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“Leilighetsnormen”- Oslo’s Inner-city Policy on Dimensional Requirements for Newly Built Apartments

A WPR approach to critical policy analysis of Oslo’s inner-city building
control tool – “Leilighetsnormen”

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Abstract

Housing policies have gradually developed in tune with the increasing level of prosperity seen in Norway after the Second World War. Originating from securing housing for everybody, housing policies have developed into strategies prioritizing living qualities and securing stable living environments. This thesis wishes to investigate Oslo's inner-city policy for dimensional requirements, the "Apartment Norm" (Leilighetsnormen). It will do so by using Carol Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to be" (WPR) approach. The approach will enable critical policy analysis of the municipal evaluation documents reasoning for revising, defending, and maintaining an active Apartment Norm. This has given insight into why the norm exists, but also how governing categories are created within the norm. Analyzing these governing categories against the current housing situation in Oslo has revealed several silenced perspectives and issues with potential negative effects on certain people and groups. While the current Apartment Norm claims it promotes quality living and stable living environments, arguments can be made to suggest this is promoted in a way making the establishment into the housing market difficult, especially for first-time buyers and singles. The results of the analysis confirm this.

Acknowledgments

With this, my master thesis, and inevitably my studies, comes to an end. Through my almost seven years as a student, little has been as intimidating as imagining writing a master thesis one day. Going back a year back in time, I still had uncertainties if this really was something I could imagine doing, nevertheless complete. Having completed my thesis, my overwhelming thoughts are no longer intimidation and uncertainty, but rather gratitude and appreciation for the time I have had as a student. Seven years is a long time, while simultaneously being short in the grand scheme of things. One thing is for sure. I have gotten to know a lot of great people, gotten to know myself better, and am going to miss my time as a student dearly.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

2023 marks the 10th anniversary of the latest revision of Oslo municipality's inner city apartment building control tool, “leilighetsnormen”, or Apartment Norm in English (hereinafter also “the norm”). Despite being unique in a national context, the Apartment Norm is just one of many policies existing based on Norway’s national strategy for housing policies.

The Apartment Norm’s latest 2013 revision, was again based on the original dimensional Apartment Norm from 2007. Although the norm became less strict and more flexible with the 2013 revision, the main goal of the norm has always been to secure diverse housing within the inner city, especially focusing on larger apartments suitable for families with children (Oslo Kommune, 2016, p. 6).

To enable this, today's norm stipulates what apartment sizes, and apartment distribution, new developments, and rehabilitation projects should contain. The norm officially operates within four districts in Oslo: Gamle Oslo, Sagene, Grünerløkka, and St. Hanshaugen. It sets a minimum requirement for apartment size, as well as percentage limits within two different apartment size categories (Oslo kommune, 2013):

- Category 1: maximum 35% of apartments between 35-50 m².
- Category 2: minimum 40% of apartments over 80 m².

Developers may see it as a hindrance, while others praise the idea of securing diverse housing for people in all of life's stages. However, over the years, the Apartment Norm has always somewhat been debated by those affected by it. Since its introduction, discussions surrounding the norm have been characterized by contradictory opinions on what the effects of the norms are and whom it benefits. Points can be made to suggest that the norm is outdated. While the first revision came after six years, it has now been ten years without any alteration of the norm. Arguments can be made regarding how time has allowed the norm to impact areas of Oslo it was never intended to.

As of late, the norm has seen increased attention in tune with economic instability putting pressure on the goals of the national strategy for housing policies. Increases in interest rates, living costs, single population, housing demand, and changes in lending practices, all play a factor in the debate. After a recent interest to dismiss the norm by city council leader and Labor Party

politician Raymond Johansen, the norm failed to be dismissed during the decision of a new party program for the Norwegian Labor Party in January 2023 (Kristiansen, 2023).

Despite the diffuse problem-solver role the norm is associated with, there is still political agreement that the norm should continue to be a part of Oslo's inner city housing policy. On the other hand, commercial interests broadly wish the norm to cease, leaving room for increased freedom, resulting in more targeted development appealing and enabling a broader marked group. In the middle, mixed up in the political and the commercial interest, we find the private interests, the people of Oslo; inhabitants and to-be inhabitants; renters and property speculators; families and singles. These groups and others, with the variations within them, can help point to evidence showing the dysfunction of today's Apartment Norm, and how the norm exists only based on old municipal strategies, despite a lack of statistical reasoning and limited recent evidence of success.

1.2 Aim of This Study

This study aims to do a critical policy analysis of Oslo's Apartment Norm to reveal if the current norm dysfunctions regarding Oslo's current housing situation. Carol Bacchi's critical interrogation tool for public policies, the "What's the Problem Represented to be?" (WPR) approach, will be used to facilitate this. This approach bases analysis on the application of six interrelated questions meant to enable critical examination (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012, p. 21). In this thesis, these questions will examine how Oslo's Apartment Norm constructs a "problem", and dive deeper into the norm to reveal more about its problems, function, history, and background.

1.3 Research Questions

The six research questions as given by the WPR approach are the following:

1. What's the "problem" represented to be in Oslo's Apartment Norm?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the "problem"?
3. How has this representation of the "problem" come about?"
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences?
Can the "problem" be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the "problem"?
6. How/where has this representation of the "problem" been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been (or could it be) questioned, disrupted and replaced?

2 Method

2.1 Methodical and Structural Choices

Before exploring and answering the six research questions provided by the WPR approach, it is befitting to reflect shortly on the methodological and structural choices that were made in this thesis. Traditional thesis structure often follows a linear progression. The outline is predetermined, and the sequence of chapters follows and builds on each other. Often the thesis will start by reviewing a broad amount of literature, and then gradually shift more towards a final topic. Despite this being the most common way to structure a thesis, arguments can be made to suggest the sequence of material can be optimized. To do this, the focus is set early on the immediate issue, compressing the introductory information needed. (Dunleavy, 2003, p. 53-60). My decision of diverging from said traditional structure bases itself on both making the thesis more concrete and to the point, but also allowing more freedom and less repetition within the WPR analysis. As much as possible, the WPR method will be allowed to organize and present the relevant topics and information.

2.2 WPR – “What’s the Problem Represented to be?”

2.2.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the last chapter’s introduction, Oslo’s Apartment Norm exists based on Norway’s national strategy for housing policies, fundamentally opening the norm for policy analysis. Conventional policy analysis often presumes that the purpose of policies is to help fix problems. The WPR approach challenges this, suggesting that policies in fact give shape to the problems they are trying to fix (Bacchi, 2009, p. x). Australian political scientist, Carol Bacchi, developed the approach over the span of a decade before her book on the approach was published in 2009. Bacchi argues that conducting a WPR analysis gives a broader view, as the analysis sees beyond solving policy problems. Instead, the focus is set on the language and discourse in policies, to reveal how this can have implications on how the problem is thought about (Bacchi, 2009, p. 1-2).

Bacchi WPR analysis builds on three key arguments (Bacchi, 2009, p. xxi):

1. We are governed through problematisations.
2. We need to study problematisations (through analysing the problem representations they contain), rather than “problems”.

3. We need to problematise (interrogate) the problematisations on offer through scrutinising the premises and effects of the problem representations they contain.

2.2.2 Application and Structure

By applying and investigating each of the six questions, the process and reasoning behind the WPR approach will become clearer. Despite this, it is beneficial to reason around what each of the questions set out to answer. This is both to supplement, and confirm, that the following answer stays relevant and in line with each of the WPR research questions. Each of the six sections will contain a brief introductory explanation of the question prior to analysis. This includes Bacchi's theory behind the question, as well as how I set out to answer the question methodically. The end paragraph will shortly summarize the key findings in relation to the WPR question, to further confirm relevance. Despite giving an introductory explanation of the question, and a final summary, the main body of each answer will be the findings arising from each of the WPR questions.

2.2.3 Policy Documents and Subject Implications

To get started with a WPR approach to policy analysis, a desired policy to study must be chosen. As this is already determined to be Oslo's Apartment Norm, the next step is to look for raw material to gain a better understanding of the norm's problem representation (Bacchi, 2009, p. 54). Bacchi emphasizes that the selection of this raw material is quite open-ended. While it is often practical to look at legislation and government reports on the matter, text selection remains an interpretive task for the one conducting the analysis. Given the interpretive task of a WPR analysis, it is important to mention the practical implications, as there is obviously room for biased and individual opinions (Bacchi, 2009, p. 9). Because of this, Bacchi recommends giving context for your interpretive starting point for the analysis. This includes text selection explanation, but also reasoning around why I have chosen to look at the Apartment Norm, why it interests me, and how this might influence my view of the subject (Bacchi, 2009, p. 54).

Up to this point of the thesis, several of the mentioned viewpoints and dynamics regarding the Apartment Norm are in line with my own opinions and were vital in my interest to investigate this norm further. I have lived in Oslo my whole life, and desire to keep living here in the future. My current life stage suggests it is time to move from my parents and acquire my own home. With my studies on the verge of completion, and some money saved up from a part-time job, I am progressing toward this opportunity arising. However, becoming a homeowner in Oslo is a

task that has become considerably tougher over the years, especially for first-time buyers. As someone without parental funding for a loan, or the necessary income and equity, it is easy to gain a bias in the discussion of the current housing situation in Oslo. Catching my interest in this discussion is the Apartment Norm, where I have formed an opinion. My view is that today's norm is not cooperating well enough with the current economy, lending practices, market interests, and the target population living in Oslo. I am fully aware I fit the typical life stage with a bias towards the unfair housing situation in Oslo. Detaching from this bias throughout the thesis has been difficult, and something I may have fallen victim to. However, I still feel housing strategies have a place in securing a functioning and inclusive housing market. Overall, I have tried my best to stay aware and critical during the analysis, minimizing the risk of looking for evidence to support my interpretive starting point.

The documents I have chosen to look at serve as a central part of answering the norm's problem representation and consist of two municipal evaluations of the norm. These will help enlighten the problem representation, as well as follow as an important part in the rest of the WPR. Additionally, supplementary literature and documents will be used when relevant, to best answer each of the WPR questions. The two chosen documents can be found on Oslo municipality's website, under the page acknowledging the Apartment Norm. Despite the lack of further explanation regarding these two documents, they are the ones the municipality suggests looking at to acquire more information regarding the background of the norm (Oslo Kommune, 2023). As mentioned, both documents are evaluation documents on the Apartment Norm. The first document is from 2012 and evaluates the pre-2013 norm to suggest how it could be revised. The second document is from 2016 and evaluates the effects of the norm after the 2013 revision. With this, these are the documents:

1. «*Evaluering av norm for leilighetsfordeling – Forslag til revidert norm*», in English; Evaluation of apartment distribution norm – Revised norm proposal. (PBE, 2012a).
2. «*Evaluering av bruk og effekt av leilighetsfordelingsnorm*», in English; Evaluating the use and effect of the Apartment Norm. (PBE, 2016)

Together, these documents from Oslo's Plan and Building Authority, give a broad overview of the situation before and after the latest revision of the Apartment Norm, as they both give insight

into the reasoning behind revising, defending, and maintaining an active apartment distribution norm.

3 WPR Analysis of Oslo's Apartment Norm

3.1 What's the "problem" represented to be in Oslo's Apartment Norm?

Despite being one of the most straightforward questions in the whole WPR analysis, section one of the WPR can be challenging and forms the starting point and the direction for the remainder of the analysis. This question sets out to investigate what the introduction and enforcement of the Apartment Norm desire to change. By working backward, this desired change can be interpreted, which in turn produces the implied problem representation. (Bacchi, 2009, p. 2-3)

3.1.1 Methods Used to Answer This Question

This first section basis its findings on qualitative document analysis of the chosen documents following Bacchi's recommendation for text selection. Combining the WPR section's question with qualitative document analysis narrows the search area within the documents. Therefore, my task during this section was to look through the chosen documents after the problematizations the municipality pointed to when they decided to implement the Apartment Norm.

3.1.2 Apartment Norm Goal

The Apartment Norm was first introduced in 2007, and decided the following size and distribution for newly built development in zoning plans within the inner-city districts:

- Small apartments: Limit of 20% between 40 – 50 m²
- Medium apartments: At least 30% between 50 – 75 m²
- Large apartments: At least 50% over 80 m²

Municipal wishes to better adapt the norm to changing demographic, housing demand, and housing preferences, saw the 2013 revision of the norm. The newly revised norm was said to be more manageable and allow for more flexibility, as it only would control the minimum amount of large apartments and the maximum amount of small apartments (Byrådet, 2013, p. 8). As mentioned in section 1.1, the 2013 Apartment Norm were as follows:

- Category 1: maximum 35% of apartments between 35-50 m².
- Category 2: minimum 40% of apartments over 80 m².

Since the introduction of the Apartment Norm in Oslo, there are a handful of reoccurring targets the municipality claims the norm would enable. In the evaluation and case documents, these are often mentioned in introductions, and the initial and concluding reasoning behind why the norm exists. The overall goal is to secure living and housing qualities through minimum apartment size requirements and varied apartment distribution. The wish is to facilitate an increased housing stock for families with children, which in turn balances the population composition in the inner city of Oslo. The promotion of varied housing is believed to stabilize the population composition, as people would have the opportunity to move into larger apartments suitable for families, within the district they already live in (PBE, 2012a, p. 7-8). Oslo's Plan and Building Authority's 2016 evaluation confirm these goals and conclude that the norm has been effective in controlling demographics, housing distribution and size, and as a case management tool. In line with the WPR, having established what the introduction and enforcement of the norm desired to change, allows me to work backward to look at how the implied problem is represented.

3.1.3 Problem Representation

Having established that the norm's desired goal is to offer varied housing to better facilitate families with children, the next step is to reveal what "problem" stood in the way of this. Investigating the evaluation documents will help reveal the problems the municipality pointed to when they decided to implement the Apartment Norm.

Controlling apartment size and distribution to ensure adequate living qualities in Oslo is nothing new. Prior to the introduction of the Apartment Norm in 2007, Oslo had an earlier addition of a building control tool for newly built apartments called the "rom-norm", or room norm in English. The room norm is quite self-explanatory, instead of controlling apartment square meterage, it controlled the number of rooms within the apartments. The room demands for apartments set by the room norm within new development were the following: 30% two-room apartments, and 70% three-rooms or more, where 30% had to be four-rooms or more (PBE, 2012a, p. 6). Ironically, this pre-courser to the Apartment Norm is one of the key problematizations in the mentioned evaluation and case documents.

Another problematization linking up to why the room norm became problematic in the first place, is the centralization tendencies Oslo experienced during this period, and even to this day. Oslo's offering of educational institutions, varied job markets, and cultural life, combined with the fact that more people strive for an urban lifestyle, secure a steady stream of new inhabitants. Therefore, the demand for housing in the central parts of the city is higher than ever. Being that many of these new inhabitants are either students or young adults, living alone, puts pressure on smaller and cheaper apartments (PBE, 2012a, p. 26).

In combination with Oslo's centralization tendencies, what ended up happening during the room norm era was highly marked-based development. The economy was on the rise, interest rates were low, and the demand for housing in central areas was high. With developers obviously wanting to capitalize on this, the room norm was used to their advantage. Smaller apartments were built simply by reducing the room sizes, to meet the demand for smaller and cheaper apartments for the youngest first-time buyers. Examples of three-room apartments measuring 30 square meters were present, as well as apartments measuring 10-12 square meters (PBE, 2012a, p. 7).

3.1.4 Centralization, Densification, and Immediate Housing Demand

Overall, the most present problematization in the evaluation documents defending the introduction, enforcement, and revision of the Apartment Norm, are the centralization issues Oslo has been experiencing. Oslo's Plan and Building Authority's study on demographic development, urban development, and housing production between 2004 and 2012 (PBE, 2012b) confirms this. With the attractiveness Oslo has in the form of educational, job, and cultural offerings, comes a higher demand for housing than supply can fulfill. Several areas of Oslo have flourished as a result of centralization promoting densification, leading to areas gaining new identities and becoming especially attractive in living the urban lifestyle. As more people choose where they live based on what lifestyle they want to live, the pressure on the inner-city districts rises. Not only does the urban lifestyle attract new inhabitants, but also existing inhabitants such as adult couples with kids that have moved out, allowing them to sell their houses in the outer city, and move into bigger apartments in the inner city. Additionally, family establishment patterns have changed. More people wait longer before they establish a family, thus living longer alone, while at the same time occupying a larger part of the housing stock (PBE, 2012b, p. 5). The advantage that was taken of the pre-2007 norm also accompanies the problem, showing the dangers of pure market-oriented development to quickly supply immediate housing demand.

Centralization and densification, combined with new patterns of living within existing inhabitants, further accompanied by a lenient norm, lead to housing development moving in a different direction than the municipality wanted. As a result, the stricter norm with strategies to better control what was being built got implemented, clearly limiting smaller apartments, while promoting larger ones. By implementing and enforcing this, the municipality revealed an aggressive approach, which in turn formed their opinion on the current housing situation. It became clear that the municipality problematized the inner-city average apartment size, especially the relation between the number of small apartments and the number of large apartments.

3.1.5 Short Answer

Pre 2007, Oslo's centralization tendencies and densifying inner-city districts saw housing development moving in a different direction than the municipality wanted. Current housing policies were being exploited, leaving an overwhelming number of small apartments compared to larger ones.

3.2 What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the "problem"?

Understanding what underpins the problem representation is crucial in this section. What is taken for granted, assumed, and left unquestioned, given the problem representation? The intent behind looking for the presuppositions or assumptions is to gain an understanding of the background knowledge that is taken for granted. By looking at why the problem is not projected differently and investigating what has not been questioned, one can identify the meanings that are in place for the current problem representation to cohere and make sense. Bacchi asks to reflect upon how something happens, not why. This will help point to the meanings that are in place for this to happen, and deep-seated cultural values and social unconsciousness working with the problem representation (Bacchi, 2009, p. 5).

Language is also a factor Bacchi puts weight on, especially binaries, key concepts, and categories, and how these operate within the relevant policy. She argues that identifying and interrogating these will help engage a form of discourse analysis. By looking deeper into the language within the policy, we can begin to draw meaning from how the language is used. This is because Bacchi states that policy is about meaning creation, and therefore the task here becomes to identify how meaning is created using language.

Binaries or dichotomies are often part of public debate, just imagine the discussion between male/female, public/private, economic/social, and so on. Within the binary relationship, there is an exclusion between each of the sides, as well as a hierarchy pointing to which side is more important. Looking at the binary can reveal conceptual logic acting to confuse our understanding of the issue. Therefore, it is important to monitor where they appear within the policy, and how they influence the perception of the issue (Bacchi, 2009, p. 7-8)

Key concepts, like “health” and “welfare”, as Bacchi uses as an example, often find their way into policies. Being abstract labels, they are open to different meanings. Take how Bacchi’s example of “health” can widely differ when you think of well-being versus the absence of disease. Investigating key concepts should point to the main concepts within a policy, as well as the meaning they are labeled (Bacchi, 2009, p. 8).

Categories, especially people categories, are another part of how policies govern, and will also most certainly find their way into policies. These categories are something we need to keep an eye on during our analysis. As with both binaries and key concepts, the task is to not accept the given properties of these categories but rather set out to understand the specific meanings these assign to the problem representation (Bacchi, 2009, p. 9).

3.2.1 Methods Used to Answer This Question

To facilitate the initial analysis of this section, Bacchi’s three language categories will be investigated within the evaluation documents I looked at in section one. Interrogation of the binaries, key concepts, and categories, within these documents, will help guide this section. While all three of these language categories are present within the evaluation documents, beginning with the key concepts makes the core within the norm clearer. After this, the binaries and categories will show whom the norm includes, and whom it may leave behind or disregard. Together, these three language categories will help answer how the current problem representation coheres and makes sense. This section will also present a deep-seated cultural value, especially relevant to the key concept in the Apartment Norm.

3.2.2 The Use of Language for the Meaning Creation of the Apartment Norm

3.2.2.1 *Key Concepts*

“Living” is the most obvious key concept within the evaluation documents of the Apartment Norm. I choose to define it as “living” because there are several variations of this concept essentially pointing to the same thing. Quality of living, living environment, stable living environments, and varied housing. These are closely related during the discussion of the Apartment

Norm within the evaluation documents and often base themselves on each other. The idea is that small apartments do not suffice in terms of quality living and are often outlived rather quickly. What this means is that people move out and into something bigger, affecting the general stability of the living environment in the area (PBE, 2012a, p. 33). To ensure a positive effect on the living environment, the 2012 evaluation explains how larger apartments allow for greater quality and function, which in turn makes it sufficient for living over a longer period. Parts of the argumentation for this base itself on a study of smaller apartments between 24-60 square meters in Trondheim in 2006. Findings showed that the inhabitants were generally satisfied with the function of their apartments, but that 80% could imagine moving in the next five years (PBE, 2012a, p. 8).

Page 3 in the 2016 evaluation further explains how varied housing within each district will have socioeconomic benefits. By securing varied housing, opportunities to live in the same district through several life stages increase, which in turn stabilizes the living environment. Given this, small and affordable apartments are seen as a short-term current need, instead of a long-term strategic development. The belief is that the norm promotes stable living environments by standing against the demand for smaller housing. By doing this, the long-term result will be a more varied housing stock, where the apartments are bigger, and the living environments are more stable. Additionally, the supply and demand for small apartments will decrease.

3.2.2.2 Binaries

Singles and families, short-term and long-term living, outer- and inner-city, and market interests and plan strategies. While the public discussion regarding the Apartment Norm may mention more, these are the main binaries up for discussion within the evaluation documents for the Apartment Norm. As Bacchi mentions, a binary relationship is signified by the exclusion between each of the sides, as well as a hierarchy pointing to which side is more important. From what we have seen thus far, the Apartment Norm is an inner-city involved strategy, which is for families with children, living long-term.

Evidence for the singles and families binary becomes apparent by the outweighing number of times “families” or “families with children” is mentioned in the evaluations, compared to “singles” or variations referring to a single individual. While “Family” is mentioned 14 times in the 2012 evaluation, and 16 times in the 2016 evaluation, variations referring to single individuals

are only mentioned 9 times in both evaluations combined. Furthermore, no evidence of mentioning singles can be seen in the summary or background of each of the evaluation documents.

Short-term and long-term living are apparent factors in the discussion of the norm, where stable living environments are seen as long-term, and unstable living environments are seen as short-term. Page 12-13 in the 2016 evaluation explains how the norm helps secure the quality of living, and the quality of the living environments, by making sure enough large apartments are being built. Page 8 in the 2012 evaluation presents how living qualities and stable living environments can be promoted by the larger apartment's ability to stay satisfactory over a longer period of time.

The outer- and inner-city binary bases itself on the actual area the norm is determined to operate. Page 7 in the 2016 evaluation, mentions that considerable reductions in the number of apartments under 35 square meters can be seen in the outer city. It states that the reason for this relates to the norm being interpreted as a standard for minimum apartment size across town. This clearly contradicts what the 2012 evaluation states on page 25. Here, it is stated that the facilitation of smaller apartments in the outer city will decrease the pressure on smaller apartments in the inner city.

Market interest and plan strategies are relatively contradictory within the norm, thus creating exclusion between each other. Page 7 of the 2012 evaluation, argues how market-oriented development was given too much freedom prior to the 2007 norm. It claims it led to unwanted development, in the form of small apartments, with poorer living qualities than expected. However, page 41 of the 2016 evaluation states that there has become a shortage of small apartments. Instead of changing the norm, the presented solution proposes market-oriented development in the outer city, thus allowing for more small apartments.

3.2.2.3 Categories

Building in the single/family binary, the people categories in the norm mainly revolve around different life stages. The main governing categories in the norm are singles, couples, and families with children. Page 33 in the 2012 evaluation discusses the norm's reasoning behind facilitating larger apartments over 80 square meters. The presented reason is that large apartments fit a variety of households, especially families with children, single parents, and couples. Page 26 in the 2012 evaluation, and page 37 in the 2016 evaluation, further argue for the single

category, acknowledging that most of Oslo's and the norm area's population lives alone, as most households are single households.

3.2.3 Deep-seated Cultural Value of Homeownership

The concept of "living" may seem quite straightforward. Working for the opportunity to enter the housing market, either as a homeowner or as a tenant. In Norway however, "living" is nearly synonymous with being a homeowner. Talks about "getting into the housing market" generally revolve around purchasing your first home and expecting to be a part of a housing market moving upwards (Dyb, 2020, p. 32). The deep-seated cultural value that is homeownership, adds sense to the market-oriented development of smaller apartments prior to the Apartment Norm in 2007. When synonymously looking at "living" and homeownership, these smaller apartments serve as starting points more than homes. Taking the step into homeownership is believed to include you into a housing market moving upwards, while at the same time allowing you to save money and further work towards moving into something bigger and more permanent (Dyb, 2020, p. 33). Furthermore, the advantages of owning your own home exceed the economic benefits. Owners are generally more satisfied with both housing and living environment. The social integration experienced by becoming a homeowner makes networking with other residents easier and gives more opportunities for both receiving help from and giving help to other residents (Dyb, 2020, p. 45).

3.2.4 Short Answer

Underpinning the problem representation is the Norwegian deep-seated cultural value of being homeowners. "Living" is nearly synonymous with becoming a homeowner, as homeownership is believed to include you in a housing market moving upwards, allowing you to further work towards moving into something bigger and more permanent. The language creation within the Apartment Norm somewhat confirms this, as much weight is put on strategies allowing families to live long-term, in quality housing and stable living environments, a considerable goal when it comes to homeownership.

3.3 How has this representation of the "problem" come about?

Investigating and pointing out the circumstances that enable the problem representation to develop and establish dominance is the essence of section three in the WPR. To facilitate this, the objective is to look at specific development and decisions, to reveal how the formation of the identified problem representation takes place (Bacchi, 2009, p. 10). Bacchi uses the example of

investigating genealogy within your family. First, you begin analyzing the present, questioning how the past has guided us here. Looking back in time will rarely reveal a clear path, without any surprises, twists, or turns. The same applies to investigating the problem representation. The idea of natural evolution within the problem representation will be scrutinized when revealing the specific points in time where the twist and turns happened, and key decisions were made.

3.3.1 Methods Used to Answer This Question

Strategies and historical reports from, or made for, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, aids this section. Looking into current housing policy from the Norwegian government gives an idea of how functioning housing markets are enabled, and how this translates to Oslo municipality. Knowing this, we can go back in time, to see how historical developments in national and regional housing policy impacted and helped form the current norm.

3.3.2 Political Guidelines and Strategies

Acquiring a home to live in is first and foremost a private responsibility. Most people will manage this by themselves, with a partner, or with partial help from family or relatives. While the responsibility of acquiring a home lies on the individual, the government's responsibility is to ensure housing policies that enable a functioning housing market nationally through effective planning and building processes. (Kommunal- og moderniseringsdepartementet (KMD), 2020, p. 5).

Norway's latest national strategy for social housing policies emphasizes the importance of a safe home, where the inhabitants feel safe, and can live their life as they wish, as well as giving more people the opportunity to own their own homes. Strategies like this rely on support on a regional level to achieve national goals (KMD, 2020, p. 3). On this regional level, municipal plans, guidance documents, regulatory framework, and in this case norms, become important tools for architects, developers, and contractors. While the appliance of tools can differ from region to region, they all set out to control and guide the planning and construction within cities. Collectively they ensure development that follows national and regional strategies and political guidelines.

In Oslo's case, the strategic use of municipal norms as guidance tools in city planning and construction is rather unique regarding the national context. There are four municipal guidance

norms in Oslo, working together to systematically, predictably, and ambitiously handle both common and important development in the city. In short, they revolve around parking, common areas, apartment size and distribution, and vegetation and water management. While these for the most part apply to the whole city, there are some variations within and between each of the norms. The common ground for each of the norms is that they have no legal basis in Norwegian law or regulatory framework anchored in Norwegian law. Despite this, they should not be mistaken as mere guidance tools for developers. Because the municipality ranks these norms equally to state planning guidelines, the expressed guidance of the norms is expected to be followed in planning and development projects. Therefore, common practice has evolved to include the norms in the regulatory framework in zoning plans, giving the originally non-legally based norm legit legal grounds over city plans and following construction (Oslo kommune, 2023).

3.3.3 Dimensional Requirements Taking Shape

Implementing dimensional requirements to control the minimum apartment size in newly built apartment buildings is not new in Europe. Although the approach to dimensional standards differs, countries like Germany, France, Italy, Spain, The Netherlands, Portugal, and Sweden, have some form of dimensional requirements for either usable floor area, individual rooms, heights, and more (Appolloni & D'Alessandro, 2021, p. 8-9). While the latest revision of Oslo's Apartment Norm was implemented in 2013, variations of building norms controlling apartment size and distribution in Oslo span back decades.

After World War II, the first real sign of building norms somewhat controlling dimensional requirements emerged. This was a period heavily characterized by the lack of housing. While trying to facilitate enough housing for everybody the government founded The Norwegian State Housing Bank (NSHB) (Schmidt, 2009, p. 43). At its core, the NSHB would finance modest housing, while maintaining low cost and reasonable standards (Husbanken, 2022). To achieve these core values, the state slowly implemented guiding building norms through the NSHB. While maintaining core values, these norms would also have a deciding factor in which apartments and housing projects qualified for a mortgage through NSHB (Schmidt, 2009, p. 57). The most prominent norms to emerge after the war was a furniture norm, and an early version of the room norm. While the furniture norm is easier explained and was shorter-lived, the room norm was more complex and evolved more during this period. However, both norms give valuable insight into how dimensional requirements emerged to become a part of strategic housing

policies. While made to deal with the lack of housing, they also contain strategies to maximize the quality of the space available.

While only affecting housing financed by NSHB, both the room norm and the furniture norm worked alongside each other for a period. The furniture norm revolved around how furniture measurements would be taken into consideration when dimensioning rooms within newly built homes (Jørgensen, 1961). The furniture norm became prominent and strictly followed until it was removed in the early 80s (Schmidt, 2009, p. 43). The room norm, however, evolved in tune with the increase in the level of prosperity, but also the availability of housing. At the end of the 1950s, the main objective of this norm was to limit the availability of housing, in the sense that no one should be entitled to more than they need. A single person qualified for a one-room apartment with a separate kitchen, two persons qualified for a two-room apartment with a separate kitchen, and so on (Schmidt, 2009, p. 57). An increasing level of prosperity brought with it changes during the 1970s. The Norwegian parliament decided that two-room apartments with a separate kitchen should be a minimum requirement for singles as well. The NSHB followed this, by demanding that all permanent housing needed to meet a minimum of two rooms and 55 square meters (Schmidt, 2009, p. 11).

In 1985, Oslo municipality introduced a general minimum size of two rooms for newly built apartments. This marks the start of the room norm that precursors today's Apartment Norm. By 1998, the room norm followed the room demands mentioned in sub-section 3.1.3, 30% two-room apartments, and 70% three-room or more, where 30% had to be four-room or more (Schmidt, 2009, p. 58). In late 2007 it was decided by the city council to implement new restrictive building norms within Oslo's most central districts, Gamle Oslo, Grünerløkka, Sagene, St. Haugen, Frogner, Nydalen, and Økern. For the first time, dimensional and distributional norms were set for new development in Oslo, setting the grounds on what today's Apartment Norm bases itself around (Lotherington, 2007). The norm as of late 2007 decided the following size and distribution for newly built development in zoning plans within the decided districts:

- Small apartments: Limit of 20% between 40 – 50 m²
- Medium apartments: At least 30% between 50 – 75 m²
- Large apartments: At least 50% over 80 m²

The introduction of these new guidelines was met with concern. Prominent was the concern of having to initialize development where half of the built apartments were over 80 m². Meeting this guideline of large apartments within newly built development, developers projected lower demand, due to higher development costs. This again pointed the finger back at the council, arguing that the council had misunderstood the market, leading to difficult apartments to turn-over, due to a limited target group (Lotherington, 2007).

With the 2013 revision, the city council wanted to adapt the norm to better suit the current demographic, housing demand, and housing preferences at the time. Flexibility and manageability were used to describe the new revision. This was because the revised norm only would control the minimum amount of large apartments and the maximum amount of small apartments, thus gaining flexibility (Byrådet, 2013, p. 8). As mentioned, this 2013 revision still applies today and decides the following size and distribution for newly built development within the four Oslo districts, Gamle Oslo, Sagene, Grünerløkka, and St. Hanshaugen:

- Maximum 35% of apartments between 35-50 m²
- Minimum 40% of apartments over 80 m²

3.3.4 Key Decisions Affecting the Evolution of the Norm

As we can see, there are multiple factors throughout to confirm how Oslo's Apartment Norm came to be. Although the Norwegian national strategy for social housing policies has been around for a long time, the period after World War II helps us understand how the concept of dimensional requirements emerged. What is apparent through history, is how strategies and the definition of sufficient housing change. Whether post-war or increasing levels of prosperity, periodic high demand for housing pressured existing strategies leading to unwanted housing development, which again promoted changes to municipal strategies. Overall, the post-war period brought with it plenty of dimensional requirement variations and strategies to ensure sufficient housing qualities. The key decisions and changes made within the national strategy for social housing policies and the municipal strategies, in the period from after the war until 2007, are the reason the Apartment Norm exists in the shape that it does today.

3.3.5 Short Answer

Solving the lack of housing after World War II relied on emerging strategic housing policies. As the level of prosperity increased in the period after the war, policies became more considerate towards securing housing as well as securing housing qualities. In Oslo, market-oriented

development sporadically interfered with and exploited municipal housing policies, causing revised policies to further strengthen the strategy used to secure the wanted development.

3.4 What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the “problem” be thought about differently?

Looking at the identified problem representation, section four of the WPR investigates the reflection and consideration issues and the perspectives silenced. Here, the exploration of the critical potential behind the WPR analysis begins to show. Investigating the problem representation in this section sets out to reveal what said representation fails to problematize. The intent is to show how certain issues and perspectives can be silenced, by the way in which the given problematization presents the problem. This does not imply that there are other ways to think about the issue, but rather that policies could constrain themselves by the way their problem is represented (Bacchi, 2009, p. 13).

3.4.1 Methods Used to Answer This Question

Having looked at how history shaped the problem representation, this section focuses on revealing how said representation may silence certain perspectives and issues. Given the binaries and categories presented in section two, the current representation is more considerate of families with children, than younger people and first-time buyers. Because of this, the “problem” will also be thought about differently, essentially showing potential effects if less consideration were given to families with children. By doing so, this section also sets out to reveal what is left unproblematic in the current problem representation, but also what would become problematic if the norm ceased to exist. While this section focuses on presenting impacts, section five will see these in relation to each other, getting into how the problem representation negatively impacts certain groups and thus may need to be reconsidered.

Methodically, the goals in Norway’s latest national strategy for social housing policies serve as a basis. From here, factors that potentially could challenge these goals will be presented. These factors base themselves on findings done by me, from looking through statistics, news, and case documents.

3.4.2 Silenced Perspectives and Issues

What the last section fails to enlighten, is how the Apartment Norm realistically stands in relation to the latest national strategy for social housing policy. Political agreement to continue the

norm by the Norwegian Labour Party could suggest it still complements national strategy. However, the age of the 2016 evaluation of the norm can also suggest that the norm no longer presents a realistic picture of Oslo's current housing situation, and that further investigation is needed. Exploring the silenced perspectives and issues heavily bases itself on the precondition that the political agreement to continue the norm confirms that the problem representation it suggests is still relevant. The whole idea is to show the constraints of the current norm, especially in relation to the current economic situation, society, and housing market.

3.4.2.1 National Strategy for Housing Policies

I choose to start by looking at the goals set by Norway's National strategy for social housing policies, as the other silenced perspectives and issues mentioned in this section potentially could challenge some of these goals. As mentioned in sub-section 3.3.1, Norway's National strategy for social housing policies (2021-2024) emphasizes the importance of a safe home, where the inhabitants feel safe, and can live their life as they wish. To facilitate this, four goals and prioritized effort areas are set by the strategy; More people should be in the position to own their own homes. Renting a home should be a safe option. Social sustainability within the housing policies. Clearer roles, and necessary knowledge and competence (KMD, 2020, p. 4). Especially the goals regarding homeownership and renting a home stand out in the discussion of the silenced perspectives and issues. A home covers one of the most basic needs in the welfare society and is the fourth welfare pillar alongside health, education, and work. Therefore, the government wants to give more people the opportunity to own their own homes, as it increases financial security, but also the preconditions for stable and predictable living conditions. Another added benefit is that the homeownership one day will be inherited, thus carrying on the financial stability, and further securing that the wealth in housing is better distributed within the population (KMD, 2020, p. 12). While around eight of ten people own their own home in Norway, it is still important to ensure that renting a home is as good and safe an option as possible. Despite this, the living conditions of a tenant are generally worse than homeowners. They live in tighter spaces and have more problems with dampness and rot, while at the same time often experiencing an unstable living environment due to short tenancy agreements. Arguments with landlords over rent payments and maintenance are also common. Obviously, there are considerable differences between owning versus renting your home. Further supporting this, is the amount of people experiencing living expenses exceeding 25% of the total house income. While 56% of renters experience this, only 16% of homeowners do. For most homeowners, this has helped considerably to increase savings and financial stability (KMD, 2020, p. 16-17).

3.4.2.2 *Lending Practices, Interest Rates, and Housing Speculators*

Challenging both homeownership and potentially the rental market, are the changes seen in the Norwegian lending practices and the presence of housing speculators. The objective of the Norwegian lending regulation is to ensure the development of household debt remains sustainable and manageable. Regarding homeownership, the regulation sets certain demands on the banks' residential mortgage practices. Factors like debt-serving ability, debt-to-income ratio, and loan-to-property value ratio, must be considered before granting a mortgage. January 1, 2023, a revised lending regulation became effective. While relatively similar to the old, a considerable change can be seen in the equity demands in mortgages for secondary residences. Instead of the prior regulation demand of a maximum 60% loan-to-property value ratio, this was changed to a maximum 85% ratio, the same as for primary residence mortgages (Finansdepartementet, 2022).

Since the introduction of the Apartment Norm in 2007, housing prices in Oslo have grown over 150% (Krogsveen, 2023). Because of this, property speculation and property investment have gradually become a more lucrative endeavor, both for investors, but also regular people. Setting higher equity demands for purchasing secondary residences were first introduced in 2017. Making it harder for individuals that already have homes to purchase a second one, would increase opportunities for first-time buyers. Essentially limiting the market group would serve as a strategy to slow down the increase in housing prices by reducing demand, which in turn would benefit the first-time buyers eligible for mortgages with less equity. By reversing this strategy, property speculators and first-time buyers are again on equal terms. With the current demand for smaller apartments being high, many first-time buyers could experience losing bidding wars to people looking for investment objects, rental properties, or commuter homes.

Furthermore, at the time of writing this, the economy is in an uncertain state, where interest rates are on the rise, and the Norwegian krone is weakening, seeing prices on nearly all goods rise (SSB, 2023). Increasing financial uncertainty for most people should see negative trends in the housing market. However, so far this year this has not been the case. Despite increased interest rates, along with already determined future increases, housing prices are up 6,2% in Oslo as of May 11, 2023, which is far more than many experts could predict. Especially smaller apartments experience bidding wars between multiple buyers (Ekås & Røiseland, 2023). This development is concerning, revealing how much stronger the demand is compared to the supply, implying that there may be an insufficient supply of smaller apartments.

3.4.2.3 *The Nurse Index*

Further adding to the concerning development mentioned in the previous paragraph, is an index called the “nurse index” (Sykepleierindeksen). The index was developed by Real Estate Norway, a publisher of Norwegian housing price statistics, and measures how many of the turned-over homes in select cities in Norway a nurse can get a mortgage to buy. The index is updated by the end of each year, which means the latest index is from 2022. Considering the nursing profession represents a typically decent yearly salary, while at the same time being a cyclical profession, it is well suited to represent such an index. It is important to note that the index's focus is on the marginal buyer, i.e., buyers with no equity, and a 100% financed purchase. Taking the average salary for a nurse, and deducting taxes, living expenses, student loans, and other expenses, leaves the average nurse’s debt-serving ability. After this is done, the maximum mortgage can be calculated, which in turn reveals the percentage of turned-over homes a nurse can afford that year (Eiendom Norge, 2023).

Table 1: Last ten yearly nurse indexes. Source: Bydelsfakta, 2021

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
14,5%	12,7%	18,7%	21,2%	11,7%	3,3%	4,6%	4,3%	3,0%	2,1%	1,5%

As the table shows, a nurse as of 2022, can only afford 1,5% of the turned-over homes in Oslo. This provides solid evidence to show how big the demand has become for the cheapest apartments in Oslo, and how singles without equity or financial backing are on the verge of exclusion from Oslo’s housing market.

3.4.2.4 *Elementary School Children Inside and Outside the Norm Area*

Page 34 in the 2016 evaluation of the norm mentions that it is a known fact that families with children move out of the inner city when their children reach elementary school age. Investigating this is interesting, as it gives an idea of how suited inner-city living is when the children are becoming older. Elementary school in Norway usually begins when you are 6 years old and ends when you are 12 years old. Therefore, I will look at the relationship between elementary school children, and pre-elementary school children, inside and outside the Apartment Norm area. To facilitate this, “Bydelsfakta” will be used. “Bydelsfakta”, or district facts in English, presents central statistics about the population and the living conditions in different districts of Oslo. These statistics can be found on Oslo Municipality’s website. The statistics show the following:

Table 2: Elementary school, and pre-elementary school children, inside and outside norm area.

Source: Bydelsfakta, 2023

	Norm area	Outside norm area
Age 0-6	6,85%	7,92%
Age 6-12	4,6%	8,33%

As we can see, the norm area sees a reduction of children living in the norm area when they reach the elementary school age group. On the other hand, the outside norm area sees growth. This can point to correct claims made in the 2016 evaluation. It can also show indications that families move outside the norm area when their children reach elementary school age.

3.4.2.5 The Norm’s Operating Area

A considerate premise in the current Apartment Norm is that it only operates within four districts in the inner city of Oslo. However, a report done by the Norwegian Association of Real Estate Agents in 2022 (NEF, 2022) argues that the norm can be seen working outside its intended area. Especially when looking at the ratio of small apartments between 10-35 square meters compared to the total amount of housing in Oslo, does this become visible. As the norm strictly excludes these smaller apartments in the inner city, the number of inner-city apartments between 10-35 square meters has dropped from around 14% to 10% since the introduction of the norm in 2007. In the same period, the outer city has also seen a decreasing ratio of small apartments between 10-35 square meters, from 6% to 5% (NEF, 2022, p. 8). Therefore, no compensation for building smaller apartments than 35 square meters can be seen in the outer city. This development is in line with what page 7 of the 2016 norm evaluation mentions, regarding how the norm is being interpreted as a standard for minimum apartment size across town.

3.4.2.6 Rooms Per Person in Oslo

Crowded living is statistically defined as one room or less per person in a household, or less than 25 square meters per person (SSB, 2015). Looking at the number of households in Oslo that have less than one room per person, will give a good indication of which districts struggle with crowded living. This statistic can also be found in “bydelsfakta” on Oslo Municipality’s website. Looking at the statistics on households in Oslo with less than 1 room per person reveals the following difference between the inner-city area affected by the Apartment Norm, and the remainder of the districts (student housing excluded). In the four districts affected by the

Apartment Norm, 11% of the households have less than one room per person. In the remaining eleven districts, this is also around 11%. However, if you look at the four districts in Oslo with the highest number of households with one room or less per person, the average is 15% (Bydelsfakta, 2021). In addition, these four districts are all outside the norm area.

3.4.2.7 “Utebarn”

“Utebarn”, or an outside child directly translated to English, is a new term emerging from the debate on crowded living. An example of this is how the bigger children in a family are not allowed to come home before the younger siblings are in bed, or have had time to do their homework, etc. Big families, with several children of different ages, living in smaller apartments, with limited financial resources, are some of the effects enabling this (Kirkens Bymisjon, 2023).

3.4.2.8 *The Effects of Covid*

Covid-19 and the following lockdown of society lead to massive changes in day-to-day life for most Norwegians. Spending vastly more time at home, especially during daytime weekday hours, our home became more important, and our living conditions became more apparent. Especially families with children, living in homes statistically defined as crowded, saw the biggest challenges regarding living conditions during the Covid period. This is based on their limited space for digital meetings and internet use, but also the children’s limited space to perform important life-unfolding activities (Brattbakk, 2020, p. 7).

3.4.3 Short Answer

Political agreement to continue the norm suggests it still complements the national strategy for housing policies. However, the aging norm evaluations lack a fuller picture of the current housing situation in Oslo, creating silenced perspectives and issues that potentially could challenge goals set by the national strategy for housing policies.

3.5 **What effects are produced by this representation of the “problem”?**

Building on the critical analysis done in section four, question five in the WPR sets out to reveal the effects of the problem representation to allow critical assessment. Established thus far, the WPR approach has a starting point presuming problem representation can unevenly impact different groups of people. However, no standard and predictable pattern follows these arising difficulties within a group like this. Because of this, the reasoning behind interrogating the

problematization and scrutinizing the problem representation within becomes apparent. By doing so, we can look at potential solutions, by understanding where and how they function, and how this potentially can harm or benefit certain individuals (Bacchi, 2009, p. 15)

In addition, Bacchi proposes several sub-questions to consider and investigate in section five.

- What is likely to change, and what is likely to stay the same, with this problem representation?
- Who is likely to benefit, and who is likely to be harmed, with this problem representation?
- How does attributing responsibility for the “problem” affect those so targeted and the perceptions of the rest of the community about who is to “blame”?

Ultimately, the goal of this section is to give aspects on how the problem representation negatively impacts certain groups and hence, may need to be reconsidered.

3.5.1 Methods Used to Answer This Question

This section will show how the current norm impacts certain groups and suggest potential solutions. To further tie together the WPR analysis, the three language categories investigated in section two, sub-section 3.2.2, will act as these “groups”. By doing so, the impacts on the key concept, binaries, and people categories will be put up against the silenced perspectives and issues introduced in section four. Furthermore, these language categories will be investigated in the reverse order they were presented in section two. The reasoning behind this is to show how the impacts on the groups and binaries, could challenge the identified key concept making up the core of the Apartment Norm. The deep-seated cultural value of homeownership will also be discussed in relation to the norm’s key concept. While several of the silenced perspectives and issues can apply to multiple language categories, they will be presented in a way that minimizes repetition.

An overall important aid in the analysis of this section is available housing statistics from both Oslo municipality and other official sources for statistics in Norway. Bacchi’s proposed sub-questions will also be used as a guide in the investigation of the impacts on the language categories and the cultural value of owning your own home. Finishing this section will be a reflection on the potential solutions minimizing the norm’s impact on certain groups. Bacchi’s sub-questions will also be answered to further draw together the findings of this section.

3.5.2 Impacts on the Categories

The main governing categories in the evaluation documents are people categories consisting of singles, couples, single parents, and families with children. As the categories define themselves around different life stages, investigating the issues arising within each of the categories can point to the life stages experiencing most of the issues from the silenced perspectives and issues.

3.5.2.1 *Families with Children*

As families with children are given the most consideration in the current norm, this category will be investigated first. Since the introduction of the norm in 2007, the size of an average new apartment in the norm area has increased from around 60 to 70 square meters (PBE, 2016, p. 27). This is in line with the norm's goal to increase apartment sizes to promote greater quality and function, which in turn makes it sufficient for living over a longer period, especially for families. However, despite the increase in apartment size, indications show that families move out of the norm area when their children reach elementary school age. As mentioned in subsection 3.4.2.4, statistics from 2023 show a difference in the amount of pre-elementary school and elementary school children living inside and outside the norm area. The ratio of children in the norm area drops from 6,85% to 4,6% when they reach the age of 6-12 years old, compared to 0-6 years old. On the other hand, the outside norm area sees an increase in the ratio of children, from 7,92% 0-6-year-olds to 8,33% 6-12-year-olds. This can point to correct claims made in the 2016 evaluation, regarding trends pointing to how families with children move out of the inner city when their children reach elementary school age.

3.5.2.2 *Couples*

While statistics may suggest families with children move outside the norm area when their children reach a certain age, it seems clear that couples continue to settle within the norm area. Between 2014 and 2022, couple households within the norm area increased by 25,1%. In comparison, households consisting of families with children increased by 21,6%, while the total number of households in the norm area increased by 16,9% (Bydelsfakta, 2022). The total increase in households confirms that new development has allowed the norm area to densify. Furthermore, the over-average increase in couples and family households confirms that most of the densification in the norm area comes from these groups. Even though the growth of family households is over the norm area's average, the tendencies pointed to above shows that family living in the city may suffer when the children reach a certain age.

Overall, couples experience few negative effects of the silenced perspectives and issues. Their

flexibility when it comes to apartment size and needs, can be seen in relation to their financials. This arguably makes all apartment sizes promoted by the norm viable for couples, where primarily their financial situation decides factors like location or size.

3.5.2.3 *Singles*

Despite accounting for around 55% of all households in the norm area, single households have seen an under-average growth between 2014 and 2022, at 13,4% (Bydelsfakta, 2022). Being the excluded side in the binary “singles and families” within the evaluation documents, singles experience more of the presented issues than the other categories. One of the strongest indicators pointing to the under-average growth of single households in the norm area between 2014 and 2022, is the nurse index. Presented in sub-section 3.4.2.3, the nurse index realistically shows what percentage of turned-over homes in Oslo a single marginal home buyer can afford. Since 2014, the index has dropped from 18,7% to 1,5%. Important to note is that the index accounts for the entirety of Oslo’s housing market. Given that the four districts within the norm area all have higher apartment prices per square meter than the city average further complicates the idea of singles being able to purchase a home in the norm area (Bydelsfakta, 2021a).

While the factors behind this increasingly challenging housing market for singles can be many, the relevant silenced perspectives and issues point to some of them. First-time buyers are often young and single, with ambitions to somehow establish themselves in the housing market. Presented in sub-section 3.4.2.2, changes in lending practices increase demand for the most attainable and affordable apartments, as first and secondary homebuyers compete on equal terms for housing for different uses. Furthermore, the lack of negative trends in the housing market despite the economic situation is also worrying. Housing prices on the rise, and bidding wars on smaller apartments, are a testament to the current skewed housing supply and demand. Given this, it becomes increasingly problematic when the Apartment Norm can be seen working outside the norm area, interpreting the standard for minimum apartment sizes across town, essentially failing to compensate in the outer city, what the restrictions of the norm limit in the inner city.

3.5.2.4 *Single Parents*

Single parents will inevitably see the same negative effects as singles, amplified by their need for extra space for their children. While the 2012 evaluation argues that apartments over 80 square meters are fitting for single parents, one must consider if a single parent's financial

situation even allows for these larger apartments to be a realistic option. Overall, single-parent households have seen the lowest growth between 2014 and 2022, at just 5,2% (Bydelsfakta, 2022). This further confirms the difficult housing market for singles, especially while needing extra space.

3.5.3 Impacts on the Binaries

As presented in section two, the binaries consist of singles and families, short-term and long-term living, outer- and inner-city, and market interests and plan strategies. These are the main binaries up for discussion in the evaluation documents and will consequently be challenged by the last section's silenced perspectives and issues. By doing so, the binary relationship within each will also be investigated, revealing the effects the silenced perspectives and issues can have on the balance between them.

3.5.3.1 *Singles and Families*

Looking back at the last section's impacts on the language categories can point to several factors in the relationship between the singles and families binary. As determined in both the municipal evaluation documents and the analysis thus far, the dominant and least troubled side in this binary relationship is families. While they are given the most consideration in the current norm, negative effects can arise if more consideration is given to singles instead.

Securing sufficient housing and living environments for families is important, as demonstrated by the silenced issues regarding rooms per person in Oslo, the effects of covid, and the emerging "outside child" term. Covid drastically changed day-to-day life for most households, arguably families the most. Having all family members spend more time at home became troublesome for many, especially crowded households. This also becomes apparent by the emerging term for defining children that are less welcome at home during daytime hours, due to limited space. As presented in sub-section 3.4.2.6, crowded living within the norm area is equal to the remaining districts in Oslo. 11% of the households within and outside the norm area are classified as crowded, i.e., less than one room per person. However, looking at the four most crowded districts outside the norm area reveals an average of 15% crowded households. While the current norm problematizes the number of smaller apartments in the norm area, the presented statistics on crowded living suggest that districts outside the norm area potentially struggle more with this.

3.5.3.2 Short-term and Long-term Living

The norm's evaluation documents look at large apartments as a driving factor for stable living environments in the norm area, as they better promote stable and long-term living, due to their ability to stay satisfactory over longer periods of time, possibly through different life stages. However, the current housing situation in Oslo requires looking at the driving factors behind stable living environments differently. As of 2021, the percentage of households that rent their home within the districts of the norm area ranges from 35% to 47% (Bydelsfakta, 2021b). While owning versus renting your home does not necessarily indicate the timeframe you intend to live somewhere, several homeowner benefits can have a positive effect on longevity. Homeowners experience added social and economic benefits, as well as being more satisfied with their housing and living environment. As presented in sub-section 3.4.2.1, the latest National strategy for housing policies reveals considerable differences in living expenses between tenants and homeowners. Over half of Norway's tenants experience living expenses exceeding 25% of their total house income, while only 16% of homeowners do. Given this, tenants are more prone than homeowners to experience economic instability that can influence the stability of living. Furthermore, as mentioned in sub-section 3.2.3, added homeowner satisfaction when it comes to housing and living environment, as well as social integration, further strengthens the possibility for long-term living.

3.5.3.3 Outer- and Inner-city

Arguments can be made to suggest how time has allowed the norm to impact areas of Oslo it was never intended to. Per sub-section 3.2.2.2, five years after the introduction of the 2007 Apartment Norm, the 2012 evaluation of the norm does not mention anything to suggest the norm had an impact on apartment sizes in the outer city. In the 2016 evaluation, however, indications suggest the norm is being interpreted as a standard for minimum apartment size across town. This is further established in the 2022 report by the Norwegian Association of Real Estate Agents, claiming the norm could be seen working outside its intended area.

3.5.3.4 Market Interest and Plan Strategies

Building further on the outer- and inner-city binary, the interpretation of the norm as a standard for minimum apartment size has decreased the housing share of smaller apartments. Market-oriented planning pre-norm became a nuisance for the municipality. Even though smaller apartments were attractive and sought after, they did not fit the municipal inner-city housing strategy. In the 2012 evaluation (see sub-section 3.2.2.2), the facilitation of smaller apartments in the

outer city was believed to decrease the pressure on small apartments in the inner city. However, since the introduction of the norm, the number of apartments between 10-35 square meters has dropped both inside and outside the norm area, see sub-section 3.4.2.5. While the drop from 14% to 10% in the norm area is expected, the drop from 6% to 5% in the outer city shows that no compensation for smaller apartments has been done, further confirming the effect of the norm outside its intended area. While the decrease in smaller apartments is obviously in line with the municipal plan strategies, one can argue that the pressure on small apartments across town is higher than ever. Mentioned in sub-section 3.4.2.2, housing prices in Oslo keep rising despite increased interest rates and a shaky current and future economy. Especially small apartments experience bidding wars between multiple buyers, a concerning development testament to higher demand than supply.

3.5.4 Impact on the Key Concept

Determined in sub-section 3.2.2.1, the norm's concept of "living" consists of several variations. These include quality of living, living environment, stable living environments, and varied housing. Together, the idea is that these variations promote sufficient apartments for living over a longer period, while at the same time increasing the opportunities to live in the same district through several life stages. Issues arising within the categories and the binaries could challenge this, especially in relation to the deep-seated cultural value of owning your own home.

The deep-seated cultural value of owning your own home somewhat contradicts the norm's key concept of living. Per sub-section 3.2.4, the concept of "living" is nearly synonymous with being a homeowner. The belief is that homeownership includes you in a housing market moving upwards, allowing you to further work towards moving into something bigger and more permanent. Language creation within the norm confirms this, as much weight is put on strategies allowing individuals, and especially families, to live long-term, in quality housing and stable living environments. However, the development seen in Oslo's housing market, combined with the effects of the silenced perspectives and issues, could challenge the initial step into homeownership and the cultural value of owning your own home.

Making up most of the households within the norm area, singles are affected the most by the silenced perspectives and issues. They are in a life stage struggling to establish themselves, not only in the norm area but in Oslo in general. The increase in average apartment size, coupled with the decreasing stock of apartments under 35 square meters, has influenced the single

marginal home buyer. Lending practices have also changed, allowing first and secondary homebuyers to compete on equal financial terms. The norm's resistance in the facilitation of small and affordable apartments in the norm area, while at the same time failing to compensate for this in the outer city, has ultimately led to even more pressure on the few small apartments that exist. This is contradictory to the arguments made in the 2016 norm evaluation, per sub-section 3.2.2.1, regarding how the long-term result of demoting smaller apartments would lead to diminishing demand. Explaining the current demand for small apartments makes more sense when these are looked at as a starting point in an individual housing career, rather than a permanent home. The concept of "living" in the evaluation of the norm fails to facilitate the need for an affordable way into the added benefits of homeownership, especially for singles.

Couples and families are life stages less affected by this. While both governing categories have seen an over-average growth in inner-city households, couples stand out as the least affected category regarding the silenced perspectives and issues. This is a life stage with a generally more stable economy and less responsibility, while at the same time having the flexibility to choose between almost all the apartment sizes promoted by the norm. Many couples eventually take the step into becoming a family someday, however, trends point to how some potentially move out of the inner city seeking living environment changes when their children reach school age. With this, the difference seen in crowded living inside and outside the norm area is concerning. While the norm has been successful in demoting smaller apartments, subsequently leading to an increase in the average apartment size in the norm area, several districts in the outer city still struggle with crowded households and could benefit from strategies to increase average apartment size.

Overall, investigating the variations making up the key concept of the norm reveal some concerning issues. Adding concern to the discussion of the norm's key concept and the cultural value of owning your own home is the development seen in the number of households in Oslo that rent their home. Sub-section 3.5.3.2 revealed that the percentage of households that rent their home within the districts in the norm area ranges from 35% to 47%. Furthermore, ownership statistics for Oslo in 2022 show that 52,1% of people aged 20-29 years old, and 29,6% of people aged between 30-39 years old, rent their homes (SSB, 2023a). Considering around 80% of Norwegians own their own home per sub-section 3.4.2.1, Oslo's ownership statistics show indications of the difficulties and the timeframe involved in working towards homeownership in Oslo, especially for the younger and presumably first-time buyers. In context, around 20%

or less of the older age groups in Oslo rent their homes. While it is uncertain if owning versus renting your home indicates the timeframe one intends to live somewhere, the added social, lived, and financial benefits of being a homeowner should have a positive effect on the norm's wish for stable living environments.

3.5.5 Potential Solutions

Going back to the introductory part of this thesis, the nature of the current Apartment Norm can be confusing. Its problem-solver role has become rather diffuse, and despite the political agreement to keep the norm, its unbalanced nature paves the way for silenced perspectives and issues. Much of this has to do with how the norm has influenced districts it never had the intention to interfere with. While the norm originated as a building control tool within four inner-city districts, time has allowed the minimum requirements of the norm to be interpreted as the standard across town. Whether this is because the strategy of the norm is valued, or it makes case management for the districts easier, the interference in the outer-city districts opens the norm up for critique regarding the housing situation across town.

Given this, a good place to start would be to revise the norm to better facilitate the current housing situation. Especially the difficulties singles are having establishing themselves in the housing market, and the crowded living seen in some outer-city districts is concerning. Making a more comprehensive norm officially working across town can better promote distinctive strategies for different districts, while also avoiding the possibility of interfering strategies between districts. Furthermore, the key concept within the norm should promote homeownership more, as the initial step into homeownership is important in securing social, lived, and financial benefits.

3.5.6 Bacchi's Sub-questions

3.5.6.1 *What is likely to change, and what is likely to stay the same, with this problem representation?*

Keeping the norm as is should continue the growth seen in the average inner-city apartment size. Subsequently, the share of small apartments will continue to decrease, both inside and outside the norm area, maintaining high demand for these smaller apartments. The growth of inner-city single households will continue to stagnate, while couple and family households will continue an over-average growth. Overall, several factors point to an almost exponential development of today's situation. Increasing inner-city apartment size averages, with more couple

and family households. Decreasing housing share of smaller apartments, with fewer single households. Together, maintaining fewer new apartments built each year than demanded, due to increased unit size. Changes would also be visible regarding living quality, living environment, and living perspective. The average apartment quality would increase, promoting better function over time, possibly leading to longer living perspectives. In terms of living environment, the housing variation would suffer, leading to more apartments suitable for families and couples, than singles.

3.5.6.2 Who is likely to benefit, and who is likely to be harmed, with this problem representation?

Exponential development should also be seen regarding who benefits and not. The possibilities for first-time buyers and singles to become homeowners in the city would continue to suffer. Given the large single population living in the norm area, the rental market would see increased demand, possibly benefitting landlords and property speculators. Increased apartment sizes could also lead to more collective housing, as the supply of small apartments to live alone in is limited. Good financials or financial help could be a must to afford to buy an apartment, as the average price increase and the average size is gradually growing.

3.5.6.3 Attributing responsibility - Can someone be blamed?

Attributing blame for the negative effects the silenced perspectives and issues have on certain groups is hard. Many of the arising issues go far beyond the perspective of the current norm and would potentially be part of the much bigger questions raised in national policy for housing. While the lack of consideration for the cultural value of homeownership is the biggest letdown of the current norm, it might be the deep-seated nature of this that is at fault.

Established thus far, most Norwegians are homeowners. Public debate and criticism around rising housing prices and a toughening housing market can therefore easily be one-sided, as potentially eight out of ten Norwegians see minimal effects of this. Among these homeowners are inevitably politicians, journalists, bureaucrats, the biggest voter groups, and other important groups affecting the public agenda.

3.5.7 Short Answer

An active inner-city Apartment Norm interfering with areas outside the norm area has opened the norm for critique regarding the housing situation across town. First-time buyers and singles are struggling to establish themselves in the housing market, due to the declining housing share

of small apartments across town. Problematized crowded living in the inner-city seems outdated, as several outer-city districts struggle more with this. The deep-seated cultural value of homeownership, and lived benefits of this, are overlooked in the current norm, essentially leading to norm strategies promoting development that bases living quality, living environment, and living perspective, solely on apartment size.

3.6 How/where has this representation of the “problem” been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been (or could it be) questioned, disrupted and replaced?

The sixth, and final section of the WPR, builds further on the circumstances that enable the problem representation to develop and establish dominance, as introduced in question three. Investigating the way problem representation reaches its intended audience and achieves legitimacy is central to this section. Furthermore, the media’s stand on the problem representation should also be investigated (Bacchi, 2009, p. 19).

3.6.1 Methods Used to Answer This Question

This section will shortly be getting into the political, corporate, and media stand on the “problem”. This will further establish how the problem representation establishes dominance and how it has been disrupted and criticized, giving valuable insight into how the current situation stacks up compared to the findings in the analysis.

3.6.2 Political Response

The latest publicly available document with a political response to the effects of the Apartment Norm is the 2016 evaluation. Considering the political agreement to continue the norm by the Norwegian Labor Party earlier this year (Kristiansen, 2013), it is reasonable to presume that most of the conclusive arguments regarding the norm, made in the 2016 evaluation, still apply today. Additionally, support from politicians from parties like The Red Party, The Green Party, and The Socialist Left Party, can be seen (Vestreng, 2023). The whole point behind the 2016 evaluation was to evaluate if the norm had worked as intended and explore if a new revision could be needed. By looking at the conclusion of the evaluation, we can gain a rough overview of the political justification behind the norm, arguments for its effectiveness, and what, if any, issues were discovered during the evaluation. Overall, the conclusive argument in the 2016 evaluation is that the norm should remain as a building control tool in Oslo. It was however

pointed out that increased development of smaller apartments should be considered, which is in tune with several points made thus far in the WPR analysis.

Defending the norm was its ability to secure good, varied, and attractive living environments through minimum requirements for apartment sizes. The evaluation confirms that apartment sizes in the norm area have increased, leading to an increased amount of family households. Smaller apartments have suffered, seeing less development than the norm allows within and outside the norm area. Overall, the evaluation sees little effect in revising the norm. It does indicate how the current norm area is not suited to handle all of Oslo's population growth, and that market-oriented planning, especially focusing on smaller apartments, could be initiated more in the outer city (PBE, 2016, p. 40-41).

3.6.3 Market and Corporate Response

Given the age of the 2016 evaluation's defense of the apartment norm, responses from market interest and corporate hold can be seen, in the form of critique of the current norm or capitalization on the effects of the current housing situation. In terms of response from the market, the most recent is the 2022 report from the Norwegian Association of Real Estate Agents mentioned earlier. Regarding corporate response, multiple co-owner concepts have emerged in the last few years, realizing homeownership for those who do not qualify for big enough mortgages to afford the home they want.

As mentioned earlier in sub-section 3.4.2.6, the 2022 report from the Norwegian Association of Real Estate Agents reveals several effects arising from the enforcement of the norm. The housing stock in the inner-city areas has become more varied, by reducing the number of small apartments under 35 square meters and increasing the number of apartments over 80 square meters. However, the norm can be seen working outside the norm area, as the construction of small apartments under 35 square meters in the outer city has seized. The report concludes that compensation for apartments under 35 square meters has been done by apartments between 35-50 square meters, both within and outside the norm area. It also predicts that the rising housing prices will make it difficult for single households to become homeowners in the inner city, blaming the norm for failing to facilitate the development of smaller apartments with lower unit prices (NEF, 2022, p. 11)

On the topic of rising housing prices and the growing difficulty of becoming a homeowner, several co-ownership models can be seen emerging as of late. As homeownership is becoming gradually more unrealistic for many, these co-ownership models wish to include the excluded. The methods to enable this vary and differences between them can be seen. One side of co-ownership goes through a developer of housing projects. This usually works by purchasing 50% or more of the apartment and renting the rest from the developer for the current market price (OBOS, 2023). The only drawback is that you must buy an apartment from the actual developer, within development projects offering co-ownership. This essentially limits your choice of apartment considerably. Another important factor is an incentive to offer co-ownership. As demand for housing remains high, the easy nature of just straight-up selling the apartments can threaten co-ownership models like this.

The other side of co-ownership is through companies offering this. This method usually involves a firm helping the homebuyer with equity requirements, and in turn, claiming a part of the value-add as their return on investment when you come to sell the apartment. An example from a company offering is the following. Value is created by the installment payments made on the mortgage and the increase/reduction in housing value. With this value in mind, the company's share for offering co-ownership will be four times the initial investment made. The initial investment cannot be more than 10% of the total purchasing price (Finit, 2023). Simplifying this, even if the housing prices increased nothing over 3 years when you come to sell your co-owned apartment, the company would claim 40% of your installment payments as their return on investment if their initial investment were 10% of the total purchase price. While this method allows co-ownership on all homes, the potential capitalization can be considerably larger depending on the development of the housing market.

3.6.4 Media Response

Response in the media has definitively been the biggest arena for both criticism and support of the current Apartment Norm. Many of the silenced perspectives and issues, as well as the governing categories, have come to light in the media through debates, articles, and opinions, from politicians, organizations, associations, citizens, developers, and more. A lot of the response in the media is also quite recent, as the norm gained an agenda after it failed to be dismissed during the decision of a new party program for the Norwegian Labor Party in January 2023 (Kristiansen, 2023). Investigating the media's stand on the norm makes it apparent that criticism of the norm is much more common than supportive arguments.

The main supporting arguments present are based on the dangers of crowded living, leading to emerging terms like “outside children” and unstable living environments where people move frequently. Another present argument has to do with transportation, regarding the mobility needs families with children have. In a recent news article, the Deputy mayor in Oslo, Labor Party politician Abdullah Alsabeehg, debated why Oslo needs the Apartment Norm. He argues that the norm is effective in securing sufficient housing for families and is a preventative measure to the arising problems of crowded living and “outside children”. He further argues how the current lending practices are not suited to complement a non-existing norm allowing for more small apartments, and that this will lead to small apartments becoming secondary residences or speculation objects, rather than homes for first-time buyers (Alsabeehg, 2023). Another present argument revolves around the transportation and service needs a typical family with children have. Given the environmental goals in Oslo, facilitating family living in the city, where service offerings are high and public transport is good, can reduce much of the car-based transport needed by families (Lunke, 2023).

On the other side of the discussion are both long-time and arising critics of the norm, mainly developers, associations, politicians, and homebuyers. Common critique agrees that the norm plays a part in the difficulties of becoming a homeowner. It is also pointed out that the norm has failed itself. Discussing the failure of the norm is the Norwegian Association of Real Estate Agents. They argue that the norm’s failure can be seen in the household development in Oslo from 2008-2022, where single households have decreased, couple households have increased, and family households with small children remain unchanged. With this, they suggest the winners of the norm are couples with good financials, while singles trying to establish themselves in the housing market are the losers (Wig, 2023).

Politicians from The Conservative Party and The Progress Party can be seen criticizing the norm. The Progress Party politician, and group leader in the city council, Camilla Wilhelmsen, criticizes how the norm is being used all over Oslo. Her reasoning comes from having looked through all received zoning plans in the city council over the last three years. She also problematizes the nurse index, as mentioned in sub-section 3.4.2.3, and how the solution for the declining index is to build more small apartments aimed at first-time buyers and those without financial backing, to get more people into the housing market (Vestreng, 2023).

Commentaries from Oslo inhabitants, especially the younger ones, have also become more present in the media over the years. While some of these carry a certain bias because they are written by politically engaged youths with ties to political parties, commentaries without political ties are also present. We can read about non-politically involved Ane, who has lived in an 18-square-meter apartment for four years and enjoys how it has become a part of her. She reflects on how living centrally in town compensates for having less space than normal (Tolfsen et al., 2020). We can also read about 19-year-old Elisabeth, with ties to the Conservative Party of Norway. She criticizes how the debate on housing only revolves around how some groups of people need more space, while not mentioning something about singles, who would be glad to have less space if it means increasing their opportunity for available housing (Tangen, 2023). What they have in common is criticism toward the single hostile nature of the current norm, as well as an appreciation for smaller apartments and how they benefit first-time buyers by enabling an overcoming step into the housing market. Especially interesting is how little politically biased comments and debates from youths can be seen from the political parties currently supporting the norm.

One of the newer problematizations in the media has to do with the rising interest rates, increased costs on nearly all goods, and the low rate of zoning. This has led to a dramatic decrease in new development projects nationally. In Oslo, the rigidity of the norm also plays a part. Bigger apartments are often harder to sell, thus making the initialization of new projects in a rocky economy harder to justify. In Norway, as of March 2023, the initialization of new housing projects was down 64% and the sale of new housing was down 44%, compared to March 2022. This has essentially limited the available housing, putting tremendous pressure on existing housing, and subsequently increasing housing prices (Mikaelsen, 2023). The CEO of one of Norway's largest developers, JM Housing, criticizes the current housing policy in Oslo, and its inability to meet the demand for housing, especially during the present unstable economic period. While the zoning of new development has decreased in the last year, it has been inconsistent and lower than the demand for several years. She fears the welfare good of homeownership in the national strategy for housing policies, per sub-section 3.4.2.1, is in danger. Oslo's gradually increasing housing demand, without sufficient supply, can lead to a class distinction between those with financial support from parents, and those without (Vatne, 2022).

3.6.5 Short Answer

Politically, the norm has been, and still is, supported by the majority in Oslo's city council. The last political evaluation of the norm suggests it still works as intended, even though the lack of facilitation for smaller apartments was a concern. Despite the concern, no change has been seen. Judging the response from associations, corporations, and the media, the lack of facilitation for smaller apartments is problematic. With rising average apartment sizes, and consistently lower apartment supply than demand, winners and losers of the current norm start to show. Increased difficulty becoming a first-time homeowner and more apparent class distinctions between different life stages, could end up threatening the cultural value of homeownership.

4 Conclusion

A critical policy analysis, in the form of a WPR analysis of the Apartment Norm, has allowed for a deeper dive into the norm's problems, function, history, and background. Relying on the WPR questions to determine the structure and organization of information has been effective in enabling a comprehensive and to-the-point analysis. Looking at the short answers to each of the WPR questions, and rearranging them in chronological order, presents a systematic overview of how the norm has emerged, functioned, and impacted Oslo's housing situation.

Solving the lack of housing after World War II relied on emerging strategic housing policies. As the level of prosperity increased in the period after the war, policies became more considerate towards securing housing as well as securing housing qualities. Over the years, market-oriented development sporadically interfered with and exploited these housing policies, causing revised policies to further strengthen the strategy used to secure the wanted development. Prior to the introduction of the 2007 Apartment Norm, Oslo's centralization tendencies and densifying inner-city districts saw housing development moving in a different direction than the municipality wanted. Current housing policies saw market-oriented exploitation, leading to development with an overwhelming number of small apartments compared to larger ones. In addition to being a result of centralization, this development could be underpinned by the Norwegian deep-seated cultural value of being homeowners. In Norway, "living" is nearly synonymous with becoming a homeowner. Homeownership is believed to include you in a housing market moving upwards, allowing you to further work towards moving into something bigger and more permanent.

Homeownership and living qualities are key goals within Norway's national strategy for housing policies. The language creation within the Apartment Norm somewhat confirms this, as much weight is put on strategies allowing families to live long-term, in quality housing and stable living environments; that is, a considerable goal when it comes to homeownership. Political agreement to continue the norm suggests it still complements the national strategy for housing policies. However, the aging political evaluations of the norm lack a fuller picture of the current housing situation in Oslo, creating silenced perspectives and issues that could potentially challenge the goals set by the national strategy for housing policies.

Complicating this is how the active inner-city Apartment Norm interferes with areas outside the norm area, opening the norm for critique regarding the housing situation across town. First-time buyers and singles are struggling to establish themselves in the housing market, due to the declining housing share of small apartments across town. Problematized crowded living in the inner-city seems outdated, as several outer-city districts struggle more with this. The deep-seated cultural value of homeownership, especially the lived benefits of this, are overlooked in the current norm, essentially leading to norm strategies promoting development that bases living quality, living environment, and living perspective, solely on apartment size.

Politically, the norm has been, and still is, supported by the majority in Oslo's city council. The last political evaluation of the norm suggests it still works as intended, even though the lack of facilitation for smaller apartments was a concern. Despite this concern, no change has been seen. Judging the response from associations, corporations, and the media, the lack of facilitation for smaller apartments is indeed problematic. With rising average apartment sizes, and consistently lower apartment supply than demand, winners and losers of the current norm start to show. Increased difficulty becoming a first-time homeowner and more apparent class distinctions between different life stages, could end up threatening the cultural value of homeownership.

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