start-ups oriented towards ideas of sustainability has increased exponentially in Oslo in just the past five years, as have new co-working spaces to support them. Rune,<sup>1</sup> one such entrepreneur, expressed this connection between Norway and sustainability at a seminar at one of these new spaces:

Norway’s legacy after Gro must be to be an absolutely visionary pioneering country in sustainability. That opportunity we have, we have together. And I believe that you here and others must have ambitious– to dare to be visionaries in this, to say let us take this responsibility here people. We have the possibility in Norway, we are the world’s second

<sup>1</sup> All names in this dissertation are pseudonyms, except for those of elected politicians. In some cases, in order to preserve anonymity, I created composite characters based on two or three people.

happiest country this year, happiest last year,<sup>2</sup> one of the world's best countries to live in. We have eh fantastic conditions to do this here, right?<sup>3</sup>

Important in Rune's call to seminar participants is not just his framing of sustainability as a particularly Norwegian legacy or inheritance (*arv*), it is also the way that he frames Norway as having a responsibility (*ansvar*) globally to be a leader in this area. This responsibility comes from both the legacy of Gro Harlem Brundtland and the international prestige of being one of the best countries in which to live. By switching to English in the underlined portion, Rune reminds the audience that the outside, English-speaking world looks toward and possibly envies Norway, suggesting that, if Norwegians take the lead, the rest of the world will want to follow.

The popularity of the UN SDGs within Norway also speaks to the authority of the United Nations more broadly within Norway as something Norwegian but internationally recognized as “good.” It is a point of pride among many Norwegians that the first Secretary-General, Trygve Lie, was born in a working-class area of Oslo. Although one of the wealthiest countries in the world today, at the time Norway was one of the poorest in Europe, and so cultivating its image as a leader in international peace and cooperation was important to developing its national interests (Riste 2001).<sup>4</sup> Norwegians continue to hold many leading positions within the UN, including, during most of my fieldwork, Environment Chief.<sup>5</sup> This history also comes into play when

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<sup>2</sup> The underlined portion is where Rune code-switched into English.

<sup>3</sup> Norges arv etter Gro må kunne være et absolutt visjonært foregangsland på bærekraft. Den muligheten har vi, den har vi sammen. Og jeg mener at dere her og andre må ha ambisiøse— å tørre å være visjonære på det, å si la oss ta dette ansvaret her folkens. Vi har muligheten i Norge, vi er the world's second happiest country this year, happiest last year, et av verdens beste land å bo i. Vi har eh fantastiske forutsetninger for å gjøre dette her, ikke sant?

<sup>4</sup> In this sense, Norway's international image is a direct continuation of the role the Scandinavian delegation had played at the League of Nations (see Pedersen 2015).

<sup>5</sup> UN Environment Chief Erik Solheim was forced to resign in late 2018 after an audit revealed he had ignored UN regulations and his frequent air travel was deemed to go against an office focused on carbon emission reduction. Solheim has long been a controversial figure in

Norwegians, like Rune, speak about their responsibility to lead the rest of the world to a sustainable future. In less than a century they moved from being one of the poorest countries in Europe to one of the wealthiest countries in the world, so some would say they are also uniquely situated to help developing countries today to do the same (Haugestad 2003). This feeling is not just internal pride, but also shows that many Norwegians are very concerned with how the rest of the world sees them.

While sustainability indexes a planetary ecoauthority, the Norwegian lexical item itself indexes the Norwegian essence of the concept. *Bærekraft* (sustainability, or *bærekraftig*, sustainable, with the adjectival *-ig* suffix) is a compound of the words *bære*, “carry,” and *kraft*, “power,” both words coming from Old Norse roots. This makes it rare among current “buzzwords” circulating in Oslo that are clearly borrowings of foreign words that were originally from Latin (like *innovasjon*), or English terms (like *coaching* or *impact*). While my social entrepreneur interlocutors would complain about the difficulty in communicating those foreign concepts to a Norwegian audience because of their untranslatability, sustainability does not have the same issue. Instead, the word’s Old Norse etymology can be seen as a diagrammatic icon of the idea that sustainability is a fundamentally Nordic concept, not a foreign import. The morphology also differs from other Scandinavian words for sustainability, although semantically, all have similar meanings to the English of “bearing a load.” In Danish, the adjective *bæredygtig* (literally “bearing capable”) becomes nominalized with the suffix *-hed*. *bæredygtighed*. In Swedish, the adjective *hållbar*, which aside from sustainability can also be translated as “durable,” is similarly nominalized, although the equivalent Swedish suffix is *-het*, *hållbarhet*.

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Norwegian national politics, and the UN scandal was closely followed in the Norwegian news media.

While Norwegians are well-aware of Norway's role in creating and perpetuating the UN's policies around sustainable development, the concept is not seen as something solely Norwegian, but instead as an internationally recognized standard that cannot easily be dismissed as the policy of one political party. For example, when the oil fund uses the SDGs to justify some of its ethical restrictions on the kinds of investments it can make, that is seen as bringing in a kind of ethical authority that is not only beyond any one political position, but also beyond the nation (Myhre 2019). As these examples demonstrate, discourses around "sustainability" are highly salient in Norway today, indexing this conception of Norway as a leader towards a more equitable and greener future on a global scale. This makes sustainable discourses an excellent candidate for what Susan Gal has called graftings, which "are registers indexical of one social arena that are 'implanted,' as analogies, in another arena that is conventionally considered widely different, even opposed" (2018, 16). For example, the president of Russia justified the 2014 military incursions into Ukraine by using shibboleths of humanitarian discourses, like the "responsibility to protect" populations in crisis. Graftings like these may get taken up as parody or sarcasm as some, who continue to see the two arenas being compared, war and humanitarian protection, as vastly different. Yet, for some audiences, these graftings succeed because they are able to deny the differences between these two arenas, framing them as the same. Although Derrida (1988) has argued that any sign can be "grafted" onto a new context, Gal's use of the term grafting goes farther than that, highlighting the ways that citationality is used to gain authority.<sup>6</sup> The Russian president did not choose to take up humanitarian discourses to justify military actions by chance. Instead, he took up those discourses because of the "hefty cultural

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<sup>6</sup> This is much in line with Nakassis's critique of Derrida that, while all signs may be citable, "not all signs are citable to the same pragmatic effect" (2013, 73).

legitimacy” that those discourses and the practices associated with them have, “thereby capturing authority for the grafted activity that would otherwise be rejected or opposed in powerful arenas” (Gal 2018, 16). Grafting, when successful, produces political authority.

As we will see in the next section, the Conservative national government has worked hard to graft environmental and developmental discourses of sustainability onto calls for neoliberal reforms to the welfare state. This work is an attempt to graft the international ecoauthority of sustainability and the particularly Norwegian authority of the concept onto their own political aspirations. This grafting, which also reimagines the temporality of the welfare state, has been largely successful in determining policies even within Oslo, which is governed by parties opposed to the Conservatives. While they may be opposed to many of the neoliberal reforms in principle, it is more difficult for critics to say they are against sustainability.

### **Chronotopes of Norwegian Welfare**

Thinking of welfare as something that needs to become “sustainable” is a new kind of temporal imaging of the Norwegian welfare state. We can think of different conceptions of the welfare state as different “chronotopes,” or configurations of time and space, which can be indexed through discourse (Bakhtin 1981). In Norway, I see three primary “welfare chronotopes” circulating in public discourse. I am calling these the “Gerhardsen chronotope,” which focuses on egalitarian welfare in the present, the “oil-fund chronotope,” which imagines welfare into a limitless future, and the “sustainable chronotope,” which sees present-day limits and austerity as a way to continue some form of welfare into the future.

Although the first laws mandating accident and sickness insurance in Norway were passed around the turn of the twentieth century, and the welfare state itself can be seen to have

emerged when the Labor Party entered into government in 1935, many Norwegians point to the several decades following World War II as the height of the Norwegian welfare model. This is a period that many people look back on nostalgically, across the political spectrum. Einar Gerhardsen, who was Prime Minister for 17 years between 1945 and 1965, is sometimes considered the father of this modern welfare state, and for many his name indexes this idealized time of social solidarity and egalitarianism,<sup>7</sup> which is why I have named this first chronotope after him. Unlike future-oriented oil-fund and sustainable welfare chronotopes, this model was more focused on universal rights to food, housing, and security in the present. At the same time, the welfare state was an integral part of a larger project of modernization. The 1950s and 60s in Norway was also a time of increased industrialization and large urban renewal projects, where for example houses in Oslo without running water were torn down and replaced by new apartment blocks. A subway was built out into the Grorud Valley to the east of the city, which connected rural areas to the city and allowed for the creation of commuter suburbs.

Timothy Mitchell has traced the connections between carbon fuels and democratic politics across Europe, the US, and the Middle East, arguing that, while coal production created the conditions for mass political mobilization and the labor movement, the infrastructure of oil extraction allowed for new fields of expertise and understanding of the economy, which tended to be less democratic (2009). Although Mitchell focuses on a different geographic area and a

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<sup>7</sup> For the entire time he was prime minister and until his death in 1987, Gerhardsen lived in a housing block for civil servants on the edge of Tøyen. The apartment was relatively large by Oslo standards at the time, but there is a popular story that, after Nikita Khrushchev visited it in 1964, he asked to see where the prime minister “really lived” (Engh 2004). Some of my interlocutors pointed to Gerhardsen’s choice to live modestly in Tøyen as evidence that the neighborhood was a place that could lead the rest of Oslo back to more egalitarian housing and living conditions.



somewhat earlier time period, his analysis resonates in some ways with shifts in how the Norwegian welfare state has been conceptualized. Yet there are also important differences. In Mitchell's account, the use of coal enabled the concentration of people in cities, which grew along channels through which this coal traveled. These workers had a great deal of power, as they could completely shut down energy nodes, something that had not been possible with previous forms of energy. This power over transport channels enabled workers to reach compromises with industrialists that became models of welfare democracy and universal suffrage. The Norwegian labor movement was certainly also reliant on the growth of Oslo and other cities and the power of unions. Before entering politics, Einar Gerhardsen had worked building roads, and it was through that work that he became involved in the Labor Party. However, although it was strongly influenced by the situation in coal-driven industrial areas in the rest of Europe, the Soviet Union, and the United States, Norway itself has never had a large coal supply, and it continues to rely heavily on hydropower to fuel most of its industry.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, industrialization was slower in Norway than in much of the rest of Europe, so the success of Norwegian Labor relied much more heavily on farmers and fishermen in rural areas.

The emergence of the Norwegian oil industry in the 1970s, and more particularly the ways that oil revenues are managed through the "oil fund" since the 1990s, shifted ways of imagining the welfare state, particularly in terms of temporality. Again, there are some resonances with Mitchell's account of the shift from coal to oil, with some important differences. Mitchell points to differences in the way oil is transported, and to the new kinds of centralized experts that came out of the oil industry. The Norwegian oil industry is quite different from the

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<sup>8</sup> Hydropower continues to be important in Norway today, accounting for well over 90% of Norwegian electricity demand.

situation he describes in the Middle East, in large part because it came several decades later, when companies had begun to forecast the end of oil, and the rising prices made it more feasible to develop the more expensive Norwegian off-shore oil fields in the North Sea. This later wave of oil production, a decade after the creation of OPEC, also allowed the Norwegian state to maintain more control over their national industry. The Norwegian state has always had a majority share of Norwegian oil exploration, and the governance of oil revenues has long been a site for the Norwegian state to perform democracy and transparency to the outside world (Myhre 2019).

Mitchell claims that oil allowed for the creation of the modern concept of the economy, and more particularly the national economy, beginning in the late 1930s. Unlike older ways of thinking about wealth, this oil-influenced economy was conceived of as “an object that could grow without limit” (Mitchell 2009, 418), measured as the sum total of monetary transactions. This vision of the economy was reinforced by the appearance of oil at that time as an almost limitless resource. Although Mitchell states that these attitudes changed during the linked crises of the US dollar and nationalization of oil in the Middle East in 1967–74, in Norway oil is linked to practices of financialization in ways that are integral to understanding how oil enabled a kind of temporal limitlessness, and an ethical positioning, for the democratic welfare state. The Government Petroleum Fund (now called the Government Pension Fund Global) was established in 1990 as a way to lessen the effects of unstable oil prices and an expected future drop in oil revenue. Norwegians may have never seen their oil supply as being without limits, but, through the conversion of oil revenues into international investment, politicians conceived of a way for a limitless continuation of the Norwegian welfare state into the future. Politicians on the left in particular continue to claim that a “perspective of eternity” is necessary to properly manage the

fund, which is a remarkable temporal perspective considering Norway has not even been independent for 200 years (Myhre 2020).

The financialization of oil revenues also allows for many Norwegians to distance themselves from the environmental impact of fossil fuel consumption. Because most Norwegian oil and gas is exported, the consumption of those exports is not included in calculations of Norway's national carbon emissions. At the same time, although the state controls oil revenues on behalf of the Norwegian people, those people never see the direct profits of fossil fuel sales. Those are instead invested in the Government Pension Fund Global. The GPFG may be more commonly called the "oil fund," but none of the holdings in it are based in fossil fuels. Instead the fund is made up of a variety of foreign investments that adhere to strict, UN-influenced ethical standards. Today, a large proportion of the fund's investments are in foreign real estate: for example, the fund's first international real estate holding was 25% of the British Crown Estate's holding in Regent Street, London (Norges Bank Investment Management 2020). These investments greenwash oil revenues into a form that is more in line with Norway's environmentalist public image. Knut Christian Myhre argues that the international aspects of the sovereign wealth fund reframes welfare in ways that exceed the welfare state spatially, by relying on foreign investments monitored by international standards (2019). The fund also shifts the temporality of the welfare state: until the current right-wing government, it was convention that the state would not spend any of the investment principal, which would instead remain untouched so that future generations of Norwegians could continue to receive welfare benefits into a limitless future. Although, during this period of the 1990s–2000s, the Labor-led government passed some reforms that allowed for some privatization of public welfare services, particularly nursing homes and preschools, the extent of those reforms was much smaller than

Scandinavian welfare states that cannot rely on oil revenues, particularly Sweden. While oil was antithetical to democracy in Mitchell's account, through the financialization of oil revenues, it is what has allowed Norway's social democratic welfare state to prosper for as long as it has.

The imagined temporality of the welfare state has shifted yet again in the past decade. In the 2013 elections, a Conservative coalition came to power, and since then, the Labor Party has been out of government for the longest consecutive period since the Nazi occupation. In 2014, North Sea oil prices fell by 75%, and the Norwegian economy, which had been one of the few national economies to be relatively unaffected by the 2008 recession, suffered. The oil crisis sharpened already existing critiques of the Norwegian economy's over-reliance on petroleum-related industries, and the Conservatives took the moment as an opportunity to challenge the idea of the welfare state's limitlessness. While the political left sees the oil fund as a way to make Norwegian sovereign wealth less reliant on oil production, the Conservative government has been more willing to begin to spend some of that money to fund tax cuts in the present, challenging the idea that the oil fund's investments will continue to finance the welfare state forever. Yet the welfare state is too popular across the political spectrum to dismantle entirely, and Conservatives thus needed to find another way of conceiving of Norwegian welfare in order to perpetuate some version of it.

At the Conservative Party's convention in the spring of 2018, Prime Minister Erna Solberg announced the new party slogan: "Sustainable welfare society" (*Bærekraftig velferdssamfunn*). Important to this slogan are two moves, the shift from welfare state to society and the modifier "sustainable." The first shift has occurred across Scandinavia and other parts of Europe as the responsibility for welfare services has shifted from state to civil society or

community (Rose 1996).<sup>9</sup> As in other welfare states, the Norwegian state was never the sole provider of all welfare services. Civic organizations have always been important partners to the Norwegian state, but, as Andrea Muehlebach has pointed out in the Italian context, “the twentieth-century welfare state’s power lay in the capacity to erase this face, and to represent itself as the sole guarantor of the public good” (2012, 63). While new private corporations, based in market rationalities, have emerged to provide certain services, particularly elder care and preschools, much of what is cast as a shift from the public to the private is in fact a reconfiguration of the relationship between the state and civic organizations (Eikås and Selle 2002). This reconfiguration began with Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland’s government in the late 1980s, and the Conservatives have accelerated it. As then-Minister of Trade and Industry, Torbjørn Røe Isaksen, stated when announcing the platform at the 2018 Conservative Party convention:<sup>10</sup>

Sustainable welfare society: it is, despite what many have tried to say, it’s not a slogan. Anyway, it would be a rather bad slogan if it was not more than that. It’s not about the welfare state alone either, because that’s a very social democratic thought, that it’s the state alone that can create welfare. It’s about a welfare society that we have responsibility for together.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> I use the terms welfare society and welfare community interchangeably, both because that seems to be the tendency in most of the literature, and because, at least according to some Norwegians, *samfunn* can refer to either English term. Others have told me that a better equivalent for community is *felleskap*, although that word has more socialist connotations in Norwegian than community does in English—for example the Red Party’s slogan is “Because community works” (*For di felleskap fungerer*).

<sup>10</sup> Full speech available at

<https://www.facebook.com/torbjornroeisaksen/videos/894406920738135>

<sup>11</sup> Bærekraftig velferdssamfunn, det er, på tross av hva mange har forsøkt å si, så er det ikke et slagord. Det ville i så fall vært et ganske dårlig slagord hvis det ikke var noe mer enn det. Da handler det heller ikke om velferdsstaten alene, for da er det en veldig sosialdemokratisk tanke, at det er staten alene som kan skape velferd. Det handler om et velferdssamfunn som vi har ansvar for sammen.

Isaksen rejects the social democratic, Gerhardsen version of welfare as controlled entirely by the state because, as he argues, Norwegian welfare exceeds that imagining. As he details later in the speech, welfare includes feelings of trust and community between Norwegian citizens, not just public services and unemployment insurance. Especially important here is his last sentence, that the concept of welfare society moves responsibility from the state to the entire nation as a collective.

While the ideological move from state to society now has a long history, calling welfare “sustainable” is more recent. The term sustainable not only gives the policy shift a particular kind of international moral authority, as we saw in the previous section. It also suggests that the welfare state in its current form is not sustainable because of a combination of larger forces over which the Norwegian state has no control. Isaksen continued, listing these potential threats.

It [sustainable welfare society] is a description of a problem, it’s an analysis, and it’s a political project for the way forward. And briefly the political project is that Norway will have control of several large societal challenges. We need to address them, because if we do not then they will come to threaten the Norwegian welfare society itself. I have seen several places that Jonas Gahr Støre<sup>12</sup> has said that Conservatives believe the time for large reforms is past. I don’t know where he got that from. Because the time for reforms is to the highest degree now. It is in no way past. We have an elderly wave that we right now are standing in the middle of. We will have twice as many elderly people over 80 by 2030. That is very good news. It’s why we’re developing the Senior Conservatives delegation. But it can also mean that more of us must work and cost a bit more. Digitalization and technological shift will mean that some of the jobs we have today will be gone. So, we must replace them with new, profitable, private jobs. We will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030. We have had increased immigration and those immigrants must be working for the welfare society to be sustainable, and so that people will be included in society. We will have a large and important oil and gas industry for many, many years forward. At the same time, we need more economic legs to stand on and we must find new jobs to replace those we’re losing in oil and gas.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Leader of the Norwegian Labor Party.

<sup>13</sup> Det er en problembeskrivelse, det er en analyse, og det er et politisk prosjekt for veien videre. Og kort sagt så er det politiske prosjektet at Norge skal rå for flere store samfunnsutfordringer. Vi er nødt til å montere dem, for hvis vi ikke gjør det så kommer de til å true selveste norske velferdssamfunnet. Jeg har sett flere steder at Jonas Gahr Støre har sagt at Høyre mener at tiden

Of these five potential threats, some, like increased immigration and the loss of oil and gas jobs, have already occurred. Others, like the aging population and decrease in climate emissions, are imminent. For Isaksen, the limitless temporal horizon of the oil-funded welfare state no longer exists, and welfare itself must change to become sustainable, as he then discusses in the end of this section of his speech.

All of this requires reforms. It does not require change for change's sake but change to ensure a sustainable welfare society. What is however over is the time of solving all problems with more money. The time where one believed that the public sector alone could build welfare is over. The time for the belief in the infallibility of large systems is over. And I also believe dear delegates we can conclude not without a certain sadness that the time for the Labor Party as a reform party looks like it's over. (applause) Please clap for that. Even though it's sad.<sup>14</sup>

Isaksen uses parallelism to equate what he implies to be four fundamental pillars of the traditional, Gerhardsenian Norwegian welfare state: thinking all problems can be solved just with more money, the idea that welfare is the domain of the public sector alone, faith in large bureaucratic systems, and the Labor Party's dominance as the party of reformers who built the

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for de store reformene er forbi. Jeg aner ikke hvor han har det fra. Fordi tiden for reformer er i høyeste grad nå. Det er på ingen måte forbi. Vi har en eldrebølge som vi akkurat nå står midt oppi. Vi kommer til å få dobbelt så mange eldre over 80 år frem mot 2030. Det er kjempe gode nyheter. Det er derfor vi utvide delegasjonen til Senior Høyre. Men det kan også mener at flere av oss må i jobb og koster noe mer. Digitalisering og teknologiskift kommer til å gjøre at en del av jobbene vi har i dag blir borte. Da må vi erstatte dem med nye, lønnsomme, private arbeidsplasser. Vi skal ha ned klimagassutslippene med 40% innen 2030. Vi har hatt en økende innvandring og de innvandrerne må være i jobb for at velferdssamfunnet skal være bærekraftig og for at folk skal være inkludert i samfunnet. Vi kommer til å ha en stor og viktig olje- og gassnæring i mange, mange år framover. Samtidig så trenger vi flere økonomiske bein å stå på og vi må finne nye arbeidsplasser for å erstatte dem som vi mister innenfor olje og gass.

<sup>14</sup> Alt dette krever reformer. Det krever ikke endring for endringens skyld men endring for å sikre et bærekraftig velferdssamfunn. Det som derimot er over, det er tiden for å løse alle problemer med mer penger. Tiden hvor man trodde at det offentlige alene kunne bygge velferd er over. Tiden for troen på de store systemenes ufeilbarlighet er over. Og jeg tror også kjære landsmøter vi kan konstatere ikke uten et visst vemod at tiden for Arbeiderpartiet som et reformparti ser ut til å være over. (applaus) Gjerne klappe for det. Selv om det er trist.

welfare state. Yet Isaksen is not positioning himself as opposed to that work, but he instead is arguing that the world has changed so much that the Labor Party is no longer capable of ensuring the continuation of Norwegian welfare, and the Conservative Party needs to step in as the new party that will bring reforms to save welfare. Although the public-private reforms envisioned in creating “sustainable welfare” are directly opposed to the kinds of reforms Gerhardsen engineered, they remain within the same idea of large reforms that will bring the nation into a new era, thus taking up one aspect of Gerhardsen’s legacy, while rejecting the kind of egalitarian welfare chronotope that he established.

Crucially, the Conservative vision of sustainable welfare assumes a withdrawal of state responsibility and a call for the private sector to take on a larger role, as is clear in Isaksen’s speech. The underlying assumption is that welfare services are going to become more expensive as the Norwegian population ages and becomes more ethnically and socioeconomically diverse. Yet, due to decreased oil revenues, the state will not be able to keep up with the increased expenses on its own. While politicians on the left would argue that the oil fund and taxation should allow the state to continue to provide welfare services even without future oil revenues, Isaksen and other Conservatives have been able to effectively connect calls for moves towards sustainability to policies that allow for privatization. While the oil fund chronotope and the sustainable chronotope are both oriented towards some sort of undefined future, sustainability sees that future as limited by future scarcity, and thus requiring new configurations of welfare, in ways that the oil fund chronotope does not.

Grafting green discourses of sustainability onto discourses of privatization was not limited to the Conservative Party convention. In the same month as the Conservatives announced



their new slogan, the state oil company, Statoil, announced it was changing its name to Equinor.

In the press release announcing the change, the company wrote:

The name change supports the company's strategy and development as a broad energy company. The name Equinor is formed by combining "equi", the starting point for words like equal, equality and equilibrium, and "nor", signalling a company proud of its Norwegian origin, and who wants to use this actively in its positioning (Equinor 2018).

Most of the public response to this name change focused on whether or not removing the word

"oil" was an actual commitment to alternative energy sources or just an example of

"greenwashing," comparing it to other recent rebrandings, including British Petroleum to

Beyond Petroleum and Denmark's DONG (Danish Oil and Natural Gas) Energy to Ørsted.<sup>15</sup>

What was much less discussed was how Statoil was also removing *stat* (state) from its name. In

the days that followed the announcement, I only saw one person mention this part of the name

change, a Labor Party politician named Torstein Tvedt Solberg (no relation to the prime

minister). Tvedt Solberg represents Stavanger, a city on the southwest coast that is the center of

the Norwegian oil industry. He mentioned the change in a public post on his Facebook page:

Statoil is becoming Equinor – is it April 1<sup>st</sup>???

We can't allow Statoil to abandon its history, and forget who owns them.

Because a name is important. Every morning thousands of people go to work at Statoil, in the name they're reminded of the history and the ownership. They go to work for the community, in the company that manages and develops values for everyone in Norway. But what does someone who works for Equinor do? A name that is more reminiscent of a private equity fund with its main office in Bærum...

The Conservatives and the Progress Party applaud the new name – the state is going away.

This name choice is no bagatelle, but an attack on Statoil's proud history and state ownership.

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<sup>15</sup> The second most common response was joking about how Statoil had had to buy the name Equinor from an Oslo veterinary center specializing in horses.

Therefore I believe it must be stopped. Do you agree, or do you like the name Equinor?<sup>16</sup>

While Tvedt Solberg is generally much more supportive of finding alternatives to oil than most politicians from Stavanger, that is not the part of the name change that worries him. Instead, he is concerned with the change from *stat*, a word that indexes the Gerhardsen chronotope of working for the good of the community through the state, to *equi*, a term that, for Tvedt Solberg does not index the English words equal, equality, and equilibrium, but instead another English word: (private) equity. His mention of Bærum, a municipality directly to the west of Oslo that is known for having the highest per capita income in all of Norway, adds emphasis to this vision of a company that could not be farther from Norwegian welfare democratic ideals of community solidarity. While some of the people who commented on the Facebook post agreed with Tvedt Solberg, the rarity of this kind of response suggests that green and sustainable discourses can be an effective distraction from shifts towards privatization.

### **Temporal Ironies of Sustainable Welfare**

The neighborhood of Tøyen is in a part of Oslo where the large majority of people are against the Conservative-led national government. Since the 2015 municipal elections, the red-

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<sup>16</sup> Statoil blir Equinor – er det 1. april???

Vi kan ikke tillate at Statoil forlater sin historie, og glemmer hvem som eier dem.

For navn er viktig. Hver morgen går tusenvis på jobb i Statoil, i navnet blir de minnet på historien og eierskapet. De går på jobb for felleskapet, i selskapet som forvalter og videreutvikler verdier for alle in Norge.

Men hva gjør en som jobber i Equinor? Et navn som minner mest om et privat equity fond med hovedkontor i Bærum...

Høyre og FrP applauderer det nye navnet – staten skal bort.

Dette navnevalget er ingen bagatell, men et angrep på Statoils stolte historie og det statlige eierskapet.

Derfor mener jeg det må stoppes. Er du enig, eller liker du navnet Equinor?

green Oslo coalition also positioned itself as a counter to the national government, and Tøyen is one of the places in the city where they have the strongest support. Yet, for most of the time I was in Oslo, bureaucrats, local politicians, and the staff of local community organizations were almost all operating under the logics of moving towards the kind of “sustainable welfare society” that Isaksen described, where the municipal government was giving local residents and private companies increased responsibility for providing and finding funding for services that many of my Tøyen resident interlocutors thought the government should have an interest in funding itself. In all of these cases, these municipal employees justified the withdrawal of public funding by opposing publicly funded projects from those that were sustainable.

For example, throughout my time in Oslo, the Tøyen Community Center was working towards achieving “sustainable operations” (*bærekraftig drift*). The space had opened in March 2017, after the Area Boost had spent 42 million NOK (about \$5 million) on renovations to the first four floors of an office building in the middle of Tøyen. The plan behind this project was that the Area Boost would fund the center for the first few years, but that eventually it would be able to cover its own expenses, including staff salaries and about \$500,000/year in rent, as the building is owned by a private property development company. This presented a challenge to the center’s employees, who struggled to find ways for the center, which serves an area with one of the highest poverty rates in all of Norway, to make money. Within the year that I would go there almost every day, they closed twice for about a month each time as they tried new organizational structures.

This restructuring would often come suddenly and with serious consequences for staff and the residents they served. While eating lunch with some of the center staff in the last week of November, I learned that Mona, who coordinated city-sponsored volunteer activities like a public

vegetable garden and neighborhood festivals, would have her last day of work the next day. I was shocked, since I had seen Mona just two days before and she had not mentioned she was leaving. The Tøyen Christmas Festival was happening the following weekend, and Mona was in charge of the set-up and other general logistics of the event. Yet her contract from the municipality was up, and they had not been able to find other sources to finance her position. As other community center employees planned her goodbye party, they expressed anxieties, not just about how long they would have their own jobs, but about what would happen to the people who relied on their services, which included public health initiatives and translation services for Somali and Arabic speakers, if their one-year contracts were also not renewed. This was a real fear, and when I returned to Oslo the following summer, I learned of at least one other person working for the district who had suddenly learned that her position would only be funded for one more month because it was not sustainable. Striving for sustainability had created conditions of short-termism and precarity.

Cymene Howe has argued that corporations developing wind parks in Mexico are able to leverage greater ecological moral authority than local fishermen because they are able to make claims at the planetary scale about the good of renewable energy, while the fishermen's concerns can be dismissed as "'merely' regional" (Howe 2014, 397). In Tøyen, sustainability encompasses similar moral authority, but the temporal scales are more important there than the spatial. Sustainable programs, and sustainable welfare more broadly, is at least in theory about preserving services into some undefined future. As a result, promises of future long-term sustainability have more weight than current, short-term precarity. However, the moral authority of the long-term over the short is not a given, and must instead be created through interactions between politicians, bureaucrats, and others within the neighborhood. One important site where

this tension between different temporal frameworks emerged was at the Tøyen and Grønland Local Advisory Board. This board, which I discuss in much more detail in Chapter 4, was a forum where representatives from Tøyen and neighboring Grønland approved decisions related to the Area Boost Program. A frequent topic throughout the fall meetings had been the sustainability of the initiatives created as a part of the Area Boost, and after November meeting, the resident representatives had stayed late to chat among themselves about what they thought the city, voiced through Pål, the city district manager, meant by this word “sustainable,” and why the city thought community services should strive to be so. At the December meeting, which took place a few weeks after Mona had lost her job, the board was discussing the sustainability of several neighborhood organizations that had partnered with the Area Boost. The original idea had been that, after one year of public support, these organizations would become economically sustainable, meaning that they no longer relied on public funding. However, none of the organizations in the partnership program had achieved this goal, and so the Area Boost was recommending extending the partnership for one more year. This led Nina, one of the Tøyen representatives on the advisory board, to express concerns around the kinds of assumptions the Area Boost and municipality were making when they called for sustainability.

#### Transcript 1.1

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Nina: Jeg synes det var en god idé å snakke med forskjellige medlemmer. For det er noe med hva ER bærekraftig– en bærekraftig organisasjon? Vi vet at mange fotballklubber IKKE er bærekraftig, for eksempel (laughs) | Nina: I think it’s a good idea to talk with different members. Because there is something about what IS sustainable– a sustainable organization? We know that many football clubs are NOT sustainable, for example (laughs) |
| 2 | Pål: Nei.   | Pål: No.  |
| 3 | Nina: Så det er noe med også være realistisk i forhold til hvor relevant– skal det– skal det være en mølle som går av seg   | Nina: So there is also something to being realistic in relation to how relevant– will it– will it be a mill that can run for  |

- SJØL etter tre år? Det var det ene (.) og så (.) for nå snakker du om et prosjekt på tre år og jeg synes det høres ut som et mye mer fornuftig perspektiv. Men det som står her, ett år pluss ett år– og det synes jeg var veldig kort tid for å tenke å få noe til å bli bærekraftig?
- 4 Pål: Men det bør jo, det ser=  
5 Nina: =ja det kan vi jo kanskje– prøve å justere, tenker jeg at det har vært en god– det er verdt det å tenke på (.) langsi– for det er jo det det etterlyser? Det er jo litt annet som den der det
- 6 Pål: Ja.  
7 Nina: Uh, den der det kortsiktigheten oppleves som en hemsko i forhold til fornuftig drift.  
8 Pål: Mmhmm. ((Arild))?
- itSELF after three years? That was one thing (.) and (.) because now you're talking about a project for three years and I think that sounds like a much more realistic perspective. But what's written here, one year plus one year– and I think that was a very short time to think of getting something to be sustainable?
- Pål: But it should, it looks=  
Nina: =yes that's something we can maybe– try to adjust, I think that it's been a good– that it's worth thinking about (.) long t– because it's what these call for? It's of course a bit different from that there.
- Pål: Yes.  
Nina: Uh, that that short-termism is experienced as a hindrance in relation to reasonable operations.  
Pål: Mmhmm. ((Arild))?

Nina challenges this idea of sustainability in two ways. She begins by questioning how realistic these calls for sustainability are, since there are no actual examples of organizations that have succeeded in achieving it. As she explained to me after the meeting, her mention of local football clubs was meant to remind the rest of the group that there has never been a history of these kinds of local organizations being able to fund themselves. Instead, if they were not publicly funded, they were generally funded by a wealthy private donor. Then, in turn 3, Nina asks the municipal employees to think more closely in defining the time scales on which they think of sustainability. The model had been to give organizations one year, and then, when none of them achieve that goal, to extend the deadline for another year. Yet that just created cycles of sustained insecurity, as at the end of each year organizations worried that they would not be able to continue. Pål at first tries to interject to say that the one year should be enough time to achieve

sustainability, but after Nina then interrupts him (turns 4-5), instead of responding, he instead calls on another representative, Arild, and the discussion moved onto a different topic.

Several minutes later, however, Pål returned to Nina's concerns. He was willing to accept that the one-year funding contracts might not be the best for creating "real sustainability," but he did not agree with her questioning of whether community services should aim be economically sustainable in the first place. He argued that the real issue was that this part of the city offers too many things "for free."

### Transcript 1.2

Pål: I tillegg så tror jeg det er utrolig viktig at vi uh vi kan gjør det i dette her domenet det å tenke gjennom ka vi gjør i den bydelen når det gjelder gratis tilbud (.) Fordi at vi (.) vi etablerer ekstremt mykje gratis tilbud. (.) For at vi— vi— det er umulig å bli bærekraftig hvis alt skal være gratis. Det— det er ikkje mulig. Det høres veldig fint ut at alt er gratis, men det er rett og slett ikke bærekraftig samfunnsmodell. Det— det— uh vi motsatt— hvordan skal jeg tenke inntektsutvikling i en organisasjon hvis det skal være bærekraft (.) Du kan ikkje både betale trenere og ikke ha avgifta for trening. Det må være— det er det jo sammenheng her. (.) Og det— vi må trener det samfunnet å rett og slett å være betalingsvillig. For det må vi ha jo penger. Og så kan det hende at noen kan slippe unna fordi de ikke har penger. Men alle— de kan ikkje etablerer (incomprehensible) som ikke er bærekraftig sa eg. Det er det vi gjør når vi etablerer alt gratis.

Pål: In addition, I think it's unbelievably important that we uh we can do that in this domain to think about what we do in this district when it comes to free offers (.) Because we (.) we establish an excessive amount of free offers. (.) Because we— we— it's impossible to be sustainable if everything is free. It— it's not possible. It sounds very nice that everything is free, but it's just not a sustainable societal model. It's— it's— uh we oppositely— how will I think revenue development in an organization if there is to be sustainability (.) You can't both pay trainers and not have fees for training. There has to be— there's a connection here of course. (.) And that— we must train society to simply be willing to pay. Because we have to have money. And it could happen that some people get out of it because they don't have money. But everyone— they can't establish (incomprehensible) that aren't sustainable, I say. That's what we're doing when we're creating everything for free.

Key to Pål's understanding of sustainability is the opposition he sets up between "sustainable" and "free." The programs that Pål describes as being "free," were in fact funded by the public Area Boost program. However, the Area Boost's funding was always supposed to be temporary, an envisioned temporality that resembles an NGO-led development project that just provides start-up funding (Ferguson 2015; Kremer and Miguel 2007; Scherz 2013; 2014; Swidler and Watkins 2009), more than a welfare state service. This funding model only officially applied to the new services that were a part of the Area Boost, which was always kept separate from the municipality's "permanent budget. Pål's mention of "trainers" points to how this new kind of funding was also aimed at a very different set of welfare services—fitness classes and activities instead of drug addiction services or mental health counselling, or "happy" things instead of "sad" things, as some middle-class, white neighbors described the distinction. Yet there was also a concern among many people in the neighborhood that this push for "sustainability" would move to more seemingly permanent welfare services eventually. At the same time as the Area Boost began, "permanent" funding to that district of Oslo had decreased, and social workers complained about how what they saw to be necessary support programs for people living in the neighborhood, like counselling, were being cut, while beautification efforts like public murals, and free yoga classes or afterschool programs popped up.

While Nina and the other local representatives thought that these kind of services should be paid for, if not by the state then at least by one wealthy donor, Pål had a different vision. He argued that "we must train society to be willing to pay" for their own services. He suggested that this idea of paying for services was not something that existed among Tøyen residents, but something that "we," by which he may either mean the Area Boost, or the Local Advisory Board, "must train society," with a view towards a future where citizens will be willing to pay



for services that they may have expected “for free” before. More than three times as many children live below the poverty line in Tøyen than in Norway as a whole, and unemployment rates, especially among residents of minority background, are much higher than the city-wide and national averages (Brattbakk et al. 2015), which is why so many children’s activities in particular are offered for free. Yet when advisory board members suggested that free activities were important for including the entire neighborhood, Pål and the other city employees present did not agree. Jorill, another employee who attended advisory board meetings, complained that the far-left Red party wanted to “create things that aren’t sustainable” because they rely too much on state funds, and that we instead need to “get parents to do something, not just the public sector.” Pål agreed, adding that when you have so many free activities you run the risk of creating a “parallel society” (*parallelt samfunn*), where in communities like Tøyen, with large migrant populations, everything is financed by the state, as opposed to other parts of the city, where parents pay for their children’s activities, or otherwise contribute through volunteer labor. In this understanding, “sustainability” is not just about economic self-sufficiency, it is also about creating a society based on forms of volunteer work and personal responsibility. This perspective did not just gloss over the fact that most people in Tøyen have less disposable income to spend on their children’s leisure activities. It also erased the fact that many of the Area Boost’s trial services were things that the average Norwegian would not have to pay for because they would not need them. For example, the very popular service that helped translate bureaucratic forms from welfare offices into Somali or Arabic was something that most Norwegians did not need.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> A difference that had serious consequences at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the government was slow to release public health guidelines in languages other than Norwegian and English. Some of the highest infection rates in the country were among Somalis living in Oslo, and in response a group of Somali-Norwegian women in Tøyen who worked

After speaking about how the city had to stop offering so many programs for free, Pål paused to take comments from the resident representatives. Nina reminded the group that the reason why many youth programs were free was to eliminate the stigma of one's peers knowing that your family could not afford to pay for them. Yusuuf, the other Tøyen representative, pointed out that the problem was not free programs, but that young people had trouble finding jobs. Employment was the real problem here—if young people had jobs, they would both no longer need so many activities to keep them busy, and they would have the money to pay for the activities they did take part in. Then Samira, a Somali-Norwegian university student representing the Grønland neighborhood and youth in both neighborhoods, raised her hand to speak next.

### Transcript 1.3

31 Samira: Uh dersom vi kutter ut uh gratis aktiviteter for dem så kan det være store utfordringer uh for mange å ikke ha den økonomiske stabiliteten. For de kunn– kunne ikke betale for ungen når de har flere søsken i en familiehusholdning. Uh så da lurer jeg på hvor ligger statistikken an? Uh med det med fattigdom før vi tar bort gratis tilbudet eller hvilke aktiviteter er det vi tenker er– skal være gratis og hvilke kan være (.) ikke gratis. Da er det jeg også lurer på fordi uh for meg så er det veldig vanskelig å uttale meg, “Ja, la oss gjøre alt gratis, nei la oss ikke gjøre alt gratis.” Fordi vi må sjekke hva vi har nå av tilbudet og hva som kunne vært aktuelt at folk betaler. Fordi jeg er helt enig at enhver mor kan betale 100 kroner fra uh ungen til– for å trene. Eller noe annet. Liksom, finne ut hvilken tilbudet er aktuelle at foreldrene

Samira: Uh if we cut out uh free activities for them [who live below the poverty line] there can be big challenges for many to not have that economic stability. Because they cou– couldn't pay for the kid when they have several siblings in the family household. Uh so I wonder where the statistics are? Uh for poverty before we take away free activities or which activities do we think are– will be free and which can be (.) not free. I also wonder about that because uh for me it's very hard to say, “Yes, let's make everything free, no let's not make everything free.” Because we must check what we have now of offerings and what could make sense that people pay for. Because I completely agree that any mother can pay 100 kroner from uh the kid to– for sports training. Or something else. Like, find out which offerings make sense that parents pay

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primarily as social workers, doctors, and nurses, began a voluntary Somali-language “Corona-telephone” service to share information with Somalis across the city.

betaler, og hvilken tilbuder er aktuelt at det skal fortsatt være gratis.

32 Pål: Uh bare for å si det og så (.) jeg tror bare at den bærekraft modellen skal utfordrer oss litt. Fordi at hvis alt blir gratis er det ikkje mulig å ha bærekraft. Og det— og det å arbeide sammen er inngangen i det norske samfunnet (.) og det er ikkje nødt å— hvis alt er gratis. Heh. Så her er noe sånn gordiske knuter som:

for, and which offerings make sense to continue to be free.

Pål: Uh just to say it (.) I just think that the sustainability model will challenge us a little. Because if everything is free it's not possible to have sustainability. And that— and working together is an entrance into Norwegian society (.) and that isn't necessary to— if everything is free. Heh. So here are some Gordian knots which:

Samira is concerned with the present moment and present needs, knowable through statistics, and through evaluating the programs that the city is offering for free *now* and in the neighborhood. In response, Pål performs what Jan Blommaert has called a “scale-jump..., in which...he moves from the local and situated to the translocal and general, invoking practices that have validity beyond the here-and-now” (2007, 6). Samira frequently uses first-person deictics and insists on looking at specific cases. Pål, however, after his first sentence (“the sustainability model will challenge *us* a little), moves from the specific case of Tøyen and Grønland to talking more generally about the effect of the sustainability model on “Norwegian society.” The construction he uses, where the subject, *det* (that) + the infinitive *å arbeide* (to work) is nomic, stating a general rule that applies to all people who may want to enter Norwegian society.<sup>18</sup> Bringing together that more generalized scale with his discussion of sustainability, Pål works to make a sustainable logic appear authoritative because it is just the common-sense way through which the advisory board should be considering the neighborhood. It is unclear if Pål is speaking about migrants finding formal jobs so that they can afford to pay

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<sup>18</sup> Pål's word order also emphasizes the subject by placing it at the beginning of the sentence. A more standard word order for infinitive subjects in Norwegian puts the subject at the end, which in this case would be: *Det er inngangen i det norske samfunnet å arbeide sammen.*

for their children's activities, or if, by "working together," he is instead imagining parents coming together to provide activities for their children. Either way, Pål is claiming that economic sustainability is about much more than activities for neighborhood children, but will push migrants to step up and take part of the collective responsibility for maintaining Norwegian society. Pål admits that this situation is complicated, a "Gordian knot," and charging participants or their parents for previously free activities would likely exclude many of the people Samira is concerned about, at least in the short term. But, from Pål's point of view, the short-term, local difficulties matter less than the long-term promise of sustainable welfare for Norwegian society as a whole. Pål's jump to this more generalized scale is also a way of easing the conflict between his vision of the best policies for the neighborhood and Samira's. His avoidance of concrete examples or the first-person allows him never to say he disagrees with Samira, but instead to shift perspectives, asking Samira, and the rest of the board, to try to see the larger picture with him.

### **Sustainability's Orders of Indexicality**

As sustainability gained authority within Tøyen, at least among municipal employees like Pål, it became significant at higher orders of indexicality within the neighborhood. "Indexical order" is a concept developed by Michael Silverstein to explain the dialectical relationship between (micro-social) face-to-face semiosis and (macro-social) ideological categories or types (2003). While norms and types inform the ways that signs are taken up in real-time interactions, those interactions also have a creative potential to remake those norms and types. Indexical orders come in ordinal degrees: first-order, second-order,  $n$ -th order,  $n + 1^{\text{st}}$  order. While at a lower order, sustainability discourses index a particular orientation towards the future, through

these discourses uptake by particular kinds of people within Tøyen and the rest of the city, the discourses themselves have taken on a higher order indexicality of being associated with a particular kind of Tøyen and Oslo insider. Developers working to brand the commercial areas of Tøyen have taken up these discourses to align themselves as insiders within the neighborhood, while at the same time also addressing themselves towards the resources associated with Oslo's position as 2019 European Green Capital.

The square in the middle of Tøyen underwent major renovations that culminated in 2018, and as a part of the reopening, the four development companies that owned the buildings around the outdoor plaza hired a consultant to rebrand the new "Tøyen Square." This consultant, Geir, spent the first few months he was employed speaking to business owners, municipal employees, and nonprofit leaders around Tøyen, and throughout the process he was quick to pick up on the ways these different kinds of insiders spoke about Tøyen, learning how to speak about his own project using their registers. We will see Geir again in Chapter 5, but here I want to point to the ways that sustainable discourses were a way for Geir to place himself in relation to the neighborhood, the city, and international, UN-sponsored projects. At a public meeting about the square's reopening, he introduced his vision for the square:

What our goal is I'll come back to in a moment, but basically, it's that we create an organization of the square that will last and be self-financing and that word, "sustainable." And [the actors] behind the project we've called "The Square Boost." Uh, there are many boosts in Tøyen, and the Square Boost is one of them.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Det som er målet vårt kommer jeg litt tilbake til, men det er i hvert fall at vi får på plass en organisering av torget som skal være selvfinansierende og dette ordet, bærekraftig. Og bak dette prosjektet som vi kalte for "Torgløftet." Uh, det er mange løft på Tøyen, og Torgløftet er ett av de.

Geir had met with initial resistance from some of the Tøyen activists and others working in the community center, who saw what he was doing as just an outsider coming in and making money off of the neighborhood, so his mention of “that word, sustainable” is no accident here, but instead an attempt to position his project as motivated by the same concepts as he saw as important to other projects in Tøyen. In the months that followed, Geir continued to try to align himself with these organizations, writing blogposts and newspaper articles about how they have taught him the importance of thinking about economic, environmental, and social sustainability. Using the word sustainable also situates his project as aligned with the city’s goals, which is further emphasized by the name he gave the project, *Torgløftet*, or “Square Boost,” which he explicitly connects to the other “boosts” occurring in the neighborhood, beginning with the state-sponsored Tøyen Boost. Register shibboleths like “sustainability” and “boost,” just like the Tøyen-branded gear he sometimes wears around the neighborhood, are all part of an effort to position himself as a kind of Tøyen insider. This positioning was not always successful within in the neighborhood, but Geir was frequently asked to speak about Tøyen at the municipal level, or even at international urban planning conferences, so his performance of a Tøyen insider was persuasive to some audiences.

Branding his project as sustainable is not only an attempt to align himself with Tøyen, it is also a way of situating his project within a larger UN-based project of sustainable urban development. At this meeting, and also in an interview with me, Geir connected his work to the UN Habitat report, *Placemaking and the Future of Cities*. That report lists “Ten Ways to Improve Your City,” the second of which is “Create Squares and Parks as Multi-Use Destinations.” This alignment with international organizations continued as the square reopened and scheduled family-oriented events like “Sustainability Day,” which took advantage of the resources the city

has as the 2019 European Green Capital. In branding this space in the center of Tøyen as a sustainable square, Geir directly invoked authoritative UN discourses and the resources associated with them.

In Blommaert's analysis of scale-jumping within discursive interactions, he identifies "scale-jumping triggers" (2007, 9)," or words that, just through their use, can index a speaker's categorical political position within longer histories, not just their position in the context of that one interaction. "Sustainability" is one such word. When a Norwegian politician invokes it, they are indexing not only histories around of environmentalism, international development, and the authority of the UN, but also Norway's, and especially Gro Harlem Brundtland's, particular place as a leader within those histories. When Pål spoke about the need to create sustainable programs, he shifted the conversation in the local advisory board from how to address current problems, to how to create what he at least sees as a better social order for Norwegian society into the future. Geir, who frequently described Tøyen Square as "tomorrow's square" (*morgendagens torg*), had a similar temporal outlook. Yet Geir was also jumping spatial and institutional scales, speaking about sustainability as a way to align with what he understood to be the neighborhood's political commitments and the city's funding interests in the year that Oslo was the European Green Capital. Blommaert argues that these scale-jumping triggers are "intertextually asymmetrical" because their intertextual relationship to historical context varies depending on who is hearing them. He uses the example of the word "slavery," arguing that it evokes a different history for an Afro-Caribbean person than it might for a white British person. With "sustainability," the different intertextualities do not come from the listener's positionality as much as from what the listener perceives the positionality of the speaker to be.

When I returned to Oslo for a few weeks in summer 2019, I noticed that people seemed more wary of calls for sustainability, often using words like “long-lasting” (*langsiktig*) or “predictable” (*forutsigbar*) instead. Yet it was not only the term itself but also who was speaking. At a debate at the Tøyen library before the 2019 municipal elections, the representative from the Socialist Left (SV) spoke about how municipal programs in Tøyen would have “sustainability over time” (*bærekraft over tid*) because they could be financed by the new property taxes the left-coalition municipal government had created. On hearing this, the Conservative (H) representative jumped in.

#### Transcript 1.4

41 H: Skal jeg bare spørre at uh jeg– forrige debatten vi hadde så sa jeg at jeg mente tiltakene burde være bærekraftig. Da fikk jeg beskjed at dette betydde budsjettkutt. Eh men når SV brukte ordet bærekraftig så burde vel han også få den samme tilbakemeldingen?

42 SV: Nei.

H: Shall I just ask that uh I– the last debate we had I said that I thought the measures should be sustainable. Then I got a message that that meant budget cuts. Eh but when SV used the word sustainable so shouldn't he also get the same feedback?

SV: No.

Judging from the audience's response, they agreed with the SV representative, that he could talk about sustainability without meaning he was talking about budget cuts. His use of the word was not judged to be an invocation of the sustainable-welfare-as-privatization stance that it was when the Conservatives used it. This was primarily due to his position as a member of the Socialist Left, which is known to be a party that is particularly concerned with preserving the Gerhardsen version of welfare, based in public funding and social solidarity. SV further reinforced this positionality by speaking about sustainability in connection to taxation, a policy where social programs will be financed by a continuous income source, not the oil. Because of the audience's



assumptions about each of these people, they would take up the same register shibboleth in very different ways.

These opposed political parties have both grafted a logic of sustainability onto discourses around government funding. Both were imagining futures where there would need to be new funding models to finance welfare services, and thus assuming that the continuation of the welfare state into the future would have to account for limits. Yet the new funding models each party was calling “sustainable” were diametrically opposed. For the Conservatives, sustainability meant privatization and individualized self-sufficiency, while SV spoke about sustainability in terms of increased taxation on the wealthy. This exchange in the basement of the Tøyen library was one instance of likely many when representatives from the two parties fought over who would be able to claim the authority that sustainability has for their own party platform. Except in this case, H realized that she was in a part of Oslo where it was unlikely many people in the audience would vote for her party. This area had even outright rejected her party’s claim to authority through sustainability at a previous debate. So she was trying to at least bring down her opponent and deny his party’s access to that authority as well. H was erasing the different ways in which each party was taking up this register in hopes of discrediting a popular political party.

The asymmetries of how actors variously invoked these kinds of register shibboleths, like sustainability, points to a confusion I experienced frequently throughout my fieldwork, where it might sound to me, or to another listener, like two people were saying the same thing and using the same register, while another set of listeners, while acknowledging that they were using many of the same words, did not think these people were not saying the same thing or were tokens of the same person-type. In this example, the two political representatives did not sound like they were saying the same thing to most of the audience. H however, tried to create a moment of

confusion to challenge SV's authority in the neighborhood. As we will see in other chapters, this same kind of confusion around different lexical items served different purposes, like an attempt to smooth over conflicts. Other anthropologists have remarked on the ways that the semantic variability of salient lexical items, like "solidarity," are what allow for unexpected, and often uncomfortable, resemblances between seemingly opposed political projects (Holmes 2000; Muehlebach 2012). Yet as is the case for "sustainability," these words did not automatically "signal...political...coherence across right and left" (Muehlebach 2012, 194). Instead, attempts to create political coherence are a fraught process that only succeeds from some perspectives.

## **Conclusion**

As I have shown, discourses about sustainability, a concept derived from planetary concerns about the supply of natural resources, are now also organizing debates about the future of the Norwegian welfare state. These discourses have particular authority in the Norwegian context because of their association with Norwegian leadership in "good" international institutions like the UN. They challenge the temporal promises of a temporally limitless welfare state that can rely on the profits of the oil fund's investments, and instead reimagines welfare as something that all citizens must contribute to, either financially or through volunteer labor, in order for it to survive. Although "sustainable welfare" may have the most support on the political right, its logics inform policies even in some of the most socialist areas of Oslo, and scale-jumping through taking up these discourses is still a strategy that municipal employees use as they work to legitimate policy decisions, albeit with mixed success.

As several of the examples above suggest, calls for "sustainable welfare" are not only motivated by concerns about the long-term viability of Norwegian oil wealth, but are also closely

tied to concerns about a national population that is much more ethnically, religiously, and economically diverse than it was during the welfare state's peak following World War II. The next chapter explores how public discourses use the neighborhood of Tøyen to frame foreign migration as a threat to the Norwegian state's future, and how some Tøyen residents are twisting standard boundaries between kinds of people and ways of speaking, to create a different, more inclusive Norwegian future.

## CHAPTER 2

### “NORWEGIAN CONDITIONS”? AXES OF DIFFERENTIATION AND TØYEN IN THE NORWEGIAN NATIONAL IMAGINATION

Popular American explanations of why the US does not have the same kind of welfare state as Scandinavia often hinge on the argument that the Scandinavian welfare model only works in small, homogenous societies. This assumption also circulates in Norway, and, along with climate change and the decline of the oil industry, increased immigration is frequently pointed to as a challenge to the welfare state and a barrier to sustainability. Reasons why immigration is seen as a threat to the welfare state vary, from statistics of how unemployment rates are higher among foreign migrants than among white, “ethnic Norwegians,” to culturalist arguments about how newcomers do not share the same values of trust and solidarity on which the welfare state relies. Most commonly, these narratives come from the political right and circulate around migrants from outside Europe and North America.

However, throughout my fieldwork, I also heard parallel discourses at the same time coming from people who would identify as being on the political left about a different kind of foreign threat to the Norwegian welfare state. This threat comes from a more cosmopolitan, consumer-oriented lifestyle, which increased oil wealth has given many Norwegians access to. While Norwegians, along with other Scandinavians, continue to proclaim their adherence to the “Law of Jante” (*Janteloven*),<sup>1</sup> which declares that no one is special or better than anyone else, some interlocutors have also lamented to me how much more conspicuous consumption they

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<sup>1</sup> The Law of Jante (*Janteloven*) originally came from a Danish novel written by Aksel Sandemose in 1933. It is well-known throughout Scandinavia.

witness in Norway, and how quickly economic divisions are growing in the country. In Oslo, salient signs of this kind of foreign influence include the trendy Michelin-starred restaurants and minimalist cafés that have sprung up over the past 10–20 years.

For outsiders, led by the national news media,<sup>2</sup> the neighborhood of Tøyen has become a key site for both of these kinds of foreign “threats.” After some historical context on Tøyen as a place of migration, I turn to a documentary about the neighborhood that presents these perspectives. I choose to look at the documentary for two reasons. First, its premiere at the local public library branch and the responses over the next week were one of the tensest moments of my fieldwork. Second, while most media accounts of the neighborhood focus on one kind of foreign threat or the other, this documentary is different in that its argument rests on a comparison between the two, and an implied “real Norwegian” audience. Through an analysis of the documentary and responses, both from people in the neighborhood and more broadly on social media, I show how perspectives about Tøyen index national anxieties around the ways Norway is changing as it becomes more ethnically diverse, as a larger proportion of the population moves to cities, and as wealth inequalities grow.

I then turn to placing Tøyen within Oslo, a city that for hundreds of years has been seen as “foreign” in relation to the rest of Norway, and how the neighborhood fits within what has historically been the most important axis of differentiation within the city, that is between east

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<sup>2</sup> Thanks in large part to government subsidies, Norway has a relatively large number of media platforms for a nation of its size: there are seven major daily national newspapers, in a country with a population of just over 5 million. It is not uncommon to have a subscription to more than one, and there is frequently a public debate taking place in the opinion-editorial sections of several newspapers simultaneously. Many of these were originally founded by various political parties and, even if the parties no longer actively control them, you can still see their influence in the perspectives of the different papers.

and west. While some residents see what used to be a spatial division between two sides of the city being reproduced fractally within Tøyen itself, others play with traditional boundaries between east and west to create something entirely new.

Throughout this chapter, and in the rest of the dissertation, I am interested in the ways in which Tøyen is taken up as a part of scalar projects (Tsing 2000; Carr and Lempert 2016), and the ways different actors use scaling practices like comparison as part of their “everyday world-making” (Swanson 2013, 49). I am interested not in arguing for some “essence” or “reality” of the neighborhood, but in the ways different actors use the neighborhood to advance various, often conflicting, ethico-political projects.

This chapter’s attention to the scalar projects and axes of differentiation (Gal and Irvine 2019) at work when thinking about the neighborhood is also an attempt to move beyond the standard ways migration is discussed, both in the Norwegian public sphere and in the migration studies literature, which almost always equate the foreigner with the migrant, a frequently racialized figure opposed to the citizen (e.g. Besteman 2016; Brettell 2006; De Genova 2002; Malkki 1995; McKowen and Borneman 2020; Reed-Danahay and Brettell 2008; Vertovec 2007; Wikan 2001). As Marianne Gullestad has argued, in Norway in particular the word “immigrant” (*innvandrere*) “has become a stigmatizing way of labeling ‘them’ ...based on ‘Third World’ origin, different values from the majority, ‘dark skin,’ a working-class background” (Gullestad 2006, 175). As a result, many of the people frequently categorized as “immigrant” in Oslo were born and spent their entire lives in Norway. Instead of assuming the foreigner is always this figure of the immigrant, in the first half of this chapter, I show how the figure of “the foreigner” is not a monolithic given, but instead representations of the neighborhood take up different kinds of foreign to make a claim about a projected Norwegian future. My approach to the foreign is

complementary to anthropological work that challenges the assumption of the foreigner as enemy Other (Honig 2001; Ticktin 2017) and attends to the semiotic processes through which kinds of people are categorized as foreign, or as belonging, while others are not (Chu 2006; Dick 2011; Fikes 2009; Ong 2005; Paz 2018; Yeh 2018). In so doing, I hope to avoid what Gullestad (2002) has identified as a frequent shortcoming of well-intentioned academics' attempts to analyze forms of difference in Norway: perpetuating the very "invisible fences" between "Norwegian host" and "immigrant guest" that they were attempting to break down.

In the second half of this chapter, I trace how my interlocutors within the neighborhood attempt through their speech practices to break down traditional divisions between insider/outsider, foreigner/Norwegian, and Eastsider/Westsider, to create a heterogenous "we." As I will then show in subsequent chapters, my interlocutors do not see this aspirational Norwegian "we" as a threat to the Norwegian welfare system, but instead as an asset that strengthens social bonds between neighbors and creates the conditions for a fairer and more inclusive society. Taken together, the two parts of this chapter show how processes of comparison and differentiation project potential futures of the Norwegian nation and the kinds of ethical relationships Norwegians should have with their neighbors.

### **Tøyen as a place of migration, from Swedes to Somalis**

Throughout my fieldwork, I rented a room in a two-bedroom apartment in the iconic *Gråbeingårdene* (Wolf Apartments), sturdy brick buildings that had been built in the 1880s-90s for working class families—the name comes from a popular epithet to describe that time in Oslo as the "wolf times" (*ulvetider*). At least from my experiences of finding places to live in Tøyen, it seems to be fairly common for single women in their late 30s to rent out their extra bedrooms as

an extra source of income that helps with mortgage payments and bathroom renovations, although I think most prefer short-term AirBnB guests to having an American anthropologist move in for 18 months. However, it was fairly uncommon in 2017 to find shared housing in that apartment complex, where most inhabitants were white Norwegians, with a few southern Europeans and North Americans, living alone or as families with small children. Apartments in this complex were highly sought after, and during the time I lived there sold for about 3.5 million NOK for two-room apartments (about \$500,000 in 2018), or 5-6 million NOK (\$700,000-\$850,000) for three rooms.

In their first century, however, the apartments had not been so luxurious. Before major renovations in the 1980s, the buildings had been broken into much smaller apartments of one room and a kitchen, with communal toilets in the hallway.<sup>3</sup> During those renovations, the Oslo Museum acquired one of the old apartments and restored it to how it had looked in 1900, when a Swedish family who had come to Oslo to work in the nearby factories lived there. On a tour of the apartment with a dozen of my neighbors in 2018, the museum docent was eager to draw comparisons between that family and other labor migrants to Oslo at the time, and the many East African families living in Tøyen today. She told us that Oslo Norwegians frequently called Swedes “dark” and “dirty,” racialized adjectives commonly heard to describe African migrants. She also told us how, until the 1980s, apartment advertisements would sometimes say that Northern Norwegians would not be considered, pointing out that Somali families in Tøyen currently often struggle to find landlords who will rent to them. The difference between us living in our nice apartments in the Gråbeingårdene and the refugee families down the street, the docent

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<sup>3</sup> Tone Huse (2011) describes this urban renewal project and the resulting turn over in who lived in the *Gråbeingårdene* in detail.



was suggesting, was mainly temporal. Many of my neighbors seemed to agree with her, and as our visit ended the conversation moved into sharing stories their grandparents had told them about what life in Norway was like when the country was still relatively poor.

Through framing the tour in these terms, the museum docent provided a counter-narrative to the dominant version of Norwegian history that immigration is something relatively new, having begun when Pakistani guest workers arrived in the 1970s as the Norwegian economy rapidly expanded following the discovery of oil in the North Sea. Many of this first wave of Pakistanis also lived in Tøyen and neighboring Grønland when they first arrived in Norway, and while they and their children have generally moved to other parts of the city, there is still a visible Pakistani influence in the neighborhood. Looking out of the window of the museum apartment, you can see a Pakistani grocery, two Pakistani restaurants, and a bakery specializing in Pakistani sweets. Many of the landlords on the private rental market are also Pakistani-Norwegians who used to live in Tøyen and have held onto their apartments there. The visible remains of these successive waves of migration, sometimes literally stacked on top of each other, reinforce this temporal understanding of otherness.

More recently, this image of Tøyen as a place of working-class migration has been coupled with the neighborhood as a place of welfare state assistance. The largest office in the country for the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV), which administers unemployment, disability, pension, and childcare benefits, sits on the corner of Tøyen Square. Tøyen also has some of the highest rates of people living in public housing in all of Norway, even after many public housing blocks were sold to private owners since the Tøyen Agreement in

2013.<sup>4</sup> Both of these institutions make clearly visible both Tøyen's relatively high unemployment rate and the rate of children living in poverty. While many of the current public housing residents have hopes for their children, they doubt that they personally will be able to move up socially as previous waves of migrants have done, because, as they see it, public assistance programs create a "poverty trap," where families stop receiving benefits and housing subsidies as soon as they make enough money to start saving to buy their own homes. As a result, it makes more financial sense for many families to keep their incomes low, often meaning one parent remains unemployed, so that they can continue to live in public housing.

Most recently, the newest wave of arrivals to Tøyen are coming from much closer by, just the other side of Oslo. Unlike in the rest of Scandinavia, the Norwegian real estate market is largely unregulated, and housing prices have surged in the past decade. As other "hip" central neighborhoods, like nearby Grünerløkka, a neighborhood that has become a metonym for gentrification for many of my interlocutors, have come to be out of reach for most people, Tøyen has come to be the next popular place to live. Many of the apartments in Tøyen are small for Oslo standards, with only one bedroom, so they primarily attract young people who do not have children. However, the only way that apartment ownership is possible in central Oslo for most young people is if their parents are able to provide substantial financial support, and the people most likely to have these kinds of parents come from the wealthier areas of Oslo, on the Westside. Yet, just because these new arrivals have traveled less far physically and for very

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<sup>4</sup> This was the agreement where in exchange for moving the Munch museum to the fjord, the neighborhood would receive increased public funding. In the first few years following the Tøyen Agreement, many public housing buildings were sold and the inhabitants were moved to other parts of the city, however that practice has stopped following public outrage over how many long-term residents were being forced to move.

different reasons than other new residents arriving in Tøyen, that does not mean they are any less out of place. A Pakistani-Norwegian friend enjoyed telling me stories about his wealthy university acquaintances who moved to Tøyen while I was living there, but “just didn’t know how to live on the Eastside,” afraid to be surrounded by so many people who do not look like them. Although some come to fully embrace life in the neighborhood, many of these newest arrivals do not remain in Tøyen long, moving to nicer suburbs when they start to have children.

### **“Norwegian Conditions”**

November 14, 2017 was the first major snow storm of the year, but that didn’t stop over 100 people from crowding into the basement of the local branch of the public library for the premiere of *Norske tilstander* (Norwegian Conditions), an episode of the investigative series *Brennpunkt* (Focus) that is broadcast by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) (Sunde 2017). The documentary would air an hour later on television and is available for online viewing indefinitely. Yet as the director explained when she introduced the film, many of the teenage boys the documentary was about had only agreed to participate if she promised there would be a premiere party.

I had arrived at the library over an hour early, but already almost all of the seats downstairs were taken, by teenaged boys, their parents, other neighbors, city employees, a journalist, and a well-known public intellectual. I found a seat squeezed between a group of Somali-Norwegian women in their 30s on one side, and a white Norwegian woman who was about the same age on the other. All of us lived nearby, and several of the women worked for local social organizations. Some of the municipal employees in the audience were on edge, because a preview of the documentary’s argument that teenagers’ challenges were the fault of the

city's mismanagement of funds had been released on NRK's website earlier in the day. Yet for the most part it was a warm atmosphere, and we chatted and took photos as we waited for the event to begin. The mayor of Oslo arrived, and shortly after that the screening began, 15 minutes before the starting time that had been advertised on Facebook because the room was already at capacity.

Interest in the documentary was not limited to the neighborhood, and for the rest of my fieldwork, when I told someone I was working in Tøyen, they would frequently ask, "Did you see the *Brennpunkt* documentary?" followed by some sort of evaluative statement about the situation in Tøyen. I was always amazed at the range of people who had seen it, many of whom I doubted had spent much time (if any) in this neighborhood themselves and yet had formed strong opinions about the place. I was also amazed at how long-lasting its influence was, with people continuing to mention it over a year after it aired.

Although there were several factors that contributed to the documentary's popularity, in this chapter I will focus on the way that it crystalized fears of a "foreign threat" to Norwegian society. It is not new for the news media to frame Tøyen as a foreign place. However, these perspectives, whether to praise diversity or criticize Norwegian immigration policies, usually treat that foreignness as one-dimensional, where various stereotypes, like "exotic" spicy smells, images of dark streets and hooded young men, or pictures of Somali women wearing jilbabs, focus on the Tøyen as a neighborhood filled with primarily Muslim migrants from the Middle East and Africa. What makes *Norwegian Conditions* different is that it brings together several different kinds of "foreignness," making an argument through stark contrasts between them. These include stereotypes of Muslim migrants, but also the figure of the cosmopolitan, anglophone "hipster." The documentary title, *Norwegian Conditions*, also indexes a more

proximate foreign: Sweden. The phrase “Swedish conditions,” which originated in right-wing discourses, has since been taken up by a wider group to refer to a kind of situation presumed to exist in neighboring Sweden, where the “naïve” Socialist government has allowed too many foreign migrants to enter the country, overwhelming the welfare state and creating foreign “ghettos” with high poverty and crime rates in all major Swedish cities. Through a comparison of foreign Muslim migrants and foreign hipsters, the documentary is arguing that Tøyen, and, by extension Norway, is also facing this chronotope of “Swedish conditions.”

### The Boys

The documentary had been advertised as telling the story of Tøyen’s youth in their own words, and most of the hour-long film focuses on a soccer club for teenaged boys growing up in Tøyen. As the director told me several months later when I got the chance to interview her, she was interested in hearing from these young people themselves about their lives.

#### Transcript 2.5

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | Janet: Jeg bare lurte for å begynne som– hvordan dere kom på å lage dokumentare– denne dokumentaren. Var dere interessert i Tøyen? Eller ungdom? Eller?  | Janet: I just wondered to start like– how did you come about making the document– this documentary? Were you interested in Tøyen? Or youth? Or?   |
| 2 | Director: Nei:, ja altså eg var– eg var interessert i ungdom. Og så: var eg interessert i hvorfor ingen snakka med ungdommen. Hvorfor det alltid var noen som snakka FOR ungdommen, spesielt politiet. Og politiet var jo veldig proaktive en periode med å uh snakke om gjengkriminalitet og den type ting. Um eg sier gjengkriminaliteten men hvis du minner så altså at det var mye uroligheta i området. Så uh og da: så MITT formål det var jo at uh hvis man skal uh altså | Director: No:, yes so I was– I was interested in youth. And I was interested in why no one was talking with the youth. Why it was always someone speaking FOR the youth, especially the police. And the police were of course very proactive a while with uh speaking about gang-related crimes and that kind of thing. Um I say gang-related crime, but if you remember there was a lot of uneasiness in the area. So uh and then: so MY aim was that uh if one will uh that is if, if one will in a way (.) if it is so that there is a |

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|----|--|--|
|    | hvis, hvis man skal på en måte (.) hvis det er sann at det er mye trøbbel, så må jo ungdommene sjøl da, hvem uh hvorfor– hvorfor hører vi ikkje noe fra dei? Hvorfor snakker ikkje til dei? Det meiner eg. Ja mmhm. Så det var mitt mål. Jeg ville snakke med ungdommene å få tilgang og det var vanskelig | lot of trouble, so the youth themselves must of course then, who uh why– why don't we hear from them? Why not talk to them? That's what I think. Yes mmhm. So that was my goal. I wanted to speak with the young people. Getting access was difficult          |
| 3  | Janet: Ja det  | Janet: Yes, that   |
| 4  | Director: mmhmm  | Director: mmhmm  |
| 5  | Janet: Og var det, var det alltid Tøyen ungdom? fordi det er også, man høre også litt om trøbbel andre steder, eller?  | Janet: And was it, was it always Tøyen youth? Because there's also, one also hears about trouble other places, or?   |
| 6  | Director: Men akkurat DEN perioden=  | Director: But at exactly THAT period=  |
| 7  | Janet: =å ja=  | Janet: =oh right=  |
| 8  | Director: =det er når eg gikk inn i problematikken så var fokuset veldig lite: og så nå er det jo mye sånn større fokuset men da var jo fokuset veldig på (.) sentrumsområdet i Oslo. Det var Grøn–Grønland og Tøyen som var fokusert på da i veldig stor grad av politiet                                 | Director: =When I went into the problematic the focus was very little: so there is much larger focus now but then the focus was very much on (.) the center of Oslo. It was Grøn–Grønland and Tøyen that were focused on to a very large degree by the police. |
| 9  | Janet: Ja  | Janet: Yes   |
| 10 | Director: mmhm   | Director: mmhm   |
| 11 | Janet: Ja ok ja politiet.  | Janet: Yes ok, yes the police.   |
| 12 | Director: mmhm   | Director: mmhm   |

The director made clear that she was not only interested in young people, but specifically in the young men who were a part of a wave of gang-related crimes that had been reported in the media in the preceding months. For viewers who may have missed this media focus, the documentary includes archival footage of it early on, arranged in small boxes on screen and with overlapping voices of news reporters to give a sense that violence in Tøyen is ubiquitous.



Figure 2.1: Still from *Norwegian Conditions* (Sunde 2017).

After setting the scene, the documentary begins to follow a group of teenaged boys, ages 16-18, who belong to a neighborhood soccer club. All of them have parents from the Middle East or Africa, although many of them have grown up in Norway. As one boy sings on the way to a match, “Some are from Somalia to Gambia to Zambia. We are multicultural, but we get it done!”<sup>5</sup> They speak Norwegian throughout, with the prosodic patterns typical of the stigmatized youth register generally thought of as influenced by the languages of foreign immigrants (Svendsen and Røynealand 2008). As the documentary continues, we learn that most of the boys also live in small, cramped apartments in public housing blocks in Tøyen, and that they joined this club because it has much lower membership fees than any of the other youth soccer clubs in the city because most coaches work as volunteers and it receives some public funding. Many of

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<sup>5</sup> Noen er fra Somalia til Gambia til Zambia. Vi er flerkulturelle, men vi får det til!

the boys have been involved in the “violent episodes” frequently discussed in the media, as both convicted perpetrators and victims.



Figure 2.2: Boys on the soccer team walking down the street in *Norwegian Conditions* (Sunde 2017).

The documentary places some of the blame for why these boys struggle on Norwegian society. The volunteer coach, Mohammed Fariss, explains that the boys’ living situations mean there is nowhere they can be alone, so they spend most of their evenings with friends outside on the street. At the same time, the boys see how many others their age in Oslo have new iPhones and other consumer products, and want to have the same, but their parents cannot afford to buy them for them, and few of these boys have jobs. Fariss explains how both of these factors make boys easily recruited into selling illegal narcotics.

At the same time, the boys feel alienated from the country where they live. One of the boys, Hamse, explains this feeling, flipping back and forth between “the Somali” and “the



Norwegian” perspectives, which I illustrate by organizing the transcript with the Somali perspective on the left, the Norwegian on the right, and Hamse as someone from Tøyen’s perspective in the middle.

#### Transcript 2.6

When I travel to my homeland and such they take me for Norwegian there, you understand.

But when I’m here I’m Somali, understand.

Because over there they see that I’m coming with Norwegian cl—, not Norwegian clothes, but they— that I don’t have any scars or anything on my face

so they think at once, “him there he’s Norwegian.” And so they think, “Just go away, joker, you’re Norwegian.” You understand?

And so now I’m here and it’s, “Yes, he’s dangerous he’s Somali. He’s not white,” you understand.

But I like to show that we— that we other people from Tøyen aren’t bad people. So I try to prove them wrong. For example when I meet old people and such I try to smile, you understand.<sup>6</sup>

Hamse flips perspectives several times throughout this interview, both “here” in Norway and “over there” in Somalia, showing how he is seen as foreign from each of them. He voices imaginary speakers in each place, both of whom tell him he does not belong. In Somalia, not having scars on his face mark him as foreign and Norwegian. In Norway, not being white mark

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<sup>6</sup> Når jeg reiste til hjemlandet og sånt så tar de meg for norsk der, skjønner du? Men nå jeg er her så er jeg somalier skjønner du. Fordi der borte de ser at jeg kommer som norske kl--, det er ikke som norske klær da, men de—at jeg ikke har noe arr eller noe på ansiktet så tenker de med en gang han der han er norsk. Og så tenker de, “bare gå av, din tulling. Du er norsk.” Skjønte du? Så nå jeg er her så er det, “ja han der er farlig, han er somalier. Ja han er ikke hvit,” skjønnte du. Men jeg liker å vise at vi—at vi andre mennesker fra Tøyen er ikke dårlige mennesker. Så jeg prøver å motbevise dem. For eksempel når jeg møter på gamlinger og sånn så prøver jeg å smile, skjønner du.

him as foreign and Somali. This feeling of not belonging anywhere is common among children of migrants all over the world, and Hamse describes it through a metricalized structure, switching back and forth between Somali and Norwegian perspectives, mirroring the voicing of an imagined Somali speaking to him in the second person with an imagined Norwegian speaking about him in the third person. In both imaginations he is alone against an imagined plural other. This opposition changes when he concludes with an inclusive, plural first person “we other people from Tøyen,” scaling up his personal experiences of being told he’s foreign to a collective group of people who, not belonging to any nation, at least belong to the neighborhood. They are all “other people,” out of place in more standard understandings of national belonging.

*Norwegian Conditions* works to evoke sympathy in the audience towards the teenaged boys. This was an easy project among the premiere audience, made up of these boys’ friends and families, but the majority of viewers were the general Norwegian public, whose only knowledge of the neighborhood is likely the media reports of crime that the documentary addresses at the beginning. As I tracked the fall-out from the documentary, I was frequently reminded of Catherine Fennell’s discussion of *There Are No Children Here*, a bestselling book about growing up in public housing on Chicago’s west side (2015). Although it is too soon to know if *Norwegian Conditions* will have the same long-lasting impact as that book, what was the same is how it opposed children and teenagers to neglectful government officials to evoke sympathy from a much broader national public. This is not surprising in Norway, where children have long been a powerful symbol of Norwegian nationalism—the Norwegian Constitution Day celebrations every May 17 center around a children’s parade, which Norwegians frequently contrast to the military parades on national holidays in many other European nations. Norway also has a reputation for accepting many unaccompanied refugee children, although this

humanitarian concern does not always extend to teenagers and young adults, as demonstrated in a controversial policy to send Afghan refugees who had arrived in Norway in 2015 back to Afghanistan as soon as they turned 18, which for many was in fall 2017.

However, a stark difference between the Chicago book and *Norwegian Conditions* was that, while sympathy in the Chicago case relied on creating the sense that “people like me” live in public housing, the boys in the Norwegian documentary were still portrayed as being very much Other from the imagined, “typically Norwegian” white audience. While the director seems to be trying to evoke sympathy for these boys through her narrations and the way she has edited interviews, the style of the documentary does the opposite and perpetuates negative stereotypes of young Muslim men as poor and dangerous, which are common across Europe (cf. Ewing 2008; Kleinman 2019). For example, the boys were almost exclusively filmed at dusk or night, and outdoors. When I asked the director about this, she told me that that was just because the boys were only free in the evenings after school. This is also related to the filming schedule. While it appears to be late winter-early spring in the scenes with the boys, later scenes with other people in Tøyen appear to have been filmed around June, when there is much more daylight in Oslo. While there is one scene with two young men that, from the leaves on the trees behind them, seems to have been filmed later in the spring when there would have been more daylight, that entire scene has a blue tint to it that matches the other night scenes. When I asked, the director told me that had been to make the documentary have a more “cinematic” quality to it, and that the different light and colors did not have any sort of meaning. Yet regardless of whether it was intentional, the visual style equates the boys with their surroundings, evening streetscapes and a soundtrack of eerie instrumental music that crescendos into the noise of sirens or Swedish or English-language rap. This is another European trope, what Nitzan Shoshan in his work with

young right extremists in Berlin has called a “territorialization of alterity” (2008, 383). Sights, sounds, and smells within the physical landscape of the city acquire a strangeness equivalent to the people living there, and these qualities then appear to be an inherent part of the places themselves.



Figure 2.3: Overhead night shot from *Norwegian Conditions* (Sunde 2017).

As with all scalar projects, the filmmakers’ representation of Tøyen involved many erasures (cf. Gal and Irvine 2019). First, the idea that all young men of color in Tøyen are involved in crime. This is of course not the case, and rumors abounded among adults and other teenagers surrounding the ways the filmmakers had selected the young men they followed. Although the documentary had been advertised as being about youth in Tøyen, something that everyone I heard from immediately remarked on was that there were no girls in the film. The soccer club profiled also includes a girls’ team, and many of them attended the premiere at the

library, but there is no mention of them in the documentary itself. The director later said that she regretted not having been clearer earlier that this was a story about boys. Yet their absence allowed many far-right groups and media outlets to support claims that Muslim girls in Norway are victims of social control and not allowed to leave home.

The documentary also includes none of the boys' parents, although I knew parents who had been interviewed. The only adult present in the boys' story is the soccer coach, and the only mention of their parents comes from an interview with two of the boys, as they stand on a darkened street corner. They had been explaining how they have no one to pull them out of cycles of crime and violence, when we hear the director's voice off-camera, ask them about their parents.

#### Transcript 2.7

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | Director: Men du sier at det er ingen som, ingen gode som hjelper dokke. Hva med, hva med foreldrene dine da?  | Director: But you say that there's no one who, no one good who helps you [pl]. What about, what about your parents then?  |
| 2 | Hamse: Foreldrene hjelper, men som sagt foreldrene er ikke: (.) De hjelper da men, å, hva skal jeg si?   | Hamse: The parents help, but that said parents are no:t (.) They help but, oh, how should I say it?   |
| 3 | Rami: Nei, du, jeg vet hva du prøver men, jeg vet hva han mener. Foreldrene våres er ikke (.) som (.) For eksempel nordmenn. Nordmenn, de er som– som begge foreldrene viser empati og tenker, “ja, ok, barna mine, ok vi må sette en plan om hvordan vi skal ha det.” Vi har ingenting, foreldrene våres tenker at vi, eller, ja, “De på Tøyen er bra unger. Bra barn. Bra ungdommer.” Men de vet ikke hva som ligger bak det. Hjemme de er englebarn, men ute. | Rami: No, hey, I know what you're trying but, I know what he means. Our parents are not (.) like (.) For example Norwegians. Norwegians, they are like– like both parents show empathy and think “yes, ok, my kids, ok we have to make a plan about how we're going to have things.” We have nothing, our parents think that we, or, yeah, “They in Tøyen are good young people. Good kids. Good youths.” But they don't know what lies behind that. At home they're angel kids, but outside. |

This scene was upsetting for many of the migrant parents living in Tøyen. There are some parents in the neighborhood who may not be as engaged with their children's lives as a

stereotypical white Norwegian parent, often because they are dealing with mental and physical health issues related to experiences they had before arriving in Norway as refugees. However, there are also many parents who are actively concerned about their children's future. One Somali father, for example, would attend most of the city-sponsored participatory governance workshops I describe in Chapter 4, to push politicians on creating better job training and employment opportunities for his teenaged children and their peers.

The filmmakers did interview parents they met through a connection at one of the nearby mosques, but as the director told me, that “wasn't their focus” and so none of those interviews made the final cut. Yet the omission also, whether purposively or not, allowed for the perpetuation of far-right, anti-immigrant stereotypes of migrant parents as irresponsible people who have more children than they can handle and rely on others to raise their children, as for example this Facebook user expressed in a comment on the documentary series' Facebook page in the days following the release.

Parents have to engage themselves in their young people. If one's going to have many kids, one can't just expect that it's the public's task to entertain and take care of all of these kids? All these young people who go around without offerings have parents. These parents must engage themselves and make an offering,<sup>7</sup> just like is happening elsewhere around the country, where voluntary work makes a variety of offerings for kids and young people. Scouts, 4H, sports teams, chess clubs, etc. It can't just be the public sector that will solve the problems of free time. It's not uncommon that parents have to join in as leaders for a variety of offerings so that the kids can participate.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Tilbud*, which I am translating here as offering, is being used here to mean an activity or opportunity. In other contexts, the same word can be used to mean a bid, estimated cost, or a deal when an item is on sale.

<sup>8</sup> Foreldrene må engasjere seg i ungdommene sine. Hvis man skal ha mange barn, så kan man vel ikke bare forvente at det er det offentliges oppgave å underholde og passe på disse alle barna? Alle disse ungdommene som driver rundt uten tilbud har foreldre. Disse foreldrene må engasjere seg og lage et tilbud, slik det foregår rundt om i landet ellers, hvor dugnadinnsats lager diverse tilbud for barn og unge. Speidere, 4H, idrettslag, sjakkklubber osv. Det kan ikke være bare det offentlige som skal løse fritidsproblemene. Det er ikke uvanlig at foreldre må stille som ledere på diverse tilbud for at barna skal få delta.

This argument that parents need to be stepping up and taking care of their own children resonates with Pål's arguments in the previous chapter about why the city cannot provide unlimited free programming. It also rests on the assumption that Norwegian society relies on voluntary work, and that migrant parents' inability to understand that is indexical of a perceived inability to integrate into Norwegian society, a topic that I explore in more detail in the next chapter.

Tøyen residents are used to being under close scrutiny from extreme-right organizations. The neighborhood is one of several places in Oslo that these organizations frequently invoke. Two months before the documentary aired, for example, the publicly funded, anti-Islam organization Human Rights Service,<sup>9</sup> posted a series of photos taken of veiled women standing at bus stops, most of which were in Tøyen. These photos, which were generally taken by HRS members without the knowledge or consent of the women in them, were a part of the organization's narrative that the leftwing parties are allowing a Muslim "invasion" of Norway. A year into my fieldwork, a Somali-Norwegian woman grocery shopping with her young child was suddenly attacked by a white woman, whom it later came out did not live in Tøyen and it seems had come to the neighborhood for the specific purpose of harassing Muslim residents. The attacker tried to rip off the Tøyen woman's hijab, so forcefully that she also dislocated the woman's shoulder. In response, the municipal government named the district of which Tøyen is a part a "racism-free district," but what consequences that actually has were questioned almost exactly one year later, when the resolution was not able to stop the organization "Stop the Islamization of Norway" (Stopp Islamiseringen av Norge, SIAN), from holding a demonstration in the middle of Tøyen Square—although counter-demonstrators far-outnumbered SIAN. The

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<sup>9</sup> See Bangstad (2020) for a history of far-right media in Norway.

documentary director told me that she was not responsible for all of the ways her reporting might get taken up, but the ease at which the far-right could take up the documentary to support their own claims concerned many residents and pointed to the director's outsider perspective on life in Tøyen.

### Another Other: White Gentrifiers

About halfway through the hour-long documentary, the focus and the style shift. Instead of following a group of boys as they walk through dimly lit winter streetscapes, we find ourselves in the middle of the bright, sunny Tøyen Square in summer, where young, white “hipsters”—the English word has been borrowed into Norwegian—and the mayor herself sip espresso at the “Tøyen Work Bar,” a newly opened café. This might seem fairly Norwegian to a North American audience, the light wood reminiscent of iconic mid-century Scandinavian design, and lattes a part of the *hygge* craze from the mid-2010s. But in fact, this kind of lifestyle is newer to Oslo than the Pakistani grocery that has been down the street from Tøyen Square since 1991. Restaurants and these kinds of espresso bars and cafés were fairly uncommon in Oslo until the late 1990s, and this practice of conspicuous consumption of a “cosmopolitan” lifestyle, inspired by continental Europe, New York, and San Francisco, has noticeably increased even since I first lived in Norway in 2012.





Figure 2.4: Tøyen café scene as shown in *Norwegian Conditions* (Sunde 2017).



Figure 2.5: Shot of Tøyen Square in *Norwegian Conditions* (Sunde 2017).

Although it did not come up in the documentary itself, these cafés also highlight the anglophone aspect of Oslo hipsterdom. As the name “Work Bar” suggests, many of these places have English names and are staffed by young and hip migrants from elsewhere in Europe who do not speak Norwegian. While 10 years ago, café staff were primarily Swedish labor migrants speaking “Sworsk,” Swedish-influenced Norwegian, after the value of the Norwegian kroner dropped following the 2014 oil crisis, many of the Swedes working in service positions in Oslo returned to Sweden, and their jobs were frequently taken by the Southern Europeans who have been coming to Norway in larger numbers since the 2007 economic crash. These Southern Europeans often do not speak any Scandinavian language, and so service interactions take place more and more in English. At the same time, central neighborhoods like Tøyen also attract a cosmopolitan clientele of highly educated foreigners, who also tend to be much more comfortable speaking English over Norwegian.

The Tøyen Work Bar is an especially anglophone space because it is affiliated with the Tøyen Startup Village, a public-private partnership whose goal when it opened in 2015 was to turn Tøyen into the “Silicon Valley of Norway.” It offers office rentals to entrepreneurs, and the Work Bar hosts networking sessions for entrepreneurs that are open to the public. Throughout Oslo, these kinds of higher end coworking spaces privilege English. For example, at one of TSV’s networking seminars that I attended, panel speakers were chastised for switching into Norwegian, even though it seemed as though most people in the room were more comfortable speaking Norwegian than English, and some of what people said sounded a bit odd to my American ear, like a reminder posted on the Facebook page the morning of the event, that told us, “ If you have not registered yourself and you are willing to attend, you have some hours left!”

Following shots of the café and interviews with white passersby about how they feel about the changes in Tøyen, the scene shifts to a real estate open house. The genre also changes dramatically here, resembling an advertisement more than a documentary, with panning shots of the immaculate apartment. Instrumental music so cheery it's almost cartoonish plays in the background. As the real estate agent lays out cupcakes and plumps pillows, apartment hunters, who are entirely white Norwegians, begin to arrive. Yet just as the average white Norwegian café-goer is a mix of the Norwegian and the foreign cosmopolitan, these apartment hunters bring together the foreign and the typically Norwegian in ways that are both comical and unsettling. For example, large bearded man at an open house eats a cupcake, which is an American borrowing—“real” Norwegians would stick with waffles or cardamom-flavored buns—in front of a print of “Bridal Procession on the Hardangerfjord,” painted by Adolph Tideman and Hans Gude in 1848 and one of the most famous examples of Norwegian romantic nationalism.



Figure 2.6: Potential apartment buyer eating a cupcake in front of “Bridal Procession on the Hardanger Fjord” on *Norwegian Conditions* (Sunde 2017).

The real estate agent serving the cupcakes repeatedly uses the ingressive backchannel [ja:↓], which is probably the most “typically Norwegian” sound there is, and which the primarily Somali-Norwegian audience at the premiere thought was hilarious. These scenes seem to be meant to make uncomfortable young white urban Norwegians who are hipsters themselves, maybe also having recently moved into a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood like Tøyen. At the same time, they allow other white Norwegian viewers to distance themselves from what is happening in Tøyen. The growing social inequality in Norway can be blamed on the self-centered, consumerist hipster’s let-them-eat-cupcakes attitude, not on a “real” Norwegian. This view emerged in the weeks following the documentary’s airing, as conservative politicians flocked to the underserved soccer club, erasing how they had not given the club much of any attention in the preceding 40 years they had governed the city.

One of the most controversial arguments in the documentary is that the state-led urban revitalization “Tøyen Boost” program is responsible for gentrification. The Work Bar café where the director interviewed the mayor is not technically a part of the state sponsored Tøyen Boost because it is funded by private organizations and does not receive money earmarked for the Boost. This was a boundary that the municipal staff I knew firmly policed: when cafés and restaurants would apply for funds to host neighborhood-oriented events, they would always be denied, with the response that funding was for local community groups, not commercial for-profit businesses. Yet many private companies have also taken up the municipality’s language of “boosting,” leading to a blurring in public discourses between what is receiving public funding and other developments happening in the neighborhood. Even the mayor of Oslo defines the Tøyen Boost in much broader terms. As she tells the documentary’s director, it includes for her anything “positive,” that has happened, is happening, or will happen within Tøyen. Although she and her staff clarified this point later, her broad definition allows the filmmakers to put all of the responsibility on gentrification and other forms of inequality on her and the leftist political position she represents.

The connection between the state and these gentrifiers is reinforced through the visual style. The mayor and city employees are filmed in the same bright summer sunlight as the cupcake-eating, espresso drinking hipsters. They all live in the same world, separate from the dark, shadowy world of the boys in the soccer club. There is also a suggestion that they believe that boys’ world no longer exists. As the real estate agent says, “If you look at the 90s, there were a lot of gangs and a lot of trouble, but it’s not like that anymore.”<sup>10</sup> The filmmakers immediately

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<sup>10</sup> Hvis du ser på 90-tallet det var jo mye gjenger og mye bråk, men det er ikke det lenger.

cut to shot of a dark exterior street and the sounds of young men shouting at each other, suggesting that the agent is out of touch with reality. Similar cuts while politicians and other municipal employees, all of whom are white Norwegian women, are speaking suggest they are similarly clueless. The dramatically different styles of these cuts also suggest that these two kinds of people exist in differently imagined timescapes, with city employees and hipsters living in the same bright, sunny world, separate from the dark, shadowy streets of the soccer club.

Just as the portrayal of the boys erased many other kinds of people of color living in Tøyen, this picture of Tøyen's white residents was also an over-simplification. The private equity firms who own many of the commercial buildings in Tøyen, including the building housing the community center, are never mentioned. As some residents pointed out later, it is their choice to rent their spaces to “sushi, scones, and cocktails,” as one wrote, instead of more free amenities, like the public library. Aside from a brief mention of the police, the documentary also erases most of the other public institutions that have a stake in Tøyen. The Area Boost, for example, has no control over the condition of public housing. That is instead controlled by a municipally owned corporation called Boligbygg, who, although they were at the center of a corruption scandal shortly before the documentary aired, are never mentioned.

Aside from these institutions, the documentary also depicts all white Norwegian Tøyen residents as incoming hipsters, looking to buy bright apartments now that the neighborhood is no longer dangerous but “super-trendy,” as the real estate agent describes it. While this could describe many of the white, middle-class people in their 20s and 30s living in Tøyen, it also ignores the relatively large number of community organizations that have been started, primarily by parents, by people living in Tøyen from all backgrounds, which I will return to later in this chapter.

Just as the portrayal of the soccer team allowed extreme right organizations to perpetuate stereotypes, the portrayal of everyone else as an unconcerned white hipster allowed for an uptake from the city's rightwing, although this came from a more moderate center-right. Within days of the documentary's airing, the Oslo Conservative Party visited the soccer club. The Liberal Party invited the boys to Parliament. A local real estate developer donated money to the club for new jerseys. These actions particularly irked the primarily white, left-leaning local activists I spoke to, who pointed out that most of the issues the documentary raises, including poverty, unemployment, and the inequalities surrounding gentrification, are far more the responsibility of those groups than the white Tøyen residents and the Area Boost Program.

#### A third foreign: "Swedish Conditions"

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, something that set *Norwegian Conditions* apart from other media representations of the neighborhood was not the use of either of these stereotypes on their own, but the way the filmmakers brought the two together to make a larger argument. Framing the neighborhood through this dichotomy of dark and potentially dangerous young men on one side, and somewhat ridiculous white politicians and hipsters on the other allowed the filmmakers to make another comparison, this one between Norway and Sweden. The title, *Norwegian Conditions*, is a reference to the phrase "Swedish conditions" (*svenske tilstander*), which has become a common expression over the past few years in Norway. It was originally popularized by far-right politicians, in particular the former immigration minister Sylvi Listhaug, to refer to a presumed situation where liberal immigration policies have led to dangerous "no-go-zones" and high crime rates. Although some people are critical, throughout

my fieldwork I frequently saw the media take the concept up as truth, where the question was more whether or not Norway had “Swedish conditions,” not if the phrase was valid in itself.<sup>11</sup>

“Swedish conditions” is thus a chronotope (Bakhtin 1981) made up of two complementary figures: the dangerous, unintegrated, generally male Muslim migrant, and the feckless, naïve, white politician whose liberal immigration policies let in more people than the country can handle. In editing the documentary, the filmmakers bring out these Swedish comparisons. The soundtrack for the scenes with the soccer club, for example, is frequently Swedish rap music. Several viewers who commented about the film afterwards on social media mentioned the “Rinkeby aesthetic” of the exterior street scenes, Rinkeby being a heavily mediatized area in Stockholm that has a reputation across Scandinavia for poverty and violence among its majority Muslim immigrant population. Only a few months before the documentary’s release, Sylvi Listhaug had traveled there, uninvited, for an anti-immigration campaign event for the Norwegian national election. The politicians in Tøyen are not portrayed with any tropes that are recognizably Swedish, at least to me, but they are portrayed as bumbling and naïve, not always thinking about the consequences of some of their decisions or being unsure if the programs the city offers are actually being used. This characterization was pointed to by many of the people I spoke to outside of the neighborhood, as well as being a target of responses to the documentary on extreme-right websites.

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<sup>11</sup> The phrase “x Conditions” has been indexicalized at an even higher order as a dangerous way of dealing with ethno-racial difference that Norway should not emulate. For example, Norwegian people of color who have tried to popularize Critical Race Theory in Norway as a way of explaining their everyday experiences as targets of racism have been chastised by the political right as trying to import “American Conditions” of racism into Norway.



It is unsurprising that, in trying to understand its own situation, Norway would look to Sweden, a country that many Scandinavians often call Norway's "older brother" (*storbror*). This relationship goes back at least to the period between 1814 and 1905, when Norway was forced into a union with Sweden, and the fact that until Norwegian oil exploration in the 1970s, Sweden had a much stronger economy with more developed urban centers. The popularity of "Swedish conditions" as a way to speak about migration policies indexes how migrants from outside of Europe have not entered a fixed nation, but instead are incorporated into a centuries-old comparative relationship between Norway and Sweden.

This framing of two kinds of foreign, the racialized male migrant and the cosmopolitan hipster, through the third foreign of "Swedish conditions," allows the filmmakers to make an argument that is not really about or for Tøyen, but is instead about larger anxieties about foreign threats to a Norwegian future. While the narrative that increased ethnic and religious diversity is a threat to the forms of solidarity on which the Norwegian welfare state relies was not new at the time, the directors add that the growing number of anglophone cosmopolitan consumerists are also a threat, and that the imagined Swedish present could become Norway's future. This narrative complicates the more standard assumption that the sole "foreign threat" to the Norwegian national community and welfare state comes from increased "non-Western" migration.

### **Placing Tøyen within Oslo**

While there were people in Tøyen who liked the documentary, and even critics would always say they were glad the boys at the soccer club had gotten the chance to tell their stories to the Norwegian public, one group of Tøyen residents was probably the most upset about the

version of the neighborhood that had been presented. This group, which was erased from the documentary's depiction of Tøyen, was the so-called "Tøyen activists" or "Tøyen patriots." Although this is a broad category with several factions, the core group of these "patriots" are in their late 20s through 40s and parents of children who go to the local public elementary school. While many are white Norwegians, who grew up all over Norway, this group also included Norwegians with Somali or Middle Eastern background, many of whom themselves grew up in Tøyen, as well as migrants from other parts of Europe. The interlocutors I got to know best during my fieldwork were generally a part of this group. In the rest of this chapter, I describe a salient axis of differentiation for many of them, between the more laid-back and accepting "east" and the snobbish and homogeneous "west."

Several Tøyen activists argued that one of the worst things about *Norwegian Conditions* and some of the media follow-up was the way it tried to divide neighbors. As one activist, Lars, wrote on his Facebook in the following days, "The reason that I'm reacting so strongly is that the Tøyenish cohesiveness and the community across background, economy, living conditions, and everything is our most important capital."<sup>12</sup> This vision of Tøyen as an idealized multicultural haven, frequently called "Tøyen village" (*Tøyenbygda*) to highlight the strong feelings of community, was shared among many of these activist interlocutors, either as an already existing fact, or an achievable goal. While people like Lars have been accused as being "Tøyen Cheerleaders," closing their eyes to any sort of conflict or negative portrayal of the neighborhood, people like Lars were concerned about who would benefit from exposing conflict. Of course the neighborhood was not as rosy a place as many Tøyen patriots sometimes described

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<sup>12</sup> Grunnen til at jeg reagerer så sterk er at det tøyenske samholdet og felleskapet på tvers av bakgrunn, økonomi, boforhold og i det hele tatt er vår viktigste kapital.

it to be, but as Lars and others I spoke to in the days and months following pointed out, framing Tøyen's conflict as being about migrant boys against all white Tøyenites frequently seemed to benefit right-wing groups that were not interested in the kind of community solidarity the Tøyen activists were trying to build. For them, the political project of showing the rest of Norway that immigrants and ethnic Norwegians could live together was important enough that they were willing to downplay public discussions of conflict.

Although this image of Tøyen as a caring village is very much a kind of “global village,” where people from all over the world come together and live side by side, for many local activists, this idea of a warm and accepting Tøyen village is also in close opposition to the cold, snobbish, and homogeneous west side of Oslo, whose residents in the minds of many of my interlocutors are afraid to come to a diverse place like Tøyen. The most salient axis of differentiation in Oslo, arguably since the city's modern development in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Andersen 2014; Myhre 2017), is between the bourgeois westside and working-class eastside. The division is commonly seen to be along Aker River, which runs through the middle of the city. These divisions deepened when non-European migrants began arriving in the city in the 1960s and would largely move into eastern neighborhoods. Anthropologists (Andersen 2014) and eastside residents (Kriznik 2015) have argued that westside and eastside residents live in separate “worlds,” rarely traveling to the other side of the city. Subway lines are frequently used as a tool for discussing this division, for example through a comparison of the median income of households around each station on the line. In 2017, for example, an art installation called “We are Oslo” was installed along Line 2 that included facts about a station on the opposite side of the city and an interview with someone who lived near that other station. The entire installation became an exhibit at the Oslo City Museum the following year.

The difference between the two sides of the city is perceptible in architecture, sports preferences, where people spend their leisure time, politics, and language, as described in the following chart:

Table 2.1: City-Wide Stereotypes Associated with East and West Oslo

<b>East</b>	<b>West</b>
Working-class	Bourgeois, “Snobs”
Diverse, multicultural	White
Apartments in housing blocks	Single-family villas
Plays hockey and soccer	Plays bandy and goes cross-country skiing
<i>Østmarka</i> (East Woods)	<i>Nordmarka</i> (North Woods)
Votes for Labor, Socialist Democrats, or Reds	Votes for Conservatives or Liberals
Speaks “street” ( <i>gate</i> ) or “ <i>harry</i> ” <sup>13</sup>	Speaks “pretty” ( <i>pen</i> )
“Radical” language that includes:	“Conservative” Dano-Norwegian language
-a suffixes	No feminine grammatical gender
Diphthongs, especially /ei/	Monophthongs, especially /e/

The east/west divide in Oslo of course involves erasures. Critics, generally westside residents with right-wing politics, are quick to point out that there are economic differences within neighborhoods that are greater than many of the differences between the east and west. However, semiotically we can see these neighborhood-internal differences as the fractal recursion (Irvine and Gal 2000) of this same differentiation between east and west. This east/west divide within Tøyen has become especially visible in the past few years as housing prices have soared, the neighborhood has gentrified, and more young people from the westside

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<sup>13</sup> Most cities in Norway distinguish between a “pretty” upper-class sociolect and a “street” working-class one. Another way of describing the qualities of the eastside working class is *harry*, which means something like tacky, tasteless, vulgar, or unsophisticated. The word is most commonly used when speaking about *harrytur* (*harry* trips) to buy cheaper meat, sugary foods, tobacco products, and alcohol across the border in Sweden. These trips are also very popular among Somali people living in Oslo, who buy meat in Sweden because of the lower prices and because there are more halal butchers there. In the weeks before Eid, I would see the Munch museum parking lot in Tøyen would be filled with busloads Somali-Norwegians unloading large quantities of meat and soda they had purchased in Sweden.

are moving in. This has not broken down the east/west divide, but it has changed its spatiality. As a white Norwegian local activist I interviewed, Mads, told me as we sat in his living room:

So it's a bit like this. If you go to K7 [a public housing building] and to that playground and such, and then you go up to Tøyen Square, it's like two different worlds there now. A parallel society actually. Uh and like the youth now, they— their life situation is completely different than I don't know where (.) that is they must share a bedroom with three others and here I'm sitting, right? And you have something as concrete as that, this apartment building here, right, here are people who are doing well, a nice courtyard. And then you have them there, [they] have a completely other living situation. So it— so seen like this you have (.) I feel it's maybe like a sort of change in Oslo more generally that— there is always talk about east/west, but uh now you see east/west within the small ar— that is between here and there.<sup>14</sup>

As he spoke, Mads gestured between the “here” of his living room in the one-bedroom apartment he owns and lives in by himself, and the “there” of the public housing block across the street. If you just looked at a map, you would think that we were sitting on the east side of the street and the public housing building was on the west side, but the actual cardinal directions are not important to Mads. Instead, he positions himself as living in a building in the “west” because it is filled with the kinds of people who “are doing well” and have “a nice courtyard,” while the other side of the street is the “east” because they live in a “completely different world:” not only do they get their own apartment, they must share a bedroom with three other people. He sees this same “east” and “west” distinction also replicated fractally in the largest public housing block in Tøyen, K7, and Tøyen Square, which is filled with hip restaurants, bars and cafés. Again, K7 is

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<sup>14</sup> Så det er litt som. Hvis du går K7 og på den lekeplassen og sånn, og så går du opp på Tøyen Torg det er som to forskjellige verden der nå. Parallelt samfunn egentlig. Uh og sånn som de ungdom nå, de— dems livssituasjon er helt annerledes enn jeg vet ikke hvor (.) altså de må dele soverom med tre andre og her sitter jeg da, ikke sant? Og du har den så konkret som den, den gården her ikke sant, her er det jo folk som klarer seg fint, fin bakgård. Og så har du de der, har en helt annen bosituasjon. Så det— så sånn sett så har du (.) det føler jeg kanskje litt er en sånn endring i Oslo mer generelt at— det er alltid snakk om øst/vest, men uh nå ser du øst/vest innen av de små om— altså (.) mellom her og der.

just across the street, to the south of Tøyen Square, but in the way Mads plays with the distinctions, it becomes equivalent to the “east.”

While people who grew up in East Oslo, like Mads, might doubt the ability of white Norwegian newcomers to become “real” Eastsiders, some of these newcomers feel as though they have changed, especially in their way of speaking. During my time living in Tøyen, I joined a yoga group that met weekly for classes in a building in the neighborhood. The other members were almost entirely white Norwegian women in their 20s and 30s, almost all of whom lived around East Oslo, with a few living in Tøyen. About once a month a group of us would have a drink at a nearby bar after class. Members were from all over Norway, and, as is often the case in such social situations between casual acquaintances, the conversation one of these evenings turned towards the different ways people said things in their dialects. Several of the women agreed that their speech had changed since they moved to East Oslo, and that, in particular, they had started to use far more “-a endings” than before.

“-a endings” refer to a definite singular suffix -a used for one inflection class of Norwegian nouns. It is commonly associated with feminine gender, although Norwegian morphologists are divided as to the exact relationship between grammatical gender and inflection classes (Enger 2002). Yet linguists tend to agree that the feminine indefinite article *ei* is disappearing in Oslo in favor of the masculine/common gender article *en*.<sup>15</sup> Regardless, the -a suffix is extremely salient among Norwegian speakers. Typically, people from Western Oslo, like Danish speakers, do not have this suffix, but instead have a binary distinction between common gender and neuter:

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<sup>15</sup> With the exception of *ei litta* (Fløgstad and Eiesland 2019; Opsahl 2017).

Table 2.2: Definite Articles in Western Oslo

common gender	<b>bilen</b>	‘the car’
	<b>solen</b>	‘the sun’
neuter	<b>huset</b>	‘the house’

In Eastern Oslo, however, as well as in many other parts of rural Norway, there is a three-way distinction, commonly described as masculine, feminine, and neuter:

Table 2.3: Definite Articles in Eastern Oslo

masculine	<b>bilen</b>	‘the car’
feminine	<b>sola</b>	‘the sun’
neuter	<b>huset</b>	‘the house’

Since the -a suffix is so indexical of living on the East Side, it is unsurprising that some newcomers, striving to show off their new East Side affiliation, would overproduce it. For some older Norwegians, this overproduction has led the suffix to take on a higher order level of indexicality. In the fall of 2018, a new bridge opened across the Aker River, at the edge of Tøyen. The naming of the new bridge, *Sundtbroa* (Sundt Bridge) caused a small stir on a popular Facebook group for people interested in urban development issues in Norway.<sup>16</sup> There are two alternate spellings of “bridge” in Bokmål,<sup>17</sup> *bro* and *bru*, and almost all of the other bridges over this river are officially named *bru(a)*, a spelling more indexical of the East Oslo sociolect. The other reason the bridge’s name caused some controversy is that, since *bro* is indexical of West Oslo speech, while dictionaries say the definite form *broa* is “correct,” it is much less common than *broen*.

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<sup>16</sup> This group of over to 9,900 members as of February 2020 is made up of city employees, researchers, local activists, and developers. Although it is described as being for all of Norway, most of the posts are about Oslo. I joined this Facebook group when I realized that several of my interlocutors were a part of it and that Tøyen was a common topic of discussion.

<sup>17</sup> There are two Norwegian orthographic standards. Bokmål, the more common, is closer to Danish and based on the Norwegian used by the Oslo elite. The other, Nynorsk, is based on rural Western Norwegian dialects.

One middle-aged white Norwegian man, Øyvind, who told me when I got in touch with him later that he lives “near Tøyen,” replied to an article another member had posted about the bridge’s opening:

A bridge [*en bro*] – the bridge [*broen*]. And a bridge [*ei bru*] – the bridge [*brua*] was the rule at one point. But gender cross-cutting is in fashion. In Hipster Norwegian it could just as well be called *bruen* or preferably all forms interchangeably. Salad is *Sundt* [a pun on the name of the bridge—*sunt*, a homophone, means healthy]!

But they’re safe in the Bokmål dictionary

[link to dictionary entry for *bro/bru*]

I say *brua* and all of Oslo’s other bridges [*bruer*] are called -*brua*. The nearest, Nybrua, is from 1828 and must have been called “Nybroen,” but only on paper – and on Oslo’s West side. Nybrua, Ankerbrua, Beierbrua have been incorporated into written language since the 1950s<sup>18</sup>

For Øyvind, mixing these forms is indexical of a hipster, who does not have roots in one side of the city over the other, and instead mixes the two variants without following the established rules, creating a kind of fashionable “salad.” Øyvind realizes that, according to the dictionary, *broa* should be acceptable, but for him what is more important is the more locally grounded division between *broen* and *brua*.

I sent Øyvind a message to ask him about his post and to elaborate on what he considered to be “Hipster Norwegian.” He replied:

Hehe Hipster Norwegian was an expression I found in the moment... I don’t know if I really know anything about hipsters’ language. But I am just interested in language and development at the same time as I am old enough to feel that I react to language being washed out into mushy formlessness and meaningless use of English. Lost without urban

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<sup>18</sup> En bro - broen. Og ei bru - brua var regelen en gang. Men kryssklipping av kjønn ligger i tida. På hipsternorsk heter det like gjerne bruen eller aller helst alle formene om hverandre. Salat er Sundt!

Men de har sitt på det tørre i Bokmålsordboka

<https://ordbok.uib.no/perl/ordbok.cgi?OPP=Bro...>

Jeg sier brua og alle andre Oslos bruer heter -brua. Den nærmeste, Nybrua, er fra 1828 og må ha hett "Nybroen", men bare på papiret - og på Oslos vestkant. Nybrua, Ankerbrua, Beierbrua er innarbeidet i skriftspråket siden 50-tallet



dictionary at the same time as entries there only rarely give a precise explanation of something<sup>19</sup>

Øyvind brings together the “mushy formlessness” of mixing affixes with the “meaningless use of English,” both of which he also associates with hipsters. Øyvind, who suggests he’s older than most of the white Norwegian “hipsters” living around him, expresses his dissatisfaction with the rootlessness of the way his younger neighbors use language. I never spoke to anyone else who had such explicit awareness of these linguistic differences, and when I asked Mads about Øyvind’s comment, he told me he thought hipsters in Tøyen spoke “a little too prettily” (*litt for pent*), indexing their westside influences. Yet I did hear from many of my white Norwegian neighbors, even those I did not see as “old” (some were in their mid-thirties), who identified themselves as disconnected from the typical white Tøyen resident because they were too old, meaning not “hip” enough, for the bars and restaurants opening around them.

### **Speaking Tøyensk**

While this way of speaking may appear to be “mushy formlessness” to a listener like Øyvind, to many of my interlocutors this lack of adhering to traditional grammatical rules had more positive connotations, and I would sometimes hear people describe it as speaking *tøyensk* (Tøyenish). This would include, for example, comments about the signs that were often hung up in the community center (see Figure 2.7). These signs were written by someone who worked in the building, in a mixture of Nynorsk and Bokmål, two Norwegian orthographic standards,

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<sup>19</sup> Hehe hipsternorsk var vel et uttrykk jeg fant på der og da... Jeg vet ikke om jeg egentlig kan noe om hipsteres språk. Men jeg er bare interessert i språk og utvikling samtidig som jeg er gammel nok til å føle på at jeg reagerer på at språket vaskes ut i grøtaktig formløshet og meningsløs bruk av engelsk. Fortapt uten urban dictionary samtidig som oppslag der bare unntaksvis gir presis forståelse av noe

which are not generally mixed. While riding the elevators where these signs would be posted, I would frequently hear confusion and questions of “what language is that?” followed by the half-joking reply, “*Tøyensk?*”<sup>20</sup> The adjective *tøyensk* could also refer to other things that crossed traditional boundaries, for example, popular music that seems ethnically ambiguous could be labeled as *tøyensk*.

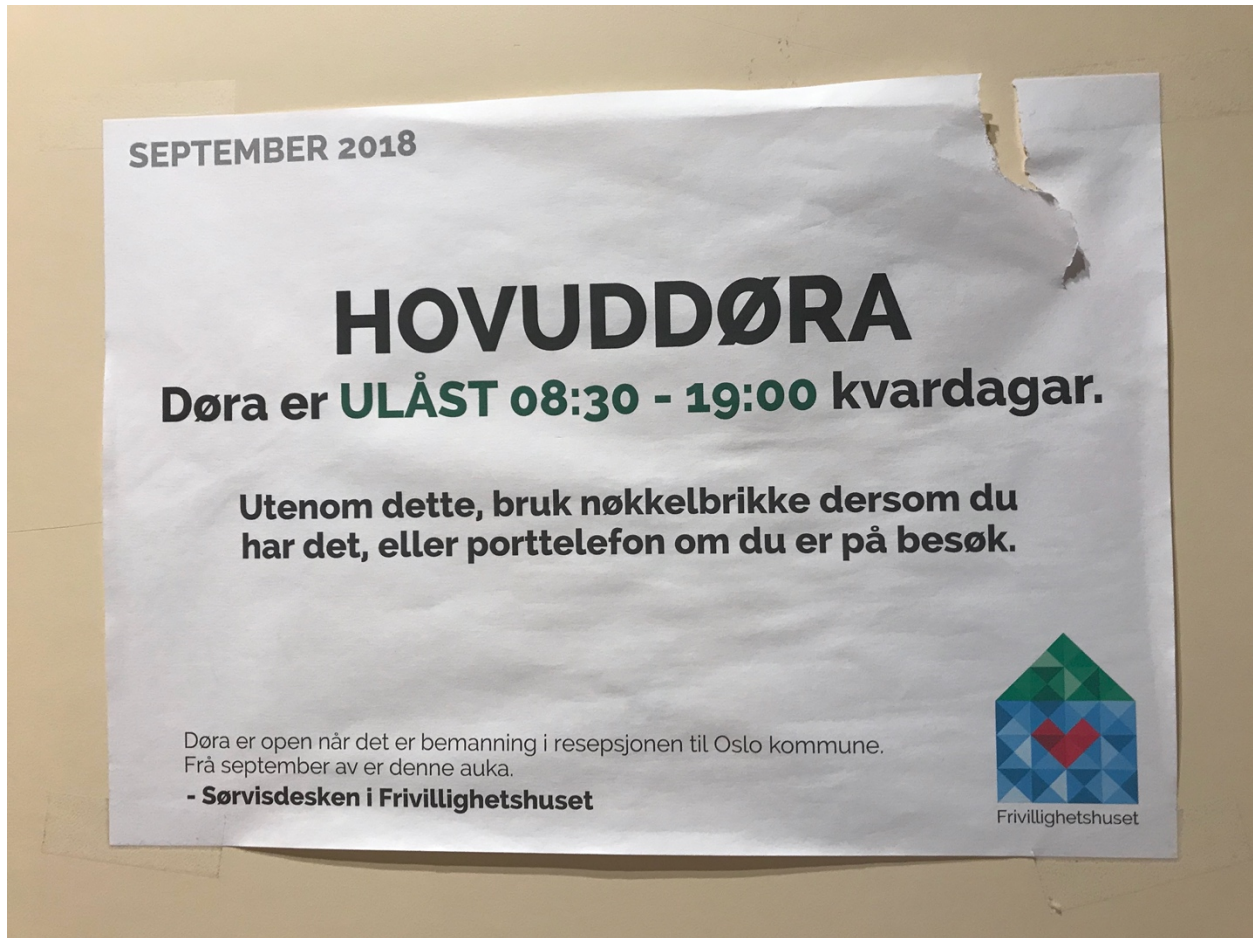


Figure 2.7: One of the signs from the community center, this one saying what hours the front door is unlocked. While most of words are the same in Bokmål and Nynorsk, there are several Nynorsk words, for example *hovuddøra* (main door) instead of the Bokmål *hoveddøra*, *kvardagar* (weekdays) instead of the Bokmål *hverdager*. However, *utenom* (except) is Bokmål.

<sup>20</sup> When I showed these signs to a friend who would consider herself to be a Nynorsk activist, she told me they were just written in Nynorsk. It was only when I pressed her that she said they were likely written by someone who usually wrote in Bokmål and so were not in perfect Nynorsk, but she considered any attempt to use the minority orthographic standard to be successful.

Figure 2.7: One of the signs from the community center, continued

The Nynorsk word is *utanom*. Finally, although service and desk have both been borrowed from English into Norwegian as *sørvis* and *desk*, the compound *sørvisdesken* is not something I've seen anywhere else, in either Bokmål or Nynorsk.

For many of the Tøyen activists I spent time with, “speaking Tøyensk” oneself was not as important as tolerating when others spoke in ways that crossed boundaries. Towards the end of my fieldwork, I began to hear one word that could be seen as a rheme (Gal 2005; Parmentier 1994) of this stance. Many of the neighborhood activists I knew who were most explicitly trying to talk to an audience beyond Tøyen’s borders began to talk about something they called “*innenforskap*,” which they used to refer to the kinds of inclusive social relations that they argued exist in Tøyen. This was a play on the Norwegian word *utenforskap*, which means “exclusion,” and is used to refer especially to the kinds of social exclusion like bullying and marginalization. *Uten* in Norwegian means “without,” while *innen* means “within.” *Innenforskap*, for these activists, is part of a larger project of putting the focus of diversity and inclusion on the people to be accepting of each other’s differences, instead of what they see as the more standard Norwegian model of migrants and other people who are different needing to work to integrate themselves into Norwegian society. Although it would be more common to say *innkludering* (inclusion) to express this idea, as an echo of its opposite, *innenforskap* directly reminds the audience of the perspective the speaker is *not* taking.

The word *innenforskap* also became a diagrammatic icon of the kind of people activists are saying exist in Tøyen. Shortly after I returned to Chicago from fieldwork, the following interaction between two of my interlocutors, and liked by several others, appeared on my Facebook newsfeed:

Jens: Important question, [Hanne]: Do we say INNENFORSKAP or INNAFORSKAP?

Hanne: Innenforskap

Hanne: But it's within [innafor] with innaforskap too.<sup>21</sup>

While Hanne is not personally adding the -a suffix to every word to make it sound more Eastside, she is not stopping anyone else from doing the same thing. Similar to the Barcelonans Woolard has followed for several decades (2016), among these Tøyen activists these older east/west differences, while still salient, matter less than the division between those who accept however someone speaks and those who do not.

This wider acceptance of speaking however you want can also extend to other languages, or what Øyvind describes as the “meaningless use of English.” Mixing Norwegian and English is fairly common among all young, well-educated Norwegians. Additionally, many of my interlocutors grew up outside of Norway, and so frequently felt more comfortable speaking English than Norwegian. Even most of the people I knew who had been born in Norway had spent extended periods living abroad and were probably more comfortable speaking and hearing other languages in public than the average Norwegian. Many of my interlocutors, both white Norwegians and foreign migrants from all over the world, told me that Tøyen was the only place they could live in Norway because it was the most diverse and accepting of difference. Even other parts of Oslo, they told me, were too “quiet,” “homogeneous,” “conservative,” or “boring.” Several told me that Tøyen is the closest you can get to living in New York while being in Norway.

Øyvind however, was not the only person who thought all of the English they heard around the neighborhood was “meaningless,” and I would frequently see older people at various

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<sup>21</sup> Jens: Viktig spørsmål, [Hanne]: Sier vi INNENFORSKAP eller INNAFORSKAP?

Hanne: Innenforskap

Hanne: Men det er innafor med innaforskap å

organizations' meetings grow frustrated as discussions shifted into English. I rarely met someone in Norway who did not understand English, but many people, especially older ones, were not enthusiastic about having to speak it themselves. The unease reflected a general feeling that Tøyen was a place for "the young," although who the young are is always shifting. The *Norwegian Conditions* documentary claimed municipal programs had made Tøyen a good place for children under the age of 10, but not teenagers. People in their 30s would talk about how the bars popping up around Tøyen Square were for people in their 20s, not for them. Seniors would frequently complain that they had been entirely forgotten as the neighborhood had changed—there was no longer a bank or even an ATM in the neighborhood for them to access cash since most younger people only use bank cards or their phones to make purchases.

While -a suffixes and mixing varieties of speech were clearly indexical to people of a Tøyenish style of speaking, whenever I asked anyone outright if there was a "Tøyen dialect," they would assume I was asking them about the youth register. Teenagers in Tøyen, including the boys in *Norwegian Conditions*, also play with the boundaries between codes. For several decades now, the Norwegian media and many Norwegian linguists have been interested in the register spoken among teenagers growing up in East Oslo. This way of speaking has many names. The most common is the controversial "Kebab Norwegian," which many speakers reject as stigmatizing, but some speakers have claimed. Sociolinguists have called it a "multiethnolect" (Svendsen and Røynealand 2008), and most recently have also begun to call it New Norwegian (*ny norsk*, not to be confused with the Norwegian orthographic standard *nynorsk*). One of the defining features of this register, at least for researchers, is that many words were borrowed from so-called "immigrant" languages, like Arabic, Berber, and Urdu. However, while teenagers speaking it may be aware that some of the words came from other languages at some point, that

does not make this way of speaking any less Norwegian, as these three teenaged girls told one journalist.

Transcript 2.8 (Kvittingen 2018)<sup>22</sup>

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | Journalist: Vet dere hvor ordene kommer fra, hvilke språk de kommer fra? | Journalist: Do you ((pl)) know where the words come from, what language they come from? |
| 2 | A: Uh, Norge?  | A: Uh, Norway?  |
| 3 | B: ((laughs)) Uh, oss?   | B: ((laughs)) Uh, us?   |
| 4 | C: Hva sier du?  | C: What are you saying?   |
| 5 | Journalist: For eksempel, flus, da?                                      | Journalist: For example, <i>flus</i> [money], then?                                     |
| 6 | A: Flus, det er arabisk man!   | A: <i>Flus</i> , that's Arabic, man!  |

While the journalist, and likely many linguists as well, are eager to catalogue borrowed lexical items, asking what other named languages they come from, for teenage speakers themselves this question is practically unintelligible. While, when pressed, they know that many of the words they use are from other languages, they do not think their way of speaking is foreign, but instead comes from “us” (turn 3) in Tøyen/Oslo/Norway. It is only when the journalist can isolate one particular example, *flus* (turn 5), that A realizes what the journalist is asking, and that the word means the same thing in Arabic.

These kinds of othering also frequently assume that young people are speaking this mix of languages because they cannot speak or understand “real” Norwegian. At a presentation I attended for young people in Tøyen interested in starting their own businesses, one speaker, a white Norwegian man in his forties from Western Norway, was concerned that the audience would not understand his regional dialect. The Somali-Norwegian man in his late twenties who was running the event jokingly replied that he would provide spontaneous translation into

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<sup>22</sup> While all of my interlocutors were adults, many Norwegian researchers focus on youth. This video of a group of teenaged girls living in Tøyen comes from website that writes popular articles about research being done in Norwegian universities.

Tøyensk if needed, likely meaning the youth register. Everyone laughed, but no one required his translation, because everyone in the audience had grown up in Norway and would be at least somewhat used to hearing other dialects, either from public school teachers, or on television, for example from the director of *Norwegian Conditions*.

Norwegian sociolinguists have argued that switching into this register is a way for teenagers to index a “global identity,” so, in that sense, what they are doing is not that different from the white Norwegian “hipsters” who sprinkle their speech with English. However, the uptake differs, and the kind of global community with which these different speakers are aligning themselves also differs. Yet at least ideally for the Tøyen activists, all of these different ways of speaking should be acceptable. This is actually not that different from a Norwegian national language ideology, where it is the responsibility of the listener to be able to understand all kinds of Norwegian regional dialects, and in some cases also Danish and Swedish. However, that standard focus on the listener’s responsibility only goes so far. It does not include foreign accents (*aksenter*, distinct from rural *dialekter*), and ways of speaking that cross boundaries are also generally considered to be incorrect. A Tøyensk way of listening at least ideally extends to all types of difference. That is not to say that anyone can just speak however they want—Mads told me he thinks it is “lame” (*teit*) when white adults, like himself, speak the youth register. Instead the kind of language ideology emerging from Tøyen activists is one of accepting other people’s different ways of speaking are all a part of the Tøyen “us.”

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored Tøyen’s place within contemporary scalar projects. First, we saw how Tøyen is seen from the outside as a model of challenges Norway faces as the population

becomes increasingly ethnically diverse and economically stratified. The documentary *Norwegian Conditions* represented this through clearly dividing Tøyen residents into two categories: poor, Muslim young men and wealthy, white gentrifiers. This category-making also allows the neighborhood to be seen through the chronotope of “Swedish conditions” and suggests the dystopic future of “Norwegian conditions” to an imagined Norwegian audience.

Second, we saw the ways Tøyen residents place the neighborhood and its residents within the city of Oslo, as part of a shifting east/west axis of differentiation. While some long-time Tøyen residents, like Mads, see what used to be a social division between two sides of the city being reproduced within Tøyen itself, other residents are also playing with traditional boundaries between Norwegian dialects or languages like English and Arabic.

What these seemingly disparate scalar projects share are the ways that processes of comparison and differentiation project potential futures of the Norwegian nation. In the documentary, the representation of the neighborhood through the comparison of three different kinds of foreign projects a divisive future, where national solidarity has been replaced by two classes of Norwegians living in separate worlds. Among Tøyen activists, ideas of tolerance and acceptance, of which linguistic practice is a diagrammatic icon, also imagine a future, but one that is the polar opposite of the imagined future of the documentary. Instead, these activists imagine the neighborhood, and especially their children’s generation, as a beacon of a future Norway as a multicultural melting pot.

Through each of these examples, I have also shown how categories like “foreign migrant” and “local citizen” should not be pre-supposed. Not only are these categories not monolithic, but the ways they are deployed and the ways the boundaries between them are built



up or broken down, frequently through language use, is an important aspect of these various actors' differing political projects in imagining futures.

These first two chapters have explored and tried to complicate two of the most important arguments for the finitude of the Norwegian welfare state: its dependence on revenue from resource extraction and increased foreign migration leading to a more diverse society that both overwhelms the public services and diminishes solidarity between citizens. In the following chapters, I move more deeply into the neighborhood, looking at the ways my interlocutors are participating in and (often simultaneously) contesting a newly emerging “sustainable” welfare system. Central to creating more sustainable welfare is a focus on civil society and volunteerism. Although controversial, the documentary *Norwegian Conditions* did succeed in raising sympathy for the volunteer soccer coach, Mohammad Fariss, who expresses his concern for young men growing up in Tøyen. A month after the documentary aired, Fariss was voted “Oslo Resident of the Year” by readers of Norway’s largest newspaper. As the article announcing his win stated, he won for his work “getting immigrants to join in on the *dugnad*,” a traditional form of Norwegian volunteering.<sup>23</sup> The volunteer-based aspect of Fariss’s work had been a strong focus that came out of the follow-up to the documentary. This is not to say that a large number of adults working with young people in Tøyen don’t also volunteer, but there was a feeling that others, especially the white “Tøyen Patriots,” receive more recognition and support from the Tøyen Boost, while Fariss and the rest of his club had been relatively overlooked. These questions of who can volunteer, in return for what, and how that relates to ideas about foreign migrants, will be the subject of the next chapter.

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<sup>23</sup> for å få innvandrerne med på dugnad

## PART TWO

### CHAPTER 3

# SELLING WAFFLES, EARNING TIME CREDITS: VOLUNTEERISM, SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND THE BOUNDARY-MAKING PRACTICES OF “DOING GOOD”

When describing social entrepreneurship, whether to outsiders like politicians or volunteer-based non-profits, or to potential new members, the staff at Inspire<sup>1</sup> frequently explained what they do through a version of this diagram, which they told me they had adapted from resources on social enterprises produced by the European Commission:

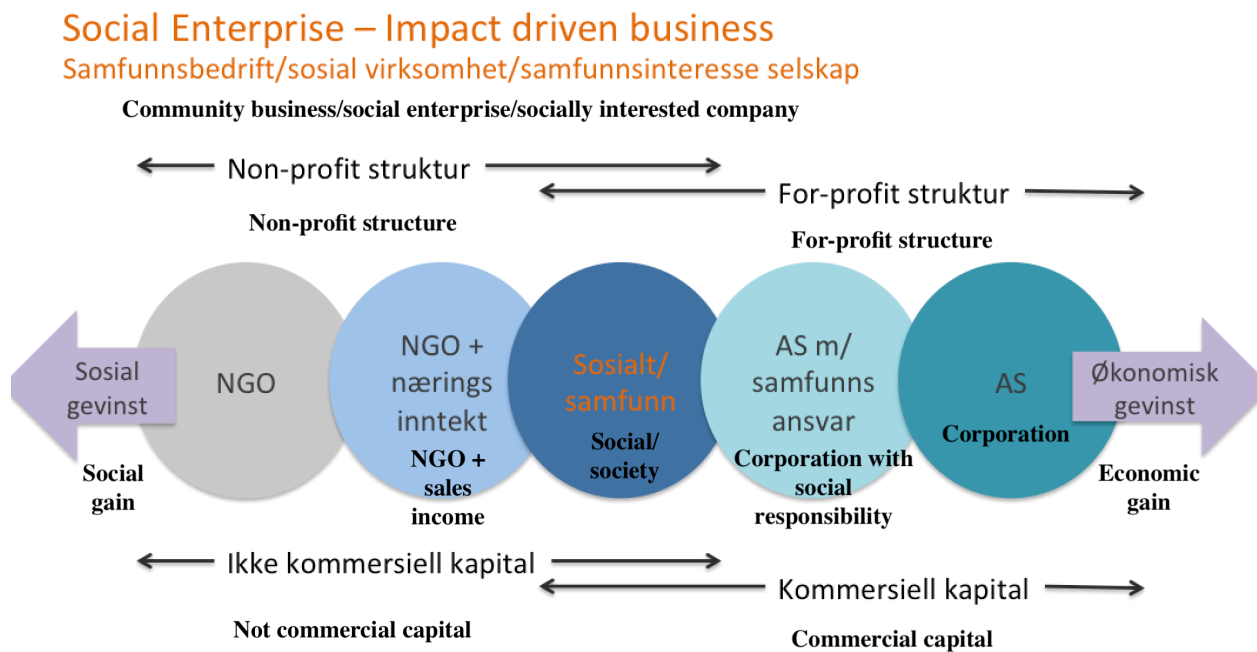


Figure 3.1: The social-economic value continuum, from an Inspire PowerPoint presentation. English glosses added by author. Used with permission.

<sup>1</sup> This is a pseudonym, but the organization’s real name is also in English.

On the left are the more “social” kinds of organizations, which have a non-profit structure. On the right are the profit-oriented organizations. The first time I saw someone draw this cline, instead of writing out the words, the person presenting just drew a heart on the left side and a dollar sign on the right. While doing so, he verbally made the distinction between “nice volunteering” (*snille frivillighet*) on the left, where any income the organization receives comes from “just baked waffles” (*bare stekte vafler*),<sup>2</sup> and companies that are “a little mean” (*litt slemme*), like Shell or Statoil,<sup>3</sup> on the right. Not completely mean, he clarified, because those companies do create jobs, but money is what rules their decisions. In more hands-on workshops, the Inspire staff member presenting threw out names of companies and asked participants where they lay on this cline. The Red Cross? An NGO, but farther to the right than a community group selling waffles. IKEA? A corporation, although they can be placed slightly to the left because they have strong CSR policies. Epleslang?<sup>4</sup> A social enterprise, right in the middle.

In seeing businesses on this cline from the social to the economic, Inspire and related organizations saw the social and the economic as not only opposed, but also commensurable along the same scale as a part of a unified theory of value.<sup>5</sup> We can think of this cline as an

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<sup>2</sup> Waffles are an extremely popular food item in Norway, to the point where a Danish anthropologist has told me, only half-jokingly, that they are the primary thing Norwegian children eat. They are also the most common food item sold at school fundraisers, or in other contexts where in the US you might expect to see a bake sale or a lemonade stand. You could also see waffles themselves are rhematic of the kindness of the volunteers selling them and the civically minded waffle consumers, since the standard Norwegian waffle is not a circle, but a flower made up of five heart-shaped “petals.”

<sup>3</sup> Now called Equinor, a name change I discussed in Chapter 1, this is the largest Norwegian energy company.

<sup>4</sup> An Oslo-based apple juice company that employs people with developmental disabilities and uses donated apples that would otherwise go to waste from the many apple trees in private yards around the city.

<sup>5</sup> My social entrepreneur interlocutor’s use of “social” tended to exemplify Muehlebach’s discussion of a shift in meaning of “society,” where “‘the social’ now usually comes as an

explicit -onomic structure (Silverstein 2004), where social and community enterprises are in a “Goldilocksque,” just-right position between the two poles. This model reproduces common understandings of the market as amoral (Bauman 2000; Thompson 1991). Yet it also posits that that amorality is not a foregone conclusion, and that it is possible to “do social good” while making money at the same time. This theory of value is also what allowed Inspire staff to claim that all of the of the members of their program have been “successful,” because even if their businesses have not made any economic profit, all members, or “Inspirers,” as they are called, have gained “social capital” through their work. By social capital, Inspire staff tends to mean growing their social networks or gaining self-confidence. Inversely, staff would always stress in presentations that merely being economically profitable was not an index of success if the business had not also brought about some kind of social good.

While most people in Norway would likely agree that the social and the economic are polar opposites, Inspire had a difficult time convincing others that an organization could exist in this middle ground. Public good was generally entirely separate from private profit, and anything in between risked being accused of “welfare profiteering,” where private companies profit off of state contracts to provide welfare services. Yet for Linda, an Area Boost employee who had helped to launch Inspire, the more important distinction was between top-down and bottom-up. Her focus on finding the middle ground was also way for her to try to find a place where smaller community organizations and kinds of Norwegians who are generally not included in policymaking could have more power over the state-funded services they needed. While the

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addendum and descriptor rather than as an object sui generis. It is a relation produced, step by step, by participatory citizens rather than an a priori domain into which the state interjects” (2012, 43).

previous chapter focused on concerns about how increased migration threatened the solidarity that made the welfare state possible, Linda had a different perspective, where she saw Norwegian understandings of how the welfare state should function to be too rigid, where a standardized model was imposed onto people who were nothing like the imagined citizen-type. Linda, who was about 50, had lived in Norway for several decades, but she was originally from Scotland, and I frequently heard her contrast what she saw as the “fairer” Scottish system with the traditional, stubborn Norwegian one. She saw social enterprises and other initiatives that brought together the social and economic to be a way of making the Norwegian system fairer. One important difference was she thought that the Scottish government was better at talking to the communities the welfare state is supposed to serve and working with them to “empower” them to set up the kinds of services that they say they need. This sounded like a very neoliberal idea to me, but Linda always framed her ideas around equity and respect, where the government still had an important responsibility to work with citizens and to fund the initiatives they created.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter considers two of Linda’s initiatives that saw the economic and the social to not be mutually exclusive categories and encouraged altruistic work in the neighborhood through economic incentives: a time credits program and Inspire, an organization that helps community members start socially focused businesses. Both of these initiatives, in their own ways broke down the standard boundary between volunteer-based care work and waged labor. In so doing, they tried to break down boundaries that separated Norwegians of migrant background from the typical Norwegian citizen. Yet, as this chapter will show, these efforts also worked to reinforce the same boundaries they were trying to break down. This irony is not particular to Tøyen, but

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<sup>6</sup> Linda’s ideas were inspired by the Scottish National Party’s platform, which others have described as “neoliberalism with a heart” (Cuthbert and Cuthbert 2009).

something others have noticed in similar projects across Europe, where moral sentiments and feelings of solidarity that can both bolster and work to undermine neoliberal reforms (Muehlebach 2012; Siniscalchi 2019). Beyond Europe, anthropologists have argued that similar entrepreneurial projects may be creating the very racialized assemblages that they are trying to overcome (Tompkins 2017). The boundary-making of Tøyen's boundary-breaking initiatives is also no surprise for semiotic anthropologists, who have pointed out that both trying to erase boundaries and trying to police them both actually create the very boundary itself (Gal and Irvine 2019, 273). This chapter brings that semiotic attention to these projects to create what I am calling "ethical-entrepreneurial citizens," showing the processes through which attempts to make the welfare state fairer and more inclusive forge boundaries between different kinds of imagined Norwegian citizens.

Boundaries and boundary-making have been important to anthropologists studying Norway and to Norwegian anthropologists working elsewhere. Marianne Gullestad has suggested that it is no accident that one of the most classic works on boundaries, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Barth 1969), was written by a Norwegian (Gullestad 1997). She argues that there is a particularly Norwegian "passion for boundaries" that predisposed Barth to see that ethnic boundaries are maintained exactly because of intensive social interactions between groups, not despite them. Boundaries, for Gullestad, are limits that Norwegians maintain in their everyday as a way of managing social changes being brought about by capitalist modernity. In Gullestad's sense, boundaries center around questions of self-determination and being able to manage on one's own. Children learn to take care of themselves without asking adults for help, while Norway voted no in the referendum to join the European Union, creating a boundary

between themselves and the rest of Europe, so that they would be able to maintain their independence.

In this chapter, and in the dissertation more broadly, I see boundaries differently. While I agree with Gullestad that boundaries mark a sense of confinement, I am more interested in the semiotic processes through which boundaries are made. Boundaries are made as some kinds of contrasts are given a sense of duration and confinement, either by individuals or institutions (Gal and Irvine 2019, 183). A semiotic approach to boundary-making agrees with Barth and Gullestad that boundaries are relational, but it focuses more on the role that perspective plays in boundary-making. In their own analysis of Barth's argument, for example, Gal and Irvine suggest that while colonial officials saw the difference between ethnic groups to be a boundary that separated two cultural universes, for members of the groups themselves, it was only differentiation across which social relations were organized (2019, 184). Which contrasts become salient from which perspectives, and what contrasts are erased? How do some kinds of differentiation become institutionalized as boundaries? In contemporary Norway, boundaries between "ethnic Norwegians" and "Norwegians of migrant background" are so heavily institutionalized and taken-for-granted, that, as I show in this chapter, even when interlocutors may have different perspectives on which contrastive qualities are important in distinguishing these groups, they still assume ethnic and migrant Norwegians to be two distinct and separate groups, making the very boundary they are trying to bridge.

### **Norwegian Forms of Volunteering: the *Dugnad***

The rise of volunteerism across the world has been long- and well-documented. Much of the scholarship on volunteerism in Europe has shown how increased volunteering has been key to the new forms of citizenship emerging in post-welfare societies (Muehlebach 2012; Rose 2000). These trends are also visible in Norway, where they are situated within a particular history of voluntary, collective labor, called the *dugnad*, or “socializing through doing good,” as a French man living in Oslo succinctly described it to me once. For many, the *dugnad* is a leading example of things that are (stereo-)“typically Norwegian” (*typisk norsk*), along with *koselig* (“cozy,” like Danish *hyggelig*), or the ingressive backchannel [jɑ:↓]. However, unlike some of these other examples, an equivalent of *dugnad* does not exist in other parts of Scandinavia—there was a large amount of Norwegian media coverage when the Swedish Tourist Association borrowed the word *dugnad* several years ago because they liked the concept but could not find a word in Swedish.<sup>7</sup> A *dugnad* was historically time-consuming, cooperative work on which rural Norwegian farms relied, for example building a sod roof or repairing a house after a natural disaster like a flood or avalanche. At least according to the idealized collective national memory, about 10-12 nearby families would come together to help their neighbors and participate in a *dugnad* as needed. Like the closest American equivalents of a barn raising or quilting bee, a *dugnad* was also a social event and would culminate in a collective meal.

The traditional *dugnad* has become less common as Norwegian social structures and the economy have changed, but the general principle of collective voluntary labor has remained, even in an urban area like Oslo. Today’s *dugnad* maintains the same hallmarks of working

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<sup>7</sup>While Finnish Swedish has the term *talko* from the Finnish *talkoot*, a similar concept, and there are also cognates in Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian, I’ve never heard a Norwegian mention these.



together, face-to-face, without pay, during a defined period of time, and frequently culminates in a social meal or coffee (Lorentzen and Dugstad 2011). The primary distinction between today's *dugnad* and those pre-20<sup>th</sup> century is that, while the earlier *dugnad* were carried out by a group of nearby farms, today's *dugnad* is generally centered around a more institutionalized form of organization, like a homeowner's association, school, or interest organization. Today, activities categorized as *dugnad* most commonly include maintenance work in the shared spaces of housing blocks, working at a flea market benefiting their child's school band, or some other form of fundraising activity, often for a sports team. While all apartment owners and parents are expected to participate in these events, it is possible, at least in the case of a housing association *dugnad*, to pay a higher homeowner's association fee in lieu of contributing labor. Sometimes there are multiple formal organizations involved in one *dugnad*—for example the choir I joined during fieldwork had two *dugnad* activities a year where we would volunteer at a charity relay race, and in exchange the sponsoring organization would donate money to our choir. I return to the heavily institutionalized nature of volunteering below.

In their book on the history of the *dugnad*, Lorentzen and Dugstad identify one of the most important aspects of the *dugnad*, more than the product of the labor itself, to be the feeling of community (*felleskap*) and of being a collective “we” that it maintains (Lorentzen and Dugstad 2011). In recent years, the Oslo municipal government has looked for ways to foster this feeling of sociality in the parts of the city with a high proportion of foreign migrants. Increasing volunteering is one of the primary goals of the Tøyen Boost, and when evaluating the program, politicians and city employees will often point to the large number of “engaged residents” as proof of the program's success. Even Queen Sonja of Norway visited Tøyen shortly after I had completed my fieldwork to highlight how the act of volunteering can bring people from different

backgrounds together. Importantly, these initiatives promoting “community engagement” focus on encouraging volunteerism within secular community groups, a housing block, or at the local school. Although many Muslim Norwegians volunteer through their mosque, these actions are not generally seen to be a part of the local community that the city is trying to foster (Horst, Jdid, and Bivand-Erdal 2018; Jdid 2021). They are also not always entirely welcome: I spoke to several resident volunteers in Tøyen, for example, who were more cynical and felt the state was going too far in handing over responsibility to unpaid volunteers without providing them with adequate support from paid municipal employees.

Since the 1980s, politicians have increasingly spoken about the *dugnad* in more figurative senses, as a way of addressing particularly difficult policy problems (Klepp 2001). In spring 2020, for example, the health ministry called for a national *dugnad* to help stop the spread of COVID-19 and mitigate the resulting financial downturn (Myhre 2020). During my fieldwork, the government called for a national *dugnad* on integration, which included both a discussion of “ghettoization” (*ghettoifisering*) of immigrants in areas where they only come into contact with other immigrants, and a push to support foreign migrants to start their own businesses, thereby creating their own jobs and decreasing unemployment rates. This kind of national *dugnad* is primarily a public discussion and so does not imply unpaid volunteer labor, but by labeling it as *dugnad* politicians are indexing a sense of social obligation that cannot be shirked, where people are working together towards a common objective. In this sense, the *dugnad* retains a moral force across much of Norwegian society. Politicians speaking of these more figurative senses of *dugnad* tend to invoke “the *dugnad* spirit” (*dugnadsånden*), a term that indexes the chronotope of the welfare state at its strongest, an idealized time of cooperation and solidarity associated with the decades immediately following World War II. During the serious housing shortage

following the war, *selvbyggerlag*, or teams of people coming together to build their own houses, made home ownership accessible to the working class for the first time. Politicians today evoke the *dugnad* spirit when speaking about the importance of active citizenship to sustain the Norwegian welfare system.

### Volunteering and the Welfare State

Before WWII, a *dugnad* provided the kind of social safety net that has since been taken over by the welfare state in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet even as the state took over responsibility, it continued to work closely with membership-based, general humanitarian organizations, which multiplied during the 1950s–70s. These organizations had an influence on state policy and received general governmental funding grants that they could spend as they wished. As the public sector shifted in the late 1980s and 90s through New Public Management reforms, Eikås and Selle (2002) describe how voluntary organizations underwent a similar transformation, where they tended to become larger and increasingly specialized. At the same time, public funding for these organizations shifted from basic grants to project-based, competitive contracts. As a result, voluntary organizations were pressured to professionalize and hire salaried employees. This shift in the structure of voluntary organizations and their changing relationship to the public sector is part of a wider change in the Norwegian welfare model, where the state has moved from being a welfare service producer, and instead contracts out services to private organizations.

As a part of their increased professionalization, the relationship between these larger voluntary organizations and their members has also changed. Many now prefer monetary contributions instead of volunteer labor, as most people cannot volunteer for an adequate amount

of time to be of use to these organizations. The highly institutionalized nature of Norwegian volunteerism is something that some foreign migrants have criticized, expressing frustration at this narrow definition of volunteering as necessarily connected to formal organizations and *dugnad* events (Horst, Jdid, and Bivand-Erdal 2018; Horst, Erdal, and Jdid 2020; Jdid 2021). Based on this idea that Norwegian volunteering traditions often have trouble recruiting people of minority background, between 2013–2018 the Tøyen Boost allocated 14.7 million kroner (almost \$2 million), or 7% of the total program budget, to studying and implementing “new forms of volunteering.”

### **Volunteering as Self-Improvement**

One of their largest projects aimed at finding new forms of volunteering was the Time Credits initiative. On a Sunday evening in early September 2017, twenty-five people, primarily a mix of white middle-class neighbors and social geography students from nearby universities, braved the heavy rain to gather at the Tøyen Community Center. They were there to learn about Time Credits from Craig, an employee at Spice Time Credits in the UK. Linda, who we met in the introduction, had invited him to spend a week helping staff set up a similar project in Oslo. While most of his meetings were closed to staff and invited community groups, the Sunday evening event was an opportunity to introduce the concept to interested local residents.

Inspired by other neighborhood “placemaking” currency initiatives across Europe, like the Brixton Pound in London, Linda had been trying for several years to introduce a Tøyen-specific currency, but she ran into problems with the Norwegian tax authority. She had also tried to set up a time banking program, where a person with some set of skills, for example fixing a bicycle, would exchange an hour of their time for an hour of another set of skills, like childcare.

However, that had not gained much traction because it had been difficult to find pairs with complementary skills and needs. Linda, who as part of her job frequently visited community projects across Europe, learned about Time Credits when trying to move on from the shortcomings of her previous pilot programs.

Spice Time Credits began in the UK in the late 2000s. Craig explained that what set their program apart from more traditional time banking models, including what Linda had tried to create previously, was that it was about “scaling up from people-to-people connections,” by connecting people to organizations. This approach worked well with both the highly professionalized, volunteer-reliant organizations prevalent throughout the UK and Norway, and with the corporate social responsibility commitments of the partnering companies that provided leisure experiences for Time Credit volunteers. The program worked through Spice’s giving accredited volunteer organizations Time Credits, which those organizations then “paid” to their volunteers, one credit for each hour the volunteer works. Volunteers in turn were able to spend those credits on activities worth the same amount of time at other partnership organizations. For example, going to see a movie or a visit to a museum would cost two Time Credits because it is a two-hour experience. A trip to an amusement park might cost five. Craig framed the reasons why a company might choose to accept Time Credits as either tied to a corporate social responsibility obligation, or as a strategy to increase profits—more people going to movie theaters means increased concessions sales. Importantly, you could only spend Credits on activities and experiences that can be measured temporally, not on material commodities. Craig explained that this rule existed primarily for tax reasons, but it also reinforced Time Credits’ value calculation based not abstractly on labor or exchange, but on the time of one individual—the labor of

whoever is providing the leisure experience to the Time Credit spender is not considered in this price.

Craig repeatedly said that this system was a way of moving “beyond the cash economy.” While he meant it was a way of thinking of exchange outside the bounds of the market, it was an interesting phrase because Time Credits materially would seem to be much closer to the cash economy than more traditional financial exchanges in Norway, where a large majority of payments occur through debit cards and smartphone apps. Time Credits looked very much like banknotes, sheets of paper designed so that they would be difficult to counterfeit. When someone in the audience asked if Spice had considered making credits digital or putting them onto a sort of debit card, Craig said they had found that having something physical to give people was important. It also allowed Time Credits to circulate outside of the organizational system Spice created, and for the Credits to foster not only relationships between an individual and institutions, but also between friends and neighbors. For example, you could give Time Credits you had earned to someone as a gift, or you could pay a neighbor in Time Credits in exchange for helping you at home.

In exchange for attending the hour-long presentation, each audience member received one *Tøyen Tid* (Tøyen Time) prototype, which we were encouraged to exchange for a samosa, made by a catering company run by a group of Somali women living in the neighborhood, and a bottle of Tøyen Cola, a popular locally made soda. Technically, spending Time Credits on food is not allowed, but an exception was made for this one launch event, with the implicit idea that the food and sodas would encourage us to spend an hour socializing with each other. As the Time Credit system developed over the next year (and expanded beyond the neighborhood so that they

are now called Oslo Time Credits),<sup>8</sup> it became possible to spend credits on events like concerts, visits to the Munch museum, movie theater tickets, and hockey games. Area Boost staff and volunteers, led primarily by a group of Somali-Norwegian teenaged girls from Tøyen who quickly labeled themselves “Time Credit ambassadors,” continued working to expand the program, holding open office hours at the community center and running workshops to brainstorm new organizations the program should try to involve.



Figure 3.2: A prototype Tøyen Time Credit. Note the serial number in the upper-left corner to ensure authenticity. Spice Time Credits have much more sophisticated anti-counterfeiting technology, more like a banknote. Photo by author.

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<sup>8</sup> In Norwegian, Time Credits are called *TimeKred*, which could just be a Norwegianized pronunciation of the English “Time Cred(it),” but it also highlights the hour-unit of each credit, since *time* means “hour.” *Kred*, like the English “cred,” is slang for “credibility” (*kredibilitet*).

The Time Credits program tried to challenge the dominant social order through its creation of an alternative currency, measuring a form of labor that beforehand had not been measurable, and making it commensurable with previously unrelated leisure experiences. Aside from commensurability, Time Credits link a kind of money-token to a social interaction where money is usually hidden, bringing in the kinds of social indexicals of other interactions involving money (Agha 2017). This project may encourage more people to become volunteers, but it also changes the nature of what volunteer labor is and its relation to leisure activities, making it into a different kind of exchange. In explaining Time Credits, Craig emphasized how this way of approaching volunteering focuses on what people have to *give*, not what others *need*, a distinction that mirrors the value calculation focused on the individual earning and spending the credits, instead of the social interaction between the volunteer and the person benefitting from the volunteer labor. The action of spending Time Credits is potentially more relational, because it might also include the volunteer's family or friends, but the register in which a "spend event" is talked about still very much focuses on the *experience*, not the *exchange*.

This change was a concern among many of the attendees at the launch event. After Craig's presentation, he and Linda took questions from the audience. Many worried that this sort of program would corrupt traditional forms of volunteerism, because it would make people only volunteer if they got something out of it in return. Craig responded that Time Credits should be seen as an addition to the kinds of volunteer work that are already occurring. At events that followed throughout the year, Linda anticipated this critique, and repeatedly assured audiences that this would not replace the *dugnad* tradition. She and other organizers also began to speak about the Time Credits program differently. While in the initial information session, Linda had spoken about the program as encouraging volunteering, a section on the program's website,



which was launched a few months later explains that they prefer to speak about a contribution (*bidrag*) instead of a volunteer effort (*frivillig innsats*), separating work done for Time Credits from traditional volunteer labor.

Time Credits were about finding ways to engage people who had not been volunteers before—in the British program, almost half of Time Credit users report that they had not regularly volunteered before (see Figure 3.3). Time Credits were also meant to help fill holes in already existing volunteer efforts, for example when the neighborhood evening safety patrol had trouble finding enough people, or the neighborhood vegetable garden needs volunteers to do intensive manual labor bringing in new soil. As a result, not every person who volunteered would receive Time Credits. Instead, the program was targeted at certain kinds of activities where organizers had trouble recruiting enough volunteers, or at particular groups of people who traditionally do not volunteer in large numbers, like teenagers with minority background.

In his presentation, Craig repeatedly referred back to a study that had been conducted among British Time Credit earners. The study focused on their improved quality of life, and his organization had made the results into an eye-catching graphic that Linda would frequently use when speaking about what she hoped Oslo Time Credits would become. While some of the statistics in that graphic overlap with the ideas of social inclusion present in a *dugnad*, there is no mention of the forms of social obligation present in more traditional forms of Norwegian volunteering.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> These statistics from the British Time Credits program also put much more focus on the health of the medicalized individual than Norwegian forms of volunteering. However, I have not heard these arguments about physical health being taken up in Oslo, and the Norwegian Healthcare System remains much more robust than the British National Health Service.

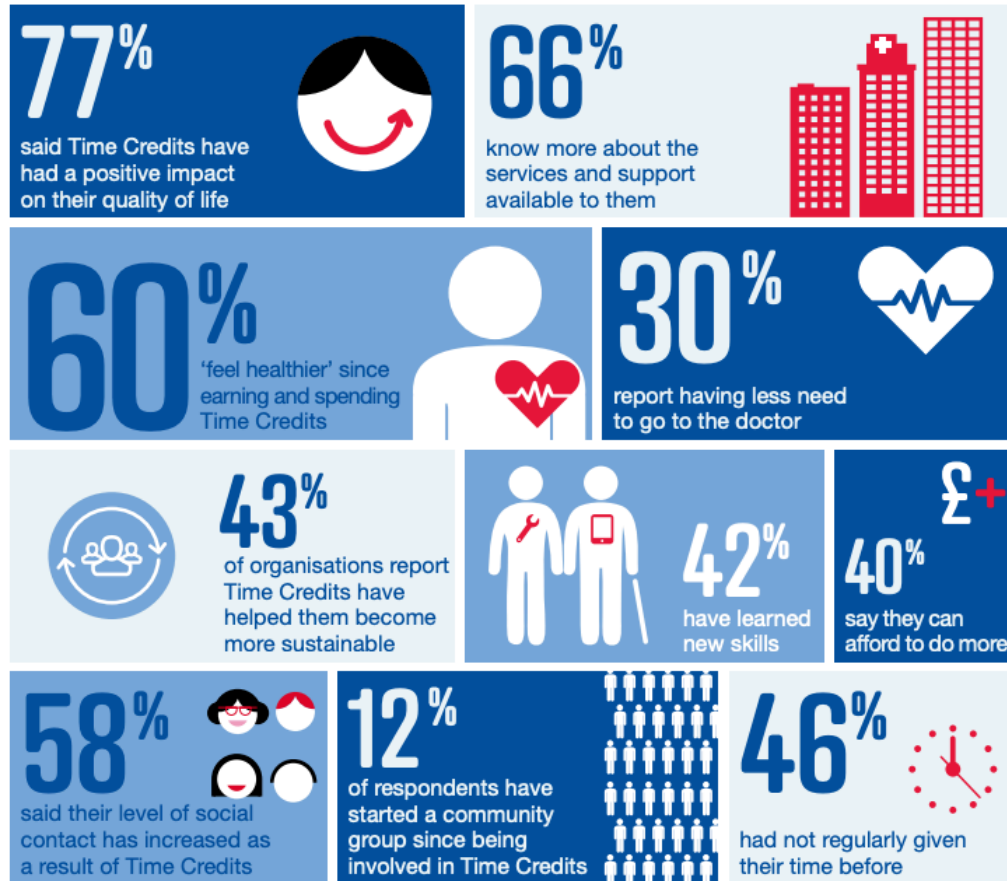


Figure 3.3: The benefits of Time Credits (Spice 2016, 5).

With Time Credits, volunteering is not about charity for the receiver, it is a way for the volunteer to develop self-confidence and try something new. While a traditional *dugnad* was as much about reinforcing solidarity between participants as it was about the final product, Time Credit volunteering is much more individual-focused. In this sense Time Credits support a Marxian critique of money promoting individualism over older forms of solidarity (Marx 1992; Simmel 1978; see also Bloch and Parry 1989). While much of the audience at the presentation in Tøyen, like Marx, worried that this kind of exchange would destroy the social obligations holding the local community together, Craig, and later the group of neighborhood activists and teenagers who went on to build up the Oslo program, saw Time Credits as having the potential to strengthen local communities through helping to “activate” individuals.

Yet, just because Time Credits turn volunteer hours into a kind of exchangeable cash-like currency, as Alain Lemon has observed, “Not all cash is alike” (1998, 22). Lemon argues that cash abstracts some values while solidifying others, and while her analysis centers on Russian discourses of value, socialism and capitalism, her argument could be extended to Time Credits, which are never fully commensurable with other currencies. Unlike Ithaca HOURS (cf. Herrmann 2006; Maurer 2005; Papavasiliou 2010) and similar alternate currencies, Time Credits do not have an equivalent in Norwegian kroner: a cinema ticket cost 140NOK or 2 Time Credits (1 hour = 70NOK), a concert at the Opera House would generally cost 200–250NOK or 2 Time Credits (1 hour = 100-125NOK), while the Øya music festival cost 1,000NOK or 6 Time Credits (1 hour = 167NOK). Yet most people did not seem to think primarily of the market value, as movie tickets, possibly one of the cheapest options, are also one of the most popular.

Other anthropologists and social scientists have observed the ways that the circulation of money can make and break boundaries (Chu 2010; Maurer 2005; Zelizer 1994). Time Credits do both simultaneously, providing access to leisure activities while also reinforcing class boundaries. While Time Credits are based on the idea of a kind of universality, where everyone’s time has equal value, in actual use they were not for everyone. While I was chatting with Maria, an Inspire staff member, about some of the other organizations I had been volunteering at as a part of my fieldwork, she joked that I could probably be getting rich on Time Credits, before saying, “but they’re not really for us,” meaning that, because we were adults with enough disposable income to buy our own concert tickets, we should not expect remuneration for our volunteer labor.

In the British program, Craig had implied that there was a clear audience for Time Credits: people who live in disadvantaged areas that have been hit the hardest by the withdrawal

of public welfare programs. Similarly, the Time Credits piloted in Tøyen, had the explicit goal, according to the program's website, of "smoothing out negative social differences,"<sup>10</sup> and "making accessible diverse cultural opportunities among groups that today have little or no access to those opportunities."<sup>11</sup> While some organizations, like the library and the evening neighborhood patrol, used them to incentivize volunteering among everyone in Tøyen, many of the ways one could earn time credits are limited to smaller groups of people. For example, in an effort to increase participation in workshops soliciting input for the Area Boost Program plan for the following year, which I discuss in more detail in the next chapter, Tøyen residents affiliated with some organizations, like the public housing board and a youth leadership academy, could receive three Time Credits for each workshop they attended. Middle class white Norwegians, who were less likely to be affiliated with these organizations, were generally over-represented at these kinds of meetings, so organizers did not see a same need to incentivize their attendance. I did not hear anyone complain that they were participating in workshops for free while others were paid in Time Credits. Instead, there seemed to be a general agreement with Maria that the Credits were not for generally white, middle class residents.

What I never heard the Time Credits supporters say explicitly, but what was always in the background, was a stereotype in Norway that people of immigrant background did not tend to volunteer in the same numbers as "ethnic Norwegians." Some in Tøyen liked to pride the neighborhood as a counter-example to this stereotype, but the reason why they were was that the neighborhood tried actively to include different kinds of people. At an event several months later

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<sup>10</sup> utjevning av negative sosiale forskjeller

<sup>11</sup> tilgjengeliggjøre mangfoldige kulturelle tilbud blant innbyggergrupper som i dag har liten eller ingen tilgang til tilbudene

at a nearby non-profit, Sumaya, a Somali-Norwegian woman active in many of the local organizations in Tøyen, tried to explain this difference to an older white, Norwegian man who was skeptical about immigrants' interest in voluntary work. She told him that, in Tøyen, "very many immigrants work as volunteers...because they feel included."<sup>12</sup> While Time Credits were generally accepted as being only for a certain group of Tøyen residents, their supporters highlighted their power as an example of a way migrants could feel included, and that their contributions to the neighborhood had value. Time Credit earners differed from the typical participant in a Norwegian *dugnad*, the parent of a school-aged child who organizes the semi-annual flea market that funds the school's marching band, or the apartment owner who, also on a semi-annual cycle, spends an afternoon with the other residents of the apartment block doing maintenance work in the common areas. Instead of the social obligation as the reason for the collective labor, Time Credits moved in the other direction, assuming that altruistic work would both help individuals while also creating a feeling of community.

This boundary was also present in some of the ways you could spend your Time Credits. One popular spend event was the bimonthly neighborhood café at the nearby Munch museum, where there were activities for children, food provided by one of the many local small catering companies, and a tour of the current exhibit led by a docent who assumed the audience had no previous experience of European art. The one I attended was almost exclusively Somali and Iranian families who lived in public housing. Other popular events included the Øya music festival that has occurred each August in Tøyen Park since 2014. One-day tickets start at over 1,000 NOK (\$115) and so are out of reach for many people living in Tøyen. The prohibitively

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<sup>12</sup> skikkelig mange innvandrere jobber som frivillig...fordi de føler seg inkludert

high price of admission was one of many criticisms of allowing Øya to take place in one of the poorest areas of the city. However, beginning in 2018, Øya tickets were also available for six Time Credits, making the festival more accessible for local teenagers or others who might have been unable to pay, but who did have six hours to volunteer for the partner organizations. In their ideal form, Time Credit advocates saw the program as mitigating some of the inequalities brought about by gentrification, allowing all residents to access nearby events and institutions.

Time Credits did not address the underlying reasons for these inequalities, like different access to employment, or the fact that most young people are only able to buy apartments in central Oslo if they can receive financial help from their parents. Time Credits instead extended access to new spaces of consumption, or what Sharon Zukin evocatively calls “domestication by cappuccino” (1995; 2010).<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that many of the people who brought about Oslo Time Credits were not deeply committed to these political issues. Instead, they displayed the same ambivalences that Andrea Muehlebach saw in the leftists she worked with in Northern Italy, where they saw Time Credits as a chance to boost feelings of solidarity between Tøyen residents at the same time as they fed into neoliberal ideas of individual responsibility (2012). One of the leaders of the Time Credits program was also one of the most vocal supporters of housing rights and loudest critics of whether the Øya Festival, which is now owned by an American private equity company, should be allowed to take over a public park for several weeks at the height of the summer, in a part of the city where many people do not have the means to go elsewhere for the summer, like to a family cabin or an international vacation.

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<sup>13</sup> Although not total access, since you cannot actually buy a cappuccino with a Time Credit. At the September event to introduce Time Credits, one local activist suggested that one credit should give you an hour in one of the many new cafés that have opened up in Tøyen. However, his proposal was quickly rejected because coffee is considered a product, not an experience.

However, that did not contradict his pragmatic outlook of making the best of the current situation.

Time Credits also pointed to an assumption in traditional Norwegian forms of volunteering that the adult volunteer will most likely also have a paying job, and that doing work for the community is something that they would save for their leisure time—most *dugnad* occur on weekend mornings. *Dugnad* participants are choosing to volunteer instead of doing some sort of leisure activity, while Time Credits recipients volunteer so that they can later do a leisure activity later. Tøyen has one of the highest unemployment rates in Oslo, and the rates are the highest among women of minority background. While unemployed people might also have been interested in the social aspect of a *dugnad*, many needed to be remunerated for their labor, whether that be in experiences through Time Credits, or through the professionalization of their volunteering efforts through becoming social entrepreneurs, as I discuss in the next section.

### **Professionalizing “Good Work” through Social Entrepreneurship**

While the Time Credits program may suggest an assumption that some Tøyen residents, like unemployed people of immigrant background living in public housing, needed a market-based incentive to volunteer, many of the people I met around the Tøyen Community Center proved that that was not always true, and that strong social obligations also motivated them to volunteer. Yet many of the volunteers there who were unemployed wanted full-time jobs, and some worked hard at turning their volunteer jobs into full employment.

I first met Fatima, Hodan, and Ayaan at a weekly Inspire members meeting. All three had come to Norway over twenty years before from Somalia, and they lived in Tøyen with their husbands and school-aged children. They led a sewing group for migrant women, many of

whom, although not all, were also Somali, where they taught how to use a sewing machine and mend clothing. For the first six months that they had had the sewing group, the three women had received payments from the Norwegian Welfare Administration (NAV) for their time teaching as part of a job training initiative. After that money stopped, they had continued to work as volunteers. Hodan explained why she had worked for free:

Now I come because the women need someone who uh shows how they learn— uh sew clothing and such. So if I don't come they say oh we need you, when are you coming? The day I say I'm coming they come with their clothes... so I enjoy doing this with the women because we don't just work the sewing group, we also talk with the women about psychological problem [sic], if they have psychological problem.<sup>14</sup>

Hodan continued to work voluntarily because she felt an obligation to the other women in the sewing group. All three women of the women spoke, as Hodan does here, about how their work was about far more than mending clothes. It also involved the emotional labor of supporting women with mental illness. However, they were not content to remain volunteers, in large part because they did not have other, paying jobs. When I first met them, they were asking for salaries directly from Inspire, but staff told them that this is not the way that their model works, that Inspire is only there to provide guidance as you create a job for yourself.

Over the course of my fieldwork, the three women worked closely with Inspire staff to turn their sewing group into a social enterprise that could enter into contracts with clothing companies. After several months, they negotiated a contract with an outdoor clothing company that produced most of its products in Eastern Europe. The company's owners lived near Tøyen

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<sup>14</sup> Nå kommer jeg fordi damene trenger noen som uh viser hvordan de lær— uh syr klær og sånn. Så hvis jeg ikke kommer de sier å vi trenger deg, når kommer du? Den dagen jeg sier jeg kommer de kommer med klærerne sine... så jeg trives å være sånn med damer fordi vi jobber ikke bare sygruppen, vi også snakker med damer om psykiske problem hvis de har noe psykiske problem.



and were interested creating a local “Made in Tøyen” brand. The three women, along with four others, began making woolen hats, which the clothing company then sold for 399NOK (about \$45), a third more than similar wool hats made in their Eastern European factory. The clothing company provided the materials and did all of the marketing and sales, NAV paid the four other women as part of their job training program, and the clothing company paid Hodan, Fatima, and Ayaan 90NOK (a little over \$10) per hat, although they hoped that after a trial period they would be able to renegotiate for a higher price, because the clothing company would see what a financial success the new brand has been.

Fatima, Hodan, and Ayaan built up their business through a small grant and advising from Inspire, a non-profit, non-governmental organization that supported individuals who had ideas about how to “solve” (*løse*) a social “challenge” (*utfordring*), a commonly used Norwegian euphemism for problem, in the neighborhood. “Inspirers,” like these three women were trained to solve these challenges through creating a social enterprise, a model that combines business ideas with a “social goal” (*sosialt mål*). Returning to the cline from the beginning of this chapter, this business model is in that “just right” middle position between social and economic gain. Many Inspirers, like these women, came to Inspire because they had been working as volunteers, and they wanted to turn that work into a paying job. Others, through jobs at NGOs or for state institutions, had identified problems with the traditional ways these organizations addressed social issues, and they believed they could have more success with a different approach. Still others were foreign migrants who had difficulty finding a traditional job in Norway that took account of their education or experience elsewhere, and they hoped that if they started their own businesses, they would be able to finally have the kind of jobs they wanted.

The first step after becoming a new Inspirer was to learn to use a new linguistic register. Much what distinguished this register was lexical: Inspirers must know how to make a “pitch” (*å pitche*), speak about their “social mission” (*sosialt formål*), and sit and work in an “incubator” (*inkubator*). They got weekly practice using this register in Wednesday meetings, where they had to introduce their business ideas. Generally, everyone in these meetings already knew each other, so the point of these introductions was more to practice a pitch. Some staff members took this practice especially seriously, correcting Inspirers and asking them to repeat their introduction again. This was not as much about the specific lexical items as it was about the narrative structure. Inspirers’ pitches were supposed to take the formula of beginning with the Inspirer’s social mission, and then moving to their business idea that would address that mission. This structure was supposed to set Inspirers apart from other kinds of people who called themselves social entrepreneurs but who, as Hanna, the leader of Inspire, described it, primarily wanted to be entrepreneurs and only added the qualifier *social* because it sounded trendy. By beginning their pitch with their social mission, she thought that Inspirers showed that the social aspect of their project was the most important, and that the business idea was only the means they were using to reach the social end.

Other important lexical shibboleths separated Inspire from the corporate start-up world, even if most outsiders did not notice them. Larger entrepreneurial organizations, like Innovation Norway, the state-owned company that supports entrepreneurs, focus on “sustainable growth” (*bærekraftig vekst*), measuring the success of a business in whether it is “scalable” (*skalérbar*). Inspire staff also spoke about scaling up, but they distinguished between scaling a business itself and scaling that business’s “impact.” While they encouraged Inspirers to scale their impact, often through partnering with other people living elsewhere in Oslo and sharing their experiences with

them, staff was generally more wary about scaling the business itself. Yet among my interlocutors, only those who had spent an extended period of time at Inspire could really see the difference between how Inspire talked about scaling and growth and how other social entrepreneurship organizations did.

As is clear from many lexical items in this entrepreneurship register, the relationship between English and Norwegian was also important in how Inspire placed itself within the neighborhood and the city more broadly. Staff laughed when I told them about the event at the Tøyen Work Bar I discussed in Chapter 2, where everyone had had to speak English, even though it had seemed like everyone spoke Norwegian. They thought that sounded just like something the work bar would do. Inspire, meanwhile, tried to use as much Norwegian as possible, even though many staff members were from primarily anglophone countries and so were much more comfortable speaking English. This was because Inspire, although an independent organization, had emerged out of the publicly funded Area Boost. Sometimes the push to use Norwegian created frustration, since social entrepreneurship had been largely created in anglophone places, and many staff members thought the nuances of the English terms got lost in the translation to Norwegian. Hanna complained more than once that the Norwegian term *sosialt entreprenørskap* includes 12 different English concepts, ranging from the business-oriented social entrepreneurship of Innovation Norway, to the “community enterprise” model that she said Inspire was looking for. Petter, another Inspire advisor, struggled to find what he felt was an adequate Norwegian translation for the concept of “scouting talent.” At the same time, although staff worked so hard to use Norwegian, not all staff members were comfortable speaking it themselves, and so meetings would frequently switch back and forth depending on the speaker. A new Inspirer jokingly called the introductory training workshops “English class.”

Visitors, not understanding that some people were switching between English and Norwegian to make sure everyone would understand, instead took up the switching as pretentious. At one informational event to recruit potential new members, I overheard one woman turn to her friend and annoyedly say in Norwegian, “We’re talking about business now, so we’ve switched to English.”

As I introduced at the beginning of this chapter, Inspire, along with similar organizations, had a distinct understanding of value as balance between the “social” and the “economic,” where it positioned Inspirers’ businesses in the middle of that continuum. According to the Inspire staff, while social enterprises, like regular businesses, are encouraged to create “profit,” (*profit*), unlike those other businesses, they need to put an asset lock in place from the beginning, so that these profits will always be reinvested in the business’s larger “social mission” instead of being given to shareholders. Inspirers learned not only think about financial accounting differently, but to also see “social good” as something that needed to be accounted for just like a company’s finances. Trainings for new Inspirers included not only a session on managing money, but also a workshop in how to measure and report social impact. At one workshop I attended, Maria, the staff member leading it, discussed survey techniques. She focused on ways to present data, for example through annual reports that synthesize the survey data, using the Time Credits graphic (see Figure 3.3 above). Additionally, Maria recommended that Inspirers supplement their synthesized data with individual stories of the people their social businesses served. Maria told them that this was important not only to show that your business was really bringing about the kinds of social good that it promised, but that successfully accounting for social impact could then be translated into economic gain, as large funding institutions, like the Gjensidige

Foundation,<sup>15</sup> were more likely to provide grants to businesses that can prove they “know what they’re talking about.”

While accounting for social forms of value differentiates social businesses from corporations on the right of their value cline, business models differentiate them from non-profits and charities on the left. Many of Inspire support staff and also several Inspirers came from full-time jobs at NGOs, and they all told me that one of the reasons why they left those jobs was the frustration they had with how much time they had to spend applying for funding. They felt that the grant-writing process took away too much time from doing the sorts of work that were a part of the organization’s mission. With a social enterprise, however, you ideally would no longer rely primarily on grants but would be economically self-sufficient from sales of your business’s product or service. This does not necessarily mean that 100% of your income is based on sales, which is why Maria’s workshop training also addressed how to attract large charitable grants. Instead, in order to be considered to be a social business, at least half of your income should come from sales, either to private individuals, corporations, or the public sector. This is what distinguishes a social business from a charity. This was not just a narrative coming out of Inspire, but was common throughout the social entrepreneurship community in Oslo, and presumably globally as well. At a seminar I attended for social entrepreneurs interested in environmental sustainability, the organizer spoke about the increased agency you have when you run a social business instead of being “dependent on gifts” as non-profits are. This belief closely echoes the United Nations Human Development Reports (UNHDR)’s policy framework of liberation

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<sup>15</sup> Created by an insurance company, this is the largest charitable financial foundation in Norway. It focuses on promoting safety and health (*trygghet og helse*), and funds many organizations in Tøyen, including Inspire and some of the members’ businesses, as well as other organizations including the public library. <https://www.gjensidigestiftelsen.no/en/>

through the market, where individuals become “entrepreneurs,” a term conflated with “active agent,” instead of passive charitable recipient (Alkire 2010; see also Schuster 2015). These discourses of entrepreneurial agency at Inspire also erased all of the time that goes into creating a commodity, marketing it, and finding a consumer. The women’s sewing group was not the only Inspirer that had months of meetings, following leads, and working for free before securing their first contract.

This model may sound like the municipality’s calls for economic sustainability, where, as we saw in Chapter 1, services funded by the city were considered services provided “for free.” Yet in practice relationships between Inspirers’ business ideas and municipal and national policymakers were not always smooth. While Inspirers agreed that providing services for free was not sustainable, they did not agree that that meant that the people benefiting for those services should be the ones to pay. While Inspirers hoped to no longer be reliant on short-term public funding, many still thought that the government should finance them. Instead of short-term gifts, they hoped to enter into a different sort of contractual relationship with state agencies, where they provided a product or service for the welfare state. Inspire staff and members saw contracts as preferable for the kind of reciprocal relationship they created between the business and the buying organization, where larger amounts of money were generally involved, and contracts tended to be longer-lasting than one-time charitable grants. These kinds of public-private contracts have become common in Norway, but they usually go to larger corporations run by people who went to business school with members of government, as Inspire staff member Hanna explained to me once, not to people who actually live within the communities at which the services are aimed. A contractual relationship, in Inspire’s view, shifted the power relationship between state and citizens, where the people living in communities that needed state

assistance knew better what that assistance should look like than did the politicians, bureaucrats, or corporations who govern “from above” and “from the outside” (these two distal comparisons were frequently used synonymously).

Yet the structure and procurement policies within the public sector are not conducive to buying services from small social enterprises. As a result, at the time when I finished my fieldwork, almost all the Inspirers I had first met the year before were still reliant on applying for small, short-term, public and private grants. Many worked other jobs, most commonly in preschools or medical centers, and would come to Inspire evenings and weekends to work on their social enterprise projects. Several told me they had invested all of their personal savings in these projects, and at the most extreme a few had sold their valuable personal belongings on FINN.no, the Norwegian equivalent to craigslist, to make ends meet. Their experiences pointed to an ambivalence in the way Inspire thought of value as a mix of social and economic. In selecting new members, Inspire specifically did not look for people who they believed would be motivated by financial gain. Instead, they wanted members who had identified a social problem that they thought they could solve, and who also thought it would be “exciting” (*spennende*) if they could make money when they solve it. Like the entrepreneurs Lilly Irani describes in India (2019), what exactly that conception of “social good” was was particular to each individual, and Inspire staff were always interested in a potential new member as long as they were motivated by personal experiences of living or working in the neighborhood, regardless of their exact business idea. As Hanna told me, “That’s the important thing about social enterprise: the ones that work

are the ones that are run by the person who's experienced the challenge,"<sup>16</sup> not people interested in solving the problems of others.

Yet, similar to the Time Credits program, not just anyone living in Tøyen became an Inspirer. The first time I met Hanna, she told me about the stereotype of the kind of member they did *not* want: ethnic Norwegian men in their 50s who said they needed a salary first before they could try to start their business. These men were always disappointed to learn that Inspire's funding packages were only a one-time grant of 10,000 NOK (about \$1250 in 2018), with a chance of a second grant of 50,000 NOK when the business idea was more developed. Hanna told me that these men were always the first people to give up and go back to the traditional labor sector. Inspire staff must have done a good job weeding these people out, because I never met anyone who fit this stereotype while I was at Inspire. I was only aware of one person's request to join being denied. He was a Somali man, and the staff felt that his project idea would be better suited to an NGO because he had no business plan. He was still invited to Inspire workshops to try to come up with one, and to reapply for financial support later.

Hanna's attitude toward older white Norwegian men was perhaps not surprising given her and other Inspire staff's backgrounds. Staff were a mix of white European and sub-Saharan Africans, some of whom grew up in Norway, but all of whom had spent at least several years living outside of Norway, generally in the UK, US, Kenya, or South Africa. Most were highly educated, with at least a master's degree that was usually in business or international development. Conversation among staff freely shifted between Norwegian and English, and a

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<sup>16</sup> As I discuss below, many Inspire staff members came from the US or UK and so I would frequently speak English with them. In some cases I have chosen to not always present Norwegian translations for reasons of anonymity.



common activity at social events was to poke fun at the homogeneity and rigidity they perceived among most Norwegians.

Instead of middle-aged white men, Inspirers were largely in their 20s to 40s, and while a few could be categorized as “white Norwegian hipsters,” most were migrants from Africa and the Middle East, or the Norwegian-born children of migrants. Middle-class, white Inspirers tended to run projects focused on increasing youth unemployment, and you could say that the many local teenagers they knew, almost all of whom have migrant background in Tøyen, boosted their legitimacy as people doing “good work” in the neighborhood. Many Inspirers lived in public housing and had been either unemployed before they joined Inspire, or worked in service jobs that did not account for the education they may have received outside of Norway, for example as preschool aides. Inspirers were not necessarily more selfless than Hanna’s stereotypical 50-year-old white Norwegian man: Fatima, Hodan, and Ayaan, joined Inspire because they wanted salaries to support themselves and their families financially. However, they had very different job prospects outside of starting a social enterprise. Racial discrimination within the traditional Norwegian labor market was a frequently discussed topic around the Inspire office. While they wanted to find employment and tended to have close ties to groups within the neighborhood, many Inspirers were ambivalent about starting social businesses. Migrant Inspirers in particular frequently faced financial hardships as they started their businesses, as they did not tend to have the financial support from their families. While Inspire offered workshops to help all Inspirers to develop skills like grant-writing and budgeting, white Norwegians tended to be more comfortable with these things, and to have a better understanding of how the Norwegian system worked. In particularly frank moments, some migrant Inspirers would complain to me about how their white counterparts were able to achieve so much more in

short time periods because they did not face the same financial pressures. Yet even those who complained would also express their gratitude to Inspire for acknowledging the value of their individual expertise to change an aspect of Norwegian society for the better, instead of making assumptions about their abilities or their desire to work based on racialized stereotypes.

The Inspire support staff were aware of and sympathetic to the kinds of financial hardship their members faced. At least one staff member offered to loan money personally to an Inspirer to help him get through an especially difficult period. Yet the organization as a whole could do little to support its members financially because their own situation was also entirely reliant on irregularly timed, project-based grants, generally from public agencies or from the Gjensidige Foundation. Almost all of Inspire's funding came earmarked for certain tasks based on the grants they receive. Staff came and went based on these grant timelines, and the frequent turnover made it difficult for the organization to develop its services, as guiding documents or long-term plans got lost when employees left. Inspire staff were always forthright with their members that they were unable to provide more economic support than the initial starting grants, but at the same time some members became frustrated that the organization, with its institutional authority and connections to the municipal government and funding agencies, could not do more.

At the same time, the value scale that brought together the social and the economic allowed Inspire to claim that all Inspirers were successful, regardless of whether they had been able to create a paid job for themselves and start their business. Through the connections they develop at Inspire, some were able to get another job, often for the municipality. In other cases, staff said Inspirers were successful because of the *social* value their time as a social entrepreneur has given them because it allowed them to meet more of their neighbors. "Success" for an

Inspirer can look very similar to the success of Time Credits: members learn more about the services around them, have increased social contact with their neighbors, and learn new skills.

### **Inspire's Scalar Projects**

While the scale of the social to the economic is useful in placing Inspire's project in some contexts, it was not the only salient axis of differentiation for staff. Social enterprise "incubators" like Inspire are emerging in many communities across the world (Defourny and Nyssens 2010). There is a wide range of the sorts of businesses that can be called a social enterprise and the scales they can address, from Nobel Prize winner Muhammad Yunus's multinational microcredit organization, Grameen Bank, to an app that helps bakeries across Norway cheaply sell leftover products to reduce food waste, to a small catering company that brings isolated migrant women together and teaches them about nutrition. Inspire distinguished itself from most of the other incubators across Oslo in its focus on the latter, "community-based," "bottom-up" kind of business.

Social entrepreneurship has been criticized for ignoring the political and contributing to minimizing government in favor of individual "heroes," without adequate proof that social enterprises succeed at what they say they will do (Ganz, Kay, and Spicer 2018). Some have responded that this is a misunderstanding (Zakaras 2018), while others distinguish between "neoliberal social entrepreneurs" who are driven primarily by market logics, and those who are looking to instead create new organizational models (Sharma 2016; see also Lundgaard Andersen, Gawell, and Spear 2016). My Inspire interlocutors would agree with this response, pointing to a large discrepancy in the kinds of social enterprises within Norway. They would say that many of the larger companies were started by people who just wanted to be heroic

entrepreneurs and only added a social component to make their business idea more “trendy.” Inspirer’s enterprises, however, differed because they started with the social issue that they wanted to address. For them, creating a business and becoming an entrepreneur was only the means to an end, not the end in itself. Inspire employees also disagreed with the accusation that their work ignored the political. At internal meetings and workshops and when explaining the Inspire model to outsiders, Hanna and Maria constantly spoke about how their end goal was what they called “systems change.” They tended to talk about this in terms of trying to change municipal or national policy, arguing that their members were solving social problems in the local community, but also providing the case studies necessary to convince politicians that there is a better way to address various social problems nationally. While Inspire staff wanted to change the way the current political system functioned, they did not want to remove it entirely.

### **Social enterprise within the Norwegian welfare state**

As a part of differentiating themselves from other organizations focused on entrepreneurship, Inspire staff must also do constant communicative work to position social enterprises in relation to the welfare state (see also Hauge and Wasvik 2016). While social entrepreneurship is a fairly well-established concept in places like the UK, the idea is relatively new in Norway, and some of my interlocutors who had spent time in the UK would frequently complain about how far behind Norway was in its understanding of social entrepreneurship, especially in terms of the support structures and recognized forms of business organizations. Maria explained to me that Norwegians were slow to take up social entrepreneurship because they were used to a clear separation between the public and private sectors, just like there was a separation between the social and the economic, and they were wary of anything that did not fall

neatly into one category. This, and the fact that most start-up funding was public money instead of coming from private foundations or venture capital, sets the Norwegian context apart from many other places where social entrepreneurship has become popular. Tøyen is quite far to the left politically,<sup>17</sup> so concerns about anything that looked like the privatization of public services looked suspicious to many Tøyen activists. Staff had to work to negotiate the fine line between their work and “welfare profiteering,” or making a profit off of public contracts to run welfare services. A category used solely by the political left,<sup>18</sup> welfare profiteers typically own companies that run preschools, hospitals, or elder care homes (Herning 2015). Inspire staff worked hard to distinguish themselves from welfare profiteers by focusing on how Inspirers came from the groups they were trying to help, and lived within the neighborhood.

Inspire’s model was based in part on these kinds of social enterprises coming out of the UK, which were closely tied to the weakening of the welfare state there. The theme of needing to step up and “fill the gaps” the state cannot was a common theme of the promotional materials for most of the British organizations that came to share their experiences with Inspirers over the course of my fieldwork. Yet Inspire itself had a different goal, which was to complement and improve the welfare state, not to replace it as it receded. After several staff members attended a

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<sup>17</sup> Tøyen is also the home of several prominent left-wing organizations, including the headquarters of the Socialist Left Party, a leading leftist publisher and think tank, and organizations including the Norwegian branch of the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and for Citizens' Action (ATTAC).

<sup>18</sup> The right, who prefer expressions like “free choice in welfare” (*valgfrihet i velferden*), claim that “welfare profiteer” is a sexist term devaluing the work of women business owners. However, the left argues that, while most employees of these companies are women, the owners of these companies are almost all men, and that the Liberal Party should be more concerned about how these owners, regardless of gender, are increasing their profits by offering employees reduced salaries and pensions in relation to employees at the equivalent publicly run facilities (Sander 2017).

large social enterprise symposium in the UK, they came back visibly shocked by how little people there could depend on the state for support, and they repeated around the office in the following days that the Norwegian model was not the same.

This approach also meant that, although several Inspirers had leadership roles in local branches of left-wing political parties, they and the Inspire support staff had to be willing to work with officials from across the political spectrum. These collaborations were often frustrating for Inspire staff, and Hanna would often tell me after meetings with politicians that “they still don’t get it.” Yet she and others at Inspire also thought it was better to be a part of these discussions than to refuse to work with some people for political reasons. Throughout the time I was at Inspire, the national government was controlled by a right-wing coalition, so Inspire staff had to learn how to work with the political right, and this was where the business-sounding register staff cultivates proved to be most useful because it could mask some the leftist leanings of many of the Inspirers and put Inspire’s mission into terms that appealed to the more business-oriented political parties in the center and on the right.

The right-wing Norwegian national government encourages entrepreneurship, both social and otherwise, especially among people of migrant background. During my fieldwork, the Norwegian Trade Minister Torbjørn Røe Isaksen, whose discussion of sustainable welfare we saw in Chapter 1, came to Tøyen to listen to entrepreneurs and business owners of minority background as a part of the government’s “integration *dugnad*.” At the event, he told the assembled audience of social entrepreneurs from Inspire and elsewhere that he wanted to learn what the government could do so that even more people could start their own businesses.

“Creating one’s own job is good integration,”<sup>19</sup> stated the press release announcing the visit. The national government sees entrepreneurship, social and otherwise, as a way to address the high levels of unemployment among people of minority background because unemployed migrants actively create jobs for themselves, and perhaps also others, instead of being passive welfare recipients waiting to be given a job, which is a stereotype that circulates widely, across the political spectrum. The Nordic welfare model may be known as having gone the farthest in de-commodifying rights to social assistance (Esping-Andersen 1990), but participation in the labor force and contributing to the continuation of the welfare state through paying taxes is still an important aspect of being a “good” Norwegian citizen (McKowen 2018; 2020).

However, this idea of entrepreneurship specifically as “good integration” may seem curious. Entrepreneurship, while becoming more popular, is still not very common among ethnic Norwegians. Innovation Norway seems to be aware of this difference, as their online guide to social entrepreneurship features a photo of a group of women, all of whom are wearing hijabs, working at sewing machines (Innovasjon Norge 2021). Instead, I frequently heard entrepreneurially-minded Norwegians express frustration with how oil wealth has made most Norwegians “complacent,” satisfied with working a traditional job.<sup>20</sup> Pointing to Spotify in Sweden or Skype in Estonia, these frustrated entrepreneurs say Norwegians will need to change their mindset if they have any hope of creating similar innovations. Although I heard these narratives during my first stay in Norway in 2012–13, they took on a new urgency after the 2014 oil crisis. Isaksen’s visit to Tøyen was a part of these narratives, and he introduced the event in

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<sup>19</sup> Det å skape sin egen arbeidsplass er god integrering.

<sup>20</sup> In late 2019, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) warned Norway against exactly this kind of complacency.

the Tøyen community center by saying that Norway can no longer rely solely on oil, but needs “more legs to stand on” (*flere ben å stå på*), just as he had in his Conservative Party Convention a few months before. Being an entrepreneur and creating your own job is not “good integration” because it makes migrants more like actual ethnic Norwegians today. It is good integration because it makes them into the kind of Norwegian the government wants to see in the future.

Programs like Inspire and Time Credits call on minoritized people living in Oslo to care for each other and fill the “gaps” within the Norwegian welfare state. In this sense, they have much in common with other “ethical citizenship” projects in Europe, which, as Andrea Muehlebach has described it in the Northern Italian context, “transforms a dystopic future of the breakdown of welfare into a utopic vision of community welfare” because it activates otherwise passive citizenry *and* strengthens the social fabric at the scale of the community (2012, 39). Yet Inspire goes even farther than volunteering, suggesting that social entrepreneurs will also be able to support themselves financially through their capacities to care for one other, making them no longer reliant on state assistance, while they are also “solving” social problems like loneliness, public health, or youth unemployment.

The kinds of ethical citizenship being promoted through the Time Credits and Inspire programs also create particular racialized boundaries that differ from those emerging elsewhere. In Muehlebach’s account of Northern Italy, for example, retired Italian volunteers are seen to be providing a kind of selfless relational care that immigrant women doing similar forms of labor are not. Italian ethical citizenship excludes racialized immigrant others. In Oslo, however, these initiatives are addressed specifically at these racialized others, promoting a kind of belonging within Norwegian society to those of minority background as long as they perform a kind of (quasi-) remunerated relational care towards others in their community. This conception of



citizenship might more accurately be called ethical-entrepreneurial citizenship, combining Muehlebach's ethical with Lilly Irani's "entrepreneurial citizenship," which "promise[s] national belonging for those who subsume their hopes, ideals, particular knowledges, and relationships into experiments in projects that promise value" (2019, 2). While white Norwegians are good citizens just through having been born in Norway, participating in *dugnad* a few times a year, and paying taxes, minoritized Norwegians need to professionalize their care relationships, solving problems in the welfare state *and* creating their own forms of employment.

## **Conclusion**

While only a small number of Tøyen residents become social entrepreneurs, similar ideas about value and "good work" circulated among other Tøyen residents as well. Shortly before I left Oslo, I went for a walk with my neighbor, Mari. We'd met about a year before when she had begun to organize an urban vegetable garden so that she could meet more of her neighbors, both the middle-class ethnic Norwegians and other Northern Europeans who lived in her building, and her neighbors in the public housing block across the street, most of whom are African migrants with children. Starting the garden had been Mari's first major foray into community volunteer work, and throughout the summer, she repeatedly expressed how happy she was that she had finally followed through on an idea of how to contribute to her local community. Mari had a full-time job on the other side of the city as an engineer, so the garden was something she worked on in the evenings and on weekends. But as we chatted that winter day out in the Oslo forest about what I'd learned through my fieldwork, Mari expressed that her situation was not entirely satisfying. "Anyone" could do the job she had, she explained. There are so many more important

problems that need to be addressed, like youth unemployment, and she wished she could be working on those.

This was the second time that month I had had a friend living in Tøyen express this sentiment that community work was more satisfying than their 9-to-4 office jobs.<sup>21</sup> The other, Stine, had told me a week or so before that she had moved from working full- to part-time as a developer at a software company so that she could spend more time getting involved with several volunteer-based neighborhood organizations. She explained that what was going on in Tøyen right now was just more “interesting” than her real job. At first I thought that desires to find more meaningful or interesting work came from having gotten to know some of the Inspirers. Stine and Hodan, for example, were acquaintances because their children were in the same class at school, and the desire to do something “meaningful” reminded me of Hodan’s explanation of how she spent months leading the sewing group as a volunteer because of the obligation she felt to the other women. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that they also sounded like other white Norwegian women I met during my fieldwork. For example, I heard exactly the same line about not wanting a job that “anyone” could do from a real estate developer I interviewed. When she described the motivation behind her project, converting an old warehouse building into luxury apartments, she told me, “if that’s something everyone could do or everyone could make, I probably wouldn’t bother making it.” Although building luxury apartments and working to address youth unemployment are admittedly very different goals, the motivation behind these job aspirations were similar.

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<sup>21</sup> 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. are standard working hours in Norway, although many Norwegians I know actually work on “flex-time,” meaning they can set their own work hours, usually within some limitations to ensure there were a few hours a day when everyone would be at the office.

While some Inspirers were motivated by the idea of creating something unique, and Inspire staff also focused on the promise of the individual, Mari and Stine's motivations were in fact the opposite of Fatima, Hodan, and Ayaan's sewing group. Those three women became Inspirers as more of a steppingstone into the traditional labor market. When I asked Fatima what she thought about the wool hats they made, she told me that she was happy the group was making something so typically Norwegian as wool outdoors wear, because it showed other potential employers that "even though we dress like this," gesturing to her full-body jilbab, "we can still make that kind of clothing." While their social obligation to the other women in the sewing group was important, their situations and aspired trajectories were different from Stine's and Mari's because for them, a traditional, full-time job has been out of reach. Muehlebach and Shoshan (2012) discuss the generational distribution of post-Fordist affect, including a nostalgia for job security. These women in Tøyen pointed to a similar distribution on ethnic lines, where it was the women who have not had access to Fordist labor regimes and job security who strove for it, while the white Norwegian women who do benefit from secure employment yearned for something different. Others have written about the shift from Fordist-Keynesian work as a vehicle for pleasure through paid holidays, to neoliberal work "as a good in itself: a means towards self-realization rather than as an opportunity for self-transcendence" (Donzelot 1991, 251). Stine and Mari took this shift further, where pleasure in work was based not only in individual pleasure, but on an individual's specific ability to care for others.

This chapter has considered two initiatives that made ethical claims about citizen engagement and altruistic work through a set of scalar practices that bring economic ideas of money, exchange, and accounting to social projects that previously relied on volunteers and welfare state services. Through calculations, measurements, and comparisons, my interlocutors

placed themselves along scales between the “social” to the “economic;” the local, national, and (anglophone) global; the big and small; and the present and projected future, to name a few. Both the Time Credits and social entrepreneurship programs attempted to address the exclusionary nature of Norwegian society, including the institutional formations that support and control volunteering, a discriminatory job market, and a welfare state that may be too rigid to account for the kinds of differences present in Oslo today. However, even these “inclusive” initiatives promoting a sort of ethical-entrepreneurial citizenship reproduced the ethnicized boundaries they were trying to break down. At the same time, while both initiatives were also aimed at smoothing over socio-economic inequalities, they continued to take for granted the market as an organizing social order.

## CHAPTER 4

### LISTENING LIKE A STATE? CREATING AUTHORITY AND LEGITIMACY THROUGH PARTICIPATORY POLITICAL PROJECTS

I frequently saw Abdi at community meetings and events around the neighborhood. Originally from Somalia, Abdi had moved to Norway in the 1990s and lived in one of the public housing blocks with his family. He was active in a large number of community organizations, especially those related to housing, and he tended to be outspoken at public meetings, especially around issues of youth employment and the barriers his children and their peers faced. His engagement had earned him invitations to participate in advisory panels to the municipality, so I had always assumed he was fairly influential. Which is why I was surprised when, at a meeting of housing activists in late October, he began complaining to the group of neighborhood about his frustrations with the municipal corporation that manages all of the public housing in the city. Aside from not keeping up with maintenance, he had just learned that they would be turning off the electricity for twelve hours the next day, meaning children would have to negotiate dark hallways and stairwells when they came home from school—the sun sets at around 4:30 p.m. at this time of year in Oslo—and that temperatures might dip dangerously low without electric heating. He said many of his neighbors were giving up their positions on the housing association board because they did not see the point if they were not going to be listened to.

Saying no one listened was an almost constant complaint I heard from my interlocutors. Most frequently, young people and their advocates would complain that politicians and journalists never listened to them, but they were not the only ones to feel this way. Inspire members and staff expressed similar complaints about how politicians, who would come to visit

and meet with them frequently, still “didn’t get it.” Yet at the same time, community organizations and the municipality hosted more public meetings in Tøyen than anywhere else I have ever lived. These meetings were ostensibly to share information about municipal programs and plans for the neighborhood and to get feedback on them. Yet the attendees I spoke with always seemed to be ambivalent about these meetings, and to not really expect that they would change municipal policy. So why did organizations continue organizing these meetings and why did neighbors continue attending?

Anthropologists of democracy have long been interested in the neoliberal trend of “participation” and “community involvement,” where governments encourage civil society to become involved in their own self-management. Drawing on Foucault’s concept of governmentality, this scholarship generally focuses on the ways discourses of democracy and participation work to make citizens complicit in contemporary forms of power (Paley 2002). While many of my interlocutors involved in participatory democracy programs within the city did voice similar concerns about complicity and resistance, I am more interested here in looking closely at the interactional genres that count as participation (cf. Hartikainen 2018; Hull 2010).

Much work on democratic political participation focuses on the ways that representative democracy depends on citizens’ “having a voice,” where “voice” becomes a salient metaphor for power (Keane 1999; Kramer 2013). In this context, political empowerment is equated with “giving a voice to” individuals, and thus making them into liberal subjects. While similar metaphors of voice as political action are also common in Norway—the same word, *stemme*, means both “voice” and “vote” (which can lead to puns, as in Figure 4.1)—in this chapter I want to look not at speaking, but at listening. While my interlocutors might take up the metaphor of being “a voice for the voiceless” in other contexts, for example in advocating for refugees on

Lesbos, I never heard anyone in Tøyen described as “voiceless” or needing a voice. What I did hear frequently, however, was the need for politicians to listen to “the quiet voices” (*de stille stemmene*), which most usually referred to young people and migrants living in public housing. These metaphors assumed that everyone had a voice, but that the government was not listening to all of them equally.



Figure 4.1: Voting station in the middle of Tøyen Square, August 2019. The text is a play on words, which could either mean “Don't let another voice make the choice for you,” or “Don't let another vote take the election for you.” Photo by author.

Summerson Carr has shown how institutions, instead of silencing or excluding critics, have ways of hearing different kinds of people (Carr 2009). Yet while Carr's focus is on how actors inhabit these roles in ways that are politically efficacious, I am interested in the ways my interlocutors turn the tables and instead question what listening to citizens actually entails.

Frustrations around not being listened to are fairly common in participatory political initiatives, and they are well-documented in Tøyen (e.g. Reichborn-Kjennerud and Ophaug 2018). In his study of the same Area Boost Local Advisory Board that I examine below, Larsen (2019) reports that board members do not feel that the municipal employee leading the meetings is really listening to them. Yet while Larsen takes for granted these complaints of “not being listened to,” and is instead interested in places where participation is more “successful,” I want to pause and ask what listening actually looks like. The participatory political initiatives I observed were all ostensibly moments for the state to listen to civil society, but what does that listening look and sound like, who is the audience of performative state listening, and how do citizens make themselves into listenable subjects?

In asking these questions, this chapter is also inspired by work in sound studies and an anthropological focus on listening. This scholarship has focused on styles of listening, or “listening genres” (Marsilli-Vargas 2014), as a kind of total social fact, through which we can better understand, for example, the cultivation of certain kinds of ethical personhood (Hirschkind 2001), modern subjectivity (Inoue 2003), or changes in forms of social organization (Johnson 1995). As I show in this chapter, differently positioned actors in Tøyen have different understandings of what it means for the municipality to listen, and with different temporal horizons. For the municipality, listening is a process that gives authority to official plans and bureaucratic documents. Many neighbors, however, are less interested in the processes of listening than they are in seeing physical evidence of listening. These different understandings of listening point to different ideas about “transparent” democratic political action, which, at least in Scandinavia, is fundamental to the existence of the welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1990; Wahl 2011).



As Deaf Studies scholar Hilde Haualand (2008) has pointed out, hearing has particular metaphoric power in Norwegian and many other Germanic languages. The phrase *å høre sammen*, (lit. to hear together) idiomatically means “to belong.” Similarly, *tilhørighet* (belonging), is a nominalization of the prefix *til-* (from the preposition *til*, to) and the verb *høre* (to hear). The Norwegian words *høre* and *lytte* are roughly equivalent to hear and listen in English, respectively, although phrases like *å høre på* and *å høre etter* can also be used as rough synonyms of *å lytte*, “to listen.” However, as this chapter will show, municipal listening is not limited to the auditory, but also includes the circulation of various graphic artifacts, like reports, Post-It notes, and photographs. In this way this chapter contributes to recent work in semiotic anthropology on the role that such graphic artifacts play in the production of governmental and other forms of organizational knowledge (Hull 2012; Wilf 2016). Listening also entails an engagement with the surrounding built environment—just as Abdi pointed to the deteriorating building in which he lives as proof that the state is not listening to him, other interlocutors point to playgrounds, abandoned buildings, and the new and old Munch museums as indexes of listening, or a lack of it.

This chapter examines two participatory political initiatives sponsored by the municipality, a local advisory committee and a series of public meetings, examining the modes of interaction, temporalities, and kinds of listening they entail. It then moves to debates about what listening should look like, including imaginings of less hierarchical moments of co-creation (*samskaping*), and signs that residents point to that show that the municipality listens to some kinds of people more than others. Ultimately, the chapter is about the ideologies of democratic action and representation at work in shifting understandings of the relationship between the welfare state and civil society.

## **Speaking through Butcher Paper and Post-it Notes at Public Meetings**

A government's ability to listen to all of its citizens is fundamental to a particularly Norwegian conception of political authority, entwined with ideals of egalitarianism and consensus. Frequently, this is glossed as the "Law of Jante," the idea that "you are not special and you are not any better than the rest of us." As Marianne Gullestad has shown, Norwegian ideas of equality rely on a perception of sameness, where differences, especially those related to rank, are deemphasized in everyday social interactions (1989). While this understanding of egalitarianism can create pressure toward conformity, it can also work to legitimize democratic institutions. Halvard Vike has extended Gullestad's observations on egalitarianism to his analysis of Norwegian state institutions, arguing that elected politician's success relies on "the ability to demonstrate a subordination to the will of the majority" (2018, 20). Failing to do so can result in a politician's being accused of "not 'really listen[ing]," being arrogant, and eventually being voted out of office (Vike 2018, 8). Vike connects this attitude to the universalist ethos of the Norwegian welfare state, where rights to entitlements are tied to citizenship, not means testing, and how relatively easy and natural it is for Norwegian citizens to make legitimate claims on the state.

Historically, Norwegians interacted with and made collective claims on state institutions through egalitarian civic associations, a form of organization that pre-dates the modern Norwegian state (Sivesind and Selle 2010). These fostered forms of horizontal solidarity that gave individuals freedom from a reliance on more hierarchical social structures. These kinds of membership organizations have decreased since about the 1980s, at the same time as government reforms have weakened the authority of local municipal governmental institutions, which had

been relatively strong compared to other parts of Europe. As part of what Norwegians tend to call “New Public Management,” after the British term, these changes have had two important effects on the functioning of Norwegian democracy. First, they have brought in a new kind of hierarchy, as municipal bureaucrats have taken on more of a managerial role as administrators of state policies (Vike 2018). Second, it has made citizen’s positions in relation to the state more precarious because it has taken away the political power that citizens previously had as members of collective organizations, instead turning citizens into standardized “individualized egalitarians,” whose needs are assumed to be the same as every other Norwegian’s (Tranvik and Selle 2007). In Tøyen, the municipality has followed this trend toward seeing citizens as individuals, but it is experimenting with new ways for the government to listen to these individualize voices. The main goal of the Tøyen and Grønland Area Boost program is to increase active participation among local residents. A large part of this project involves increasing volunteering, as described in the previous chapter, but another important component is making sure residents’ wishes are included in the policies and programs the Area Boost oversees. This attention to participation, which is a cornerstone of many urban renewal projects, is partly about activating citizens assumed to be “passive,” like public housing residents of immigrant background (Jdid 2021). Yet, while participation had always been an important component of Boost’s plans, efforts to listen to the “quiet voices” increased considerably following the release of the *Norwegian Conditions* documentary and the resulting media focus on who the Boost was really for. Participatory events created an opportunity for legitimization of policies, where Boost staff and other municipal employees could perform listening to all residents, both quiet and loud.

The largest participatory events that the Area Boost organizes are the annual workshops around creating a Program Plan for the following year. These include a series of themed

workshops that take place at various times over several weeks in September and October, culminating in a larger public meeting on a Saturday afternoon. In the year I was there, the workshop themes, which had been suggested by the local advisory board, included environment and climate, volunteering, housing, youth belonging, and public health. The goal of all of these meetings was to listen to local opinions and perspectives and translate them into the planning policy document for the coming year. This process of translation involved the creation of a metadocument produced primarily for the local advisory board, which reported on “how residents and other actors have been involved and been listened to in various phases of the work with the program plan.”<sup>1</sup> This metadocument described the participatory events and included every written comment the meetings had produced. The cover featured photographs of residents and staff members taken at the events.

The workshops, which were held at different publicly accessible places in Tøyen and Grønland, had mixed attendance, from 8 people at the environment and climate workshop, to over 60 at the one about youth belonging. They had a “café dialogue” format, as they called it, which was also used by many of the local organizations in the neighborhood, where attendees would sit in groups of about 5 people around tables covered in large pieces of paper. Each table discusses prompts, while one or all of the participants jot down notes on the paper. At the end, each table shares the important points from their discussion with the room.

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<sup>1</sup> “hvordan innbyggerne og andre aktører har vært involvert og blitt lyttet til i ulike faser av arbeidet med programplanen” (Områdeløft Grønland og Tøyen 2018, 3)

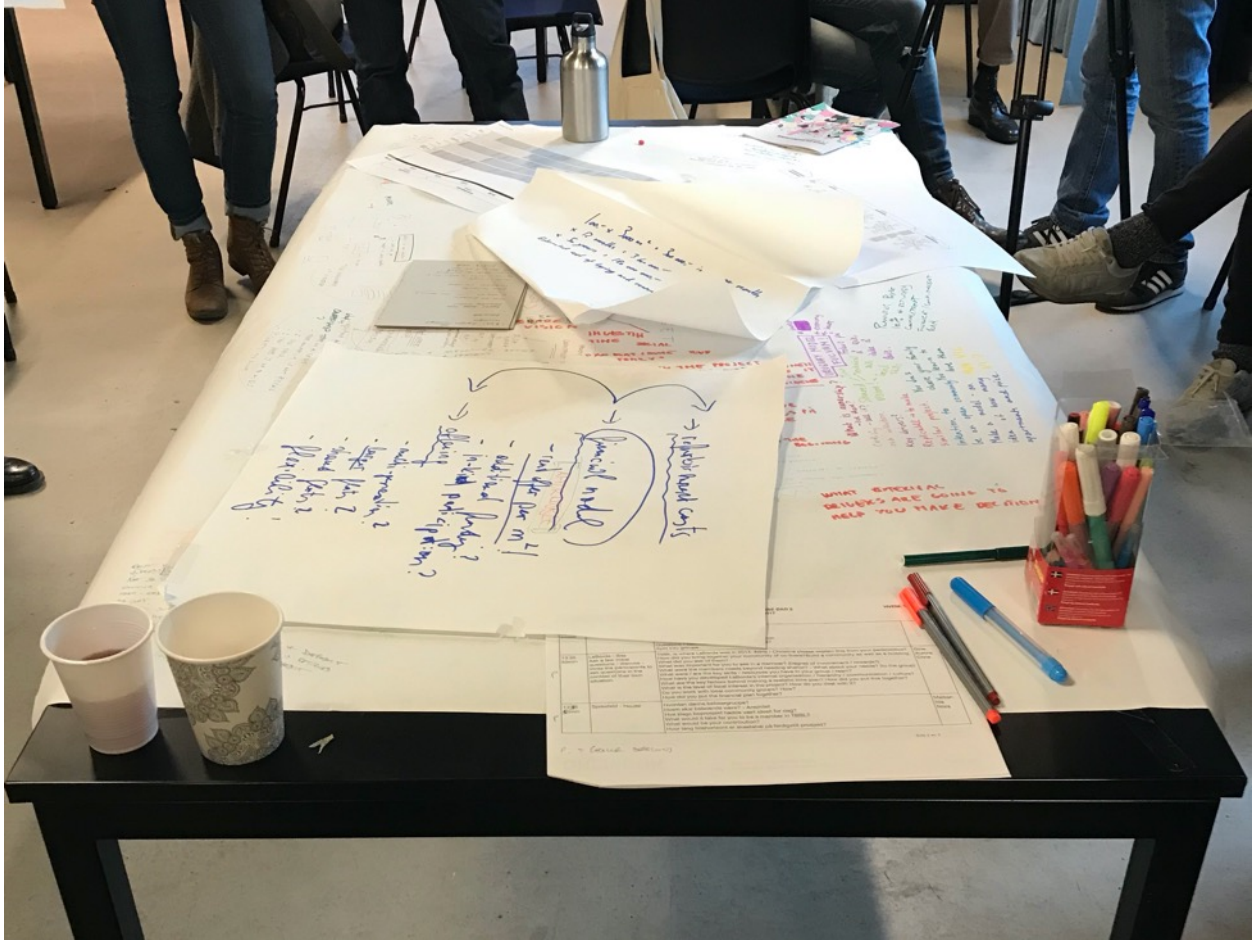


Figure 4.2: The result of a similar “café dialogue”-style meeting organized by the Tøyen Housing Association a month after the Area Boost’s public meetings. Photo by author.

In the days following these workshops, Area Boost staff, who had collected all of the graphic artifacts of these workshops, organized them into numbered points that they typed and printed out on sheets of A4 paper that they could then hang around the outer walls of the tent where the Saturday public meeting took place.

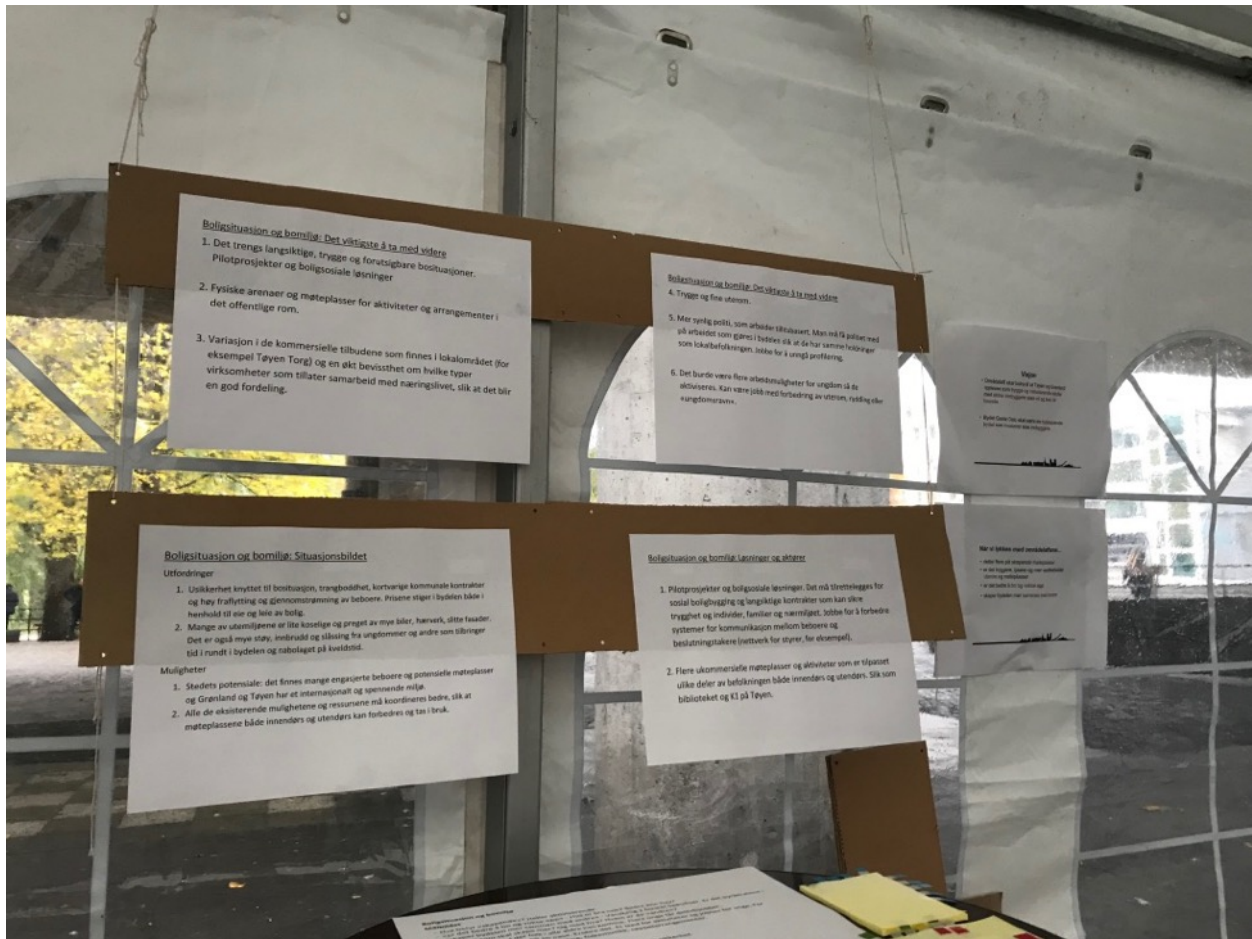


Figure 4.3: The Housing station, before the meeting began, with typed up points from the housing workshop. Photo by author.

The Saturday meeting had been advertised as starting at noon, but when I arrived there were only a couple of people there, along with the ten Area Boost employees running the meeting. We were in a large white tent that had been set up outside of the Grønland subway station. The area is known for its cheap vegetable shops, most of which are run by Turkish and Kurdish families, and the area was bustling with weekend shoppers. Inside the tent, there were four long tables, piled high with candy, clementines, and apples. Around the edges, there were five stations, one for each of the workshops that had taken place over the previous few weeks. At each station, Area Boost employees had hung up a list of what the workshop attendees had

decided were the most important points around the themes, suggestions for the “solutions,” and the important actors who needed to be included (Figure 4.3).

At about 12:30, the meeting officially started, beginning with about a half an hour of official speakers. First two local politicians welcomed everyone and spoke about the importance of civic participation and local engagement. They left as soon as they’d finished speaking, and then Sofie, the Area Boost leader, began a PowerPoint presentation about the structure of the workshops and the main recommendations that had come out of them. Once she had finished, her colleague explained how the rest of the meeting was going to work. Most of the other employees spread out between the five stations, ready to have individual conversations with people as they came by to read the important points that had come out of the workshops, and to vote for the ones that they agreed were the most important. One employee with a camera moved around the tent snapping photographs of people as they engaged with the stations and chatted with each other.

While the tent could easily have fit 100 people, during the presentations at the beginning, there were only about 20 attendees, along with the 10 people working. Almost all of the attendees appeared to be white Norwegians, something that disappointed the meeting organizers and some of the attendees, one of whom, a woman who introduced herself as being originally from South Africa, gave a long speech during the question-and-answer period about the importance of thinking “outside the box” and including more kinds of people and more kinds of ideas. The audience applauded her enthusiastically as Sofie made sure the employee with the camera took a picture of her, a photo that became part of the cover of the metadocument.

After the formal presentations, a group of teenagers the Area Boost had employed for the day arrived with a load of halal pizzas. The smell of the pizzas attracted others, and more people

began pouring into the tent. Many of these newer arrivals were families with small children, and they were overwhelmingly not white Norwegians, but people with African and Middle Eastern backgrounds. Each attendee was given 10 small Post-its to vote on the points from the workshops that they thought were the most important and a few larger Post-its in case they had anything they wanted to add. As the formal presentation part of the meeting ended, everyone got up to move toward their favorite station. No one went to the Climate and Environment area. Instead, as was the case at almost all of the local meetings I attended, most people grouped around the station about youth. The teenage boys who Area Boost had hired to help with the event were also grouped around this station, giving all of their 10 votes each to the same point (Figure 4.4). Off to the side, I saw Abdi involved in an energized discussion with a local Red Party politician about how young people do not need more youth clubs where they can drink coffee; they need jobs and financial independence.



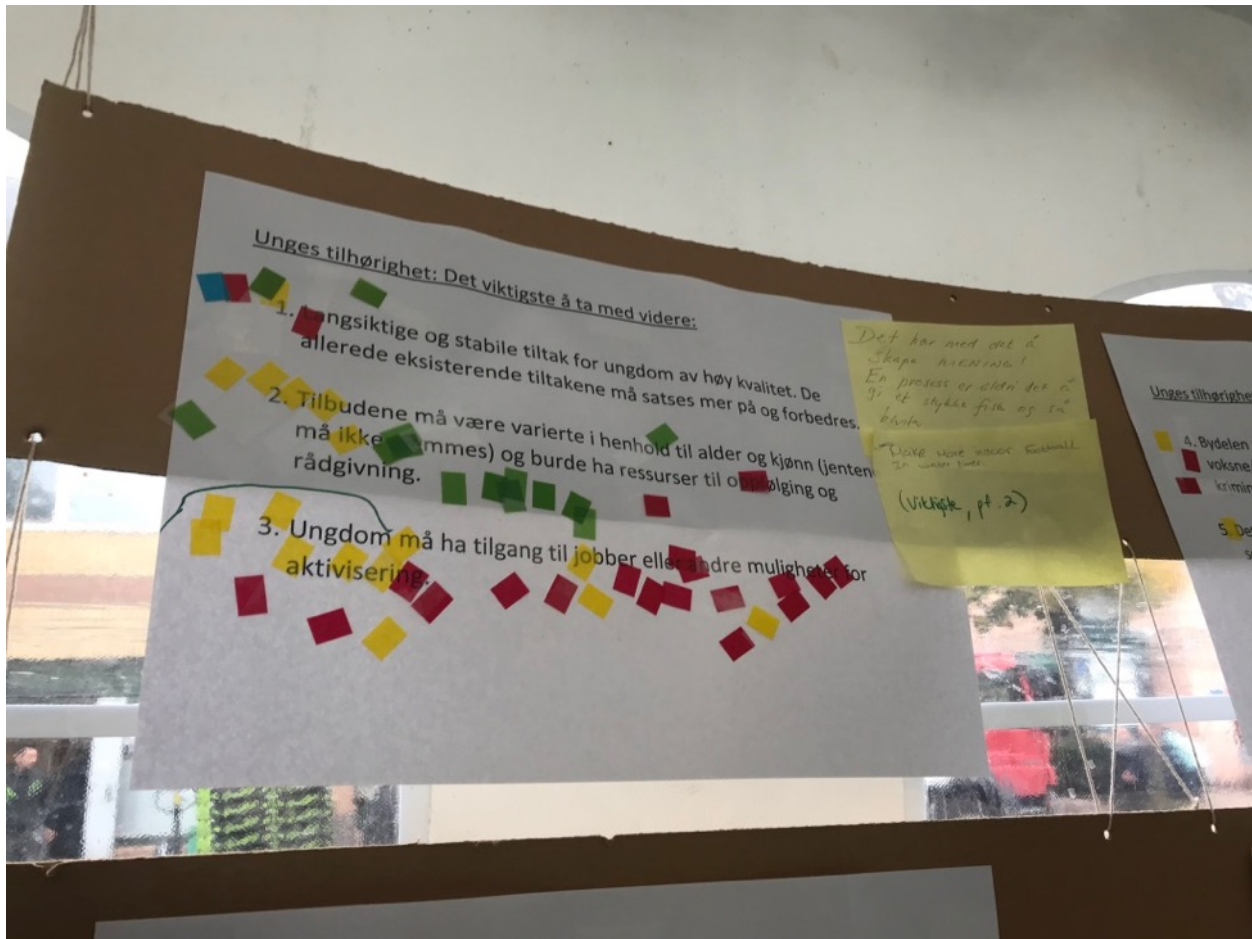


Figure 4.4: The station on “youth belonging” after the teenaged boys working at the meeting had voted. The most votes are for point 3: “Youth must have access to jobs or other possibilities for activation.” Photo by author.

Just as Wilf (2016) argues that the use of Post-it notes by consultants and entrepreneurs in New York City are a salient index of a ritual of creativity, the Post-it notes at this public meeting are also a theme of the “innovative” (*nyskapende*) character of the kinds of participation and local engagement the Area Boost program is meant to create. Policy in an Area Boost does not come out of dry documents and meetings alone, but through the active involvement of potentially all citizens. These meetings have a kind of immediacy to them that more traditional ways of doing local politics do not have—anyone can write a comment on a Post-it. At the same time, the Post-it notes at the public meeting work to create a kind of idealized liberal public sphere, where

the suggestions from the general public come to be completely detached from the people making them. While the municipal employees worried about diversity and representation and made sure to document that not everyone was a white, middle-class “hipster” through photographs of the events that were included in the metadocument, the individual people who made each suggestion come to be completely erased. The only thing we can know about the participant is what their handwriting looks like, but even that disappears as the Area Boost employees type up the comments into their reports. While the Area Boost likely uses this format partly to make everyone’s contributions appear equal, it also takes away a form of accounting for which residents the city eventually is seen to be listening to over others.

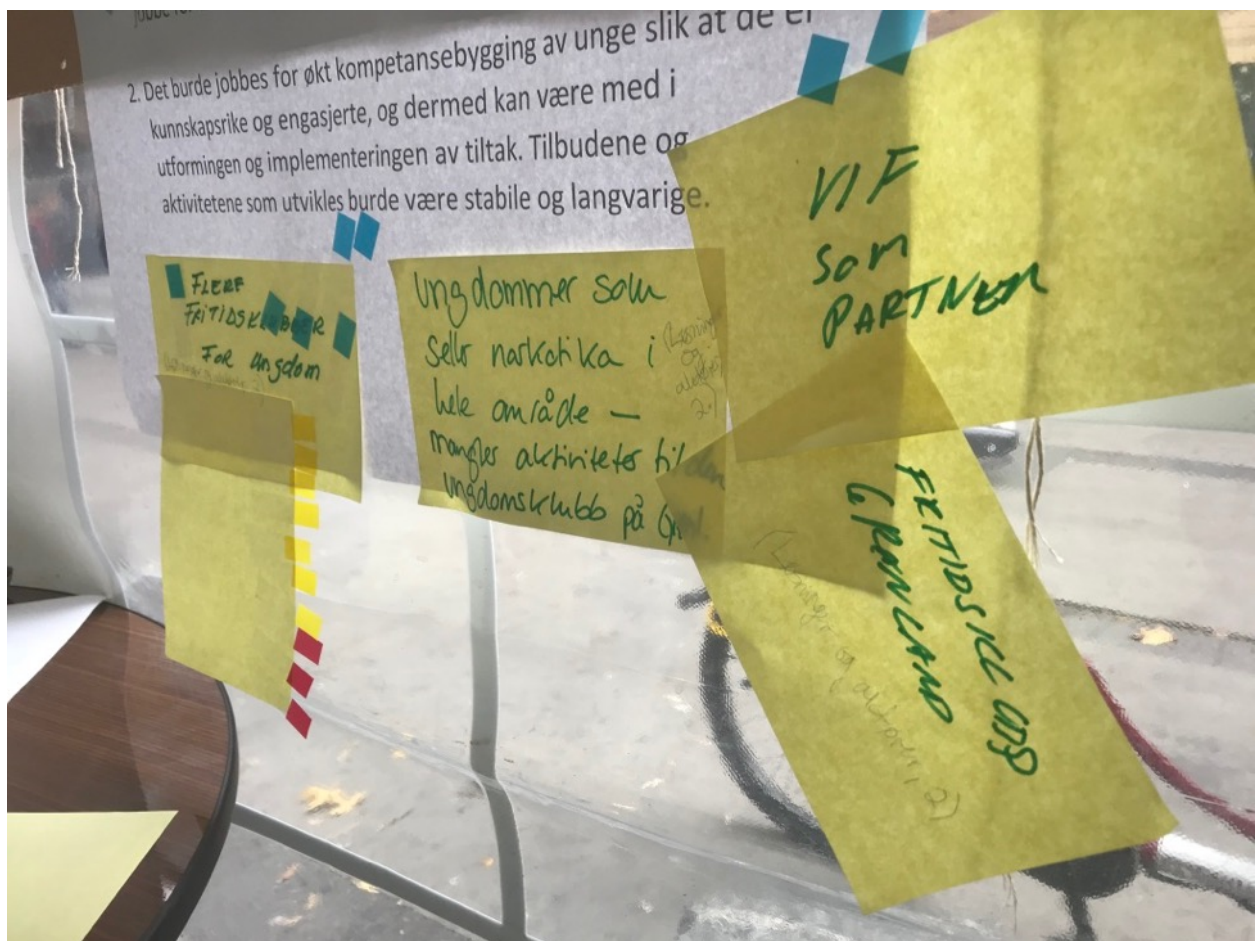


Figure 4.5: Handwritten additions, including “MORE LEISURE CLUBS FOR youth,” “Youths that sell narcotics in the whole area lack activities in the youth club in Grønland,” “VIF [local

Figure 4.5: Handwritten additions, continued

football club] as a partner,” “Leisure club Grønland.” The fainter comments in pencil point to the typed points where staff thought these comments had already been addressed. Photo by author.

The rush of people who had arrived with the pizza began to trickle out around 2 p.m., and the employees and teenagers who had been hired for the event began to clean up. Marte, the employee with the camera, moved around to the five stations, photographing all of the Post-it notes and the votes that people had left so that she could later type them up in the order of which had received the most votes.

In the weeks following the public events, Marte and her colleagues collated the suggestions from the workshops and any additional suggestions on Post-it notes in a table in the metadocument. They annotated each piece of input with comments and a suggestion for how to carry out the idea. For example, the suggestion above in Figure 4.5, *FLERE FRITIDSKLUBBER FOR ungdom*, “MORE LEISURE CLUBS FOR youth,” was typed up in the report with the following recommendations, in the same format as the point about youth employment in Figure 4.4.

Table 4.1: Translation of table in metadocument “Rapport fra medvirkning til lokal programplan 2019” (Områdeløft Grønland og Tøyen 2018, 9).

<b><i>Input</i></b>	<b><i>Assessment</i></b>	<b><i>Recommendation</i></b>
<i>Youth must have access to jobs or other possibilities for activation.</i>	<i>This point came up at all of the workshops, and got the most votes of the theme during the public meeting. There is obviously a need for activity options and employment of youth, and easier access to salaried work is sought after by the youths themselves. Important both as a crime prevention measure, to improve conditions for growing up, and to improve the quality of life for residents in the long run.</i>	<b><i>Input for focus area in the budget:</i></b> <i>Co-creation residents, civil society, social entrepreneurs and business community. Seen in connection with goals 3 and 6.</i>
More leisure clubs for youth.	Great need for strengthened leisure and activity offerings for youth. The district has mapped 124 different activity offerings in the Gamle Oslo District within sports, leisure, culture and health under the auspices of volunteer teams and associations, social entrepreneurs, and the district’s services.	<b>New area of opportunity</b> discussed in the program plan’s ch. 6 <b>Input for focus area in the budget:</b> - Attractive and stable activities for children and youth in Tøyen and Grønland. - Co-creation residents, civil society, social entrepreneurs and business community.  Seen in connection with goals 1, 3 and 6.

The recommendations point to an area of the Area Boost budget that incorporates these suggestions and includes them as a “new area of opportunity” where an Area Boost policy and future budget item should be developed. They also link the comment to the specific, numbered goals of the Area Boost:

1. **Social life and volunteering:** The municipality facilitates a varied cultural and

organizational life and new forms of volunteering and participation.

2. **Citizenship:** Residents increasingly contribute to developing their own local society.
3. **Living environment:** The living environments are increasingly well-functioning and are perceived of as safe by residents.
4. **Physical qualities of the local environment:** Buildings and outdoor areas are used and are well maintained, and residents have good access to important functions in and outside the area.
5. **Urban development:** Area and infrastructure planning, housing and urban development is based on local needs and contributes to increasing the area's attractiveness.
6. **New municipal practice:** The municipality is better at cooperating internally and externally to create good living and growing up environments (Områdesatsingene i Oslo - Delprogram nærmiljø 2018, 11).

These goals had been developed by the municipality for all of their urban renewal programs across the city, and so have a kind of “top-down” authority reminiscent to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals discussed in Chapter 1, reinforced by how they are referenced in the metadocument by number instead of name or thematic content. The Area Boost staff’s job is to take up comments from local residents, transducing them from thoughts jotted on a piece of butcher paper or a Post-it note into a recommendation that can be nested under a strategic goal. The main goals were broad enough, and the citizen input structure had been directed enough, that this translation generally appeared to always be possible. I never witnessed a citizen suggestion that the municipality could not take up.

After the Area Boost staff had completed the metadocument report and the Program Plan (Oslo indre øst-satsingen - Delprogram nærmiljø 2018), which included a budget, the documents

were shared and discussed with the local advisory board, which I discuss in the next section. They then moved through the elected district committees, with written recommendations from the district manager that came verbatim from the local advisory board’s official recommendations. These recommendations were taken up by the District Council, and the Program Plan continued to move up to the City Council, who had the final say on budgeting. While the Program Plan included a summary of the main themes that emerged from the participatory workshops, they were no longer written as direct reported speech from participants, but instead as general themes, expressed in nominalizations and tenseless constructions, that had emerged from the participatory meetings (Table 4.2). The citizen input was even less visible in the budget request at the end of the Program Plan (Table 4.3).

Table 4.2: Translation of Table 3, “Summary of recommendations from workshops and the public meeting to the new local program plan” (Oslo indre øst-satsingen - Delprogram nærmiljø 2018, 14)

<b>Workshop Theme</b>	<b>Recommendation to take further</b>
Housing	Stabilization of housing situation, especially for families with children More safe and nice, non-commercial meeting places outside and inside
Youth	Jobs for youth Varied and stable leisure time offerings for youth
Climate and environment	Create knowledge and engagement about climate and environment Less traffic, more green connections between Grønland and Tøyen
Local environment and volunteering	It must be easier to engage yourself – accessible information and meeting places Need for coordination of volunteer and public offerings
Public health	The elderly must be lifted up as target groups for active participation in the area boosts There are not open drug environments in the living areas where children and youth play

Table 4.3: Translation of Table 6, “Budget for area investment Oslo inner east” (Oslo indre øst-satsingen - Delprogram nærmiljø 2018, 19). I have italicized the budget items that include the citizen suggestions from Table 4.1.

	Financing from area effort Proposed amounts 2019 [in millions of NOK]
<b>Focus areas local environment/ area boost</b>	
Program leadership and administration	4.4
Feasibility studies and development of new concepts	1.5
<i>Co-creation residents, civil society, social entrepreneurs and business community</i>	4.0
Development and operations of community center	7.0
Parks and plazas Tøyen and Grønland	3.5
<i>Attractive and stable activities for children and youth in Tøyen and Grønland</i>	3.5
LINK Grønland/Integrating measures	2.5
Better living environment in Tøyen and Grønland	2.7
Interdisciplinary follow-up team 10-15-year-olds	2.2
Prepare volunteering policy in Gamle Oslo District	1.2
Wellness as a means of participation and coping	0.9
<b>Sum focus areas local environment/area boost</b>	<b>30.3</b>

“Listening” for the municipality culminated in these budgetary allocations. The implementation of budgeted projects might provide further opportunities for local residents to participate, but the major decisions of the kinds of programs and interventions and what would receive funding had already been made. While these stages of translation from citizen input to budget allocation were all carefully documented so as to make transparent how priorities are coming from the needs and desires of the local community, as William Mazzarella has observed, there is a “paradoxical tendency of transparency measures to yield, in practice, new opacities” (2006, 476). This processes of translating comments on Post-it notes into budget line items was opaque to most of my interlocutors,<sup>2</sup> who wondered if their participation was just a formality to

<sup>2</sup> And to the ethnographer—much of the translation work from comment to budget item was done by municipal employees in private meetings that I could not attend.

provide legitimacy to what the municipality had already decided, or if the city listened to some groups of people but not others.

### **The Local Advisory Board: authority through documents or experience?**

While the Program Plan is publicly available on the municipality's website, the audience for it is primarily politicians and policymakers, not the Tøyen residents who contributed to it. Their input is a one-time event, not a dialogic back-and-forth between them and the municipality. Dialogic interaction between citizens and the municipality officially occurs instead through the Area Boost's local advisory board, made up of four residents living in Tøyen and neighboring Grønland, four municipal employees, a representative from the police, and a representative from one of the elementary schools. The board's primary job was to review the documents created by the Area Boost staff, like the reports following the October public meetings, and then make recommendations to the elected District Council. Board members had prescribed participant roles about how they were supposed to appropriately speak and listen. Just like with the public meetings, documents were an important aspect of that participation process. However, there was more disagreement about the best ways for the board members to produce knowledge about the neighborhood that could then inform municipal policies. At the meetings I attended, the dialogic interactions between them would be as much about the ways the members should interact with each other as they were about the agenda items up for discussion.

The four resident representatives, Arild, Nina, Samira, and Yusuuf, had been selected by the Area Boost staff "using their networks," meaning the Area Boost had contacted local neighborhood activist organizations and housing boards. While the resident members questioned the fairness of this selection process, they had all agreed to join in part from a sense of



responsibility to their local community. Several had been on other boards before, and so they felt obliged to join since they had that expertise, while many of their neighbors did not. They represented a broad range of ages and were evenly split between men and women and Somali and “ethnic” Norwegians. They thus reflected what was commonly imagined to be the two primary groups of people in the area: white and Somali Norwegians. In reality, residents came from a much larger range of backgrounds. The Tøyen Council, which had existed prior to the creation of the Local Advisory Board, had included designated representatives from the Somali and the Syrian communities, but there were also people in Tøyen from many other parts of Africa and the Middle East, Asia, and Southern Europe. Arild and Nina, the ethnic Norwegians, were each married to people from other countries in Europe and Northern Africa, and they considered this to be an asset in representing a wider range of residents (Larsen 2019). The representatives’ living situations had also been considered: one lived in public housing, while two of the others lived in some of the largest privately-owned housing blocks in the area. The board’s official job was to ensure that the participatory measures of the Area Boost were working properly and including everyone they needed to. Resident representatives received an honorarium for their participation, and the district also provided members with tablet computers so that they could read all documents through the municipality’s web platform. Although all of the representatives had other jobs or were full-time students, these meetings happened during normal business hours, typically scheduled for 2–5 p.m. on Wednesdays.

The municipal employees on the board were also not a homogeneous group. The board was chaired by Pål, the Gamle Oslo district manager,<sup>3</sup> who was in charge of all public programs

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<sup>3</sup> Oslo is divided into 15 districts (*bydeler*), each of which has an elected district council (*bydelsutvalget*), which allocates the funding the district receives from the municipality. Each

at the district level and reported directly to local elected officials. He was the only municipal staff member who had voting rights on the board, and as chair, his vote counted for double what the resident representatives' votes did. Two other municipal employees were technically not board members but official observers representing the district and the municipality. They sat together at the far end of the table and said very little. The fourth municipal employee was Sofie, the director of the Area Boost program. She was not a voting member of the board, but she attended every meeting, sitting at Pål's right. It was her job to compile the documents that would be discussed at the meetings, generally with the help of the Area Boost staff, who were not present.

The board met bi-monthly in a conference room in the municipality's offices, where they sat around a large table in the front of the room. Public observers were welcome at the desks arranged in rows at the back. Although the meetings were open to the public, at the ones I attended the only other observer was a political scientist at a local university. Meetings were organized in much the same way as the monthly District Council meetings for elected local politicians, where participants follow a previously set agenda, with each point of business given a catalogue number and all relevant documents archived as pdfs on the municipality's website. Agenda topics for the advisory board range from reviewing the Area Boost program plan for the next year, to discussing partnerships between the city and locally based NGOs, to planning participatory projects around renovating public spaces. Advisory board meetings were organized in this way in large part so that their decisions could easily move through the pre-existing bureaucratic infrastructure to the District Council, although the board's decisions did not go

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district also has a full-time manager (*bydelsdirektør*), who reports to the committee. Tøyen is in the Gamle Oslo (Old Oslo) District.

directly to the governing political body. Instead, the board's job was to make recommendations to Pål, who then made his own recommendations to the council. The temporal rhythms of these meetings were also dictated by the District Council's schedule, not by events that might be more important for local residents, and took place about bimonthly, a week or so before the District Council's meetings.

Advisory board members were expected to review all of the documents that were going to be discussed in advance and come to the meeting ready to present their comments. Each agenda item typically involved anywhere from one to five documents. The first was the official item (*sak*), about 1-2 pages long, which laid out the issue and ended with a final paragraph that began, "The local board recommends the district manager make the following decision(s)."<sup>4</sup> On the agenda item for the Program Plan, these decisions included, "Program Plan for area boost in Gamle Oslo district is moved to the district council in Gamle Oslo and forms the basis of the application for 30.3 million kroner from Oslo inner east-investment – Subprogram local environment,"<sup>5</sup> and "The participation process for the program plan has been satisfactory."<sup>6</sup> This means that the decisions had been written before the agenda item was actually discussed, although board members could always ask for it to be changed during the course of the meeting. Consensus had been reached, at least officially, before the meeting even happened. However, in the meetings I observed, while representatives did make suggestions to attached documents, the major decisions did not change. These meetings were thus not exactly a site for the *creation* of authoritative discourse (Morton 2014) as much as they were a site for the frontstage (cf. Goffman

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<sup>4</sup> Lokaltstyret anbefaler bydelsdirektøren å fatte følgende vedtak.

<sup>5</sup> Programplan for områdeløft i Bydel Gamle Oslo fremmes til bydelsutvalget i Gamle Oslo og legges til grunn for søknad om 30,3 mill. kr fra Oslo indre øst-satsingen - Delprogram nærmiljø.

<sup>6</sup> Medvirkningsprosessen til programplanen har vært tilfredsstillende.

1959) *affirmation* of discourse that had emerged through backstage conversations between municipal employees.

Each agenda item would also usually include several supporting documents, generally reports written by the Area Boost staff or other municipal employees. All of these documents were sent to board members and also posted on the municipality's website shortly before each meeting, where they remain archived permanently. Representatives were encouraged to read all of the documents on tablets and to provide written comments on shared electronic copies. These documents tended to be fairly dry kinds of reports, and, although they had reached higher levels of education than many other residents and so were relatively well-suited for this kind of job, all of the resident board members mentioned how much time it took to read through everything and understand it well enough that they felt they could make contributions during the meetings. They frequently met the Saturday before the official meetings to go through the documents and make sure that they had all understood them, although Pål, the district manager, frowned on these extra meetings, for reasons I discuss below.

The regular attendees at these board meetings had strict roles and modes of participation. Pål would go through each agenda item, opening the floor for comments from the resident, school, and police representatives. When there was need for clarification, Sofie would jump in with further explanation but otherwise said very little, at least not verbally. A few days after one of these meetings, I bumped into Nina, one of the resident representatives, and Sofie at another event, and we started to talk about the advisory board. Nina told Sofie it was too bad she was not allowed to speak more at the meetings, but Sofie reassured us that she had actually "said a lot" (*sagt mye*) in the form of the documents and decisions the board reviewed. Nina nodded, agreeing that the resident members of the board then have the job to "listen and respond" (*lytter*

*og svarer*). In Goffmanian terms (1979), Sofie and her staff were the author of the decisions made by the board, while the local representatives were the principal, a role that they took on through listening and responding to Sofie's written contributions during board meetings.

This job of "listening and responding" meant that, as Pål moved through the agenda, the local residents were expected to ask questions and raise concerns, for example, suggesting civic organizations that needed to be included in various issues. At one meeting, which was entirely devoted to commenting on the annual Area Boost Program Plan for the following year, the board went through section by section commenting on everything from suggesting changing wording away from a bureaucratic urban planning register and into something more easily understood by local residents, to asking about omissions from the report, like why it did not include a mention of recent protests and discussions about problems with racism in the area. These residents' suggestions were then incorporated into the final document that Pål presented to the district council at their next meeting.

Pål tried to keep meetings entirely focused on the documents at hand. He was new to these kinds of meetings with neighborhood representatives and had not been part of the previous model of the Tøyen Council. However, one of the reasons that council had been disbanded was a feeling that their meetings were ineffective because their decisions did not get taken up by the district council, so Pål, who already had a role on the district council, was put in charge of the new iteration of the local advisory board. Pål was a career bureaucrat, with much more experience in formal policy meetings with civil servants than he had engaging directly with local residents, and so he tried to structure meetings in a way that he had found effective. However, the resident representatives were not entirely satisfied with this format, and at the ends of the meetings they would share suggestions for topics they wanted to cover or suggest other possible

structures for how the meetings could function. These different opinions about meeting structure came up towards the end of their December meeting, when Arild, a resident representative, asked for a way to bring up issues that were not on the official agenda.

#### Transcript 4.4

- |    |  |   |
|----|--|---|
| 1  | Arild: Eh kan vi har et sånt fast eventueltpunkt da for å (incomprehensible) eh?   | Arild: Eh can we have a kind of permanent any other business point then to (incomprehensible) eh?   |
| 2  | Pål: Helst ikkje.  | Pål: Preferably not.  |
| 3  | Arild: Helst ikkje?  | Arild: Preferably not?  |
| 4  | Pål: Ja.   | Pål: Yes.   |
| 5  | Nina: Ikkje?   | Nina: Not?  |
| 6  | Pål: Nei. Fordi eventueltpunkt, dei har du ikkje heim i et styre. Og det har eg sagt at uh dokke må heller då be om uh hvis det er saker dokke har lyst til å få, kan vi få en liten– begynner med en treffetid. | Pål: No. Because AOB points, those don't have a place on a board. And I've said that you [pl] should instead ask for uh if there are items you [pl] want to get, we can get a little– start with a consultation time. |
| 7  | Arild: Mmhmm.  | Arild: Mmhmm.   |
| 8  | Pål: Det– det som er erfaringa er at eventueltpunkter blir ofte de lengste punkter eh i alle møter fordi at dere slippe å formulere saker.   | Pål: What– what is the experience is that AOB points often become the longest points eh in all meetings because you [pl] avoid formulating items.   |
| 9  | Arild: Mmhmm.  | Arild: Mmhmm.   |
| 10 | Pål: Så i utgangspunktet er så ø– ønsker ikkje eg uh kjen–   | Pål: So to begin with I don't w– want uh kn–  |
| 11 | Arild: Ja.   | Arild: Yes.   |
| 12 | Pål: Og så det– vi er et vedtakssystem   | Pål: And so that– we are a decision-making system   |
| 13 | Arild: Ja.   | Arild: Yes  |
| 14 | Pål: og ikke en diskusjonsklubb.   | Pål: and not a discussion club.   |

Arild, feeling that there are topics that do not make it onto the official agenda, is asking for a time during the meeting when representatives can bring those up. Arild has been on other boards, so he's familiar with terms referring to meeting protocol and uses the word *eventueltpunkt* (often called AOB in English, for “any other business”) to ask Pål if it would be possible to add this as a permanent part of every meeting. For Pål, however, these kinds of

agenda items are not at all time efficient because they allow “you all” to speak without formulating ideas into actionable agenda items (turn 8). Pål instead translates Arild’s request into something more appropriate for this genre of administrative meeting, suggesting a “consultation time,” where representatives can ask for agenda items they would like to see at future meetings. Keeping meetings time-efficient and tied to action items was part of an important distinction for Pål between a “decision-making system” and a “discussion club” (turns 12 and 14). The former follows strict protocols where everything is formulated as a concrete agenda item, while the latter is undirected and an inefficient use of time.

This distinction encapsulates what Pål repeatedly stressed about civic participation in policymaking, both during meetings, and when I first spoke to him about what I was interested in studying. I heard him say more than once that it is important to remember that the Norwegian word most commonly used to talk about this kind of participatory politics, *medvirkning*, meaning cooperation, is made of up 2 words, *med* (with) and *virkning* (consequence, result). Compound words with a preposition and verb or nominalized verb are very common in Norwegian, and although the meaning of the compound tends to be more idiomatic, it is a common metasemantic analysis to break the word into its two parts (*tilhørighet*, belonging, being another example). Pål worries that most people focus on the first word and its idea of inclusion, but he likes to focus on the second part, because “if there is no result, there’s no point in having people participating.”<sup>7</sup> A discussion club-style format might be more comfortable for the resident representatives, but, at least for Pål, that would not produce a result.

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<sup>7</sup> Hvis det ikke er noe virkning så er det ikke noe poeng i å ha folk med.

At this point in the discussion, Arild jumped in to clarify that he does not want the meetings to turn into a discussion club, but he does want a way to ask about topics that are not on the agenda. As the conversation continues, Pål continues his translational work of getting the representatives to speaking the right way, modeling the kinds of contributions they should make: asking for specific, concrete information about the status of certain projects:

Transcript 4.5

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>15 Arild: Ja det var ikke– det var ikke eventuelt saker (incomprehensible) for eksempel jeg skulle spør om status om (incomprehensible) men konkrete saker=</p> | <p>Arild: Yes it wasn't– it wasn't miscellaneous issues (incomprehensible) for example I would ask about the status of (incomprehensible) but concrete items=</p> |
| <p>16 Pål: =Ja=</p>  | <p>Pål: =Yes=</p>   |
| <p>17 Arild: =som er– som er litt mer som uformelt.</p>  | <p>Arild: =which are– which are a little more like informal.</p>  |
| <p>18 Pål: Men det– men det kunne du be om, og så sagt, “Neste gang så ber vi om at det legger fram en sak om DET.”</p>  | <p>Pål: But that– but you [sing] could ask about that, that is said, “Next time we ask that there's an item about THAT.”</p>                                      |
| <p>19 Arild: Ja.</p>   | <p>Arild: Yes.</p>  |
| <p>20 Pål: Det– det er heilt supert.</p>   | <p>Pål: That– that's totally super.</p>   |
| <p>21 Nina: Ja. Og da trenger vi ikkje en sak for å be om en sak.</p>  | <p>Nina: Yes. And then we don't need an item to ask for an item.</p>  |
| <p>22 Pål: Neida.</p>  | <p>Pål: Nope.</p>   |
| <p>23 Nina: Nei. (ler)</p>   | <p>Nina: No. (laughs)</p>   |
| <p>24 Pål: Ofte er det kobla til statusen så her det– “Vi har lyst til å ha mer om det, kan du ikke komme med det tilbake?” Så gjør vi det.</p>                    | <p>Pål: It's often connected to the status so here– “We'd like to have more about that, can't you [sing] come back with that?” So we do that.</p>                 |

In turns 15 and 17, Arild counters Pål's claim that items that do not have an official agenda item can still be “concrete,” they are just “more informal.” Nina had expressed a similar frustration with me after another meeting, suggesting that instead of sitting around a table going through a dense document, the board should be on their feet, moving around the room and interacting less formally. Pål, however, felt strongly that the structure of the meetings was necessary to the board's running efficiently, and so he instead takes up representative's



suggestions and translates them into more felicitous ways of engaging. This included both correcting their use of the bureaucratic meeting register—“any other business” becomes “consultation time” in turn 6—and voicing potential contributions from other members of the board. In turns 18 and 24, he models the kinds of ways they can make requests and direct the topics covered during meetings.

Some of the representatives questioned if Pål’s voicings were really translation work where he was listening to what they were saying, or if instead he was voicing the kinds of things he wanted them to say that would make their participation fit the policies he had already decided on. They also took up Pål’s desire to be time-efficient as evidence that he was not interested in really listening to the local resident representatives but was only going through the motions of so that he could report to the District Council that the Area Boost was following its requirements for local involvement and participation. Both of the meetings I was able to observe, which were supposed to last for three hours, ended over an hour early. Pål would quickly leave at the end, while most of the local representatives, as well as the school and police representatives, would stay behind chatting. At the meeting before the one where Arild asked for an informal way of discussing topics not on the agenda, the group had stood out in the street in front of the municipality’s offices for an hour in the cold, dark November evening, chatting about issues ranging from how to prevent local teenagers from selling narcotics to what it would actually mean for the community center to become “sustainable” (see Chapter 1). During the conversation, Pål came out of the building on his way home, and, while he did not stop to join the conversation, Nina told the group after he walked by that she was glad he had seen them out there because maybe he would realize that he should not be ending the meetings so early.

Nina was especially vocal during board meetings and would sometimes apologetically describe herself to me as the “troublemaker.” About five minutes after the conversation in Transcript 4.4 and Transcript 4.5, she came back to Arild’s request for a more open, less formal, time in the meeting, stating that the kinds of experiential knowledge that the representatives can contribute cannot come out of a standard meeting structure.

Transcript 4.6

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|--|---|
| <p>51 Nina: Eg har– eg har ikkje– eg har et sånn forslag (.) mer uh mer en sånn tanke om et punkt på agendaen som vi kunne hatt som et sånt fastpunkt som ikkje er et eventueltpunkt men som kunne være litt som (.) kort og åpen diskusjon om hva vi har opplevd si– eller om det er viktige ting vi har opplevd siden sist (.) for at vi tenker for å få (.) potensiale til oss som lokalstyret der det blir sittende forskjellige erfaringer. Og DET kunne vært nyttig (.) ikkje for at det skal bli en sak men bare for at– for å– for å ta litt som temperatur på hva skjer Nå. Uh (.) kunne det være en tanke?</p> | <p>Nina: I have– I don’t have– I have a kind of suggestion (.) more uh more a kind of thought about a point on the agenda that we could have as a kind of permanent point that isn’t an AOB point but that could be a little like (.) short and open discussion about what we’ve experienced si– or if there are important things we’ve experienced since last time (.) so that we’re thinking about getting the potential for us as the local board where there are different experiences. And THAT could be useful (.) not that it’s an item but just so that– to– to take a little like the temperature of what’s happening NOW. Uh (.) could that be a thought?</p> |
| <p>52 Pål: Skal vi og– vi har snakket om å ha en evaluering, altså rundet rundt bordet=</p>  | <p>Pål: Shall we and– we’ve talked about having an evaluation, that is a round around the table=</p>  |
| <p>53 Nina: =ja ja=</p>  | <p>Nina: =yes yes=</p>  |
| <p>54 Pål: =etterpå, hvordan har dagens møte– har dokke fått (incomprehensible)</p>  | <p>Pål: =afterwards, where has the day’s meeting– have you [pl] gotten (incomprehensible)</p>   |
| <p>55 Nina: ja</p>   | <p>Nina: yes</p>  |
| <p>56 Pål: Snakker litt om det dokke skulle ha visst for å behandle saken med, eh så det var å fine en sånn måte å gjøre det på</p>  | <p>Pål: Talk a little about what you [pl] should have known to address the item, eh so that’s a fine way to do it</p>   |
| <p>57 Nina: Ja? Ja.</p>  | <p>Nina: Yes? Yes.</p>  |
| <p>58 Pål: Men det– men men m– e:g eg prøver å holde det innafor at=</p>   | <p>Pål: But that– but but b– I: I try to keep it within=</p>  |
| <p>59 Nina: =tida?</p>   | <p>Nina: =the time?</p>   |
| <p>60 Pål: Ja, nei ikke– ikke tida.</p>  | <p>Pål: Yes, no not– not the time.</p>  |
| <p>61 Nina: Å nei (ler)</p>  | <p>Nina: Oh no (laughs)</p>   |

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>62 Pål: (incomprehensible) ikke blir en general diskusjonsgruppe</p> <p>63 Nina: nei, ja!</p> <p>64 Pål: Det er veldig fort at du kan har et sånn, du vet, et klageorgan.</p> <p>65 Nina: Ja, nei det skjønner jeg veldig godt</p> <p>66 Pål: Men da er det=</p> <p>67 Nina: =men– men</p> <p>68 Pål: Ja?</p> <p>69 Nina: Potensiale vårt som gruppe siden vi (.) er satt sammen fordi vi (.) kommer fra forskjellige steder, har forskjellige erfaringer i uh i området? Så kunne vi på en måte (.) Og da øver vi og, ikke sant, og er i gang på bare konkrete forslag, hva som passer inn her. Kan vi gjøre det bare litt som øvings sak for oss?</p> <p>70 Pål: Ja, men dokke må tenke mer at vi på styret har strategisk arbeid.</p> | <p>Pål: (incomprehensible) not be a general discussion group=</p> <p>Nina: no, yes!</p> <p>Pål: It happens very quickly that you [sing] can have a kind of, you [sing] know, a complaint body.</p> <p>Nina: Yes, no I understand that very well</p> <p>Pål: But so it's=</p> <p>Nina: = but– but</p> <p>Pål: Yes?</p> <p>Nina: Our potential as a group since we're put together because we come from different places, have different experiences in uh in the area? So we could in a way (.) And so we're trying and, right, and are going with just concrete suggestions, what fits here. Can we do that just as a trial case for us?</p> <p>Pål: Yes, but you [pl] must think more that we on the board have strategic work.</p> |
|---|--|

In turn 51, Nina thinks that having “short and open discussion” would help the meetings because it would allow board members to talk not only about the documents they are meant to be consulting, but also about their own personal experiences. Doing so would allow them to learn from each other, which she sees as an untapped potential of the board, and to bring a kind of immediacy to the meetings (“what’s happening NOW”), which Nina does not see in the documents they discuss. Pål thinks that this sort of interaction would count as a “discussion club” (turn 62), which he now equates with a “complaint body” (turn 64).

Pål urges Nina and the other representatives to think about the meetings more “strategically” (turn 70), which he then models a few moments later in turn 76 (Transcript 4.7).

Transcript 4.7

- 76 Pål: For at– de her løpende diskusjoner kan fort til at vi mis– mister fokuset. Men det, det å få et strategisk bilde, “Kor er det vi når? Skal være– Skal vi den veien eller skal vi meir den veien? Skal vi ta den investeringa der eller skal vi gå opp hit?” Så eg, eg, eg vil at det ikke bli en disk– at vi ikke vil bli (incomprehensible) heile tiden.
- 77 Nina: Nei? Nei, men samtidig så hvis man ha en god strategisk tenke på at man må ha en strategi
- 78 Pål: Ja.
- 79 Nina: Men så har man– føler det ut at sånt man vet at, “Øi nå er strategien blitt på vei i feil retning for at det realsituasjonen er.”
- 80 Pål: Ja
- 81 Nina: Sånn tenker jo du mer som en sånn der eh temperatur.
- 82 Pål: Ja.
- 83 Nina: Eh
- 84 Pål: Ja. Hvis vi=
- 85 Nina: =Du kan tenke på at=
- 86 Pål: =det vil bli et slags svar=
- 87 Nina: =for å være sånn=
- 88 Pål: =hvis du– hvis du kan–
- 89 Nina: Ja?
- 90 Pål: Ta en konkret– hvis– hvis– Det tanke, god k– hvis, hvis du tenker deg er inn i setningen her. [referencing document under discussion]
- 91 Nina: Mmhmm.
- 92 Pål: Når du– eller for at det blir sittende noe du her tenker på?
- 93 Nina: Nei det var ikkje noe i konkret akkurat nå=
- 94 Pål: =nei=
- Pål: So that– these kinds of running discussions can quickly end up that we lo– we lose the focus. But getting, getting a strategic picture, “Where is it we’re heading? Will be– Will we go that way or will we go more that way? Will we take that investment there or will we go up here?” So I, I, I want that this doesn’t become a disc– that we won’t become (incomprehensible) all the time.
- Nina: No? No, but at the same time if one has a good strategic thought that one has to have a strategy
- Pål: Yes.
- Nina: But then one has– it feels like one knows that, “Oy, now the strategy has headed in the wrong direction from what the real situation is.”
- Pål: Yes.
- Nina: So you [sing] think more as a kind of uh temperature.
- Pål: Yes.
- Nina: Eh
- Pål: Yes. If we=
- Nina: =You [sing] can think that=
- Pål: =this will be a kind of answer=
- Nina: =in order to be such=
- Pål: =if you [sing]– if you [sing] can–
- Nina: Yes?
- Pål: Take a– concrete– if– if– That thought, good k– if, if you [sing] imagine the sentence here. [referencing document under discussion]
- Nina: Mmhmm.
- Pål: When you [sing]– or is there something here you [sing] are thinking about?
- Nina: No it wasn’t something concrete right now=
- Pål: =no=

- 95 Nina: =Jeg mer tenker på at (.) i løpet av neste års møter skulle vi– uh– eg– at vi må få HELE potensiale ut av den gruppa her.
- 96 Pål: Ja.
- 97 Nina: (ler) Ikkje sant? Og eg tenke at eh så har vi et veldig stort potensial i å faktisk prate og eg så den, siste gang når vi avsluttet tidlig du så og vi sto (ler, andre ler også) utenfor og pratet! Skal vi ikke den da? Men det betyr at vi har glede av og nyte av å prate sammen uten at– uten at DET er– at det er en verdi i seg sjøl å faktisk prate sammen også.
- 98 Pål: Mmhmm.
- 99 Nina: Uten at det er et agenda– forberedt agendapunkt. Men det kan være en måte å få punkter som skal komme på agendaen.
- Nina: =I was more thinking that (.) in the course of next year’s meeting we should– uh– I– that we need to get the FULL potential out of this group here.
- Pål: Yes.
- Nina: (laughs) Right? And I think that eh we have a very great potential in actually chatting and I saw that, last time when we ended early you [sing] saw us and we stood (laughs, others laugh too) outside and chatted! Won’t we do that then? But that means we enjoy and find use in chatting together without that– without that THAT is– that there’s a value in itself to actually chatting together too.
- Pål: Mmhmm.
- Nina: Without there being an agenda– prepared agenda point. But that can be a way of getting points that will come on the agenda.

In this entire exchange, Nina and Pål frequently speak over each other trying to hold the floor, especially in turns 84-89, which reflects their larger disagreement about the ways these meetings are structured, with Pål’s wanting the resident representatives to stay focused on the item at hand, while at least some of the representatives want the conversation to flow more freely. In turn 76, Pål uses his strategy of voicing the board and what it means to think in a strategic and focused way. Nina, meanwhile, takes up Pål’s use of reported hypothetical speech to argue against him in turn 79, stating that it is important to make sure that strategic thinking matches the reality that the advisory board is supposed to be addressing. However, while Nina also uses reported speech, the hypothetical board she is voicing speaks differently from Pål’s. Pål always uses first-person plural deictics to focus on what “we” the advisory board needs to consider, and is future-oriented, toward the next meeting or future outcomes of board decisions.

Nina, meanwhile, does not use the first-person, instead making a factual statement that the board's strategy "has headed in the wrong direction from what the real situation is." Thinking collectively toward the future, for Nina, is not useful if the board's plans are not grounded in reality.

Nina comes back to this idea of the group's potential coming from their different experiences in the neighborhood (turns 95 and 97), and she does not understand why they do not speak about that more. She thinks that a way of accessing this "real situation" happens through local residents' sharing recent experiences with each other, not just through discussing the bureaucratic documents Sofie and her staff have prepared for them. As she says in turns 97 and 99 when she refers to their outdoor conversation at the previous meeting, there is a value in the kinds of "informal" conversations the group has outside of the "formal" meeting agenda, and the kinds of topics they discuss there and what they learn from sharing experiences can then lead to the creation of new agenda items at future meetings. Formal agenda items should not just come from the municipal employees. Instead, Nina has a more receiver-focused understanding of meeting structures, where agenda items come into being through the uptake of others' speech. It becomes the responsibility of board members, as good neighbors, citizens, and government representatives, to be listening to each other and act based on that listening. This understanding of political listening has similarities to James Slotta's account of decision-making discussions in Yopno villages in Papua New Guinea, where men display their own self-determination and equality and their respect for their interlocutor's self-determination and equality through formalized performances of listening (2015). While self-determination is not at stake in the same way for the local advisory board, listening and uptake of other's speech is also a way of performing the egalitarianism fundamental to ideals of Norwegian citizenship.

Nina and Pål's exchange shows that they have differing ideas of democratic action. While Pål tries to fit resident input within the frame of administrative expertise, Nina is reasserting a kind of egalitarianism. While this kind of egalitarianism is about creating a kind of sameness by breaking down the hierarchies between administrators and residents, Nina is not advocating for playing down all forms of difference. Instead, creating a more egalitarian meeting structure will allow Pål, and by extension, the municipality, to finally listen to a multitude of different perspectives from the neighborhood, which resident representatives are passing along following their own moments of democratic listening of their neighbors.

This disagreement about the kinds of interaction and forms of listening that lead to effective policy decisions related to another disagreement between Pål and the resident board members about who it was they were representing. The residents generally thought that since their role was officially titled "resident representative" (*innbyggerrepresentant*) that that meant they were representing the community. All four took this representative role seriously, attending local events and soliciting feedback from their own local networks about what they should bring up at these meetings. Several told me that this kind of work of trying to make sure they were able to represent other perspectives was quite exhausting. Pål, however, saw the representatives' job to represent only their own perspectives and engage with the "facts" of the issues under discussion. He and the Area Boost staff had selected the four board members for their diverse backgrounds, and so for him having them each speak from their positions would adequately represent the local perspectives. Yet those perspectives were relevant only insofar as they pertained to the "facts" of the documents under discussion. Pål's attitude paralleled the Post-it input from the wider community, where demographic representation was important to begin with, but that personal background was erased as they participate in the meetings as individuals.

Nina, and other representatives, however, thought that the “full potential” of the group involved talking about diverse experiences and getting to know and learn from one’s neighbors.

Pål’s understanding of representation also came with a kind of ideology that the four representatives should be able to express their own opinion in meetings as separate individuals, and there should not be a need for much discussion between board members outside of the official meetings. He was not happy to learn that the four of them would frequently meet a few days before the official meetings to talk through the agenda and the pre-circulated documents. Pål told them at one of the meetings I attended, and I heard it was something he had repeated before, that the reason why they should not meet outside of the official meetings was that there was a danger of their forming “factions.” If they met beforehand and converged onto a shared opinion, Pål told them, he would only need to have one of them on the board, instead of all four people. While backstage discussions between municipal staff, which created the authoritative discussions were expected, Pål did not support backstage social interactions between the non-expert representatives.

For Pål, “residents” are a person-type of individuals who have experiential knowledge of living in the surrounding area, which allows them to know if something is being forgotten or does not make sense in the policy documents that it is Pål’s job to produce. Residents should not set the meeting agenda, just provide feedback on the topics that have been set by the Area Boost staff. This resident-type is already contradictory, since, as mentioned earlier, this typical Tøyen-Grønlander does not tend to have the kind of education necessary to know how to read policy documents. Yet Pål’s typical resident representative also erases any kinds of expertise that resident may have outside of their experiences as a resident. Nina, for example, had volunteered to be on the advisory board in part because her own job at a government ministry involved



incorporating stakeholder participation, so she had expertise in this genre of interaction, but in Pål's role. When I spoke to her later, she told me that what you need for a participatory session like this to work is that you need "people to feel like they're being listened to," with additional proof from being able to see things changing. While hedging that she does not actually know how Pål feels, she said that he gives her the impression that he is not actually interested in listening. In her interjections in this exchange, Nina is invoking her own professional expertise, in addition to her observations as a Tøyen resident, suggesting ways Pål could organize the meeting to show he wants to listen. Pål does not accept Nina's suggestions because her professional expertise does not fit within his resident type. Yet through not taking up her suggestions, Pål falls short of Nina's expectations of the listening bureaucrat type.

Pål and Nina's disagreement was part of a much wider discussion happening among some Area Boost employees and Tøyen activists around the roles and authority of democratic participation. Linda, one of the Area Boost employees, would agree with Nina. She felt that the problem was the municipality's hierarchical way of trying to engage local residents. At public meetings and casual conversations around the community center, she would frequently bring up "Arnstein's Ladder of Civic Participation" (Figure 4.6), which distinguishes between tokenistic participation and citizen control of decisions about what happens in the neighborhood. Linda distinguishes between what she sees as tokenistic *medvirkning* (cooperation, assistance) and more egalitarian *samskaping* ("co-creation"). *Medvirkning*, which she equates with Arnstein's "Consultation," is a top-down process where local residents are asked for their input on projects that have been initiated "from above," while *samskaping*, or "Partnership" on Arnstein's scale, describes projects where the state and local residents come together as equals. This view of participation relies on a view similar to Inspire's, that neighborhood residents are more

knowledgeable experts than the state. Yet these local experts cannot act entirely on their own, but through a relationship built on consensus with the municipality.

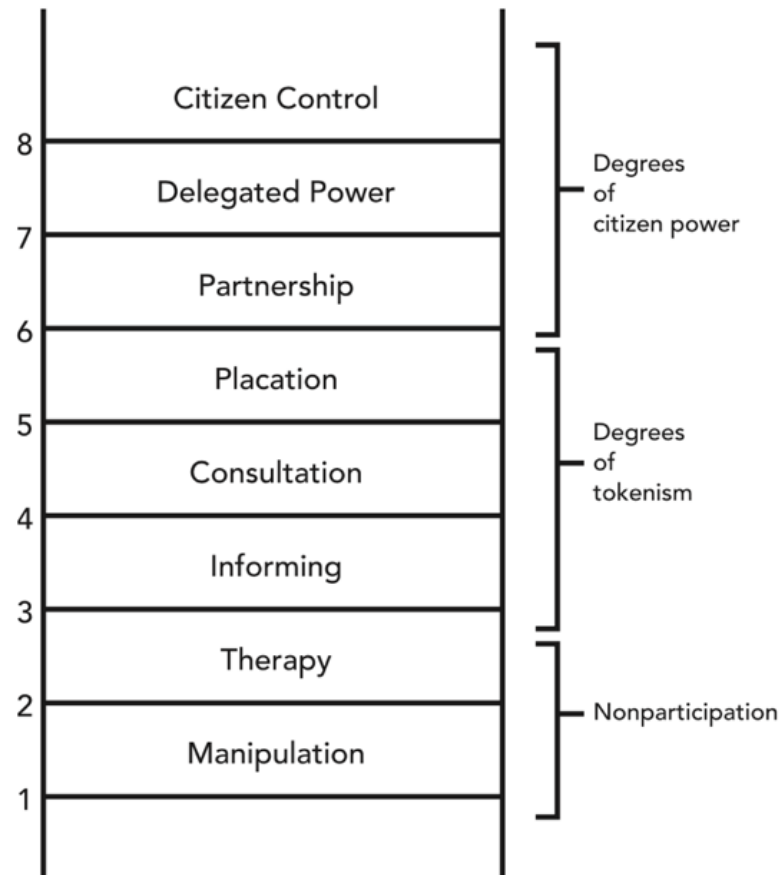


Figure 4.6: Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein 1969, 26)

*Medvirkning* is the more common term in participatory initiatives, used by the municipality, government ministries, and even corporations. As mentioned above, the Local Advisory Board was a typical example of *medvirkning*. *Samskaping*, meanwhile, implies a kind of newness. Pål, for example, did not know what the word meant when Nina brought it up at a Local Advisory Board meeting. It is a recent calque of the English word “co-creation” (Røiseland and Lo 2019), and so could be considered a part of the social entrepreneurship register discussed in Chapter 3. As Linda describes it, *samskaping* is not about getting local

inhabitants to give feedback on municipal projects, but instead to get people to come together around a table “as equals,” and to work something out together. Linda stresses that co-creation requires creating trust between different kinds of people, something that does not just come out of creating meeting places where different kinds of people are in the same place at the same time, but instead creating kinds of events where people all have to come together around a table, talk, and get to know each other. This model relies on flattening hierarchies, where municipal employees and bureaucrats are there to facilitate the ideas coming from community members. Unlike the municipality’s initiatives, co-creation relies much more on experience-based forms of expertise, where residents know what they need better than the people who are usually sanctioned experts. However, co-creation still relies on the meeting as the ideal democratic structure for people to come together and bring about socially salient political action.

In invoking the Arnstein ladder, Linda brought a Norwegian egalitarian ideal together with a more transnational, American-influenced style. Sherry Arnstein created the ladder while working at the then-newly created US Department of Housing and Urban Development, as a way of thinking about the power imbalances within poor and minority communities in American cities. While many of my interlocutors are proud of how powerful local engagement is in Tøyen compared to other parts of the city, some also see drawbacks. A woman I met at an event at Inspire, for example, embarrassedly described herself as a “bad Tøyen resident” because she was not involved in neighborhood initiatives. Nina, while frequently expressing concern about how the same small group of people showed up to every participatory political event, was also always adamant that Tøyen residents must be allowed not to get involved or have an opinion. As other social scientists studying Oslo have pointed out, the lack of attention to a neighborhood and its functioning is a sign of privilege. As I discussed in Chapter 2, many of my interlocutors see the

quiet and homogeneity of the bourgeois neighborhoods on the city's west side as drawbacks of those parts of the city, not assets like the residents there do. "Boosting" Tøyen still maintains the neighborhood and its residents as different from the kinds of places and people on the other side of the city. However, for many engaged Tøyenites, this kind of difference is exactly why they live in Tøyen instead of another part of the city.

The local advisory board had only been created several months before I attended their meetings. When I spoke to Nina on a return trip to Oslo the following summer, she told me they had been working with the political scientists studying participatory political programs and thought that more recent meetings were much better than the ones I had observed. However, at the meetings I attended, there was a clear tension between the municipality's "efficient," "strategic," and document-focused forms of policymaking and the residents' preference for policy arising out of the sharing of personal experiences. The very interactional structures of who could speak and the kinds of things they could talk about dictated which of these kinds of policymaking could occur.

### **Temporalities of Listening**

When municipal employees spoke about participatory initiatives like the public meetings and local advisory board, they frequently spoke about the amount of time they took, where their willingness to take the extra time was indexical of their listening. To some extent, residents agreed with this temporality of listening, for example when Nina thought the advisory board meetings' always ending early was a sign that Pål was not interested in actually listening, or when she anticipated that Pål would reject her suggestion for sharing personal experiences because it would take too much time (turn 59, Transcript 4.3). Yet for many residents, the more

important temporal scale was not just the event of listening and the circulation of documents. Instead, as Nina had told me, physical changes in the neighborhood that resulted from the city and state's uptake of what residents were telling them, and the speed of those changes, were more important. When Abdi complained that the city wasn't listening to him, he was making the claim based on how he felt that, no matter how many times he repeated himself to city officials, he did not *see* change. The city still shut off the water in the public housing block where he lived without adequate warning. His son and his son's friends still had trouble finding jobs. Listening for Abdi was about signs of uptake.

Abdi was not the only person in Tøyen who questioned the speed at which things changed. For some, changes could be a sign not of the city's not listening to anyone, but that they only listened to certain people. One day while walking home from Inspire, I bumped into Jamal, a musician in his early 20s I had met at the Community Center a few weeks before. He asked me more about what I was doing in Tøyen and if I was studying gentrification, pointing to a new playground next to where we were standing as an example. I asked why he thought a playground that seemed to me like it was used by all of the kids in the neighborhood was an example of gentrification, and he replied, "Why didn't they build it 15 years ago? They're just fixing up the neighborhood for the rich people who are moving here. A while ago people wouldn't come to Tøyen, and now it's an exciting place." Jamal was saying that the city only listens to and spend money on the wealthier newcomers, and much like the perspective of the documentary discussed in Chapter 2, that the state-sponsored renovations are a part of making Tøyen more attractive to gentrifiers, not of improving the lives of the people who have lived there longest.

The largest sign of this kind of selective state listening that frustrated Jamal and Abdi was a building on Tøyen Square, Hagegata 30 (H30). The ground floor and basement of the building

housed the public library, while the upper floors were city-owned apartments that had been empty and deteriorating since their inhabitants had been moved to other public housing units around the city in 2015. Residents had been forced out because the apartments had been going to be converted into student housing, but that never happened. In 2017, a group of housing activists had come to an agreement with the municipal government to convert the building into an experimental “rent-to-own” project, but three years later the building still stands empty. Politicians reassure neighbors that the measure is still active and moving through governmental committees, the waiting process is opaque for the people who hope to move into the building, where they cannot know for certain if the proposal to re-open it is taking so much time because of all of the bureaucracy involved, or because the proposal has been ignored. Periodically, there are a series of articles in one of the local newspapers about the deteriorating building, or it is the site of a Red Party<sup>8</sup> demonstration about the need for affordable housing. Yet for the most part, the building sits empty. While many of the former residents moved to other parts of the city, some live in other public housing units in the neighborhood, and when I spoke to them they still hoped that they would be allowed to move back.

When the Area Boost had begun in 2013, the local residents who showed up to public meetings had overwhelmingly called for public housing to be more evenly spread across the city instead of being so highly concentrated in Tøyen. These residents were primarily the wealthier and whiter people living in Tøyen, and while many of them likely identified as being on the political left and claimed they wanted to desegregate Oslo by spreading public housing to even

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<sup>8</sup> The party farthest to the left to hold a seat in Parliament, which they first accomplished in 2017 with one representative from Oslo. They have had representation in Oslo and a few other municipalities since the party’s founding in 2007.

the wealthiest parts of the city, these policies resulted in many people who had lived in Tøyen for decades being forced to move to other parts of the city. Public housing policy had changed drastically by the time I began the bulk of my fieldwork. Many of the white neighborhood activists who had asked for a reduction in public housing began to meet these families through the local school and to better understand the consequences of reducing public housing in Tøyen. The neighborhood organizations that had been made up of primarily relatively wealthy white women on maternity leave when I began preliminary fieldwork in 2015, had been taken over by the time I began my main period of fieldwork by people concerned about expanding their representation to include more Somali parents, men, and adults who did not have children. The Area Boost hired a team of social scientists to interview a wider range of residents and make recommendations, one of which was to stop selling public housing (Brattbakk et al. 2015). In September 2015, a Labor coalition took control of the Oslo municipal government for the first time in close to 40 years, and they were much more wary of selling public housing units than the previous Conservative government had been. However, the consequences of this selective listening to an opinion that no longer has much support among anyone actually living in the neighborhood continues to have effects.

People express frustrations around time and waiting not only through talking about the built environment within Tøyen, but through comparisons with buildings elsewhere, frequently the new Munch Museum being built at the waterfront. The Tøyen Area Boost only came about in exchange for the Socialist Democrats' joining a Conservative coalition's plans to move the Munch Museum from Tøyen to this new neighborhood being built on the Oslo fjord. As the new museum building, called "Lambda" because its shape resembles the Greek letter, rose almost out of the water, it became a very visible sign of the passage of time that could be drawn into

comparisons. One local Facebook group, for example, “First Tøyen, then Lambda,” complained about how “the new Munch museum, Lambda, shoots towards the sky at rocket speed, while things go very sluggishly in Tøyen”<sup>9</sup> and worried that Tøyen would be forgotten as soon as the new museum building opened. This image of “shooting towards the sky” might be somewhat ironic because the museum’s opening has been delayed by several years, but if so that only makes the point about how slowly things have been changing in Tøyen stronger.



Figure 4.7: Lambda building under construction. Photo by author.

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<sup>9</sup> Det nye Munch-museet, Lambda, skyter nå i været i rakett-fart, mens ting går veldig tregt på Tøyen.



The Munch Museum was used in temporal comparisons not only of the speed at which it had been completed, but also its projected long-term stability. At a political debate held at the Tøyen library a week before the 2019 municipal elections, Luis Espinoza, the candidate from the Red Party, began to speak about the importance of providing permanent funding for youth programs:

When the Conservatives and the non-socialist parties uh with the Liberals uh on the team governed the city, there were cuts year after year after year to the district finances. Since uh in the 90s, here in the district, half of the population [compared to today], so we had 5, 6 leisure clubs. Now we're uh double as many and we have only two. It costs to run these kinds of offerings. These offerings aren't required by law. So then the district saw that uh they didn't have money, what did they cut? Offerings for youth. What, what do then youth do then? They go out in the street, they find things, uh end up with problems. Eh that's the area— the problem eh specifically with the finances and how we'll maintain uh the Area Boost that finances many of these kinds of measures. It shouldn't be an area boost, it should be permanent and it should be a part of the district's finances. And uh here I have to also say that uh excuse me, but the Tøyen Boost, that was a bad deal (laughs) that was a bad deal for Tøyen. The only reason the non-socialist parties went along with giving money to us was because we had a museum. (murmuring from the audience) Huh? What's that about? So we're only worth something when we have a museum? Money that should actually come to us no matter what? Just because we had a museum?<sup>10</sup>

Espinoza began speaking about the continuous cuts to the district's budget that the Conservative coalition that had governed Oslo until 2015. He says that these cuts most severely

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<sup>10</sup> Da Høyre og de borgerlige uh med Venstre uh på laget styrte byen, så var det kutt år etter år etter år på bydelsøkonomien. Siden uh på 90-tallet, her i bydelen, halvparten av befolkningen, altså hadde vi 5, 6 fritidsklubber. Nå er vi uh dobbelt så mange og så har vi bare to. Det koster å drifte sånne tilbud. Disse tilbud er ikke lovpålagte. Så da bydelen så at uh de har ikke penger, hva kutta de? Tilbud til ungdom. Hva, hva gjør ungdom da? Da går de ut i gata, det finner på ting, uh havner i problemer. Ehh det er det som er område— problemet eh spesifikt med økonomien og hvordan vi skal opprettholde uh områdeløftet som finansiere mange sånne tiltak. Det burde ikke være et områdeløftet, det burde være permanent og det burde være en del av bydelsøkonomien. Og uh her må jeg også si at uh unnskyld meg, men Tøyenløftet, det var en dårlig deal (ler) det var en dårlig deal for Tøyen. Eneste grunn for at de borgerlige gikk med å gi penger til oss var fordi vi hadde et museum. (mumling) Huh? Hva er det for noe? Så vi er bare verdt noe nå vi har et museum? Penger som burde egentlig komme til oss uansett? Bare fordi vi hadde et museum?

affected youth programs, which is why so much of the Area Boost has gone to financing new programs to support youth. However, the Area Boost is not going to continue forever—although it had been renewed an additional eight years after its original five were up in 2018, it is still only a temporary measure that was made in exchange for the Munch museum. He then shifts to talking about this new museum:

And so we gave away uh that museum to an area full of eh eh consulting companies, banks, which uh have gotten all they've pointed to? They've gotten uh Deichmann [the main branch of the public library], they've gotten the Opera, and now they've gotten uh our uh museum— uh Tøyen— uh the Munch Museum. Uh now that museum costs— it was supposed to cost 1.6 billion kroner. Suddenly it cost uh it cost, let's look, it cost 2.2 uh billion kroner. Uh the operation— the operation budget is uh 3— is 344 million per year. That's the same as has been used on the Area Boost in total. And will be used to uh 2022. So think— think a little about that. The priorities of the non-socialists. How they look at us.<sup>11</sup>

Espinoza's comments received enthusiastic applause, and what made what he said so powerful were the comparisons made between the museum and the neighborhood, a comparison that might at first seem strange. The museum, which is owned by the city of Oslo, is not only due to receive more public funding per year than the Tøyen Boost has received in total over six years, but the commitment to provide the museum with 344 million NOK *yearly* contrasts with the one-time deal Tøyen got when it lost the museum and the long-term uncertainty as other forms of funding have been cut, “year after year after year.”

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<sup>11</sup> Og så ga vi oss fra uh det museet til et område full av eh eh konsultentselskaper, banker, som uh har fått alt de har pekt på? De har fått uh Deichmann, de har fått Operaen, og nå har de fått uh vårt uh museum— uh Tøyen— uh Munch museet. Uh nå koster det museet— det skulle koste 1,6 milliarder kroner. Plutselig så kosta det uh så kosta det, skal vi se, så kosta det 2,2 uh milliarder kroner. Uh driftet— budsjett for drift er uh 3— er 344 millioner årlig. Det er det samme som man har brukt på Områdeløftet totalt. Og som man skal bruke til uh 2022. Så tenk— tenk litt på det. Prioriteringene til de borgerlige. Hvordan de ser på oss.

Espinoza had introduced himself at the beginning of the debate that evening as representing the only party that actually listened to residents in participatory political initiatives, and his focus here on physical changes to the neighborhood was one way that he showed his party was listening. These visible buildings become effective rhemes of the city's selective listening for all kinds of people in the neighborhood. However, unlike Jamal, these temporal comparisons with the new Munch museum do not point to inequalities within the neighborhood, where the city only listens to gentrifiers, but instead scale up to the level of the city and to the divisions emerging through the creation of the new "Fjord City" being built along the waterfront, which is occupied primarily by transnational consulting firms and banks.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has unpacked ideas of listening within official participatory political initiatives in the neighborhood and what they can tell us about the different kinds of democratic accountability and action being envisioned. For the municipality, the focus is on the event of listening itself. This includes careful documentation that gives public initiatives legitimacy through their transparency. In this model, the municipality saw citizen participants as kinds of ideal liberal individuals, where representation of different demographic categories was important, but which was erased in the actual moments of speaking, so that, ideally, everyone's input would be treated equally. Residents, however, had different ideas about what it would mean for the state to truly listen to them. Local advisory board members believed that the "full potential" of participatory politics was about moving beyond bureaucratic documents and instead learning from each other's experiences through face-to-face conversations. Other neighbors questioned the city's focus on the moment of citizens' speaking, and instead saw the more

relevant temporality of listening to be the uptake of citizen speech. For them, it is not enough for the city to document that they are listening if citizen input does not have a visible effect on the neighborhood.

We could see all of these forms of participatory politics as alternatives to the very limited representation that Norwegians of minority background have through representational political channels. Foreign migrants and their children are generally underrepresented in Norwegian politics, and this underrepresentation is especially true among Somali-Norwegians. During my fieldwork (and still as of April 2021) I only knew of one Somali-Norwegian politician, Marian Hussein, who is on the Gamle Oslo District Council. In 2019, when another Member of Parliament representing her party, the Socialist Democrats, in Oslo went on parental leave, Hussein filled in in his seat and became the first Somali-Norwegian and the first woman who wears a hijab in the Norwegian parliament.

Yet at the same time, these kinds of initiatives are all “integralist” (Holmes 2000), not easily mapped onto the political left or the right. While some of the Local Advisory Board members are active in political parties, I never heard their political positions discussed. Some parties claim to be better at listening to citizens than others, but “increasing local participation” was something that all politicians, regardless of party, say they support, and individual political parties were rarely mentioned during official municipal-sponsored participatory events. In the next chapter, I look more closely at how developers and private businesses further work to depoliticize local participation, and how they dismiss neighbors who resist this kind of depoliticization as “angry.”

## CHAPTER 5

### SCALING AND SELLING THE “INCLUSIVE” NEIGHBORHOOD

The entire time I lived in Tøyen, a new apartment tower, called “South Tøyen Square,” slowly rose between the community center and the square. One evening in July 2017, I was walking by with Stian and Marit, two white Norwegians in their 40s who had lived in Tøyen for several years. Stian stopped and pointed to the yellow building in the background, the only structure on Tøyen Square that pre-dated the square’s creation in the 1970s. He told us that he had heard the new building project was threatening the integrity of that old building’s foundation and might cause it to collapse. I was never able to confirm this story, and it seems somewhat unlikely since the older building had protected status.<sup>1</sup> Yet I had the sense that Stian’s story, like concerns others expressed that the south-facing tower would “block out the light” on Tøyen Square, was as much metaphorical as it was about the actual concrete foundations: South was just the latest in a long series of developments eating away at the neighborhood’s roots.

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<sup>1</sup> Although not impossible, as a property developer had tried something similar about ten years before when building a shopping center in neighboring Grønland next to a row of old protected wooden buildings. After protestors squatted in these houses to ensure they would not be destroyed, the developer ended up adapting his building project to incorporate them into it (see Huse 2011).



Figure 5.1: South Tøyen Square construction site as seen from Hagegata, with the old yellow building and the 1970s towers in the background. Photo by author.

Concerns about the new building were not only architectural. The 13 apartment units had all been sold before construction had even begun, with the 118m<sup>2</sup> penthouse selling for 11 million NOK (\$1.4 million), a record amount for the neighborhood. Some buyers had camped outside the real estate office for two nights in November 2016 to ensure they would be able to purchase one of the units. The prices were fixed, and being able to purchase an apartment in central Oslo without having to go through the usual bidding war that accompanies most property sales appealed to many potential buyers. It was more than three years before the buyers could move into their new apartments, but that did not stop Tøyenites from talking about their new neighbors. The people I knew generally agreed that anyone who spent that much money on an apartment could not be the kind of person who would be interested in participating in Tøyen life

in the “right” way: having children they would send to Tøyen School, and volunteering in neighborhood organizations.

Yet in advertising materials, real estate developers were selling the neighborhood as much as they were the building itself. The project’s website was illustrated with bottles of Tøyen Cola and “I <3 Tøyen” decals. “Tøyen is a city of its own in Oslo!” began the “Local Area” section of the project’s website. “The people, the streets, the art, the shops, the music, the cafés, the bars and the restaurants—they are Tøyen,”<sup>2</sup> The website went on to praise the Tøyen Boost, which it described as a public works project aimed at making the area an “attractive and unique urban area with high quality of living.”<sup>3</sup> This was a direct quotation from the original Tøyen agreement, but here, in the context of a fancy apartment building, it took on a different meaning, as if the Tøyen Agreement had been about creating a luxury neighborhood, not about improving the living conditions of the people who were already living there, many below the poverty line. This way of selling the neighborhood was only one example of larger trend among real estate developers, who took up the “excitement,” “engagement,” or “vibrancy” of the neighborhood, and tried to sell it to a wealthier, white Norwegian consumer.

This image of Tøyen’s attractiveness drew not only on the area within the neighborhood’s physical boundaries, but brought in other places as well, as the name South Tøyen Square exemplifies. There are two different lexical items that mean “south” in Norwegian: *sør* and *syd*. *Sør*, which came from Norwegian dialects, is the more commonly used form in standard Bokmål today. *Syd*, which came into Norwegian from Danish, is used by people

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<sup>2</sup> Tøyen er en egen by i Oslo! Menneskene, gatene, kunsten, butikkene, musikken, cafeene, barene og restaurantene – de er Tøyen.

<sup>3</sup> Attraktivt og unikt byområde med høy bokkvalitet.

speaking and writing in the more elite, old-fashioned Riksmål, or to denote places that are more exotic: a region of Norway is called Sør-Trøndelag, while the South Pole is called Sydpolen (Larsen 1981). *Syden*, “The South,” is a common way to refer to the areas around the Mediterranean that are popular vacation destinations for sun-seeking Norwegian tourists, opposed to *Norden*, “The North,” which is the Norwegian name for the Nordic countries. This lexical difference also clearly distinguishes the more distant south from southern Norway—*sydlandsk* evokes a beach in Spain, *sørlandsk* the rocky Southern Norwegian coast and socially conservative Norwegian Bible Belt. South Tøyen Square used the more exotic term, *syd*. As the website explained, “The building is called SOUTH both because the view is towards the south, but also because we want to associate the building with a southern (*sydlandsk*) atmosphere – bringing in warmth, color, light, and good outdoor space with a rooftop terrace.”<sup>4</sup> The marketers brought together the design of the apartment and a vision of the surrounding neighborhood, to sell a comfortable and somewhat exotic lifestyle that is both within Tøyen and oriented towards an idealized elsewhere.

Much scholarship on gentrification focuses on tensions between working-class, people of color old-timers and wealthier, white new-comers (Fennell 2015; Modan 2007; Tissot 2015). Other approaches consider the political economic causes of gentrification, as post-industrial cities change from places of production to places of consumption (Smith 1996). Frequently, these forms of consumption are based on branding a kind of “black” or other minoritized identity group and selling it for the consumption of a middle-class, white consumer (Hyra 2017; Zukin 2010). While others have used both of these approaches to convincingly analyze gentrification

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<sup>4</sup> Bygget heter SYD både fordi utsikten er mot syd, men også fordi vi ønsket å assosiere bygget mot sydlandsk stemning – bringe inn varme, farge, lys og gode uterom med takterrasse.



within Tøyen (Andersen, Eline Ander, and Skrede 2020; Brattbakk et al. 2015; Huse 2011; 2014; Kohne 2020; Ruud 2003; Saleem 2020; Sæter and Ruud 2005; Tormodsgard 2015), in this chapter I instead consider gentrification as a scalar problem, where branding and selling the neighborhood as “exciting,” “diverse,” and “inclusive” to a young, white, middle-class consumer requires semiotic work to redefine the boundaries of who or what can count as a part of Tøyen, and where and how the neighborhood fits within the rest of the world.

This chapter follows tensions that arose around defining those boundaries, and how “the neighborhood” as a unit relates to the rest of the city, and to other parts of the world. It traces how developers, particularly those focused on rebranding and restructuring Tøyen Square, tried to expand the ideal participant type in ideas of community engagement. In doing so, developers unsettled distinctions between public and private, state and civil society, and insider and outsider. Their project of expanding who could participate in Tøyen-centered initiatives also involved an attempt at redefining the boundaries of the neighbor and what it means to be “Tøyenish.” Defining Tøyen became a way for placing the neighborhood within the larger city of Oslo and the political economic processes of which it was a part. Many of my Tøyen activist interlocutors, however, had different scalar ambitions for the neighborhood, where they do not define it solely as a bounded geographical area nested within a city and nation, but instead were interested in including people who may at first seem to have nothing to do with Tøyen, like Ethiopian coffee growers.

The “neighborhood” as social unit has a long history in urban sociology and geography, from the Chicago School’s view of the neighborhood as a place of community life threatened by the rise of industrial cities (Park 1915; Burgess 1925), to more recent work on “neighborhood effects,” or the idea that the conditions of a neighborhood as a whole can influence the behaviors

and outcomes of individuals living there (Sampson 2011). This work tends to presume “the neighborhood” exists as an organic socio-spatial unit, often seeing it as being the most desirable, most inherently democratic urban unit (Jacobs 1961; Mumford 1954; Talen 2018). No longer limited to the social sciences, this perspective has also been widely taken up by urban designers and international organizations like the UN. Although this view of neighborhoods still dominates much of urban anthropology and sociology, in the tradition of “neighborhood ethnographies,” some have begun to question the ways that this work takes for granted the neighborhood as unit. These social scientists, frequently geographers, have called for urban studies to instead focus on “the *production* of neighborhood by various social, economic and political forces” (Madden 2014, 479 emphasis in original; see also Martin 2003; Whitehead 2003). This chapter follows that call, questioning how and when Tøyen is produced as a neighborhood, and for what purposes. In particular, the chapter looks at the ways that Tøyen as neighborhood unit is produced on what kinds of scales: as a part of the larger city of Oslo, or in relation to other neighborhoods and face-to-face social organizations far beyond Norway. While urban studies has moved to focus on scale, that has been primarily on a conceptual level and the ways that urban theory itself deploys scale, particularly in understanding the relation between the urban and global capitalism (Brenner 2019). In this chapter, I am instead interested in how the neighborhood is scaled by social actors in the neighborhood itself and the consequences those scaling practices have for the people living there.

### **Tøyen Square**

Depending on who you ask, Tøyen as a neighborhood is centered around different physical spaces. For children and many of their parents, the center of the neighborhood is Tøyen

School. For others, it may include the community center right across the street, the playground outside of the public housing blocks, or the subway station. One of the busiest and architecturally most iconic parts of the neighborhood is Tøyen Square, which sits at an edge of the official boundaries of Tøyen. As some of the older people living in the nearby assisted living facility will be quick to tell you, the area was not even considered part of Tøyen until the subway station next to it, which opened in 1966, was named for Tøyen instead of the neighboring area of Kampen. Before the subway was built, there had not been a square there, but streets lined with old wooden buildings. Almost all of these were torn down, in part to build the subway underneath, and also as part of a project to “sanitize” (*sanetisere*) and modernize the city—many of the wooden houses did not have indoor plumbing. The newly created square, then called Tøyensenteret (*senter* is a common term in Norwegian to describe a shopping center), opened in the early 1970s on top of the streets that had been demolished. Its functionalist brick towers have since become iconic of the neighborhood, and of an earlier era in the social democratic welfare state, when the state built thousands of apartments that were cheaply produced, but which made middle-class standards of living, including electricity, indoor plumbing, and home ownership, accessible to all Norwegians.



Figure 5.2: Tøyen Square as it appeared in October 2017, shortly before major renovations began. The temporary wooden structures had been built in 2015 as part of a small NGO's initiative that tried to reimagine the square as a more social space for Tøyen's residents. The statue in the foreground memorializes the time before indoor plumbing, when neighbors would meet around a common well. Photo by author.

Through the early 2000s, Tøyen Center included independent shops like a bakery, a small produce market, a hairdresser, and a bookstore; national chains including a larger supermarket, a pharmacy, and a dollar store; and publicly owned services, like the local library branch, a post office, and the tax office. Only a handful of those storefronts were still open when I began long-term fieldwork in 2017. The tax office moved to a larger building near the train station in 2008 as part of a government restructuring. The post office had closed in 2012, along with about 80% of Norwegian post offices (E24 2012). The bank had also closed long before I first visited Tøyen, as have most physical bank offices across Oslo, and there has not even been an ATM anywhere in the neighborhood since then. While most Norwegians use debit cards or a phone app instead of

cash, the two groups that are still most reliant on cash, short-term foreign workers and seniors, make up a sizable proportion of the neighborhood's population, and they frequently point to the loss of the bank as a sign that the square is no longer for them. While most of these other services closed, what was at the time the largest office of the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV) opened on the square in 2010, and it is still there as of 2021.

Throughout the 2000s and early 2010s, the square had a reputation for being a place for buying and selling narcotics, and many of my interlocutors who had lived in Tøyen then spoke about how they had used to avoid the square at night. Yet those who lived in the public housing blocks on the square remember Tøyen, and their building in the center, as a welcoming place where people got to know their neighbors. This perspective was reinforced in the popular 2003 film *Buddy*, about three young men sharing an apartment in one of those housing blocks. Regardless of which narrative you take up, by the time the Tøyen Boost began in 2013, there was general agreement that the center was long overdue for structural upkeep—several benches and lamps were broken, and the broken tiling in some areas was dangerous for people using wheelchairs and walkers. The city began to plan a major renovation to the outdoor plaza area.

While the Oslo municipality owns the outdoor space in the middle of the square, all of the surrounding buildings are owned by four private developers. They took up the city's renovations, and the increased focus on the neighborhood following the sale of the Munch museum and start of the Area Boost, as an opportunity to re-brand the square and to market to new kinds of businesses and consumers. Their first step was to change the name, Tøyensenteret, to Tøyen torg. *Torg*, which can mean a kind of square or marketplace, evokes a kind of commercial town center from the Middle Ages, long pre-dating the “soulless” shopping centers that had been built around subway stations all over the city in the 1970s. Tøyen was only one of

many senters around Oslo rebranded as a torg in the past decade, although most of them still look very much like indoor shopping centers, and most of the people who pass through them have not changed the term they use to refer to them. Tøyen Square however, with its a brick plaza area surrounded by tall brick office buildings with ground floor storefronts, is a popular gathering place for people living and working in the neighborhood. On a sunny day, you are likely to see office workers eating lunch, retirees sitting on the benches chatting and people-watching, parents with toddlers, and all sorts of other people walking to and from the subway.

The increased excitement and investment around Tøyen attracted new businesses, like a sushi restaurant, cafés, and bars. Rising rents pushed out some of the older independent businesses, like the hair salon and butcher. More cafés and a much more expensive hair salon moved in to replace them. Some of these new businesses allude to Tøyen’s history: the first new bar to open on the square is called Postkontoret after the post office that used to occupy that space, and a café named Skatten is a nod to the former Skattekontoret (tax office), which people living all over Oslo would have had to have visited. Another bar is named after a clothing store that had been in the same space when the new square was first built.

In these naming practices, the square brings together two nostalgic chronotopes—an imagined face-to-face marketplace of the Middle Ages, and a romanticized image of Oslo of the 1960s and 70s, the “Gerhardsen chronotope,” discussed in Chapter 1, of economic growth and social solidarity, when people met face-to-face while going about daily errands and interactions with public institutions. The actual landscape looks nothing like these different past times—the tall brick buildings are nothing like a medieval market square, and the nostalgically named stores are all bars with a similar minimalist wood aesthetic, similar craft cocktails and beers that you would not have been able to find in Oslo in the 1970s, and are owned by similar (in some cases,

exactly the same) younger, white Norwegian entrepreneurs. Yet these two “historical-mythic ‘pasts’” (Munn 1992, 112) are brought into Tøyen’s present, now with the middle-class consumer in mind.

These invocations of forms of pastness are not just about Tøyen in the present, but very much part of an imagination of the future. That future was not just about turning buildings that were previously public institutions into trendy bars, but about rethinking the relationship between public and private management of city space more generally. As the physical renovations to the square began to move forward, the four main property development companies that owned the buildings around the square hired Geir to help them with their rebranding project. Geir, a white Norwegian man in his 50s, lived on the westside of Oslo, and had not spent much, if any, time in Tøyen before he was hired. A specialist in marketing and brand development, he had previous experience with marketing a new shopping center and outdoor areas on Karl Johans Street, the main street in the Oslo city center that connects the train station, parliament, and palace. That development blurs the lines between privately owned shopping center and publicly owned outdoor spaces, and Geir, aside from marketing the shopping center, had successfully negotiated with the city to close the street to cars so that restaurants could take over with their terraces in the summer. This was exactly the kind of expertise that the Tøyen property developers were looking for, since Tøyen Square had a similar dynamic where private corporations own the buildings, while the city owns the square itself. Geir’s job involved both rebranding and marketing the square, and creating a new “Tøyen Square Association” (*torgforening*) that would bring the public and private sectors more closely together in thinking about the development of Tøyen’s public space.

Geir was committed to the name change from *senter* to *torg*, calling squares, with their mix of social gatherings and commercial activities “the heart of the city.” He was inspired by a 2012 report by the NGO Project for Public Spaces UN-Habitat,<sup>5</sup> “Placemaking and the Future of Cities.”<sup>6</sup> The report offers “Ten Ways to Improve Your City.” He saw recreating Tøyen Square as a way to directly address two of those points, “Create Squares and Parks as Multiuse Destinations,” and “Build Local Economies Through Markets.” Geir, like many other visitors to Tøyen, had been struck by the number of people who spent time out on the street and in other public places compared to other parts of the city. He saw the square, as already “one of the liveliest squares in Oslo,” had the potential to change the way that the city thought about public spaces. At the same time, through this invocation of UN-Habitat, Geir was saw Tøyen Square as a way to make Oslo more relevant in international conversations around urban planning.

Key to Geir’s reimagination of the square was the new square association. As he explained it at informational meetings in the neighborhood and when I interviewed him, the Tøyen Square Association, which was made up of representatives from the municipality, building owners, tenants, and surrounding community, was created primarily for the purpose of organizing activities out on the square. Many residents and also longer-term tenants did not understand why there needed to be an association to organize these things, since there had been events on the square before, but Geir was interested in events that would bring together several of the businesses on the square and also attract a larger public from across Oslo, instead of being only for Tøyen’s residents. These activities would be free to attend but sponsored by large

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<sup>5</sup> The United Nations Human Settlement Program, also called UN-Habitat, focuses broadly on improving the quality of life of and building communities in urban areas.

<sup>6</sup> Available here: <https://www.pps.org/article/placemaking-and-the-future-of-cities>



companies interested in advertising or increasing their Corporate Social Responsibility profile. The first interested corporate sponsors Geir found included a waste management company and an international airline. Any surplus from these events would then be invested back into the neighborhood, although what that meant exactly had still not been worked out when the association first formed. More important than the details for Geir was that the association would be a new way of thinking about public-private cooperation around public spaces, and he repeatedly said that he hoped Tøyen Square, which he frequently called “Tomorrow’s square” (*Morgendagens torg*), would become a model for other public spaces around the city. As Geir said when explaining the structure of the association to me, “This...can seem a little complex. But this here is innovation.”<sup>7</sup>

“Innovation” was an operative word for Geir that expressed his larger goal of making a case for why the business sector needed to be included in urban development initiatives, and public social projects more generally. Geir was an avid participant in debates about urban development around Oslo, and he would frequently voice his opinion that purely public-led initiatives were ineffective when compared to those that involved the private sector because they did not have the same kinds of creativity and up-to-date understanding of human behavior and preferences as he saw marketing and similar private companies as having. Many people in Tøyen saw Geir’s efforts as purely concerned about making money for himself and the developers who had contracted him. They were especially wary of what he meant when he spoke about “innovation,” which they saw as a common euphemism for center-right, neoliberal policies. Geir, however, strongly believed that public-private partnerships were the most effective way of

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<sup>7</sup> Det...kan virke som litt kompleks. Men det her er innovasjon.

making the neighborhood a better place for everyone, and long after his official project funding ended, he continued to be a cheerleader for local businesses and youth-focused initiatives in the neighborhood. His categorizing his work as innovation was his strategy to bring what was happening in Tøyen to the attention of the larger Oslo business community, and he hoped that he would be able to persuade Tøyen insiders that this was a worthwhile goal.

Although speaking about “innovation,” along with his “pretty” (*pent*) western Oslo dialect and the expensive suits he wore almost every time I saw him made Geir stick out among the other people who passed through the Tøyen community center, it was also clear that he was trying hard to fit his goals for the neighborhood into a neighborhood-based authoritative register. He frequently made a point of using similar lexical items to describe his project as the Area Boost used to speak of its own initiatives, for example calling his work the “Square Boost” (*torgløftet*) and using discourses around social and economic sustainability, as discussed in Chapter 1. In doing so, he tried to claim an affiliation with who he took to be the authoritative figures in the neighborhood, which would give his presence legitimacy as well. At the same time, he hoped to stem potential conflict. Geir also frequently framed the square association as being an important site for “participation” (*medvirkning*), using the same word as the municipality did for the kinds of activities described in Chapter 4. Yet, when the city used that term, they were speaking of ways to involve individual citizens. Geir used the term more broadly to speak about the importance of dialogue between the public sector, residents, and various commercial interests, framing his work as creating a kind of hyper-inclusivity. Many Tøyen activists grumbled that his view ignored power dynamics, and that commercial interests had enough influence already without finding new arenas for them to participate. When he first began working at the community center, I heard more than one hushed conversation about whether

Inspirers, or other Tøyen activists, really wanted to work with him. Many of them ultimately decided that they should because they could tell that the Tøyen Square would change whether or not they got involved, and they hoped that this way they would at least have some influence.

In his work on the cultural significance of “the neighborhood” in the United States, Benjamin Looker has argued that “the meaning of ‘neighborhood’ is alternately constructed with reference either to a past moment that has all but disappeared, or to the possibilities for a vibrant urban and national destiny that might be ushered in through a resurgence in neighborliness and block-level solidarity” (Looker 2015). For developers like Geir, the branding of Tøyen around Tøyen Torg brought together both an idealized, nostalgic pastness and a future-oriented vision of solidarity, albeit a solidarity looked strange to the Tøyen activists working for block-level, grassroots relationships between neighbors.

### **From Tøyen-ite to Tøyen-ish**

Geir tried to avoid conflict and legitimize his efforts to turn the square into a new public-private experiment by working to readjust the boundaries around who and what could belong to Tøyen. A few months before the square renovations were completed, Geir held an information meeting at the Community Center about what was being envisioned for the new square. The meeting had two primary purposes. The first was to speak about the ways that the square would contribute to the larger project of boosting the neighborhood. The second was to introduce the new square association. His assumed audience were the organizations and businesses in the neighborhood, which is why the meeting was scheduled at 9 a.m. on a weekday morning. What Geir had not expected was that many residents who had full-time jobs in other parts of the city would want to attend and were upset that they could not. As a solution, one organization live-

streamed the event on its Facebook page so that more people could watch it. Those who could attend were primarily people who worked for neighborhood-based NGOs and social entrepreneurs with flexible work schedules.

After introducing himself, Geir spoke to the audience assembled in the community center about the conversations he had had with business owners and organizations around Tøyen, and the “place identity” that he had found through those meetings. As he told the room, and as I heard him repeat many times in future presentations and conversations, the word that he thought summed up Tøyen was “Tøyenish” (*tøyensk*), which he illustrated in his PowerPoint presentation that May morning with a picture of a bottle of Tøyen Cola and a copy of *Tomorrow We Laugh (I Morgen Vi Ler)*, a novel about a Norwegian-Pakistani girl negotiating growing up in two cultures. The book could be seen as an odd choice: although the author, Namra Saleem, has spoken publicly more recently about the effects of gentrification in Tøyen, at the time I was not aware of her as someone particularly associated with the neighborhood. It is likely that Geir selected this book for its aesthetic cover and because it is clearly by and about a Norwegian of immigrant background. The future-oriented title also fit well with his temporal image of Tøyen Square. The book and the bottle are both lying on the grass, suggesting a lazy afternoon out in Tøyen Park or the nearby Botanic Garden. At the same time, the font, which resembles graffiti, evokes a kind of urban edge that many “typical Norwegians” living elsewhere would find exotic.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Graffiti could be a contentious topic in Tøyen. I once witnessed a Conservative politician get lambasted by an older Tøyen resident for describing her first impression of the neighborhood as looking “criminal.” When the Tøyenite asked her if she thought poverty and racial difference were criminal, the politician quickly apologized, saying that, as a naïve young woman who had grown up in a small, rural village, graffiti was a sign of criminality. The Tøyen Square website uses a sans serif font instead of this faux graffiti, although I never found out if this was to not

Geir did not spend much time on this image, but instead moved on to define the word with a string of adjectives that are also on the square's website: "Tøyenish: Something real, energetic, varied, unique, genuine, sincere, near, inclusive, open, helpful, accessible, personal, sincere [sic].<sup>9</sup> An unpolarized melting pot for different life phases and living conditions." On the Square's website, the definition is illustrated by people who appear to be of African background, smiling and dancing at a concert out on the square (Figure 5.3). Geir may have come up with the word Tøyenish because he had heard people use it around the community center, but his definition differed from the ways I heard other people use it, as we saw in Chapter 2. Neighbors who used the word would tend to only use it as a joke, defining the unexpected combinations you could encounter in Tøyen, especially in terms of language. A bottle of Tøyen Cola and a novel are a fairly standard combination for a nice summer day, and the positive adjectives fit together much more harmoniously than anything I ever heard anyone else get defined as Tøyenish, very much what Joyce Bell and Douglas Hartmann have called the "happy talk" of diversity (2007). For Geir, the term Tøyenish was also much less focused on language, as most everything I saw Geir produce was written in very pretty Bokmål, the polar opposite of the "Tøyenish" signs in the Community Center that mixed Bokmål, Nynorsk, and English.

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make the neighborhood seem "criminal" to outsiders, or to not seem too exoticizing of Tøyenites.

<sup>9</sup> I did not notice the repeated word in this slogan until I started writing this chapter, I think because Geir would tend to recite the definition so quickly that I only managed to focus quantity of adjectives he was using instead of the individual words. I never heard anyone else point it out either, which makes me wonder how closely anyone was paying attention to these branding efforts.



Figure 5.3: Screenshot from Tøyen Torg's website.

SOURCE: <https://www.toyentorg.no/strategien>

Geir's description of Tøyenish also differed from how I had heard other people speak about the neighborhood as a particularly inclusive and welcoming place. Although this was a common description I heard from the Tøyen residents I got to know, they would be more likely to talk about Tøyen's inclusivity as a way of talking about the rest of Oslo's snobby exclusiveness. Geir, however, was opening up those boundaries, suggesting that if you agree with all the positive adjectives that are part of what it means to be Tøyenish, you too could belong in Tøyen. You do not have to be a Tøyen-ite to be Tøyen-ish.

More concretely, what being concerned with "Tøyenish values" meant for Geir was that all of the organizations involved in the square association, public and private, would be primarily concerned with the long-term good of the neighborhood over any kind of short-term profit. Residents were not included in this first imagining of the association. Many members of the

audience were skeptical of this claim, like Jonas, a middle-aged white Norwegian man who worked at Tøyen School.

#### Transcript 5.9

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | Jonas: De interessentene i– eller to av tre, jeg skal ikke snakke for bydelen, men uh gårdeierne og leietakerne de tenker kommersielt. Og de er da to tredeler av det torgstyret, så jeg lurte på om de er enige i det du sa, at de skal beskytte torget mot de kommersielle pregene.  | Jonas: The interested parties in– or two of three, I won't speak for the district, but uh the building owners and tenants, they think commercially. And they make up two thirds of the square board, so I'm wondering whether they agree with what you said, that they will protect the square against the commercial features.   |
| 2 | Geir: Ja.  | Geir: Yes.  |
| 3 | Jonas: Siden det er det de driver med.   | Jonas: Since that's what they do.   |
| 4 | Geir: Men det opplever jeg at de er. I de diskusjonene vi har hatt, ja, så har de vært veldig opptatt av det, nettopp fordi de varet på det tøyenske, og den tøyenske verdien. Eh det er klart at eh gårdeierne og også leietakerne det er jo kommersielle interesser i det, men samtidig så er det ikke bare utelukkende på leie og eie inntektene, men også på utvikling av torget over tid, og det er noe jeg synes også er spennende, for det synes jeg gårdeierne her burde få litt kred for i forhold til prosjektet, fordi de, det har de diskutert mye, og de er veldig opptatt av det langsiktige utviklingen av torget. Uh det har dere sikkert bekreftet uh i– uh at det er slikt. De er opptatt av å bevare egenarten og identiteten for– for– for torget, på– på Tøyen. | Geir: But I experience that they are. In the discussions we've had, yes, they've been very concerned with that, precisely because they care about the Tøyenish, and the Tøyenish value. Eh it's clear that eh the building owners and also the lessors are of course commercial interests in it, but at the same time it's not exclusively rental and ownership income, but also about the development of the square over time, and that is something I also think is exciting, because I think the building owners here should get a little cred for in relationship to the project, because they, they've discussed this a lot, and they're very concerned with the long-term development of the square. Uh that's something you [pl] have surely noticed uh in– uh that they're like that. They're concerned with preserving the uniqueness and the identity for– for– for the square, in– in Tøyen. |

There are several oppositions going on in this brief exchange. First, Jonas proposes that there is the opposition between the commercial developers and tenant businesses and non-

commercial interests, which may include the city, although Jonas hedges on that distinction. Geir, however, counters Jonas, saying that the important distinction is instead between those who are “concerned with the Tøyenish value,” an encompassing fractal (Gal and Irvine 2019) that includes the entire square association, and those who are not concerned with Tøyen, which does not include any named group. “The Tøyenish” for Geir, is not only the list of adjectives he includes on promotional materials, but it is also the idea of being concerned with the long-term development of the Square. As he tells the assembled group, the property developers display their commitment to Tøyenish values because they are not solely interested in getting a quick return on their investment, but instead are concerned in the Square over time. This distinction shows that Geir is in many ways a skillful listener and has heard Tøyen activists’ calls for long-term stability. Yet at the same time, his response to Jonas is vague enough that it remains an open question whether this long-term identity that the developers are so interested in protecting is the same as what Tøyen residents want for the square. Geir’s different way of categorizing kinds of people in Tøyen is likely also due to his previous work experience, which was in more commercial areas of the city center where there are far fewer residents. Following this first meeting, he learned that he should schedule events in the evenings when residents would be able to attend. He also expanded the Square Association to, like the Local Advisory Board, include two representatives from the community. These were self-nominated and elected by the District Council.

Geir saw this expanded vision of who and what belonged in the neighborhood as a way of breaking down traditional boundaries between the public and private sectors, which he saw as detrimental to the good of the city. Geir pitched the square association as creating a “forum for dialogue and cooperation” between the different actors concerned with the square. While the



association was officially only responsible for scheduling events, he suggested that having building owners, lessees, the city, and residents together in the same room for meetings would facilitate other discussions. Some of the local residents and community organizations hoped that this cooperation would mean that residents would have more input in the kinds of businesses that opened on the square, and that the businesses that were there already would start to employ more people in the neighborhood, especially youth. Geir never made any promises that the square association itself would be able to do this, but he did propose that, through creating a new meeting place, the association would be fostering new kinds of connections that had not existed previously.

Others, however, remained skeptical that the “dialogues” happening at the association would every have any effect. Sara Ahmed has shown how, in academic institutions, a “happy diversity” model “provides a positive, shiny image of the organization that allows inequalities to be concealed and thus reproduced” (2012, 72). At least one of the longer-term business owners, Tore, would likely agree that the same is true for “Tøyenish values” in the neighborhood. As he told an assembled group of seniors who gathered in the library basement to discuss their needs:

That square association, we don't really see the [property] owners there, you understand? They hide themselves a little, and that's what the mistake is here, that eh um those who actually are sitting with the possibility of doing something, we who are here on the square, we don't get to meet them. Now and then a property manager pops up, likely to say that there will be higher rents or increased operating costs or something, but that cooperation, we don't have that here. And I have managed many shops for many years and been in many centers, shopping centers, eh and what's needed is good cooperation between the landlord and tenant. Uh now I'm a little like, now I think ok (.) put the blame on someone, but— and this has been said, and it's the truth that that building I'm in, that is [building address], there there's as far as a uh a responsible person, a property manager who makes contact with me occasionally, ehm but the owners, that is the BOARD, I think they barely even know where Tøyen is, that is they have of course— they're in Spain, playing golf and that is they've just put money into this, that is they don't have any other feeling there, right, they don't have their hearts here, so so so if I am called [his shop's name] or Espresso House or McDonalds or what, that— for them it's exactly the same.

The most important is that they get the market price. And that, I'm trying to as well as I can to tell uh the property un manager at my place that can't they just have their property another place than Tøyen exactly?<sup>10</sup>

Tore sees the Square association as a distraction, a frontstage (Goffman 1959) similar to the Local Advisory Board and other participatory events discussed in the previous chapter. Yet instead of the backstage being the municipal government, in this case it is the boards of the companies who own the buildings. While Geir claimed the property owners were concerned about “Tøyenish values,” Tore pointed out that people in Tøyen never actually meet these owners, who are large investment firms, just the employees who work for them. Those employees may say that they care about the long-term good of Tøyen, but in the end it is the boards who make the final decisions. Tore then rejects Geir's attempt to redefine neighborhood belonging from who lives there to who cares about the Tøyenish. He expresses the property owners' lack of concern for the future of the neighborhood spatially—“they almost don't even know where Tøyen is...they're in Spain” (i.e. *Syden*). The building owners will never care about the future of the neighborhood or anything beyond making profit for themselves. The

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<sup>10</sup> Den torgforeningen, der ser vi ikke egentlig eiere, skjønner du? De gjemmer seg litt, og det er det som er litt feilen her, at eh um de som virkelig sitter og har muligheten til å gjøre noe, vi som driver her på torget, vi får møte ikke de. Av og til så dukker den eiendomsansvarlig opp, helst da for å fortelle at det blir noe høyere leie eller økte driftskostnader eller noe sant, men det samarbeidet da, det har vi ikke her. Og jeg har drevet da butikker mange år og vært i mange senter, kjøpesenter, eh og det kreves at det er et godt samarbeid mellom utleier og leietaker. Eh nå blir jeg litt som, når tenker jeg ok...legge skyld på noen, men, og det er blitt fortalt, og det er sannheten at den gården jeg er inni, også [building address], der er det forsåvidt en uh en ansvarsfull, en eiendomssjef da som tar kontakt med meg innimellom, ehm men eierne, også STYRET, de tror jeg ikke vet engang nesten hvor Tøyen er, altså de har jo— de er i Spania, spiller golf og altså de har jo bare lagt penger til dette her, altså de har jo ikke en annen følelsen da, ikke sant, de har ikke hjertet sitt her da, så så så om jeg heter [her shop's name] eller Espresso House eller McDonalds eller hva, det— for dem så er det akkurat det samme. Det viktigste er at de får inn markedsprisen. Og det den, jeg prøver å så godt jeg kan å fortelle uh eiendoms uh ansvarlig hos meg at det det kan ikke de da bare har gården sin et annet sted enn akkurat på Tøyen?

multinational companies he mentions, McDonald's and Swedish-based Espresso House, further drive in his point that these owners do not care about anything local.

Others were suspicious of Geir's view of Tøyenish, not necessarily because they saw it as a distraction from where the real decisions were being made, but because they did not like how Geir was claiming a kind of authority to be able to speak for the neighborhood through his work branding a small, commercial corner of it. Geir had told me in an interview that defining and highlighting "Tøyenish," aside from expanding the kinds of people who could fit in the neighborhood, was a way of increasing pride among local inhabitants. Showcasing the positive aspects of the neighborhood to the rest of the city would help to end the decades-long stigma against Tøyen, from the perspective of the wealthier parts of the city. The Tøyen activists I asked about the square re-opening did not see things the same way. For Mads, this was because of the way Geir's description ossified what Tøyen is.

#### Transcript 5.10

- |    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| 11 | Mads: Ja det er det samme med, altså han [Geir] har jeg (incomprehensible) mye med å gjøre. Jeg var veldig skeptisk i starten men også har jeg– jeg liker han veldig godt. jeg er ikke ening med ham=   | Mads: Yes it's the same with, that is him [Geir] I have (incomprehensible) a lot to do. I was very skeptical in the beginning, but I've also– I like him a lot. I don't agree with him=   |
| 12 | Janet: =nei=  | Janet: =no=   |
| 13 | Mads: =i alt da, men han er en fin fyr og (.) og du ser– eller han (.) han har– det går an å diskutere, altså se at han har endra mening på noen ting da. Og han er jo blitt skikkelig sånn– jeg ser– han har jo ble litt rørt av det– nå er det han har skjønt greia da. | Mads: =in everything, but he's a good guy and (.) and you see– or he (.) he has– it's possible to discuss, that is to see that he's changed his mind about some things. And he has been really like– I see– he has been a little touched by it– when he's understood the thing that is. |
| 14 | Janet: Ja, jeg tror det også.   | Janet: Yes, I think so too.   |
| 15 | Mads: Følger jeg. Uh og det er kult da  | Mads: I feel. Uh and that's cool.   |
| 16 | Janet: Ja.  | Janet: Yes.   |
| 17 | Mads: Men, når han snakker om– eller hvis du går på den Tøyen Torg nettsiden  | Mads: But, when he talks about– or if you go onto that Tøyen Square website   |

- |    |  |   |
|----|--|---|
| 18 | Janet: Mmm   | Janet: Mmm  |
| 19 | Mads: og så står det om tøyensk identitet og sånn  | Mads: and there's the thing about Tøyenish identity and such  |
| 20 | Janet: Å ja!   | Janet: Oh right!  |
| 21 | Mads: Så ble jeg litt sånn (.) ikke sant? Det er da det er (.) det følger jeg det er en del som prøver å gjøre at, på en måte, brande seg som Tøyen. | Mads: I'm a little like (.) right? It's that it is (.) I feel that there are some who are trying to, in a way, brand themselves as Tøyen.     |
| 22 | Janet: Yes   | Janet: Yes  |
| 23 | Mads: Uh (.) og det er så shallow at uh ja. For Tøyen er nettopp (.) Tøyen er bare en miks av mye og det har vært det hele tiden.                    | Mads: Uh (.) and that is so shallow that uh yes. Because Tøyen is exactly (.) Tøyen is just a mix of a lot and it's been that the whole time. |
| 24 | Janet: Mmhmm.  | Janet: Mmhmm.   |
| 25 | Mads: Så ikke kom her og litt som prøv å (.) fortelle hva Tøyen er.  | Mads: So don't come here and like try to (.) tell what Tøyen is.  |

Mads had two problems with the branded “Tøyenish identity.” First, he did not think that there was any one way to describe what Tøyen is, that Tøyen is a “mix.” He told me later that he preferred the way that Erling Dokk Holm, an urban studies scholar and journalist, had described Tøyen in an article published in *Aftenposten*.

The absolute best thing with Tøyen. Tøyen is a place that the whole time evades classifications.

What remains, is the feeling itself of being a place that in its innermost essence is a hybrid. Tøyen blends everything.

Her you get food from all corners of the world, but also from grandmother country: in the same stairway you find classic Norwegian working class, the new white middle class, different generations of immigrants, and people who don't fit in in any categories.

Tøyen is never the same place. Other districts have a clearer identity – like Vålerenga and Frogner. Tøyen on the other hand, is like a river. Always the same, never the same.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Det aller best med Tøyen. Tøyen er et sted som hele tiden skli unna klare klassifikasjoner. Det som derimot består, er selve følelsen av å være et sted som i sitt innerste vesen er en hybrid. Tøyen blander alt.

Her får du mat fra alle verdensdeler, men også fra bestemoreland: i samme oppgang finner du klassisk norsk arbeiderklasse, den nye hvite middelklassen, ulike generasjoner med innvandrere, og mennesker som ikke passer inn i noen kategorier.

Tøyen er aldri det samme stedet. Andre bydeler har klarere identitet – som Vålerenga og Frogner. Tøyen derimot, er som en elv. Alltid den samme, aldri den samme. (Dokk Holm 2018)

Although Tøyen as a name is in some respects a rigid designator (Kripke 1972), always referring to the same bounded spatial area, it also operates as a shifter (Jakobson 1971), whose exact reference changes depending on the person who is speaking and the context in which they are doing so. Mads is rejecting Geir's authority to posit a particular kind of token-type relationship in the Tøyen brand (cf. Nakassis 2012), arguing that any attempt to define the boundaries of what counts as the type of the Tøyen brand is "shallow."

The other problem Mads had with the Tøyenish brand was that Tøyen had been a mix "the whole time," long before Geir arrived, so Mads found it condescending that Geir would think he could just come to Tøyen and tell people what the neighborhood is. Neighborhood pride was not going to come from selling "Tøyenish" to the rest of the city. While Mads was not denying that the trendy bars and cafés are very much a real part of the neighborhood now, what he did take issue with was that Geir was trying to impose that one glossy, branded version of Tøyen onto the entire neighborhood.

For some, it was also a problem that Geir was defining Tøyen with the square as its center. Many working class Tøyen residents, especially the Somali families who lived in public housing, would often express frustration at how Tøyen Square was not for them. They could not afford the cafés and restaurants, and even if they could have afforded it, they did not feel comfortable at the bars that served alcohol. Aside from the library, they had little reason to spend time on the square. For them, and even for white Norwegian residents could afford the cafés, the center of Tøyen was elsewhere. Some residents began to jokingly call one area across the street from Tøyen square the "alternative square," since it was a place where you did not have to pay to belong, and where anyone could go.

## Consuming Tøyen

The existence of Tøyen-branded products was so taken-for-granted for many people that one Tøyen activist, Johanne, told me I think only half-jokingly that a group of neighbors had considered trying to trademark the name Tøyen so that they could control and profits from its use. The seeming inevitability was not just about the place and the kinds of people the name indexed, but several people told me the word Tøyen itself was a good brand name: the ø made it clearly Norwegian, while the word was still easy for foreigners living in Norway to pronounce.<sup>12</sup> Yet many people in the neighborhood disagreed with Geir on the question of who the imagined consumer of these brands should be. In fall 2018, the butcher shop on the square announced it was closing, and for many of the people following along with the new square reorganization, this seemed to be the perfect opportunity for the property owners to show they listening to concerns from neighbors and could open an independent, locally focused business. Geir jumped on the idea of what he called a “Tøyen souvenir shop” (*Tøyen souvenir sjappe*), which would employ young people to sell things made in Tøyen. Geir had been working out of the Tøyen Community Center for several months, sometimes attending Inspire’s weekly members meetings, and he was excited by all of the Tøyen-based products that were being developed, from the Made in Tøyen woolen hats, to Tøyen Coffee. For Geir, the souvenir shop fit into his larger hopes that one day Tøyen square would become a destination for the entire city, and “all of Oslo is envious of Tøyen Square.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Some people said this, but I also heard others, either jokingly or more judgingly, making fun of foreigners who called the neighborhood “Tåjen” [tøjən] because they could not produce the [œY] diphthong.

<sup>13</sup> “Hele Oslo er misunnelig på Tøyen torg.”

This was not the first time I had heard someone talk about a shop that could sell local products. Maria and Hanna, the Inspire staff members, sometimes talked about how a “community shop,” would be a great way for local social entrepreneurs to sell their products to their neighbors. This kind of shop would be a way of mitigating some of the wealth inequalities that come with gentrification, since they envisioned wealthier, more recent arrivals in Tøyen as a prime consumer base for the kinds of products the store would sell. Their approach was that, since they could not stop gentrification, they would instead instrumentalize it.

While the two kinds of shops looked almost the same, they had very different scalar goals. Geir’s “souvenir” shop was about “branding Tøyen and Tøyen pride,” as he explained it, making Tøyen into a commodity for sale to the rest of the city. He wanted the square, standing in for the neighborhood, to become a destination for the rest of the city. This goal involved branding a kind of multiculturalism and community engagement and energy and selling that to more homogenous areas of Oslo. This was not just about consumerism, but also an ethical imagining of a better Norway. As the square’s website states, “Tøyen Square is the place in Oslo that has the greatest potential to be a bridge-builder between east and west, old and new, rich and poor. Here all of Norway meets up.”<sup>14</sup> Maria and Hanna’s vision also mixed the commercial with a kind of ethical inclusivity, but their version envisioned Tøyen-branded products as a way of forging relationships between local neighbors, both as they come together face-to-face with each other through buying and selling, and as a way for longer-term residents to make money from wealthier, newer arrivals. They felt that the “souvenir shop” name showed that Geir’s shop idea had a very different motivation than their own hopes for a community shop because it implied

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<sup>14</sup> Tøyen Torg er det stedet i Oslo som har størst potensiale i å være en brobygger mellom øst og vest, gammelt og nytt, rik og fattig. Her møtes hele Norge.

that the consumers of these “souvenirs” would only see themselves as tourists in Tøyen, not full-fledged neighborhood citizens with obligations to the entire community.

As they saw it, Geir had created a higher order of indexicality (Silverstein 2003) for Tøyen through his efforts to brand and sell the square. At the first-order Tøyen, indexes a bounded, geographical area in Oslo that exists in a schematized relationship with other neighborhoods across the city. Part of this schematization may include stereotyped qualities about the kinds of people who live in Tøyen compared to the people in other parts of the city. Within certain groups, the neighborhood comes to index certain kinds of stereotypes that social actors can then take up and play with. Through the categorization of some things and manners of speaking as “Tøyenish,” people in the neighborhood are taking up certain qualities, like “inclusivity” or “engagement” they see to be typical of the place and the people who live there, and putting them into contrastive relationships. Second-order indexes emerge through fractal recursivity (Gal and Irvine 2019, 131): within Tøyen, some people may seem more Tøyenish than others, while, for Geir, people outside of the neighborhood can still be Tøyenish in contrast to others through their commitment to diversity and inclusivity. “Tøyen” gets taken up as indexing, not the neighborhood itself, but a stereotypical quality of the people living there. Geir is then creating an even higher order of indexicality for Tøyen through the way he makes these features of “engagement” and “inclusivity” into something desirable to others, that can be purchased at a souvenir shop. Maria and Hanna worry that, at this new order of indexicality, Tøyen and Tøyenish become indexical of a kind of trendiness, not with an ethical commitment to the people in the neighborhood.

Hanna and Maria expressed similar skepticism when one of the organizers of Oslo Innovation Week, an annual international conference, had suggested that they change their city



tours for the invited speakers, who generally worked for international corporations. While they usually focused on established tourist sites, like the Vigeland sculpture park on the west side of the city, she wanted to instead start in Tøyen and walk down towards the Opera House on the harbor. Maria worried that the plan sounded like poverty tourism. Hanna and Maria did not like these two projects for the same reason, that they treated Tøyen like a tourist location, either for the rest of the city or for other privileged “outsiders.” Neighborhood-internal consumers, even if they came from similarly privileged backgrounds as these outsider tourists, would, they believed, have to forge deeper relationships with the neighborhood and their neighbors because they would be living side-by-side for an extended period. While Geir saw Tøyen as a place for Oslo and Norway to come together, Hanna and Maria’s scale was within the neighborhood, not on the city-wide or national, although they did express a hope at other times that the kinds of relationships between neighbors in Tøyen might inspire other local communities in Norway.

In the end, the Tøyen Souvenir Shop did not open. Geir’s plan had been that the city could cover the first months of rent until the shop could cover its own expenses, and Linda, the municipal staff member he’d spoken to, felt that if she were going to ask her boss for the 150,000NOK (almost \$19,000) Geir had said was necessary, that a souvenir shop proposed by an outside developer was not the first choice of who should get that money. Geir took this as an example of how the public sector is never as quick-moving or as willing to take risks as the private sector. This also allowed Geir to push any sort of blame for when residents complained that the new square organization was not listening to them away from the property owners and onto the municipality.

There are likely more branded products that incorporate the name Tøyen than there are place-based brands anywhere else in the city. The first, and probably most successful, product

was Tøyen Cola, a soda that two men working in a print shop in neighboring Grønland began making from a back room in their shop around 2014. It was at first only sold in small kiosks around eastern Oslo, but it quickly spread across the city. The producers use an open-source cola recipe that they print on every bottle, and the company gained international attention in 2018 when the Coca Cola Company sued them for producing another soda they called Jalla Sprite.<sup>15</sup> The company's alternative, underdog position, likely helped by the fact that Tøyen Cola tastes much better than the bigger name sodas, contributed to Tøyen Cola's popularity among all kinds of people living in Tøyen. It was frequently provided at local events, and its aesthetically pleasing green bottle made it a popular alcohol-free alternative at the bars on Tøyen Square. Tøyen Cola has also been taken up as part of the City of Oslo's own branding efforts and is featured on their English-language website aimed at international tourists.<sup>16</sup> The article about the soda company includes pictures of the neighborhood of Tøyen, but there is no mention of the neighborhood itself, with the focus instead being on the soda's quirky, white Norwegian creators and their small "inner city" factory.

The imagined consumer of other Tøyen brands, and what Tøyen indexed, varied considerably. Even brands geared toward an outside consumer did not always index Geir's same "Tøyenish values." In late 2018, Sigrid, a real estate developer, opened Tøyen Space, an event space aimed at businesses in various creative industries. I would have said her building was located in the neighboring area of Kampen instead of Tøyen, so I asked her how she had chosen

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<sup>15</sup> Jalla is a borrowing from Arabic *yāllāh*, meaning "come on" or "hurry up." It is fairly common among young people, especially Muslims and other Arabic speakers, living in eastern Oslo.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.visitoslo.com/en/about-oslo/feature/toyen-cola/>

the name. Sigrid, a white Norwegian woman in her late 20s from western Oslo, had lived in New York and chose to speak to me in English.

Transcript 5.11

- 1 Sigrid: Yeah there's a lot going on in Tøyen right now, and everyone's hearing about it, like you read about it everywhere um that's the one thing, it's very like trendy kind of feel to it right now. Uh the other thing is that it's uh well whereas Kampen is— even though it's on the east side of the city, it's considered like cultural elite, like a lot of very highly educated um people are living there, and it's so it uh I mean probably a lot of young people as well, but Tøyen feels a lot younger and more vibrant to it, and that's more of the feel I also want uh at the [Space], right? And uh also the fact that people think it's very complicated to get to Tøyen
- 2 Janet: Hmm ok (laughing)
- 3 Sigrid: Or to Tøyen well a lot of people are like oh, it's so tricky to get there, I've had a lot of people come to Tøyen tell me later, oh it was so much easier than I imagined, like even my boyfriend, he hasn't been there a lot of times, and most of the times we have driven, but we also live right by the subway station in [Majorstuen]
- 4 Janet: Yeah, there's—
- 5 Sigrid: And then we have this— and on Friday I think it was the first time he actually went here himself without me, and he was like it's so easy to get here!
- 6 Janet: Yeah! (laughing) I never would have thought people (.) huh that's interesting.
- 7 Sigrid: Yeah but people— people think that. So uh by using Tøyen, you also signal that you're close to the subway station, which everyone knows, and that's the easiest way to get here for most people. Um. Yeah. So that's—
- 8 Janet: No that makes a lot of sense. I was also— you sort of mentioned this— but the— how important it is that Tøyen is on the east side of town. Sometimes you see other projects calling it central Oslo versus when you really highlight the east and sort of the history of Oslo um. Yeah, so it sounds like the East is?
- 9 Sigrid: Yeah, I mean it's just for the whole vibe that I want of the building. I want it to be a very inclusive openminded uh you don't want people who are like “oh I need this to be in this set way that I'm used to” uh the people that I want to be using the building and uh renting in the building are people who appreciate the cultural differences and appreciate the diversity that you see here.

“Tøyen” for Sigrid has several valences. First, it is “trendy,” in an up-and-coming, young way. Key to this is Tøyen's place on the east side of Oslo, which Sigrid described several times as more “inclusive” than the west side. By this, she meant that there is more ethnic and cultural diversity on the east side of the city, and also that people there are more easy-going, and that they do not need things to be one set way. She told me later in the interview that she also sees using

English instead of Norwegian as connected to these two kinds of inclusivity, and that English makes Norwegians sound “friendlier” than Norwegian does. For Sigrid, the Tøyen-brand could extend to index this kind of trendy, laid-back image, which she could use as a resource to brand her event space, for example using #tøyenløft in publicity images on Instagram showcasing Tøyen Space’s amenities.

Sigrid is clear that this Tøyen-brand is meant as a signal to outsiders who are coming to the neighborhood from other parts of Oslo, not to people who are already there. Although Sigrid did not say it outright, these outsiders she’s addressing all come from those “boring,” “more elite” parts of the city, which is where she herself is from, but from which she’s trying to distance herself and her business. Tøyen is a 15-minute walk from the main train station in Oslo, and every single subway line stops there. Osloites who live on the east side of the city would almost all have to pass through Tøyen to get to the city center, so they are less likely to think it is “complicated” to get there. However, people living on the west side of the city would have much less reason to pass through Tøyen.<sup>17</sup> Sigrid uses her boyfriend as an example of the typical person she’s thinking of when branding her business as a part of Tøyen. Majorstuen, which also serves all of the subway lines, is only 5 stations and a 9-minute ride from Tøyen. Yet I had a friend living there who said almost exactly the same thing to me when we met in Tøyen once—that she was so surprised how easy it had been to get there. For Sigrid then, the word Tøyen is meant to evoke centrality within the city as a whole as much as it is supposed to index any sort of qualities about the neighborhood itself.

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<sup>17</sup> See Bengt Andersen’s discussion of how the National Theater acts as a dividing line that people living on each side of Oslo do not tend to cross (2014).

Enterprising Tøyenites were also quick to pick up on the popularity of Tøyen-branded products and created their own. Yet these brands had a different, generally more neighborhood-internal imagined consumer. For Tekle, a man in his 30s originally from Ethiopia, Tøyen Coffee was the perfect step towards his desire to become an entrepreneur working between Norway and Ethiopia. He employed women in Ethiopia to source his raw coffee beans. He then planned to train young people living in Tøyen to roast the beans and to become baristas, and a percentage of his profits went to a Tøyen-based organization focused on young people. While the coffee was always going to be named after Tøyen, Tekle's business plan had also always included both the teenagers in Tøyen and the Ethiopian coffee farmers who likely would never travel to Norway, let alone Tøyen. For Tekle, the brand, "Tøyen," covered both and was a way for him to bring together these spatially distant worlds of which he was a part. The first few runs of Tøyen Coffee, which Tekle primarily sold out of the shared office space on the first floor of the community center, quickly sold out. His primary customers, at least at the beginning, were middle-class Tøyen residents, who were both attracted to the trendy sound of Tøyen Coffee and to Tekle's social commitments. The coffee launched in November, and many of the people I saw who came in to purchase it spoke about what a wonderful Christmas gift it would be for their friends and family who did not live in Tøyen themselves. White Norwegians I knew living in the neighborhood would sometimes tell me their relatives were skeptical of their choice to live in Tøyen, either because of the stereotypes they had heard about poverty and crime, or because they could not understand why someone would want to live in what they saw as the small, cramped apartments that are the norm so close to the city center. Giving Tøyen Coffee and other locally produced, Tøyen branded products as Christmas gifts was a way of showcasing a positive version of multiculturalism that they saw themselves as being part of.

Tøyen brands provided a way for people with many different motivations to articulate forms of belonging and a kind of orientation to the neighborhood. Debates about who Tøyen was for and what Tøyen was came to be articulated through this brand logic, as these different actors created, sold, and sometimes rejected Tøyen brands. In these ways it differed from many anthropological accounts of another kind of place branding, nation branding. This work sees nation branding practices as a new form of neoliberal governance, where the state is imagined to be an entrepreneurial subject that must market the nation to international consumer publics (Del Percio 2016; Dzenovska 2005; Graan 2013; 2016). While sharing the entrepreneurial hallmarks of neoliberalism, Tøyen branding was not about governance, but instead about commodifying a particular perspective of what the neighborhood is. Through the success of a particular brand, my interlocutors hoped or feared that a particular version of the neighborhood would become authoritative. Would Tøyen become a place where diversity becomes marketed to outsiders as something “trendy”? Or could commodifying Tøyen be a way to bring different groups of people together, where wealthier residents could support their neighbors through buying their Tøyen-branded products? Andrew Graan has pointed out that nation branding opens up a new space for citizens as consumers to make claims on that state (2013). He shows how critics of Macedonian nation branding articulate their critiques through a brand logic, not against one because they are not critiquing the state’s attempt to market the nation as a brand to an international consumer. Instead, these critics were concerned with the *kind* of brand the government was creating for Macedonia, and that the state’s initiatives would tarnish Macedonia’s brand image and hurt its chances at receiving foreign investment. Yet, in Graan’s account, Macedonians were not concerned with who the state was trying to sell the nation brand to, while for my interlocutors in Tøyen, the imagined consumer was just as important as the brand image.

## Anger as Boundary-Making

Geir saw the relationship between Tøyen and the rest of the city to be not just about consumption, but also about the way he understood neighborhoods, not as sovereign units, but as reliant on the larger economy. From his perspective, selling Tøyen to the rest of the city was necessary to the economic well-being of Tøyen's residents. While sitting in the group workspace in the community center one afternoon, Geir looked up frustratedly from his computer and commented, "sometimes people in Tøyen are very angry."<sup>18</sup> He went on to say that he knows business owners and developers who are afraid to start things in Tøyen because they do not want to have to deal with the "angry" local residents. Others sitting around the table jumped to Tøyen's defense. "It's about who gets to speak for whom, and who do they work for?" said one of the Area Boost employees. "I think that's what's cool about Tøyen, that people pay attention to that."

Many people would also agree that there are times when they have to be angry. When I returned to Tøyen in September 2019, I met up with Nina, from the local advisory board. As we sat drinking tea out on the square, an acquaintance, Torstein, stopped to chat. He seemed a bit depressed, and he told Nina and me that he had just found out his job finding alternative, more stable housing models for Tøyen residents currently in public housing was losing funding from the city district. Nina was shocked and assured Torstein that she would be bringing this up at the next Local Advisory Board meeting. As Torstein walked away, Nina turned to me and said resignedly, "I may have to be angry at the meeting."<sup>19</sup> She went on to say that she does not like

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<sup>18</sup> "noe ganger er folk på Tøyen veldig sinna"

<sup>19</sup> Jeg må kanskje være sint på møtet.

to be angry, but that living in Tøyen requires anger to hold policymakers accountable, and that that can be exhausting. Anger for Nina, and for other Tøyen activists in similar situations, is a necessary, if negative, emotion. While Nina wants to avoid conflict and find consensus, she also felt a responsibility to not let the city use the local advisory board as a way to legitimize any type of decision, and to fight back when she saw them as making decisions that would negatively affect the neighborhood.

Geir sometimes took up this anger himself when it was directed towards the municipality, adding his voice to demands from Tøyen activists, for example, when it came to allowing long-term residents continue to live in public housing. However, Geir also worried that this Tøyen anger had the potential to isolate the neighborhood from necessary resources when it was directed at private individuals or businesses. As part of his view of the neighborhood-unit as a component within and in relation to the rest of the city, he doubted the kinds of self-sufficiency that he saw many of the Tøyen residents he encountered supporting, especially the generally white Tøyen Patriots who were more suspicious of business interests in Tøyen. Geir had explained this view to me in an interview a few days before, when I asked him whether anything had surprised him about working in Tøyen.

#### Transcript 5.12

- 1 Geir: Egentlig har jeg vært veldig positivt overasket over eh (.) over den enorme entusiasmen og engasjementet som er her blant alle folk her på Tøyen.
- 2 Janet: mmhm
- 3 Geir: eh:: samtidig er det ganske slitsomt og krevende
- 4 Janet: Ja?
- 5 Geir: Eh:: fordi det er veldig mye frivilligheten og engasjementet, det bør forventes at folk er veldig (.) delaktige på kveldstid

- Geir: Actually I've been very positively surprised by eh (.) by the enormous enthusiasm and engagement that's here among all people here in Tøyen
- Janet: mmhm
- Geir: Eh (.) at the same time it's rather tiring and demanding.
- Janet: Yes?
- Geir: Eh:: because there is a whole lot of volunteering and engagement, it should be expected that people are very (.) involved in the evening.



- 6 Janet: Mmm. Mmhmm.  
Geir: Eh:: i, å få til alt dette her til å løpe og foregå og, og leve, eh det er ganske som krevende å organisere.
- 7 Janet: mmhmm
- 8 Geir: Eh. Ja. (.) Også er det for å si det litt som hjertesukk er at eh (.) det engasjementet og entusiasmen, og den– den stoltheten da hos mange som har ment “vi har— vi Tøyenbygda”
- 9 Janet: Ja
- 10 Geir: “Vi fikser alt, ingen skal komme utenfra og fortelle oss noen ting.” Den kan være sin egne verste fiende her òg. For da blir man veldig– da blir man veldig lukket, ikke sant? “Det vi gjør det er best, vi skal ikke ha noe annet, vi skal ikke ha noen til å komme her.” Og jeg skjønner jo det. Og man gjør mye bra selv, men man gjør ikke NOK bra. Og jeg vil si at det er med på også å kunne fremmedgjøre andre til å være med å løfte og bistå og bidra til å løfte Tøyen videre. Og det tenker jeg er super viktig i forhold til alle de utfordringene som er på Tøyen fortsatt. Som er i Kolstadgata og i boliger og sosialt, fattigdom, unge, og sysselsetting, eh (.) og (.) ja. Det det er fortsatt et– en utfordring da.
- 11 Janet: Ja
- 12 Geir: Og (.) disse (.) Tøyenfolket, de måtte– skal på en måte skjerme Tøyen for mye, så kan det være at man ikke får den ny stand man har behov for. Så den greie er at man må styre det (.) inn på alt, og dette samvær inn på, at det er på Tøyens– Tøyens premisser, Tøyens lyst. Eh og at ikke det er eh på en måte folk skal kjøpe seg god samvittighet.
- Janet: Mmm. Mmhmm.  
Geir: Eh:: in, to get everything here to run and happen and, and live, eh it’s rather demanding to organize.
- Janet: mmhmm
- Geir: Eh. Yes. (.) Also to say it a bit like a sigh is that eh (.) that engagement and enthusiasm, and that– that pride then among many who’ve thought, “we have– we Tøyen village”
- Janet: Yes
- Geir: “We fix everything, no one will come from the outside and tell us anything.” That can be its own worst enemy here too. Because then you can be very– then you become very closed, right? “We do it best, we won’t have anything else, we won’t have anyone come here.” And of course I understand that. And you do a lot well yourself, but you don’t do ENOUGH well. And I want to say that that could also alienate others from being part of lifting and helping and contributing to lift Tøyen further. And I think that’s super important in relation to all the challenges that are still in Tøyen. Like in Kolstad Street and in housing and socially, poverty, youth, unemployment, eh and yes. That’s still a challenge then.
- Janet: Yes.
- Geir: And (.) these (.) Tøyen folk, they must (.) will in a way shield Tøyen too much, so it might be that you don’t get the new conditions you need. So the thing is that that you have to steer it (.) on to everything, and this togetherness on to, that it’s on Tøyen’s– Tøyen’s premises, Tøyen’s desire. Eh and that it’s not a way for people to buy themselves a good conscience.

Geir begins with the way he frequently described Tøyen, praising the amount of involvement and enthusiasm he has found for the neighborhood from residents. Then, after first admitting that it can be difficult to have to do so much work at night, when volunteers are off from their real jobs, he moves on to what he sees as a potentially negative side to local engagement. Although he never talks about “anger” (*sinne*) explicitly, the emotion comes out through his voicing of the typical engaged Tøyen resident in turn 10. Geir admired the amount of neighborhood enthusiasm, but he also thought that that alone could only go so far. For Geir, poverty, unemployment, housing, and youth issues were all too large to be solved by local residents alone. They required the inclusion of business interests, as long as those businesses were also aligned to positive Tøyenish values.

Most people living in Tøyen would likely agree with Geir to some extent, but they would not agree with how he collapsed together all kinds of public and private interests as equal outsiders. Many of the activists I spoke with would also be concerned with Geir’s claim that he can steer commercial interests to stay within “Tøyen’s wishes.” Geir, however, sees that perspective as “closed” and “its own worst enemy.” For him, Tøyen anger was a detriment to Tøyen’s realizing its full potential of Tøyenish inclusivity. Using this categorization of dissent as “anger,” Geir included himself and commercial interests as necessary components of the healthy functioning of a neighborhood. While I am wary taking this comparison too far because the “angry Tøyenites” Geir was discussing were both white and people of color, there are some resonances here between Geir’s dismissal of Tøyen anger and Sara Ahmed’s discussion of racism and diversity in academic institutions. Ahmed describes how the figure of the “angry person of color” always hovers in the background, so that critiquing racism in institutional spaces becomes difficult because “it is as if we talk about racism because we are angry, rather than being angry

because of racism” (Ahmed 2012, 159). The “angry Tøyenite” does not come with the same historical and racialized context, but Geir also sees Tøyen residents as being closed off to outsiders because they are angry, instead of being angry because they have seen the way outside investors and politicians have perpetuated, and often even deepened, the inequalities in the neighborhood, not fixed them.

Many people in Tøyen may have been suspicious of “outsiders” from the rest of the city coming to the neighborhood, but they were also eager to make connections between Tøyen and other parts of the world. For example, in connection with the UN’s Habitat Day, the UN Special Rapporteur for the right to housing, Leila Farha, came to the Tøyen Community Center with several other UN representatives and the Mayor of Oslo to meet with local organizations and discuss challenges around access to housing. I had not been able to attend myself, but in the days that followed people repeatedly told me what a great event it had been. Nina and Linda were especially struck by a man who worked for a housing NGO in Kenya who had been there, and how he had seen so many similarities between Tøyen and the neighborhood in Nairobi where his organization was located. Oslo and Nairobi may at first seem like very different places, and part of the reason the event had been organized was to discuss if you could even compare challenges around housing in the two places. Yet the Tøyenites I spoke to were excited by the prospect of creating these forms of transnational similarity.

A neighborhood in Nairobi was not the only place that I heard Tøyen residents compare to Tøyen. One of the most common comparisons I heard was to Harlem, New York, although I also heard people mention the Bronx, along with parts of London, Berlin, Paris, and Barcelona. These comparisons would be made when visitors who worked at community organizations and NGOs within these other neighborhoods came to Tøyen. These kinds of analogies and the social

ties being created between Tøyenites and visitors from these “similar” places reflected a more general interest among these engaged residents towards idealized grassroots organizations, where individual people connected with each other, in opposition to “larger” institutional forces like uncaring politicians or profit-driven developers.

## **Conclusion**

What happens when engagement and participation get taken up and branded as trendy? As I was writing this chapter in February 2021, my Facebook Newsfeed was suddenly flooded with stories about a family who had just been evicted from their apartment in a public housing block, in the middle of winter and during the pandemic. The family, who had lived in the apartment for ten years, was being evicted because their apartment, like many other public housing units in Tøyen, had been scheduled to be sold on the private market as part of an initiative to spread public housing more evenly across the city. While many public housing residents in Tøyen had been moved to other units, this family was being evicted because their collective income, which came primarily from the father’s job as an Oslo taxi driver, had been 15,000 NOK (\$1,700) over the 600,000 NOK limit allowed to qualify for public housing. The family had resisted eviction because they had appealed to the municipality and were still waiting on a decision, so the police had been called, and reportedly about ten armed officers had entered the apartment to force the family out. For many public housing residents and their advocates, this situation showed what they had been saying for years, that the income limit for public housing eligibility is so low that many people whose incomes make them ineligible for public housing do not make enough money to qualify for subsidized loans to buy their own apartments, or to afford rent on the private housing market in the same area, and so anywhere near their children’s

schools. This particular family had fallen into exactly this gap, where they were being evicted because they had made too much money to live in municipal housing, but their income was too low to qualify for a loan to buy the apartment at market price. Housing activists call this a poverty trap, where many women choose not to work because two incomes would put the family into this unstable situation, and stories also circulated about teenagers who did not take summer jobs because the small amount of spending money might put their families at risk of going over the income limit.

Yet a Facebook post that was later published in *Utrop*, “Norway’s first multicultural newspaper,” written by Bjarte Breiteig, a white Norwegian neighbor who lived in an apartment he owned next door with his family, pointed to another side of the eviction:<sup>20</sup>

This is my neighbor and friend Mohamed, as he is being thrown out of his home with his wife and five children. He made 15,000 too much driving a taxi in 2020 and so has lost the right to the municipal apartment where the family has lived for ten years.

I am with him to show my support... We have gathered, a small group from the neighborhood and Tøyen Sports Club, to show the family that they are not alone. We know so well that it’s people like them who we need in the neighborhood. Mohamed has been involved as a football coach and in the school parents’ association. The eldest son has attended Tøyen Academy<sup>21</sup> and works in the Tøyen [Sports] Hall, where he keeps a close eye on the lively young people. He is a role model – something we need more than anything else here.

It is difficult to explain to Mohamed that it is exactly that safety he himself has helped to build that has made Tøyen too expensive for him.

The apartment in Hagegatat 31 will now be put up for sale. Mohamed has applied for a starting loan, in the hope of being able to buy it himself, but was refused. The justification states that he has too high an income to be eligible for a loan, and too low an income to service it (if he had received it).

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<sup>20</sup> Because this was a public post that was later published on a news site, I use Bjarte Breiteig’s and Mohamed’s real names.

<sup>21</sup> A program that trains teenagers to become leaders in the local community.

From my own window I see Mohamed's apartment. It is darkened, but soon it will be bright again, then with new and purchasing powerful residents. Tøyen in the statistics will have become a slightly more prosperous district than it was. But the neighborhood has become poorer.<sup>22</sup>

As Breiteig sees the situation, the prohibitively high housing prices in Tøyen are a direct result of efforts that Mohamed and his family have been a part of, of making Tøyen safer and more secure (*trygg*) through their local involvement. Although it is unclear why Breiteig would feel that he needed to explain this to his neighbors, who were likely quite aware already of how Tøyen had gentrified, Breiteig is really addressing an audience outside of Tøyen, explaining to them that the area has only become a popular place to live because families like Mohamed's have been so involved in creating a feeling of safety and neighborhood solidarity. Real estate developers and other businesses have created a new order of indexicality for Tøyen's inclusivity and civic involvement as "trendy." This higher order indexicality has made the neighborhood too expensive for the people who created this safety to remain. The active citizenship that

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<sup>22</sup> Dette er min nabo og venn Mohamed, idet han kastes ut av sitt hjem med kone og fem barn. Han har tjent 15 000 for mye på drosjekjøring i 2020 og dermed mistet retten til den kommunale leiligheten hvor familien har bodd i ti år.

Jeg er hos ham for å vise min støtte... Vi har samlet oss, en liten gjeng fra nabolaget og Tøyen sportsklubb, for å vise familien at de ikke er alene. Vi vet så godt at det er folk som dem vi trenger i nabolaget. Mohamed har engasjert seg som fotballtrener og i FAU. Eldste sønn har gått Tøyenakademiet og jobber i Tøyenhallen, der han holder kustus på de livlige ungdommene. Han er en rollemodell – noe vi trenger mer enn noe annet her.

Det er vanskelig å forklare Mohamed at det nettopp er tryggheten han selv har vært med på å bygge, som har gjort Tøyen for dyrt for ham.

Leiligheten i Hagegata 31 skal nå legges ut for salg. Mohamed har søkt om startlån, i håp om selv å få kjøpe den, men fått avslag. I begrunnelsen står det at han har for høy inntekt til å være berettiget lån, og for lav inntekt til å kunne betjene det (hvis han hadde fått).

...

Fra mitt eget vindu ser jeg Mohameds leilighet. Den er mørklagt, men snart vil det lyse der igjen, da med nye og kjøpekraftige beboere. Tøyen vil i statistikkene ha blitt en ørlite mer velstående bydel enn den var. Men nabolaget er blitt fattigere. (Breiteig 2021)

neighborhood organizations and the Area Boost have fostered are what will ultimately displace minoritized neighbors.

This chapter has outlined the semiotic work that re-scales neighborhood participation, inclusivity, and community feelings to include business interests and sell the neighborhood to the rest of the city. It has shown how gentrification is not an automatic result of economic investment, but instead requires the semiotic labor of branding, which shifts boundaries and addresses new audiences. The stakes of that work are high for everyone involved. Geir's skill at place branding has given him a successful career and provided an example of the kinds of private-public partnerships he thinks will allow Norway to survive in a globalizing world. Tøyen Coffee allows Tekle to create his first job since coming to Norway where he can use the postsecondary education he received in Ethiopia, it and increases his status with his family and friends there, in Oslo, and in the Ethiopian diaspora community across Northern Europe. Yet for families like Mohamed's, the stakes of commodifying Tøyen's multicultural inclusivity are even higher.

## EPILOGUE

### THE LINGUISTIC PRACTICES OF CONFLICT-AVOIDANCE

Towards the end of an Inspire staff meeting one afternoon, Hanna told us a story about how a local Labor party politician had called her to ask for help writing the party's platform on social businesses. Jumping at a chance to do what Inspire staff were always hoping for, that is to make a difference beyond the neighborhood through influencing policy, Hanna quickly came up with a suggestion. She did not tell those of us gathered for the staff meeting exactly what it had been, but she said she had been sure to use the words innovative and inclusive (*innovativ og inkluderende*), because those were terms she thought Labor politicians would find persuasive. She went on, half joking, to plan passing on the same recommendations to other political parties. When talking to the Red Party, she would switch innovative and inclusive for social and sustainable (*sosial og bærekraftig*). For the Conservatives, she would talk about the future, innovation, and economic inclusion (*fremtid, innovasjon, og økonomisk innkludering*). The other staff members present thought this sounded like a great plan, and they laughed at how easy it was to bridge political differences.

I do not know whether Hanna followed through with the plan and managed to convince other parties to take up her recommendations, but her method shows she shared a practice with many of my interlocutors of using register shibboleths to mitigate potential conflict, and a belief that authority was made through speaking in a way you thought your listener would want to hear. Hanna, like many of my interlocutors, knew that language and linguistic differentiation mattered. In this final chapter, I bring out two themes that have been present throughout the dissertation, but which deserve further discussion: a desire among many of my interlocutors to avoid open



conflict, even with people they disagreed with, and the linguistic practices that mediate and assuage potential conflict in favor of a “regime of value” that favors consensus and agreement. I return to many of the examples from previous chapters to look more closely at how this ideological regime gets mobilized in face-to-face interaction.

By “regime of value,” I am referring to a shared predilection that shapes, and is in turned shaped by, social action. The concept, which I take from Susan Gal and Judith Irvine (2019, 13), is an approach to analyzing the ideas and interpretations associated with signs-in-use, linguistic and otherwise. A reconsideration of the linguistic anthropological concepts “linguistic ideology” (Silverstein 1979) and “semiotic ideology” (Keane 2003), “regime of value” holds onto both the social positioning and perspective that were important to previous work on ideologies, while also highlighting how values are anchored in political relations (Gal and Irvine 2019, 12–14; see also Costa 2019; Irvine 2019). Thinking in terms of regimes of value has a long history in the anthropology of Norway. Much of Marianne Gullestad’s scholarly work, for example, focused on identifying Norwegian value regimes, although she calls them “cultural notions” (1990, 38) or “cultural categories” (1989a, 83), and showing how they operate in everyday life. Gullestad discusses three operative concepts: peace (*fred*), calm (*ro*), and quiet (*stillhet*), and shows how those tie together various Norwegian values, including a love of nature, an ability to control one’s emotions, home-centeredness, and social interactions that de-emphasize difference and hierarchy in favor of similarity and egalitarianism (1990, 42; see also 1985; 1986; 1989b). Gullestad’s work has been fundamental in analyzing the ways that this value regimes shape social action, and her work has frequently been taken up even by non-academic Norwegians to explain themselves to others. Yet, while Gullestad was concerned with the operation of regimes of value in everyday life, she was less concerned with the linguistic and interactional practices

themselves through which these regimes are created, enacted, and sometimes resisted. In this chapter, I turn to one aspect of this Norwegian regime of value, conflict-avoidance, to show the linguistic practices that my interlocutors employ to mediate disagreements and potential conflict. The first half of the chapter shows how some downplay difference to create coherence, while the second half turns to strategies local advisory board members used to express disagreement while trying to avoid open conflict.

### **Converging Lexical Shibboleths**

Many of the examples in previous chapters have focused on lexical shibboleths: sustainability, boost, participation, Tøyenish, for example. Unlike in the vignette that opened this chapter, where Hanna could identify clear shibboleths of registers spoken by different political parties, most of these shibboleths stuck out to me because they were salient for so many different, and frequently opposed, social groups. Why were different kinds of people trying to sound the same? One reason for the same lexical item to get taken up by different groups to refer to different things has to do with the ways that authoritative registers circulate. As we saw in Chapter 1, sustainability registers have so much authority in Norway today that opposed political parties have grafted the same environmental and developmental discourses onto their own discourses about the future of the welfare state. Their political positions are contradictory, with the Conservatives advocating for privatization and austerity, while the Socialist Left supports increased taxation on the wealthy, yet they are both “tapping into,” as the grafting metaphor encourages us to conceptualize it (Gal 2019), the same international authority of United Nations discourses, which have a particularly high level of legitimacy among most Norwegians. The result of these two graftings is that these two opposed political parties end up sounding similar,

at least to some people, like an undecided voter. This example points to a less-studied side of grafting, where registers do not only connect to those they grafted from, but also to the other circulating registers that have also grafted from the same authoritative discourses. The Conservative and Socialist Left registers sound not only like the UN, but also like each other. As we saw in the exchange between the representatives of opposed political parties (Transcript 1.4), these new connections can create moments of conflict, as social actors from one political party try to discredit their opponents.

While the competing graftings of sustainability discourses created conflict, most of the other examples of shared lexical shibboleths were ways that my interlocutors tried to use language to come together. Linda, the Area Boost employee we met in Chapter 3, told me once that her goal when she began working for the Tøyen Boost was that everyone across the public sector and local organizations would begin to speak about Tøyen in the same way. She liked to point to how, several years after the Area Boost began, she heard more people speak about Tøyen as one “neighborhood” (*nabolag*), which for her meant a community with common interests oriented around the place, instead of factions oriented around something like religious or ethnic background, or living situations in privately owned apartments versus public housing. Linda thought that creating a common language about the neighborhood would lead to collective action. Yet she had found that that was a more difficult project than she had thought it would be, and that, years into her work, most politicians and some of the organizations she worked with were still talking about completely different things, even if they sometimes used the same terms. The shared lexical shibboleth was creating an image from the outside that these organizations were all in alignment, but for those closely involved, there was no more agreement about the neighborhood’s future than there had been before everyone had started sounding similar.

As we saw in the previous chapter, real estate developers and marketers like Geir were especially adept at making their perspectives sound like discourses that were already circulating in the neighborhood. Geir brought together lexical shibboleths from several locally circulating registers—“boost” (*løft*) and “participation” (*medvirking*) from the municipality, “inclusion” (*innenforskap*) and “Tøyenish” (*tøyensk*) from community activists. He paired these lexical shibboleths with other salient, non-linguistic indexicals, like frequently wearing a cap with the Tøyen Sports Club logo on it, as did many of the men his age who were fathers of children at Tøyen School. In taking up these lexical and other shibboleths, Geir was trying to do two things at once—to make himself into someone who looked and sounded like he belonged in the neighborhood, and to make his perspective about fostering business interests sound like it was part of the push for inclusivity and participation that was already authoritative among most community organizations. While, from some perspectives, Geir could appear to be a token of the exact type of person Tøyen was opposed to, a wealthy, white Norwegian from west Oslo, Geir used these shibboleths in an effort to erase these differences and present himself as similar. His efforts were not generally successful—the expensive suits he wore almost every day did not fit with the cap, while his focus on innovation made many Tøyenites suspicious of his motives. Yet, because he had worked so hard to listen and take up salient local shibboleths, Geir was also able to categorize criticism from residents as “anger” and “insularity,” instead of critiques of the ways that economically powerful actors frequently have more authority than residents to determine Tøyen’s future. He felt that he had done his part to avoid conflict, so any breakdown in coherence was the fault of his interlocutors in the neighborhood. Geir’s efforts may not have been entirely successful, but even some skeptical residents were willing to work with him. They might still frequently disagree with him, but they took up his attempts to sound more like other

people concerned about the neighborhood as signs that he is actually listening to them, to some extent.

Not all uptakes of lexical shibboleths succeeded at avoiding conflict. The Time Credits program discussed in Chapter 3, for example, found that it had to create a clear boundary between what it was doing and more traditional forms of volunteering in order for it to appear legitimate. Focusing on how someone can earn Time Credits through “contributing” (*å bidra*), a term that does not necessarily refer to free labor, never describing any volunteering event to be a *dugnad*, and stating repeatedly that Time Credits only apply to cases where the voluntary work would otherwise not have happened, the Time Credits program made clear that they were not trying to challenge traditional forms of volunteering. While politicians have grafted discourses around the *dugnad* onto other arenas, that was never something that the Time Credits program considered. Recently, there has been increased resistance to those political graftings of *dugnad*, especially around the government’s framing of COVID-19 restrictions as a national *dugnad*. Critics ask how they can be expected to take part in a collective sacrifice, with many small businesses around Oslo closing, while large corporations, like airlines, received considerable state financial support. These examples suggest that there are limits to grafting, where some registers are not as easily graftable as others. Discourses around *dugnad* have a kind of moral authority them strong candidates for potential graftings, yet the *dugnad*’s authority also rests on an idealized form of face-to-face social solidarity, which makes some people protective of the concept and discourses surrounding it, and suspicious of attempts to take it up to give authority to something else.

### **The Tøyenish Listening Subject**

The most important lexical shibboleth for Geir was *tøyensk*, Tøyenish. While Chapter 5 examined the ways that Geir used this shibboleth differently from people living in this neighborhood, here I want to return to the linguistic practices those people associated with Tøyenish, and how Tøyen residents' hearing a range of linguistic variation as all Tøyenish was a way to bring the neighborhood together and attempt to create solidarity. There were a wide range of features that could get taken up as indexical of Tøyenish—suffixes, lexical and phonological variation, and orthographic variation. What united all of these examples was the way they crossed standard boundaries between known, named languages or Norwegian dialects. “Tøyenish” referred to something that was uncategorizable—although some took up the informational signs around the community center as an example of Tøyenish, others puzzledly asked if they were Nynorsk, or Swedish, or something else entirely.

People did not typically claim to speak Tøyenish themselves. Instead, they heard others speaking it. For Tøyen activists, taking up instances where speech crosses standard boundaries between dialects and languages as Tøyenish was a way of valuing what a more standard uptake would judge to be “incorrect.” Hearing something as Tøyenish was a way for Tøyen activists to assert themselves as inclusive of forms of difference. In her work on “woman’s language” in Japan, Miyako Inoue has developed the concept of the “listening subject,” where male intellectuals created the category of modern Japanese woman and woman’s speech to create themselves as modern subjects (2003). The creation of this category of Tøyenish, which included such a wide range of generally unrelated linguistic features, was a way for people in Tøyen to position themselves, not as modern subjects, but as inclusive, accepting neighbors in relation to Norwegians elsewhere.

This inclusivity of course still had its limits. As Mads told me, if someone like him, a white Norwegian man in his 30s, spoke the youth variety that mixed lexical items from many other languages, it would be “lame,” not Tøyenish. Similarly, Inspirers saw a difference between when a group of Norwegian entrepreneurs insist on speaking English at an event at Tøyen Startup Village, compared to when at their own events, speakers switched back and forth between English and Norwegian. What they did fit within the the community, while the Norwegian entrepreneurs’ speech did not. The boundaries of this vision of Tøyenish are best expressed in a song written by Per Fugelli for a project, “The Sound of Tøyen,” that the municipality had sponsored in 2014 as an attempt to “build bridges” in the neighborhood through music. Although the project was completed in 2015, when I lived full-time in Tøyen several years later, the album would still sometimes be played at neighborhood events, like the annual Tøyen Fest. Fugelli, born in 1943, was a doctor and a professor of social medicine at the University of Oslo who wrote frequent newspaper columns and many books, most of which were about the importance of feelings of safety and security on health. Fugelli passed away right after I began my fieldwork in 2017, but he had lived in the part of Grønland that had been included in the Tøyen Area Boost, and he had been held up as an example of someone who embodied the kind of idealized neighborliness that the boost was trying to foster. The song, most of which is performed by professional musicians, ends with Fugelli reflecting on what he sees to be “the sound of Tøyen”:

And right, the sound of Tøyen, but right, that is, it’s not possible to divide the sound of Tøyen-Grønland from the image of Tøyen-Grønland in a way, right? And— and I, I think that I discovered that crystal clear while I was sick. Because I have had cancer that comes and goes now for five years. And now and then chemotherapy and been rather shabby. And then I thought: “Damn, thank fate that I live in Grønland and not in Frogner!” Because it was so nice to go out and not be pointed at, or not get the feeling that: “My God, maybe someone is calling the police!” because you’re walking here and stagger and

fall. To come out in a diversity of real, honest life, not just glossy images, right. That is, it's damn relaxing. You don't need to be an actor when you live here. You can get so far, I won't romanticize, but you can get so far, at least more than very many other places, so you can take the masks off in a way. And that's a very good school I think, for children and young people, and newcomers, to go to when it comes to discovering that we're a mixed gang. This is life, this is society. Everything else is fake.<sup>1</sup>

Fugelli never uses the term Tøyenish here, but two elements of his narrative are important to how his neighbors who did use the word conceived of it. First, he says that Tøyen-Grønland is filled with a place of “real, honest life,” where you don't need to be an “actor” and can take your “masks” off. He contrasts this with other places, like Frogner, a wealthy neighborhood in western Oslo, where it is important to maintain a “glossy,” yet “fake,” appearance. I have heard many other people in Tøyen make similar comparisons, between a homogeneous, artificial snob on the west side of Oslo, compared to the laid-back, more heterogeneous, and “authentic” people on the east side, and Tøyen in particular. Among Norwegians, these qualities of fakeness, glossiness, and fanciness are all commonly associated with the “pretty” Norwegian spoken in western Oslo. Not everyone may have used the word Tøyenish to describe Fugelli's attitude, but they shared this feeling that, in Tøyen, people were able to express their “true” selves, unconcerned about fitting into a Norwegian standard type in

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<sup>1</sup> Og ikke sant, lyden av Tøyen, jo men ikke sant, altså det er ikke mulig å skille lyden av Tøyen-Grønland fra bildet av Tøyen-Grønland på en måte, ikke sant? Og– og jeg, jeg tror at jeg oppdaget det i krystall mens jeg var syk. For jeg har hatt kreft som kommer og går nå i fem år. Og innimellom cellegiftregimet og vært ganske shabby. Og da tenkte jeg: “Faen, takk skjebnen for at jeg bor på Grønland og ikke på Frogner!” Fordi det var så deilig å gå ut og ikke bli pekt på, eller ikke få en følelse om at: “Herregud det er kanskje noen som ringer til politiet!” fordi at du går her og sjangler og faller. Å komme ut i et mangfold av ekte, ærlig liv, ikke bare glansbilder, ikke sant. Altså det er jævla avslappende. Du trenger ikke være skuespiller når du bor her. Du kan ta et stykke på vei, jeg skal ikke romantisere, men et stykke på vei, i alle fall mer enn veldig mange andre steder, så kan du ta maskene av på en måte. Og det er en veldig god skole tenker jeg, for barn og unge, og tilflyttere, å gå i når det gjelder å oppdage at vi er en blanda gjeng. Sånn er livet, sånn er samfunnet. Alt annet er fake (Fugelli, Pumba, and Alfstad 2015).



the same way that people in other parts of the city had to be. This was particularly the perspective of white Norwegian adults living in the neighborhood, but others, including many teenagers in Tøyen, would also express this idea that it was easier to be oneself in Tøyen than anywhere else. Hamse, for example, the Somali-Norwegian teenager in the documentary discussed in Chapter 2, spoke about “we in Tøyen” who do not fit in in Norway or in the countries where their parents came from.

This connection between Tøyenish, honesty, and realness, or as linguistic anthropologists would call it, “authenticity,” explains why Tøyenish can include some forms of variation but not others. Inspirers mixing Norwegian and English gets taken up by some as Tøyenish because many of them learned English before they learned Norwegian and so are more comfortable speaking it. The Norwegian entrepreneurs who speak English to each other, however, are seen as using English to perform some kind of “hip” image, not their true selves. Speakers adding -a suffixes to their speech could be taken up as Tøyenish because their suffix use indexes a close relationship they have developed with eastern Oslo. Yet, to others, mixing suffixes may seem pretentious and fake because speakers are claiming a connection to the place that they do not have. Authenticity has been a concept that has long interested linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists. As Kathryn Woolard has argued, authenticity is not necessarily what is “natural” (2016). Instead, the authentic emerges through social action. The Tøyenish example reminds us that what counts as authenticity also depends on uptake and the listener’s assumptions about the speaker. The Tøyenish listening subject is not only someone who values forms of difference that a more standard Norwegian listener would hear as incorrect or chaotic. It is also someone who can see through fake performances.

Another interesting aspect of Fugelli's narrative is how he positions himself in relation to others in Tøyen-Grønland. He describes his "shabby" looks as something that would be pointed to suspiciously in other parts of the city, going so far as to suggesting that these other people might have even called the police if they saw him after his chemotherapy treatments. On the one hand, Fugelli frames others in Norway as being so afraid of difference and shabbiness that they would even call the police on a sick old man, positioning people in Tøyen-Grønland as inherently more caring and accepting than others. At the same time, he equates the experiences of all of the different people living in Tøyen-Grønland, regardless of the specificities of what makes them different. They are all a "blended gang" who would not be able to be themselves elsewhere. The inclusivity of Fugelli's vision allowed Tøyen activists to not just hear others as Tøyenish, but also to perceive themselves as such.

Young men of migrant background would likely take issue with this comparison, since they frequently get stopped by the police even within Tøyen and Grønland, while I have never heard of a cancer patient's being profiled by Norwegian police. This was an inherent tension in discourses around Tøyenish and "Tøyen village," where the imagined audience of the Tøyenish listening subject was frequently not actually other people in Tøyen, but people who might never come to the neighborhood. While also oriented around a desire to avoid conflict, the consequences of this kind of coherence people were attempting to create through the category of Tøyenish were different from the forms of authority politicians and developers were trying to claim through lexical graftings. Tøyen activists, although focused on face-to-face interactions between neighbors, had another goal of showing the rest of Norway, and in some cases also the rest of the world, that it was possible for a group of people to live together harmoniously. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, the neighborhood was a frequent target by the far-right media,

protestors, and, in some cases, violent attacks. Downplaying conflict was a way for Tøyen activists to oppose stereotypes of migrant areas as being chaotic causing trouble. White Norwegians in Tøyen also saw the neighborhood as a way to convince family and friends elsewhere that increased ethnic and religious diversity was not a threat, but an asset. These activists were challenged, however, when their desire to downplay conflict to an outside audience also resulted in some residents feeling like the limits of Tøyenish solidarity were being ignored.

Yet even some people who might be more skeptical of Fugelli's and other white Norwegians' use of Tøyenish still used the term themselves. Mohammed, the Somali-Norwegian man from Chapter 2 who joked about translating a western Norwegian dialect into Tøyenish used the term to play with what he took up to be the western Norwegian speaker's assumptions. There is a stereotypical view among many Norwegians that immigrants cannot understand regional dialects. The Norwegian national broadcaster, which is itself known for having newsreaders who speak such a wide range of dialects some Norwegians complain about not being able to understand the news, has frequent stories about immigrants not being able to understand anyone who speaks a dialect from outside of Oslo (e.g. Holø 2013; Vollevik Larsen 2013; Gabrielsen 2021). While this generalization may be true for many people who have recently arrived in Norway, since most members of the audience at the event in Tøyen had grown up in Norway and completed all of their education in public schools, where they had almost definitely had at least one teacher who spoke a regional dialect, it was much less likely that they would have had the same difficulties understanding the speaker. Mohammed was also taking up another stereotype, that young people in Tøyen, like minority youth across eastern Oslo, speak a separate language that is not intelligible to most Norwegians. Many of the few books and television series about

young people living in Oslo neighborhoods with majority migrant populations include glossaries for an imagined standard Norwegian viewer or reader, who is not expected to be able to understand the “exotic” lexical items. However, the western Norwegian speaker and the audience understood each other without issue, and Mohammed’s translation services were not needed, which he had likely known to be the case when he offered them. Mohammed’s offer to translate when no translation was needed was not about bringing together many different forms of linguistic difference into one category of Tøyenish, but it was still a challenge to a standard Norwegian view of the linguistic practices of people of migrant background.

### **Voicing Opposition**

While many of my interlocutors’ linguistic practices were strategies to try to create coherence and avoid conflict, it was still important to many of them to express disagreement and opposition, especially towards the municipality. While in previous chapters, I was interested in how, through interactions at participatory political events, municipal staff worked to translate residents’ perspectives into input that would legitimize policy recommendations, here I want to return to those examples to show how those translations were also techniques staff used to mitigate potential conflict.

We have already seen in previous chapters that residents and municipal employees spoke on different scales, with different concerns and on different scales. Pål and the Area Boost staff’s speech focused on abstract, general rules and policies, while residents were more likely to be interested in sharing concrete personal experiences. One reason for this was that municipal employees, Pål and the Area Boost staff’s jobs were to create and implement policies without letting their own political opinions influence them. They used seemingly aperspectival language

to do so. In written reports, Area Boost staff translated resident input into nominalizations and tenseless constructions that removed particular perspectives from their recommendations. In the discussion about economic sustainability in Chapter 1, Pål used the nomic construction *det* (that) + infinitive, stating general rules about Norwegian society that were assumed to be shared among everyone, not his or anyone else's personal perspectives. At the same time, these constructions also allowed these speakers to avoid conflict because they allowed them to avoid stating direct disagreement with resident perspectives. In Transcript 1.3, for example, Pål never says if he agrees or disagrees with Samira's concern about whether parents can afford to pay for their children's leisure activities. Instead, he expresses a general rule about work as an entry into Norwegian society, with which he assumes Samira and the other listeners would agree. Yet his comment also has the effect of being able to reject Samira's suggestion that some services should be offered without asking people to pay for them. The resident representatives on the local advisory board meanwhile were less comfortable with this seemingly aperspectival way of approaching neighborhood policy. For them, it did not index a lack of bias as much as it does a top-down view of governance that is not concerned with listening to residents themselves. Their consideration of concrete examples and shared personal experiences, along with their interest in spending time after meetings to socialize with each other, were ways they tried to resist Pål's vision of governance and create policies that emerge out of the neighborhood, or "from below."

Listening, however, was an important component in how each side expressed disagreement and tried to persuade the other to see things from their perspective. In Chapter 4, we saw how Nina and Pål voiced hypothetical "correct" contributions to board meeting discussions. If we look at those moments again, we can see that those were also moments where Nina and Pål, although in disagreement, were linguistically trying to sound the same. Pål takes

on a perspectival way of speaking grounded in specific cases: all of Pål's voicings of imagined resident representatives include first and second person deictics, as well as spatial deictics referring to particular questions about the status of policies under review (deictics in bold).

Transcript 4.2, Turn 18

Pål: Men det– men det kunne du be om, og så sagt, “Neste gang så ber **vi** om at det legger fram en sak om **DET**.”

Pål: But that– but you [sing] could ask about that, that is said, “Next time **we** ask that there’s an item about **THAT**.”

Transcript 4.2, Turn 24

Pål: Ofte er det kobla til statusen så her det– “**Vi** har lyst til å ha mer om **det**, kan **du** ikke komme med **det** tilbake?” Så gjør vi det.

Pål: It’s often connected to the status so here– “**We**’d like to have more about **that**, can’t **you** [sing] come back with **that**?” So we do that.

Transcript 4.4, Turn 76

Pål: For at– de her løpende diskusjoner kan fort til at vi mis– mister fokuset. Men det, det å få et strategisk bilde, “Kor er det **vi** når? Skal være– Skal **vi den** veien eller skal **vi** meir **den** veien? Skal **vi ta den** investeringa **der** eller skal **vi** gå opp **hit**?” Så eg, eg, eg vil at det ikke bli en disk– at vi ikke vil bli (incomprehensible) heile tiden.

Pål: So that– these kinds of running discussions can quickly end up that we lo– we lose the focus. But getting, getting a strategic picture, “Where is it **we**’re heading? Will be– Will **we** go **that** way or will **we** go more **that** way? Will **we** take **that** investment **there** or will **we** go up **here**?” So I, I, I want that this doesn’t become a disc– that we won’t become (incomprehensible) all the time.

Nina’s voicing of the imagined board, however, has no spatial or personal deictics, just the temporal “now.” She instead imagines speaking aperspectivally about “the real situation.”

Transcript 4.4, Turn 79

Nina: Men så har man– føler det ut at sånt man vet at, “Øi nå er strategien blitt på vei i feil retning for at det realsituasjonen er.”

Nina: But then one has– it feels like one knows that, “Oy, now the strategy has headed in the wrong direction from what the real situation is.”

Through voicing each other, Nina and Pål take up what they see to be the style of the other. Pål thinks that local representatives approach policy through their own particular experiences, while Nina sees Pål as imposing seemingly aperspectival policies onto the neighborhood. In voicing the versions of each other they would prefer to see, they take on the other's perspectival/aperspectival approach, but to argue for the other to approach the meetings in a way that they themselves would prefer. Pål shows how local representatives can speak from personal experience while still keeping meetings on-track and oriented to concrete examples and facts instead of spending time on feelings and complaints. Nina shows how you can speak aperspectivally while still being concerned about whether or not the abstract policies under discussion actually have an effect on the lived experiences of people in the neighborhood. Trying to sound like each other becomes a tool to express dissent.

### **Prosodic Features of Conflict-Avoidant Speech**

It is not apparent in the transcripts, but while I was attending these board meetings, I learned to anticipate when a board member was bringing up what they saw to be a contentious issue from a shift in their voices: they tended to speak softly and indistinctly, to mumble. Mumbling is a common speech quality in Norwegian. I know of more than one attempt to subtitle all Norwegian films because mumbling is especially common among actors. The prevalence of mumbling fits well within a Norwegian regime of value that emphasizes quiet and sees noise as troublesome (Connor 2019). At these local advisory board meetings, mumbling also fit into this theme of conflict avoidance. Nina, Arild, and Pål were especially adept mumblers, which made transcribing their speech especially challenging. For example, there is close to 3 seconds of his first turn in Transcript 4.1 that I still cannot understand, despite having

replayed that part of my recording dozens of times. Nina helped me with the transcriptions of the board meeting that appear in Chapter 1, and she also had trouble understanding even some of the things she had said. My recording technique may be partly to blame, but I wrote in my fieldnotes at the time that I was also having trouble hearing some of what was said, despite being close to the speakers and in a fairly small room. From getting Nina's metapragmatic commentary directly after the meetings I attended, it became clear her mumbling was a way of performing her unease with being seen as a troublemaker. Her voice dropped to its quietest when she was raising the issues that she told me she was most concerned about. Samira was also fairly soft-spoken, while Yusuuf, who had spent the smallest proportion of his life in Norway of anyone on the advisory board, was probably the most likely to directly state his disagreement.

Aside from speaking softly, Nina also spoke with frequent pauses and corrections. For example, turn 51 from Transcript 4.3:

Nina: Eg har– eg har ikkje– eg har et sånn forslag (.) mer uh mer en sånn tanke om et punkt på agendaen som vi kunne hatt som et sånt fastpunkt som ikkje er et eventuelpunkt men som kunne være litt som (.) kort og åpen diskusjon om hva vi har opplevd si– eller om det er viktige ting vi har opplevd siden sist (.) for at vi tenker for å få (.) potensiale til oss som lokalstyret der det blir sittende forskjellige erfaringer. Og DET kunne vært nyttig (.) ikkje for at det skal bli en sak men bare for at– for å– for å ta litt som temperatur på hva skjer NÅ. Uh (.) kunne det være en tanke?

Nina: I have– I don't have– I have a kind of suggestion (.) more uh more a kind of thought about a point on the agenda that we could have as a kind of permanent point that isn't an AOB point but that could be a little like (.) short and open discussion about what we've experienced si– or if there are important things we've experienced since last time (.) so that we're thinking about getting the potential for us as the local board where there are different experiences. And THAT could be useful (.) not that it's an item but just so that– to– to take a little like the temperature of what's happening NOW. Uh (.) could that be a thought?

The pauses, corrections, and soft volume of her voice were all ways for Nina and others to say things that they worried may seem confrontational in a way that they hoped would not be taken



up (and possibly also dismissed) as angry. They performed, in a sense, a kind of reluctance at having to say what they were saying. In that exchange with Pål in transcript 4.3, Nina begins in turn 51 by speaking softly and hedging, then she raises her voice around turns 59–67 as she struggles to hold the floor. Once Pål has yielded the floor back to her in turn 69, she switches back to speaking less distinctly and with more pauses, returning to sounding less confrontational.

While speaking quietly, indistinctly, and with frequent pauses helps a speaker avoid being taken up as trying to incite conflict, it could at the same time allow the speaker to be ignored or not taken seriously. In the local advisory board meetings, Nina's and others' soft speech allowed Pål to move on without discussing the denotational content of what they were saying. While they might complain that he had done so to each other and to the researchers observing after the meeting was over, they rarely struggled to reclaim the floor in the way Nina did in that one example, at least at the meetings I attended. In other contexts, similar ways of speaking softly were taken up to discredit the person speaking. For example, people I talked to who only knew about the Area Boost through *Norwegian Conditions*, the documentary discussed in Chapter 2, would tell me quite certainly that the Area Boost had no idea what they were doing. When I asked why they thought that, they pointed to one particular exchange that occurred between KG, an Area Boost employee, and the documentary's director, as KG was showing the film crew around the park outside of the Tøyen community center.

KG: Denne parken (.) er (.) det forløper bare: altså har vi gjort noen midlertidige tiltak på. Det er disse (.) lysinstallasjonene som kom tidlig i Tøyenløf– løftet og som um viser fotografier av folk som (.) bodde her da. Uh i tillegg så har vi denne: trekanten som er et uh: leke (.) uh apparat. Det som er viktig for at en park eller en plass skal

KG: This park (.) is (.) it's just a precursor that is we've made some temporary measures on [it]. Those are these (.) light installations which came early in the Tøyen Boo– Boost and which um show photographs of people who (.) lived here then. Uh in additions we have this triangle which is a uh: play (.) uh

være et trygt sted, det er at (.) den blir  
brukt.

Director: Og parken blir brukt?

KG: Uh: ja: den uh: blir vel brukt, ja, den blir  
absolutt brukt. I det daglige så er den jo–  
den er brukt

structure. For a park or a plaza to be a safe  
place, it's important that (.) it gets used.

Director: And the park gets used?

KG: Uh: yes: it uh: gets well used, yes, it  
absolutely gets used. During the day it's  
of course– it's used.

This exchange, which was followed by no further commentary by the director, just a fade to black before a new scene, had also received a loud response from the premiere audience, with a few people laughing and imitating the uncertain tone in KG's voice. KG did not speak that softly in this clip, likely because she was being interviewed on camera and had a lapel mic just under her chin, but her speech did sound somewhat similar to Nina's during the local advisory board meetings, with frequent pauses, repetitions, and elongated vowels. Documentary viewers who did not know KG widely took these features up as proof that she had no idea what she was doing and was completely disconnected from the straight-talking migrant men who also appeared in the documentary (also gendering this manner of speaking). Linda, however, one of KG's colleagues, took up her manner of speaking differently. Linda described KG's workplace persona as careful, not wanting to say anything factually incorrect or that would come across as controversial. While Linda thought these were positive traits in the kind of work that KG did for the Area Boost having to bring together the perspectives on Tøyen from a wide variety of residents, business owners, municipal employees, and politicians, Linda also understood why most viewers who did not know KG had decided she looked "like an idiot." But Linda instead blamed the Area Boost for not realizing that their head of communications, who was not so soft-spoken, spoke in a way that better fit this genre, an interview with a journalist who was clearly looking to expose conflict.

## **Conclusion**

For many, discussing what the bonds are that will hold Norwegian society together now and into the future has become a kind of national pastime. This dissertation has presented several possibilities coming from a variety of perspectives, and the work that my interlocutors do to achieve feelings of coherence across some opposed social groups, while creating boundaries between others. Throughout the previous chapters, I have shown how scale-making, including practices of calculating, measuring and comparing time, space, kinds of people, and forms of value, are ways for social actors to both come to understand how “the global” comes to influence their everyday lives, and to create new forms of belonging and solidarity. Additionally, as this chapter has argued, my interlocutors use a wide array of linguistic practices to mediate conflict. Some do so to gain authority for themselves and their perspectives on the future, either within the neighborhood, or to an imagined national audience. For others, the stakes of creating coherence and managing disagreement were higher, a way of showing the rest of Norway that difference does not necessarily lead to conflict, and that a more heterogenous citizenry would not destroy the welfare state, but change it for the better.

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