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AMBIVALENT HOPES: RESIDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF ARCHITECTURAL TRANSFOR- MATIONS IN GELLERUP-TOVESHØJ

JONAS BACH

Abstract

From the perspective of municipality, housing association administration, architects and media, major renovation projects are often pictured as both prestigious and necessary. In the case of the major architectural and infrastructural transformation project currently taking place in Gellerup-Toveshøj in western Aarhus, Denmark, the stated aim is to “change Gellerup and Toveshøj from a disadvantaged residential area to an attractive urban district” by transforming the area from a monofunctional modernist estate to a multifunctional part of the city. “Through implementing physical changes, we are creating – in collaboration with the residents – the necessary foundation for social improvements”, as it is stated on the homepage of the Master Plan.

But how do the residents temporally experience the physical and infrastructural changes to an area they call home? Through fieldwork in the area, while the physical and infrastructural changes have been undergoing, I have explored the residents' perceptions of the changes and their hopes and fears for the future.

Residents' perceptions, needless to say, vary. Some expect social conditions in the area to change for the better, as is stated in the political goals for the area, while others expect little or no change. Some do not place much trust in the housing association and municipality, a lack of trust which influences their perceptions of the future.

Hope, following the perspective of anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano (2003), produces cycles of expectation and arrival, and often also involves a sense of disappointment. Hope can reconstitute the present and the

Keywords:
Ghetto, material transformation,
hope, affordable housing,
Gellerup

past, and stances on possibility. How can we understand residents' hopes for the changes and their interpretation of the hopes of politicians and city planners, expressed through visions and master plans? What happens when these hopes are intersected with ongoing construction work and the messiness of building sites, political statements and everyday life, and memories and imagined futures are uprooted? This paper aims to shed light on some of these issues.

Introduction: "We are content in one way, we are not content in another way"

Civic associations are plentiful in the Gellerup-Toveshøj estate. Many are based in diasporic networks, while others are based on common activities or interests, and many are diasporic and interest-based combinations. I met Samira¹ through her work in one of the many associations in Gellerup-Toveshøj. Samira, a Somali woman in her thirties and single mother of four children, was taking courses to be able to start a University College level education while raising her children and doing volunteer work. After having lived on the Gellerup-Toveshøj estate as a teenager with her family, she returned later as an adult following a period living abroad. She had returned shortly after the Master Plan² with its architectural transformations of Gellerup-Toveshøj had been approved by the municipality and the residents. She felt safe on the estate, she explained, and her children were thriving and her networks and family were nearby. But while she had experienced that the estate and Denmark in general had changed for the better regarding job opportunities and acceptance of immigrants, and that the level of neighbourhood activities and associations in the area had increased, she was also ambivalent about living on the estate. When asked whether there was anything she did not like about living there, she answered, "In my opinion, for me, I think there are many disadvantages. For instance, they're always building outside; they don't build anything inside. They don't make changes inside the houses."³ Her point was that the Master Plan had so far focused on the roads and new buildings, not on the renovation of the already existing tenements. After recounting how recurrent problems in her apartment could take a long time to be fixed, and then often only fixed temporarily, she added, "It's the Master Plan. How many years, one doesn't know. So, after two years, after ten years, or is it five years, or every time they say after another two years, we'll fix it". But they did not fix it and so Samira connected the lack of maintenance with the new buildings of the Master Plan. "And I simply didn't know where they got those ideas that we should, or they should, build many buildings that are nice outside instead of inside", she said, adding that "It would have been good if they had started inside". To sum up her opinions on living in the area, she put it like this, "They want to attract many people, but the people who live here, we are content in one way, we are not content in another way".

1 All interlocutors have been anonymized and their personal details blurred.

2 Translated from the Danish "helhedsplan"

3 I have tried to translate direct quotes from interlocutors precisely, also to convey imperfections in their Danish and not brush up their language to what I think they might have meant to say. E.g. In this case the wording in Danish was: "for mig selv, jeg synes det har mange ulemper for eksempel, de bygger altid udenfor, de bygger ikke indenfor. De laver ikke om i husene".

Samira's experiences of living on the Gellerup-Toveshøj estate are not unique among my informants. Many experience that the ongoing changes are going slowly and that it is difficult to fathom when interior renovations will begin, what exactly is going on as part of the Master Plan, and how long the Master Plan will take to be completed. The future of one's housing situation seems more uncertain and even more difficult to chart and predict. What is about to be constructed next outside? When will renovations of the apartments take place? What exactly will it entail? It is questions like these that many of my interlocutors grapple with and the insecurities seem to affect their temporal experiences and their hopes for the future. Time is, in a sense, uprooted by the physical transformations and the related insecurities about the future.

Time and temporal experience have been explored anthropologically and sociologically in recent years by, among others, Flaherty (2011) and Nielsen (2014; 2017). Particular urban experiences of time have been explored in a theme issue of *Ethnos* in 2016, edited by Morten Nielsen. The linearity of time and temporal experience has been challenged by Nielsen, and Dalsgård (2017) in the same issue notes that temporalities can be mismatching. The passing of time can be experienced in many ways, and in this paper I will approach data from my fieldwork through the lens of experiences of time, drawing on concepts on time work (Flaherty, 2011; Jurkane-Hobein, 2015), hope (Crapanzano, 2003; Miyazaki, 2004) and the "collapsed futures" Morten Nielsen (2014) evokes, in order to untangle if and how my informants' temporal experience might differ from that of outsiders – whether they be city planners, municipal and other officials, or simply other people not living on the estate, while massive construction work is dragging on.

Placing this into the context of the theme issue of this journal, namely that of the social impact of architectural transformations, this paper does not so much look into what the impact may be when "everything" is finished and the transformations are done, but how architectural transformations also have an impact while they are underway, particularly on the residents living in the middle of the mud and noise of construction work and the uncertain time frames that often surround major architectural transformations. This paper, then, is an exploration of the following questions: how do different residents perceive the future in the light of the ruptures in time brought about by the transformations, both for themselves and the estate; how do they deal with life in the midst of architectural transformations; what do the residents hope for; and, how does the future and the past shape the present?

I draw on data from my ongoing PhD fieldwork in the Gellerup-Toveshøj estate in western Aarhus, which is currently undergoing massive architectural and infrastructural changes, introducing the views and attitudes of a mixed group of current residents as they have been expressed

to me, primarily during interviews but also in more informal conversations. This is not an architect's view on architectural transformations, but an anthropological exploration of how ongoing transformations affect residents' lives and perceptions of the future.

A brief discussion on methods

In this paper, I place particular emphasis on what my interlocutors say. It is a general view in anthropology that people do not always act in accordance with what they say and that as an ethnographic researcher one must methodologically take this into account (e.g. Hastrup, 2004; Metcalf, 2002). We do not always act consistently with how we say or think we act, and we are rarely aware of it ourselves. We tend to forget some views and highlight others when we talk to other people, and sometimes represent idealized images of ourselves. Furthermore, interviewees are also prone to try to satisfy an interviewer, meaning that if I, as an interviewer, ask about negative experiences, an interviewee will likely go to lengths to satisfy my question. I try to take these challenges into account by asking about both negative and positive aspects of the architectural transformations, talking to my interlocutors at different times, in both formal and informal settings, and spending extended periods alone on the estate in different settings enabling me to eavesdrop, have informal conversations and watch life unfold. My fieldwork consists of going to events, meetings and activities of different kinds on the estate and listening and talking to people there, but also observing how people go about their daily lives on walks in the area, from a seat at a local café or one of the many small restaurants selling pizza, shawarma and manakish⁴, and of course visiting and interviewing residents, sometimes tagging along for one activity or another. Still, this paper may highlight some views that are not necessarily representative for everyone living on the estate. Questionnaires of any form would pose a similar problem, with even more potential for error, and I have tried to give a balanced account here, merging the voices of approximately 35 interlocutors that I am in contact with more or less frequently, and with whom I have conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews that have most often been taped.

Furthermore, this paper focusses on the residents' perceptions and experiences. It only peripherally touches on how city planners, municipal and housing association officials, politicians and architects view these issues. This paper aims to nuance general representations of architectural transformations and point to an underexposed issue, namely the "betwixt and between" (Turner, 1986) time of ongoing architectural transformations.

4 Manakish is an Arabian flatbread with different fillings (some call it Arabian pizza), which is cheap and quite popular.

Situating Gellerup-Toveshøj

The Gellerup-Toveshøj estate lies in the western part of Aarhus, European Capital of Culture 2017 and a growing small city, consolidating itself as the second largest city in Denmark (after the capital, Copenhagen). Aarhus has a constantly growing population, and a number of large construction projects are currently taking place simultaneously in the city, including: a new regional “super” hospital in Skejby, a new neighbourhood at the harbour (“Aarhus Ø”), a new neighbourhood rising behind the bus and train stations in the city centre, and a new light rail city transportation system to replace some of the bus lines.

But it is not all new buildings and new neighbourhoods. In recent years, there has been a lot of political focus on estates like Gellerup-Toveshøj, built and run by housing associations, built with public financial support, and regulated by law. There are approximately half a million housing units in Denmark run by housing associations, particularly in Aarhus and Copenhagen, where they are often immediately cheaper than private rental units or the cost of owning your own house or apartment. Housing associations also house many of the people who have come to Denmark as immigrants or refugees and their descendants (Skifter Andersen, 2015), as is the case in Gellerup-Toveshøj, which consists of two neighbouring departments, Gellerupparken and Toveshøj, made up of a total of 27 concrete tenements in various sizes. There are approximately 2.000 rental units in total, built in the late 1960’s and early 70’s, on what was then agricultural land, when the old parts of Aarhus were being sanitized and gentrified. Small traces of that time can be found in “the white farm” (Den hvide gård) and “the barn” (Laden), buildings that now house residents’ activities, local associations and offices for some of the social projects run by the housing association. The buildings are now placed on either side of Edwin Rahrs vej, the road dividing the two departments. The apartments were modern, light and spacious when they were built in the modernist tradition, drawn by Danish architect Knud Blach-Pedersen. Some of the apartments are certainly still both spacious and light, but what used to be modern bathrooms and kitchens are now in many cases worn and old-fashioned by 2019 standards. If you have an architect’s eye, you might still appreciate the aligning of the tall Gudrunsvvej tenements, and the residents on the higher floors certainly enjoy their views over the city and the Brabrand Lake, as well as the functional design and outlay of the apartments. However, perceptions about Gellerup-Toveshøj, usually just referred to as “Gellerup”, have changed over the years.

From modern estate to “ghetto”: A brief history

Almost immediately after the buildings were completed, it turned out that the middle-class residents, which they were to some extent built to house, preferred to buy their own one-family houses as mortgages were competitive with the expenses of renting, particularly as the Oil Crisis

hit in 1973 (Johansen, 2013, p.51). Therefore, over time, the apartments in Gellerup-Toveshøj began to be inhabited not so much by people who wanted spacious apartments near the countryside with a favourable infrastructural position but by people who were in need of housing and were not picky about where it was located in the city. Since the 70's, a relatively large proportion of the residents of Gellerup-Toveshøj have been unemployed, crime rates rose over the years, and people remembering the estate in the 80's told me about how it was quite usual to see drunk or stoned people at all times of the day, often referring to how junkies would shoot up in the basements. Today, that would be something out of the ordinary, but unemployment rates are still high, education levels are lower than the national average, and average household incomes in Gellerup-Toveshøj are at a national low. The level of youth crime is relatively high, though burglary and vandalism levels have been falling quite drastically in recent years.

Still, Gellerup-Toveshøj features on the “ghetto-list” published every year by the Danish Ministry of Transport, Buildings and Housing⁵, listing estates in need of particular attention from municipalities and police, and which are entitled to support from the National Building Fund (Landsbyggefonden): an entity which funds both social efforts, renovations and financial measures for estates run by housing associations. In Gellerup-Toveshøj, the National Building Fund supports both social initiatives and the initiatives in the physical “helhedsplan”, the Master Plan, for the estate, based on the work and recommendations from Danish urbanist Niels Bjørn (2008; 2014). His work criticises the modernist structure and monofunctionality of the estate – a critique in line with what can also be found in urban anthropology (e.g. James Holston and his critique of Brasília (1989)).

5 <https://www.trm.dk/da/publikationer/2016/liste-over-ghettoomraader> – here the criteria for a place on the list are also listed.

The general idea of the Master Plan is to change the infrastructure of the estate, to open up the modernist structure closing in on itself by building new roads through what was formerly a closed off park area between the tenements, and to link the estate to the rest of the city. This is to change Gellerup-Toveshøj from being monofunctional (residency) to being multifunctional, with a new business street running through the centre of the estate, new office buildings and, in time, other types of housing than apartments let out by the housing association. All of this is also devised to attract new residents so that the socioeconomic level in Gellerup-Toveshøj will align with that of the city as a whole over time. The municipality of Aarhus and the housing association running the two departments, Brabrand Boligforening, have agreed upon the overall plan, which was also approved by the residents in 2010. The official goal is “to change Gellerup and Toveshøj from a disadvantaged residential area to an attractive urban district, through changing the area from a monofunctional modernist estate to a multifunctional part of the city”, as it is stated on the municipal homepage of the overall project (Aarhus Kommune, 2017).

In 2014, the actual work of constructing the new roads started and three tenements were demolished to make room for a new building that is to house part of the municipal administration, which is being erected at the time of writing. In 2016, two more tenements, marked out to be transformed to student housing, were demolished, as the housing association would rather build new buildings than renovate the old ones due to economic and architectural considerations. The former local school, Nordgårdskolen, was demolished years ago, and has been replaced by newly constructed daycare facilities. The changes are slowly unfolding, and soon renovations of three of the 29 still standing tenement blocks are due to begin. Renovations are also planned for the rest of the tenements. Pieces of land neighbouring the estates have been sold off to private investors who intend to build privately owned housing and facilities for businesses. All these changes look neat on paper, as it does on the visualizations made by architects of how the estate will present itself in the future. However, as one interlocutor told me, “It’s like if you apply make-up to an ugly person, she will still be ugly underneath”, meaning that the architectural transformations would in his opinion do little more than present a finer surface. Others, like Samira, complained about the order of the changes, and others still about the consequences of the construction work.

Construction work is not neat, particularly not when you live in the middle of it, as many residents do. There is mud and noise, there are detours as roads and paths are closed and blocked, parking spaces are blocked by construction equipment, shrubberies and trees cut down, lawns ploughed up, and whole buildings disappear as they are being replaced by other structures. In the following, I will explore the residents’ perspectives on the changes happening around them and the future of the estate, drawing on in-depth interviews, informal talks and fieldwork on the estate.



Billboards and mud

Four years ago, a walk through Toveshøj and Gellerup could have taken you from Janesvej in the north to City Vest, a shopping mall, in the south on paved paths for cyclists and pedestrians, only encountering motorized traffic (apart from the occasional moped operated usually by youths) when looking down from the bridge crossing Edwin Rahrs Vej, the road that separates Toveshøj from Gellerup. The surroundings would be mostly grass lawns, trees and shrubberies, and of course the tenements. Today, taking the same walk, parts of the path are still to be found, but now it has been cut into smaller stretches by new roads for motorized traffic, many shrubberies and trees have been cut down, and new buildings are rising up along the way. You would be hard pressed to not get your shoes muddy or at least dusty, and excavators and large trucks are regulars in the traffic passing by on the new roads. In daytime, often starting in the early hours of the morning, the noise of, for instance, the laying of foundations can be heard far and wide. At Toveshøj, the access road serving several of the tenements has been dug up in order to be broadened and improved, meaning that cars have to drive on a gravel track to get to the parking lots and the remaining local school, Tovshøjskolen, situated just north of the Toveshøj estate. One of my interlocutors never washed his car as it would get dirty right away again, and another complained that the gravel had cost him 2.000 DKK in car repairs.

Figure 1
The municipal office building, construction site, 2017.

PHOTO BY AUTHOR.

On the gables of several of the tenement buildings in Gellerup-Toveshøj, there are large billboard posters depicting how architects imagine the estate in the future. Often, the contrast is striking. That is of course as it should be. Architectural transformations are imagined to make places look and function differently. However, often the time frame of these architectural transformations only takes two phases into account, at least when it comes to illustrations. The before and the after, the time of the initialization of the transformation and the future time where it will be finished.



At the time of my research, most of Gellerup-Toveshøj is somewhere in between. In a liminal phase (Turner, 1986), so to speak, transitioning from something to something else, the Master Plan is explicitly aiming at changing the estate. But it is not always easy for the residents to shrug the changes off as something temporary, perhaps because there is no certain end date for the Master Plan. When the after starts is uncertain and that makes the liminal state less bearable as there is no tangible endpoint to the liminal phase and no precise measure of how far along the process is. Written letters of information are regularly and conscientiously distributed to the residents who are most directly affected by particular works, and an overall project timeline (which is already impre-

Figure 2
Billboard showing the future development, Toveshøj, 2016.

PHOTO BY AUTHOR.

cise) and a model of the future estate (which also has imprecisions) are on display in the Information Centre in the middle of the estate. Many residents have never been to the Information Centre, and many do not read the information letters for various reasons. Likewise, the plans change, according to financing or lack thereof and new possibilities or new needs, thus sometimes creating confusion and rumours about what will happen, what will not, and why.

The billboards, though, placed on gables at several locations on the estate, are visible to most residents who venture outside their building. Though the billboards are most likely there to make it apparent what the future will look like and make it tangible to current and future residents, there is no apparent connection between the depictions and reality to most of my informants. As Ardan, a man in his twenties, told me during an interview, he could not see how these depictions would do anything for him; likewise with the new buildings rising up from the ground – he did not see how they would make any difference for him or, for that matter, the children of the estate, which was also a concern of his. Before the demolition of buildings, there had been a liveness to the area, he recounted, but where was it now?

Pelle, a local resident in his thirties trying to get a foothold on the job market, thought that the billboards looked like “commercials” and “wouldn’t fool anyone”. Others dismissed my questions with a laugh when I asked about small-scale models depicting the future estate and the billboards, saying how everyone knew that things were not going to actually look like that. The intentions behind the billboards were not always clear to my interlocutors, and most did not think they were there for their sake.

Making things better – hope and architectural transformations

Renovations and infrastructural changes are initiated to make things better. It is a remedy for something that was not working optimally before and is expected to make a positive impact; in the case of Gellerup-Toveshøj, it is part of a complex of initiatives that are aimed at changing the socioeconomic make-up of the estate and achieving higher levels of education and employment for the residents and reducing crime rates. This will supposedly result in the residents eventually feeling safer and facilitate an improved image of the estate among the general public. That is also why large sums of money are allocated to projects like the one in Gellerup-Toveshøj; it is expected to change the current state of affairs for the better. That is also something most of my interlocutors take into account. In general, the residents and former residents I have talked to have overall positive attitudes towards the development and betterment of the estate. They hope, so to speak, that it will succeed and that the estate will become a better place to live.

Hope, though, as anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano noted, has a temporal dimension (2003, p.6). Hope has cycles – what you hope might or might not come to pass. What you have hoped for at other times might have happened, or maybe your hopes were dashed. The cycle of hope unfolds over time, and so do the changes in Gellerup-Toveshøj.

The projected future, which is conveyed through, among other channels, the large billboards on the tenements in Gellerup and Toveshøj with architects' illustrations of how the estate will look in the future, is one matter. Another is the immediate future and the present, where things certainly do not look like they do on the billboards, and the Gellerup-Toveshøj of the immediate past, which is also sometimes contrasted with the Gellerup-Toveshøj of an even more distant past of childhood experiences, for instance, by the residents. When looking towards the future, my interlocutors often look to the past as well, remembering how this or that unfolded, and using it to explain attitudes towards certain elements of the unfolding Master Plan – and perhaps also as a way of tracing change.

Change unfolds over time, but sometimes it can be hard to see change happening around you if it happens slowly. Looking at a billboard with a pretty and fancy depiction of a technicolor future, contrasting it with the greyness of the current surroundings, the trash, and so on, is sometimes unavoidable as a resident. Hoping for the future to be like what is depicted on the posters and what is being described in the visions of politicians and city planners sometimes demands intended optimism. As a resident, you are living with the messiness and noise of construction work every day. For some, it can test the limits of patience, which is an attitude I often hear my interlocutors voice. "Change does not come like that", one of my interlocutors told me, snapping his fingers to show that change does not come in the blink of an eye. Patience can seem to be a necessary trait if you want to be a resident in Gellerup-Toveshøj; however, some residents are, of course, also impatient and frustrated once in a while. This sometimes results in the voicing of complaints often directed at the housing association and its employees.

Practicing patience can be seen as a form of "time work", a form of temporal agency that we can employ to manipulate how we experience time (Flaherty 2011). As such, it can be a way of dealing with the seemingly endless length of time that construction work outside your windows might take. Patience is also a strategy often employed by people who do not have a lot of other choices available. For some, moving away is a possibility but not for others. Some residents feel "caught" on the estate, without much of a choice whether to move away or to stay.

Deadlining and a future together

Iveta Jurkane-Hobein builds on Flaherty's (2011) concept of time work, employing the concept of "deadlining" (Jurkane-Hobein, 2015, p.192) to explain a strategy of long-distance relationship partners to shorten the experience of the waiting time, making the long stretches of separation more bearable: one day, I will finish my education and then we can move in together, or next year I'll find a job in the city you live in and then we will be together. I believe deadlining is also an applicable concept for my data. Take, for instance, the large billboards with images of the future – they signal that the current messiness will not last forever. In a sense, they promise that, one day, the estate will not look like what you see around you just now but will be clean and aesthetically pleasing. What the residents often miss in communication like this, however, is a form of a "progress bar" to make it tangible how far in the process the changes are – an idea of how much more time it will take. A case in point could be the construction of "Fossen" ("the cascade"), a small artificial waterfall integrated with a path that was due to be finished in December 2016 but not inaugurated before the end of August 2017, which led to frustrated complaints from some of the residents living nearby. Another example is the paved path along some of the tenements that was disassembled when some pipelines underground were being replaced. However, when the pipelines had been replaced, the path was not repaved, and my interlocutors did not know when that would happen or why it did not happen. Of course, it was an annoyance that the path was no longer there, as the stretch would quickly fill up with water in rainy weather, making it impassable, as a couple with young children told me. But it was the uncertainty about when and if the path would be reconstructed that irritated them the most and added to a series of other operations that they did not feel had been properly explained.

Another concept employed by Iveta Jurkane-Hobein is that of a "future-together" (ibid., p.193). In order to meaningfully believe in, for instance, the deadlining of a partner, one must trust that you, as a couple, have a future together. You must be able to imagine it, to hope for it. Otherwise trust will be low, and time apart might be experienced differently. I would argue that this might also be an applicable concept to the residents' experiences in Gellerup-Toveshøj. In order to imagine and hope for a better estate in the future, and to wait for it patiently to come around, one also has to imagine oneself in it to some extent. If you cannot, it will probably influence your attitudes towards construction work and the whole Master Plan, for that matter. It might make you less tolerant towards early morning work and less prone to believe in the idealized illustrations of the imagined future of the estate.

I find the imagining of a future-together interesting to use analytically in regard to my material, not only in the positive sense, where residents can imagine themselves living in the architects' drawings that envision

the future (which is also what some people do), but also for the residents who don't see themselves in it. To them, ongoing construction work is just a difficulty and an annoyance that might even protract time, making it seem longer.



Even for the residents with a generally positive attitude towards the transformations, the bothersome nature of construction work can cause annoyances. Mohammad, an interlocutor who was otherwise positive about the prospects of the Master plan, told me about the day construction work on one of the new roads started. It was the day after Ramadan had begun. That year, the month of Ramadan started in summer, when it is light in Denmark until after 10 pm. As Ramadan starts with a large, festive meal that must be finished before sunrise, a lot of people, including Mohammad, had been up all night. Sunrise comes early in the Danish summer, and construction work also starts early, waking up Mohammad and presumably many other residents early in the morning after only a few hours of sleep. Time can seem to stretch out when you are awakened early by construction noise – it can be a long wait for the day's work to finish so that you can sleep again.

Figure 3
Preparations for a new road connecting
Gudrunsvvej with Karen Blixens Boule-
vard, 2017.

PHOTO BY AUTHOR.

Waiting time, as Auyero (2011, p.7) rightly noted, is unequally distributed – the more powerful wait for less time than the poor, for instance. At least it can appear that way to residents in Gellerup when construction work in other, wealthier, parts of the city seem to finish much faster. Waiting, Bourdieu (2000, p.228) wrote, is one of the ways of experiencing the effects of power. And though waiting is certainly not the only thing people in Gellerup-Toveshøj do, waiting for construction work to finish and for changes to come about is a part of life on the estate for the time being. How the waiting is perceived is worth considering and so are the effects of the attitudes towards municipality and housing association on how the waiting is perceived.

In the following, I will explore further examples from my fieldwork and interviews, where hope and temporality, past, present and future, and trust and distrust play central roles.

Change – but for whose sake?

Nielsen (2017, p.395) notes that “cities often operate on the basis of change as a driving force”. Cities are constantly being made and unmade in a state of “throwtogetherness” (Massey, 2005, p.149), with the city as “collision” and “clashing trajectories” (ibid., p.156), and a site for the intersection of conflicting interests, “contoured through the playing out of unequal social relations” (ibid., p.153). That seems to be true for the current state of the city of Aarhus, as many parts of the city are marked by ongoing construction work, and particularly for Gellerup-Toveshøj at present.

Change comes in many forms; however, the changes my interlocutors refer to are often changes launched through the Master Plan. Deniz, a young man studying at Aarhus University, had grown up on the estate. He lamented during an interview about the changes on the estate, that his “memories were being removed”; when I prompted him further on this, he said that the green areas were disappearing, and continued:

They’ve removed everything, and they’re digging right now in all sorts of places; they haven’t finished A and then they jump to Z, you know; they jump around and they remove all the memories and the childhood memories we’ve had (...) People are starting to grow tired of them digging up everything and earth everywhere and mud everywhere and we have to go one way and the other in all of Gellerup to get to one place.⁶

He then continued to compare the ongoing transformations to being fed another spoonful of food before you have had the time to digest the previous one. He said he was generally positive towards the Master Plan but also stressed that he believed more in social projects in order to bring about change.

6 Here I have also attempted to translate Deniz’ words as directly as possible.

Kamal, a man around 60 with a kind smile, did not wish to criticise the ongoing work but poetically expressed that his only concern was that he “could no longer hear the birds singing in the morning”; he missed it and did not think it would return. Common to these two interlocutors is the sense of something lost, of memories and birdsong, phenomena that are probably hard to contain in architects’ illustrations or city plans but are never the less tangible to residents.

Another view I also found among several residents was similar to that of Henrik and Camilla, a Danish couple who had been living in Gellerup-Toveshøj for a few years. They displayed more optimism, even a bit of excitement about what was going on and recounted how they had participated in involvement processes during their residency and how a resident, if she/he knew how, could pose questions to the municipality about the project that would subsequently be answered promptly. Asked whether they thought the transformations were dictated from somewhere else, an idea often voiced by some interlocutors, Henrik replied:

There have been a lot of options for involvement all the way through; so I don't feel that it's dictated from above. I think that there are annoyances on the way but it's because we are in the middle of a plan that is on its way to completion; so there are things that don't work. The way we want them to as residents.

Similar attitudes were evident from other interlocutors who had moved to the estate after the transformations had begun. There were annoyances along the way but that was to be expected with transformations on this level.

Two things should be noted when comparing the statements of Henrik and Camilla with that of Deniz or some of the other interlocutors mentioned. First, Henrik and Camilla had made an active choice in moving to Gellerup-Toveshøj that was in part based on a Christian belief that it was a place where they could make a positive difference for others. The second is that they, at the time of interview, were living in an apartment in a part of the estate where there was not yet any major construction work going on.

Others, like Deniz the University student, lived in the middle of the construction work and had to pass through it every day. The same was the case for Ardan, a young man in his twenties who lived with his parents in a tenement in the part of the estate most heavily influenced by construction work. During the interview, he kept asking “why”. Perfectly fine tenements were demolished, why? New roads were being led through the estate, why? It was not for him, he stated several times, and it certainly did nothing for the children, who, he reminisced, had previously played outside all the time. Now, he did not even care to walk on the estate anymore, as there was not really anyone about.

A more positive perspective, again, was found with the aforementioned Mohammad, who had lived most of his life on the estate: In his late thirties, employed, and supporting his wife and children, he was a warm advocate for the estate in general. During an interview, he had been talking for some time about how the estate had been changing over time before finally making a sort of mission statement:

I fight for this area, Gellerupparken and Toveshøj, to become a part of the city, one of the best parts of the city, because, we see now, that they're trying to do good, then we also have to make an effort. And it might be that there is a grouping of 15-20 young people (that make trouble) ... But it'll come in time, that's what I'm saying. It's not something that ... (snaps fingers). What you see now didn't come about like that (snaps fingers again). It came in the course of some years.



Trust, I believe, is also important when considering the differences between the attitudes of the residents quoted here. Trust in the municipality, the housing association, and society in general. Trust, on some level, is what Mohammad expresses when he says that “they’re trying to do good”, meaning the housing association and the municipality.

Figure 4
The path which was formerly paved,
Gellerup 2017.

PHOTO BY AUTHOR.

This is also where the past meets the present and merges with perceptions of the future. My interlocutors were often more critical of the Master Plan and the changes if they felt that they had not been properly involved or otherwise not been treated well and justly in past dealings with the municipality and the housing association. Likewise, residents' hopes for the future tended to be more optimistic if they had good experiences to draw on or knew and trusted people working with the transformations or if they felt they had been involved. Deadlining, if you actually set a date for something to happen, may, in this line of reasoning, be a "dangerous" device to employ if the work is not finished by the stated date as it will then be taken as another confirmation that the deadlines and, more generally, the messages conveyed by the municipality and housing association cannot be trusted. Similarly, if something you, as a resident, expected or hoped to be built is constantly pushed into the future or maybe taken off the table completely, the level of trust might also be lowered, and hopes dashed. This I will return to shortly.

The perception of injustice – trust and distrust

The Bazar is a central place for many residents in Gellerup-Toveshøj. It is a mall in an old industrial complex with small businesses, mainly owned by immigrants and their descendants, right next to Toveshøj, where I sometimes went to conduct interviews. One interlocutor replaced the other as I was sitting at a table with one of my main interlocutors who also often translated, drinking strong tea and eating manakish. After I had talked to a couple of men, a third man approached with something on his mind. He and his family had lived on the estate for a long time, but recently some of their relatives had been evicted due to the criminal activities of an older boy in the family. This led him into a general analysis of the past 30 years on the estate, claiming that the housing association had been making good money from residents who were on welfare. Now, as they were no longer able to make the same kind of money from them, they were kicking them out, either because of criminal youngsters or with excuses pertaining to the workings of the Master Plan. Though visibly upset, he paused several times to make it clear that he was sorry about taking it out on me, shaking my hand several times before leaving with a saddened expression.

I recount this story because it shows how previous experiences and expectations that were disappointed influence the attitudes of some residents. Morten Nielsen's concept of "collapsed futures", taken from his fieldwork in Maputo, Mozambique, opens an interesting path here. Nielsen recounts how his interlocutors:

... make their lives by gazing backwards from an imagined future moment, 'unhinged' from their fixed temporal location on a linear scale [...] they constitute retrograde and mobile moments of origin that fasten the present to a trajectory that will never reach its destination (Nielsen, 2014, p.215). [They] manage a present that is the after-effect of futures that will never be realized (ibid., p.223).

Likewise, some of my interlocutors feel disappointed and are sure they will also feel this way in the future. They would take their starting point in a hoped-for future that seemed to never come to pass, and it shaped their experience of the present and the immediate past. The case of the plan for a Mosque, which so far has not come to anything, might be an illustrative case in this respect. During the initial talks about the coming Master Plan, many residents and local religious associations advocated for the allocation of a plot on or near the Gellerup-Toveshøj estate for a new mosque; a mosque that would bring together the already existent mosques in Western Aarhus under one roof in a building that was actually constructed to be a mosque, rather than an old warehouse or something similar as is the case for most mosques in Aarhus at present. The municipality and housing association officials participating in public meetings expressed hope and optimism about the chances of this happening; however, in the end, due to, among other issues, political discussions and a changing perception of Muslims in Denmark, with more and more politicians voicing criticism of Islamic practices in Denmark and Muslims and immigrants as a burden on Danish society in general, nothing has happened to bring the construction of a mosque near Gellerup-Toveshøj closer, at least to this day.⁷ Along with other political cases⁸, this is perceived by many in Gellerup-Toveshøj, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, to be a politically motivated discrimination based on religion (see Simonsen, 2016, for more insight into how negative political discourses negatively influence the trust levels of immigrants towards democratic institutions).

My intention here is not to enter into discussions as to whether the decision of stalling the mosque plans were right or wrong, only to remark that there are certainly conflicting opinions on the case and that most residents from Gellerup-Toveshøj I have talked to disagreed, sometimes strongly, with the decision made by the city council led by Social Democrat Mayor Jacob Bundsgaard on the mosque. The feeling of having been misled to hope for something that would never be realized, and to be targeted as a group due to religion, is certainly experienced by some residents. However interesting these cases are analytically, they are not the focus of either my thesis or this paper; however, they often lurk in the shadows of the conversations I have with residents. They should certainly be taken into account as part of the context for the experience of architectural transformations as the municipality also plays a central role here; further, many residents connect the cases with the architec-

7 A Turkish mosque and cultural centre, Brabrand Ulu Camii, was constructed in the same time period only a few kilometres west of Gellerup-Toveshøj without similar public debate.

8 Another case that was often debated was one about public women's swimming in the local public baths. The women's swimming (which was exclusively for women and children with a weekly time slot on Saturdays) was, after long and heated debates, stopped by the municipality as it was seen by some members of the municipal council to support religious segregation of the sexes and support the creation and conservation of "parallel societies" among immigrants.

tural transformations because the municipality is involved in both. How conflictual dealings with the Danish state, in the form of municipal officials and police, can influence residents' views on the Master Plan is the subject of a recent article by Mette-Louise E. Johansen and Steffen B. Jensen (2017). In their article, a Palestinian father expresses his mistrust in the Danish welfare state, interpreting the Master Plan as a way to expel him and his family from the estate (*ibid.*, p.298). Though I have encountered similar attitudes a few times during my fieldwork, my informants generally experience the Master Plan differently.

Whereas the case of the mosque was certainly the talk of the town at times, a more recurrent issue was that of either personal or family members or friends' bad experiences with the housing association in one form or another. Some complained about the rent and the rises in rent in recent years, while others related how they knew people who had had to pay large sums in recompense after they had moved out of their apartments, crippling them financially. Others talked about the high payments for heating or water, and some recounted how they could wait for days for washing machines or taps to be fixed, or that the renovation system did not work for months on end. "Why," one interlocutor asked, "can they ask me to pay full rent, while I can't expect things to work properly?" And now, they experienced that construction work was progressing slowly, that they did not know when it would finish, that it seemed to be going faster in other parts of the city, and so on. They had to pay for car repairs, parking spaces disappeared, and there was mud and noise everywhere. For many of my interlocutors, it did not seem fair that there was seemingly no recompense for the annoyances they experienced and not enough information. This sense of things not being fair also affected how the residents experienced time and how they employed hope.

Other residents were more positive towards both the housing association and the future development of the estate, as well as their own future prospects. Many of those who were less positive were residents who perceived themselves as less mobile; they did not consider themselves to have much choice. When I asked them whether they thought about moving away, responses included that their wife and children were too attached to the area, that they did not have the money, or that they did not wish to move. The more positive residents, on the other hand, often spoke about farmhouses, apartments in central Aarhus, or the like, and only on being prompted directly about whether they could see themselves in Gellerup-Toveshøj in five or ten years did they say that, yes, if different housing options became available, or if this and that happened, then, yes, it was possible. Only a few, like Mohammad, stated that they would not want to move for anything. This might seem to fit poorly with the notion of the "future-together", but what it does illustrate is that perhaps the more options you feel you have for the future, the easier it is to be positive about it, also when it comes to the future prospects

for the architectural transformations; it also underscores another point, namely that my interlocutors often displayed ambivalence in terms of almost every subject. Sometimes their views could be quite paradoxical.



Ambiguity and ambivalent hope

“We can only hope”, a middle-aged man named Baris told to me with a resigned smile when I asked him how he saw the future of the area. “We can only hope, we cannot do anything about how things unfold”. During the interview, he had been complaining about how the roads meant that his car was always dirty and he was the one who had had to pay 2.000 kroner to have it repaired. He did not see the point of the ongoing transformations and, as he said, maybe the roads would be prettier but there were also roads before that worked just fine.

Did he really mean that he was hoping, then? Was he hoping and not hoping at the same time? Cheryl Mattingly (1998) and others point to the open-endedness of the future, whereas Nielsen (2014) points to the future as something that already influences the present and can appear fixed, at least in terms of what will not come to pass. Both perspectives

Figure 5
The only remaining trace of a former
daycare facility, Lærken, Gellerup 2017.

PHOTO BY AUTHOR.

might appear to yield interesting perspectives on my empirical material. As Martin Demant Frederiksen has noted, “hope can be seen exactly as a way of projecting oneself into the future” (2007, p.9). “Future and hopes for the future take part in shaping acts in the present”, Frederiksen further notes (*ibid.*, p.57); thus, following that line of reasoning, a quote like the above might be understood as a passive response towards a future that Baris does not have high hopes for. This might tie into Crapanzano’s (2003) idea that hope is dependent on some other agency than the person who hopes, and Crapanzano goes on to note that “It’s evaluation rests on the characterization – the moral characterization – of this agency” (*ibid.*, p.6). If one does not trust this agency, if the housing association or the municipality, or both, is the other agency one has to be dependent on, some, like Baris, think it a meagre hope. They simply do not feel they have much cause to place their trust in these organizations. On the other hand, for residents like Mohammad or Henrik and Camilla, the projected future was easier to fit into as they actually believed that the plan would benefit both the estate and them as residents.

Ambiguity is relatively common among my interlocutors. Most of the people listed here often also stopped to reflect and nuance their statements at some point in the interview. Like Baris, who had expressed negative opinions on the ongoing transformation before going on to express some kind of ambivalent hope. Or Ardan, who stressed towards the end of the interview that it was not all bad, that some things were going well, and that things were just frustrating him at present.

Another long-time resident, Pelle, expressed the sentiments of many of my interlocutors quite aptly after he had just weighed different initiatives and transformations on a scale of positive and negative: “I am a wary optimist,” he said. He also stressed patience, not believing that the changes in the social make-up of the estate would be significantly different before 20 or 25 years into the future. This might also be interpreted as a way of displaying doubt without seeming overly sceptical, keeping his attitudes open for change.

“It is exceedingly difficult to make predictions, particularly about the future”, as famous Danish physicist Niels Bohr allegedly told a reporter once, possibly just quoting an already existing proverb. Many of my interlocutors seem to ascribe to this. The future is not easy to grasp. Sometimes it will appear to have collapsed, at others it might appear to be wide open.

Concluding remarks

In this paper, I have attempted to highlight different perspectives on architectural transformations taking the residents living in the middle of the transformations and their experiences into account by contrasting

their views with the billboards, architects' drawings and political statements showing some future end point of the transformation. As pointed out earlier, the transformations in Gellerup-Toveshøj are ongoing. Changes on this scale take time and this paper is in no way an attempt to evaluate whether they will ultimately succeed. It is also important to state that this is in no way an attempt to evaluate the Master Plan in itself – its effects remain to be seen.

This paper addresses the effects of the ongoing architectural transformations and the mud and messiness of construction work and how it affects the residents living in the middle of it: how some feel their memories are being erased and their futures are collapsing, while others employ patience, partake actively or wait passively for it to pass, and some express pessimism that it will not change anything for the better. The attitudes and experiences are manifold, but, as construction work seems to drag on and continue almost indefinitely, people naturally become weary. Still, everything might look different in one or two years' time. My interlocutors know that and, therefore, also express what might be termed doubtful and ambivalent hopes: hopes where there is always room for doubt.

Using Jurkane-Hobein's (2015) conceptions of deadlining and a future-together, I have attempted to show how residents tend to be more sceptical and less positively hopeful when they do not see themselves in the projected future plans for the estate or when they do not place much trust in the municipality and housing association due to past experiences. Crapanzano's (2003) conception of cycles of hope also proved useful in this analysis, and also that Crapanzano ascribes a moral characterization to hope (*ibid.*, p.6). When the hopes of the residents are not met, they tend to lose faith; further, residents who find it difficult to follow the logic of the order and nature of the transformations tend to be more sceptical towards the changes, potential positive effects and their own place on the estate.

However, even though residents might see their futures as "collapsed" (Nielsen, 2014), they might still be able to imagine other outcomes. Conceptions of past and future flow together and intermingle with the present, at least sometimes, as with Deniz's childhood memories, which he felt were being destroyed and thus made him more pessimistic toward the transformation. Trust in the "partner", in this case the housing association and the municipality, is important for the residents if they are to allow themselves to hope for a better future with a place for them in it. This might be an important issue to address for the municipality and the housing association in future dealings with the residents, perhaps through more tangible representations of timelines and progress, explanations of the reasoning behind the transformations, and more involvement and dialogue.

It is hardly surprising that an architectural transformation on the scale of the one taking place in Gellerup-Toveshøj can put strain on the residents living through it, and my interlocutors often recognize that this is unavoidable. However, on the other hand, several of them also feel that they are sometimes in the dark concerning what is actually going on and why, and rumours often surface about underlying, undisclosed causes for what is being done. It might be important to bear in mind with regard to architectural transformations that it is not only buildings that are demolished and places that are transformed, but that material transformations can also uproot memories and alter perceptions of the future for the residents. They do not only entail material changes but also temporal. Though both housing association and municipality officials strive to inform the residents as thoroughly as possible, many residents still feel uncertain about it all. This does not have easily applicable solutions. Like the architectural transformation itself, it will not just happen with a snap of the fingers; however, some of the above mentioned initiatives might contribute to defusing frustrations and insecurities and thus make the future-together more tangible to at least some residents.

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