Sustainable Integration of Refugees in Norway

A service design approach

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ABSTRACT

This article will explore how the use of service design methods and design thinking can improve the daily life of refugees and asylum seekers. It will discuss the difficulty of working and designing, for and with this marginalized group, and attempt to include refugees in a co-design process. By using this approach, the article will seek to identify the most common needs of refugees and asylum seekers. As a result of the findings, it will discuss how service design can offer more value for future refugees, as well as the society, in the aims of improving integration. A set of methods for identifying needs will be presented, and the article will explore the concept of focus groups.

KEYWORDS: Service design, visual dialogue, co-design, design thinking, marginalized groups, integration, focus groups

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to experiment with 'designerly tools' and methods, in the pursuit of understanding and creating useful services for and with refugees and/or asylum seekers as "end-users". It is intricate to gain information for mapping out this user groups needs, due to differences in language, religion, and culture. The article will explore if certain design tools and methods can prove helpful in the process. Norman W. Sheenan [1] elaborates; "Design is active human intersection materials, products, social interactions, and environments; therefore, design occupies a pivotal position for any change in cultural direction." As of today, designers are not actively involved in integrating refugees, and design thinking is not tried as a manner of improving the integration process and well being of refugees. A successful integration is beneficial for the

refugees, government, and people of the "host" country. Norway hosts refugees from over a hundred different countries, the most frequent countries being Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Somalia covering 44% of the asylum seekers in 2012 [2]. The holistic integration picture is quite complex. Multiple organizations and experts within different fields are involved - which creates a wide network of institutions working together. The focus of the article will therefore be limited down to a simplified overview, directed towards the main areas of the refugee's and asylum seeker's experience. The article will begin to explain and define terms and research used in the article, and gives an introduction to the refugee's main touch points towards citizenship. A focus group with refugees living in Norway will be consulted to understand and discover the pain points. Problem areas will be highlighted, and the article will discuss how service design can improve integration.

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1.1 Marginalized groups

Marginalized people lack opportunities compared to the majority in society in matters of getting a job, socializing, being respected as a group, or being part of the larger society. They may feel separated or left out from the mainstream and labeled "different" in a negative point of view [3]. This article will focus on the marginalized group of refugees and asylum seekers in Norway.

1.2 Service Design

Service design is a fairly new and evolving direction within design, and thus also interpreted and explained in different ways. The Copenhagen institute of interaction design (2008) [4] gives the following definition: "Service design as a practice generally results in the design of systems and processes aimed at providing a holistic service to the user". Norsk Designråd [5] describes service design as "Design of services to create increased value for the user and the distributer of the service". UK Design Council (2010) [4] elaborates "Service design is all about making the service you deliver useful, usable, efficient, effective and desirable". By implementing service design methods to develop a service, the service is more likely to:

- Satisfy the user's needs
- Provide a good user experience
- Create a better working environment for the service creators
- Provide a better use of resources and a better social economy

1.3 The principals of successful service design

Stickdorn and Schneider [4] presents five principles of service design thinking, aimed at creating a good service:

- User-centered: The designer needs to walk in the user's shoes and understand their perception of the service.
- 2. **Co-creative**: The service will benefit from being designed by people involved in the

service together with the designer. A service often contains multiple actors, with different roles in the process. It is important to get everybody involved locating the problem areas, as well as identifying needs and experiences.

- 3. Sequencing: The service should be visualized as a sequence of interrelated actions. A holistic view of the process will build a better foundation for a good service design solution. The importance lies in acknowledging all relevant touch points in the service, and how the users interact with tangible and intangible elements of the service.
- Evidencing: Services can be intangible and hard to grasp, but they can be made more tangible through physical evidence. For example a receipt can be proof of receiving a service.
- 5. **Holistic**: The entire environment of the service should be considered when designing. One bad experience in the "journey" can ruin the total experience.

These pointers will be used as guidance when working with the marginalized users, in attempt to understand the refugees' experiences through focus groups. Service blueprints will be used for visualization of the asylum journey, and to get a holistic view of the important steps in the process. Design methods will be used to explore needs and wants, as well as attempt to create ideas towards improvement.

1.3 Refugees as "end-user"

Working with a marginalized group such as refugees; cultural boundaries emerge, prejudice may be present, body language is interpreted differently, trust may be an issue, and the language barrier can be significant. The end-user might feel vulnerable sharing their needs, emotions, and experiences. A feeling of security and trust is therefore key for successful collaboration. If the user does not feel secure while working with the designer, the information gained may be faulty or limited. This may be

particularly true when working with asylum seekers or refugees as the end-user. Refugees may be people on the run, dependent on their asylum application to be approved. Suspicion can arise towards their answers and involvement affecting their asylum application. This can lead to serving answers imagined beneficial towards their personal case. Not speaking the same language, and at the same time ascending from different cultures, makes it hard to communicate. An interpreter is commonly used to facilitate communication, but information may be lost through translation. When the communication is done through an interpreter, it is hard to follow which facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language, belonged to which word or sentence [6].

2. THE INTEGRATION PROCESS IN NORWAY

The asylum process in Norway can be simplified down to four main steps, which will be investigated in this research:

- 1) The refugee arrives in Norway.
- 2) The refugee arrives at the "transit reception center" where he/she goes through an interview and medical check-up.
- 3) The refugee arrives at the asylum, where he/she stays until an answer to the application is finalized. The average waiting time inside an asylum is seven months [7], however some stay for several years.
- 4) The refugee gets accepted or rejected, hence move in to the society, or is sent out of the country.

2.1 Problem Areas

Various problem areas connected to the asylum and integration process are highlighted in a report in collaboration of The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) and the Agency for Public Management and eGovernment Difi [8]: Motivation, stress, information flow in the asylums, communication, trust, resources like TV and internet, education of women with children, getting a job, cultural differences, integration with local communities, learning, socializing, and

waiting with little occupation in the daily life. Said problem areas have mainly been discovered through interviews and questioners of employees and refugees inside an asylum. Little focus has been given towards integration outside the asylum, or connecting refugees to society while inside.

3. METHODS

There is a range of methods that can be used for gathering information about the experiences, needs, and wants, of the end-users. Thus it is important to evaluate whom you are gathering information from, and what their skills and abilities are. In association with refugees as endusers, it can be beneficial to implement visual tools that could be understood across different cultures and languages. Norman W. Sheenan [1] manifests: "Images position humans to view together and share explanations so that we can understand them". Use of design methods can create a setting where you interact with both visualization and communication on a different level than in an interview. 'Designerly' methods may set the focus upon a task - hence not directly towards the participant - thus information given can be made less personal. Following are some examples of design methods perceived suitable when working with refugees as a marginalized group. The methods will be tried out in the focus groups.

3.1 Service Blueprint with icons

Service blueprints [4] are usually implemented to map out all stages of a service to gain a holistic view of everything occurring. A service blueprint can be made highly detailed or simplified. The level of detail depends on who you are exploring it with, and how useful insight about every bit of the service is. When working with refugees it can be profitable with a less detailed blueprint containing the major touch points, to make it comprehensible. Emotional icons may be used to help explain the different settings and feelings of the journey.

3.2 Statement cards – true or false

"Statement cards" can be an efficient tool, to start discussions around specific topics. By using an already existing statement, the participants can discuss the statement freely. It aims to trigger participants to react, whether they agree or disagree, without being the "owner" of the statement. The discussion is meant to lead to the placing of the statement card as "true" or "false".

3.3 What if

The "What if" method [9] is used to examine the participants' thoughts towards improvement by producing multiple post-its within a time limit, starting with "What if". The method is directed towards co-designing and problem solving.

4. FOCUS GROUPS

Researching information about a group is not the same as experiencing information from a group, as Norman W. Sheenan [1] also touches on in his article. To gain face-to-face insight of the user experience of the asylum- and integration process, a focus group of approved former asylum applicants was formed. This choice was made due to them being able to produce more direct and trustworthy information, since not under the stress and fear of their application being influenced by participation. An advantage is that they have already been through the whole process, and perhaps spent years inside an asylum. On the opposite side the participants could be influenced by the fact that they are accepted refugees grateful towards the system thus not want to highlight the negatives. However, it was considered an ethical choice to choose settled refugees for the focus groups, to exclude involvement with the false pretense that participation might help their situation. Forming a focus group with asylum seekers also proved difficult due to a long waiting time for the asylum access application to get approved. Hence, the opportunity of consulting with asylum seekers living in an asylum was not available.

4.1 Creating a focus group

Sage Research Methods [10] highlight some important aspects to be considered when creating a focus group. During focus group, information given from participants needs to be collected. Videotaping and recording the group sessions may restrict the researcher from actually experiencing what is going on real time, when listening to a tape or seeing it on video later. Simultaneously, videotaping and recording might make the participants more aware of what they say or do, which may limit their actions. For this study videotaping was rejected, for the reasons above, and to make the participants feel more protected towards their privacy. However, recording discussions was accepted to be able to revise it later. The participants were comfortable with the recording, and did not seem to take notice of it during the sessions. The attention when singling out participants was directed towards the eagerness of the participants to contribute. This was considered highly important for their willingness to share their stories. Their Norwegian or English language abilities were also considered. A conscious decision was made regarding whether to recruit participants from the same sex or mixed. The issue with mixed sexes, as mentioned in SRM's article, regards it might disturb the group dynamic due to the sexes taking on different roles. Since the focus group contained marginalized refugees, in some cases from less developed countries, it could be natural for the men to take on a more dominant role silencing the women. To avoid this, a male and a female focus group were created separately. The motive was to recruit two groups of six participants each.

5. FACILITATING FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

After being in contact with "Dialogsenteret" [11] - which is a center for information and dialogue aimed for immigrants in Trondheim - they offered to lend out their space to the focus groups. This was of interest as most of the participants had knowledge of the center, and felt comfortable coming there. Two groups were

invited with more than six participants on each group. However, only five men showed up for the male group, and no more than two participants for the female group. All participants were settled refugees from Kurdistan, Syria, Somalia, and Afghanistan, aged 21 – 33.

5.1 Male focus group

The male focus group consisted of five men aged 21 to 33 years, from Kurdistan, Syria, and Somalia. They all spoke limited Norwegian or English. The first activity was intended to loosen up the atmosphere, and get to know each other. At first the men were a bit skeptical as to why they were sitting in a circle doing animal sounds and clapping - but it soon turned into laughter and relaxed the mood of the group. The group continued with the "true or false" statement game, explained in the article. Discussing the different statements was time consuming - both with understanding the statement, thinking about it, and collectively deciding if it was true or false. Some participants were more actively contributing, especially the younger participants more skilled in language. The statement card game worked well as a discussion starter, and only half of the cards were used after 45 minutes. However, most topics left out surfaced under the discussions of other statements. The group "emotional continued with the blueprint", containing four main touch points with underlying topics, all written out in words and icons. The blueprint explored their emotional travel, which had not been included too much in the "true or false" method. The outcome ranged from blueprints with many icons and expressions, to one icon on each stop with not much to tell. Lastly the men went through the "what if" idea generating method, which did not produce notable material. At the end of the session the participants collectively agreed on three topics most important for integration.

5.2 Female focus group

Only two women attended the female focus group. This set the mood to a more private and

intimate setting. The women were from Afghanistan and Somalia, aged 25-29. They had both spent five and seven months inside an asylum - which is relatively short. There was a clear difference between the male and the female focus group. While the men expressed frustration about their life in Norway, the women expressed gratitude in a more detailed and emotional manner. While the men pointed out the issues with being an asylum seeker and refugee in Norway, the women highlighted the positives. The focus group was very emotional due to one of the women recently getting her resident permit withdrawn, after living in Norway for two years. The women went through the same "true or false" statement game, as well as the "emotional service blueprint". Due to a smaller group, they did not produce as much discussion around the cards as the male group rather said their opinions one after another. This led to the group staying more "on topic". The emotional blueprint worked well, but since the women had showed more emotions than the men in the previous method, some information was repeated. The "what if" method was not prioritized as it did not bear much results in the male focus group. At the end of the session the women identified the three most important topics for integration, from their point of view.

6. FINDINGS

Both focus groups were asked to identify, in order, the three most important topics for integration. The result is shown in the table below.

Male focus group	Female focus group
1) Work/education	1) Language
2) Language	2) Work/education
3) Bureaucracy	3) Social interaction

Table 1: The three most important topics for integration from the male and female focus groups.

Their priorities may reflect on their way of thinking when they entered the country. The women put "Language" first, while the men chose "Work/Education". Both topics are highly essential in order to integrate. However, the women seemed to choose the more patient way by learning the language first, while the men were eager to start a job or an education. Both groups differ on the third point where the men would like to know the bureaucracy, while the women value social interaction. This may be due to the men's need to "fix" things on their own, while the females were less reluctant to seek help.

6.1 Culture shock

One of the male participants was surprised to find how liberal Norwegians were, especially towards homosexuality. He did not have anything against it; he was just not used to it or knew how to react in the beginning. Another male participant shared: "I was surprised the first time I went to the gym. In the showers everybody was naked!" Several male participants were upset by how closed off Norwegians were, and how hard it was to make contact even with neighbors. This was not an issue for the females, who both had close Norwegian friends inside and outside of the asylum. Their asylums were located where there was a culture and landscape for hiking - which was something they greatly appreciated. "At my asylum we went hiking two times, which made me very happy. Everything you remember are often bad things, and when you are out in nature everything is so much better. You get fresh air, understand where you are, and the Norwegian culture. It is good for foreigners". They mentioned how women are "free" in Norway, which has immense value for them. "In Somalia, I had to wear a long hijab, or I would be killed or arrested. Here I can wear a short one, and do what I like".

6.2 Role in society

The male participants talked about respect and feeling less worth than Norwegians. This was a problem inside the asylum as well as in society. "If I call someone about a problem, they do not

understand, and they do not want to help. If I ask my teacher to call who is Norwegian, the problem gets solved right away". The others recognized and agreed with his statement. The women's feelings were dissimilar. They felt respected here, which may be due to their suppression in their home country. The woman from Somalia elaborated that in her asylum, they had their own counsel room where they could discuss issues with employees. The woman from Afghanistan shared she had people around her to help her out; neighbors, people from church, coworkers, nurses in the asylum and psychologists.

6.3 The waiting time inside the asylum

The male participants felt there was little for them to do inside the asylum. They could not prepare for entering the society, other than attend Norwegian classes. They would want to get a job, or start studying inside the asylum if it was possible. "Some of us are sitting in the asylum for two or three years, it is better for us to have something to do, to have a plan". A participant shared that he did a volunteer job for two months while in the asylum. The job gave him a diploma, which was told would be valuable when looking for a job in the society - this was not the case. One participant explained how you are not a "normal" person inside the asylum: "For me, life is not just to eat and drink and stay alive. Life starts when you start doing something. You are active. When you make your own position, and make yourself respected by others. Everybody will respect you when you are studying, when you have a job, when you have your own money. In the asylum you are not any one of those; you don't study, you don't work, you just live. If anybody talks to me now, I can say who I am and what I am doing, not just my name". The male participant from Somalia explained how his only plan was to get to Norway, that was his first priority. What comes next is not the primary focus. The women both felt pleased to be in the asylum, because they were on the road towards safety. At the same time they both experienced it as waiting, and not knowing, like the men did. The Somalian woman

got work as a cleaning lady at three of the asylums in the area without pay – which gave her something to do. The women did not tend to talk about the time in the asylum as "wasted years". They were positive to have learned elementary Norwegian while there - which became useful moving into the society. At the same time, they expressed that it would have been more of an issue if they had a longer stay.

6.4 Socializing

Most Norwegians do not interact with refugees or asylum seekers in their daily life. They are segregated in the community, and attend classes meant for "their kind" - where the only interactions with Norwegians are teachers and volunteers. They live in houses reserved for refugees, and often stay within their own social circle. This is an issue when it comes to learning Norwegian. Spending hours learning a language without having any place or opportunity to practice it is hard and demotivating. A male participant explained: "When you start to have a job, or if you learn Norwegian very quickly, you can have a chance to make contact with Norwegians. You can't stop people in the street and say hi I want to be your friend". It was evident that socializing and the degree of mastering the Norwegian language correlate. Both women in the focus group had joined several courses, volunteered for jobs, focused on learning Norwegian, and made an effort to contact Norwegians. Socializing was therefore less of a concern. The woman from Afghanistan started school when entering the society, and is now working in a retirement home. Her job made her study harder on her Norwegian, in effort to make her self understood amongst the senior citizens: "I continue to got to Norwegian classes. I think it is important to understand each other. If we can't communicate we are like a tree or a sheep; we just 'beeeh'".

6.5 Bureaucracy in Norway

All of the male participants expressed great frustration about the bureaucracy in Norway.

They have little knowledge of where to direct problems, and getting help seems almost impossible. It was emphasized they feel discriminated against in society, both by Norwegian citizens and the bureaucracy. This is a complex issue. which may involve miscommunication, misunderstandings, and lack of knowing the bureaucratic system from the refugees' side. A participant explained he has a Norwegian contact, which helps him with issues. Things get solved immediately whenever he makes a call in his aid. This was a topic the female participants did not say much about. Both women seemed to have friends to contact if they needed help.

6.6 Work

Work was a returning issue in the male focus group, in regards to the time inside the asylum, as well as in society. Work inside the asylum is hard to come by, since asylum seekers do not get to open a bank account. This leads to obstacles with payment and taxes. Most asylum seekers working therefore work illegally. Another obstacle is the skepticism in hiring an asylum seeker. When they are accepted into the community this becomes a continuing issue. Work is hard to come by, due to limited language skills, and lack or proof of experience. The women did not share the men's view. As declared, one of the female participants got a job at a retirement home after going to school. The other woman is studying in Norway, and is on her way towards an income.

7. DISCUSSION

This section will discuss the findings, design methods, and possibilities surfaced in the article.

7.1 Approaching a marginalized group and forming focus groups

One of the main barriers in the process was gaining participants to the focus groups. This proved to be time consuming both with visiting places they were located, as well as building up relationships. I attended a volunteer Norwegian education class, as well as visited a knitting club aimed for female refugees, in attempt to connect. After recruiting over six participants for each group, the challenge was to set a date where the participants could attend. My first attempt failed as almost no participants who signed up stayed in touch. A new round of recruitment was done at Dialogsenteret. Overall it would have been easier to recruit if I was a regular at the clubs/services they attended, or had something tangible to reward their participation with. In the beginning I felt like an intruder looking to recruit participants for my own good. While conducting the focus group, I discovered that it was beneficial to talk slow in "broken Norwegian" for them to better understand me. Visualization through drawings and icons were also proven convenient to ease communication.

7.2 The effect of using design tools and methods for identifying needs

Three different design methods were used in the focus groups. The use of the "true or false" statement cards was valuable for compiling a large amount of information. The statements had a positive effect of making all participants share, as they were all collectively to decide if the statement was true or false. Mostly the participants spoke directly towards me, and it would have been interesting to see how it would have evolved if I removed myself from the room. If I would have asked the same statements as questions, I imagine that I would have gotten an answer from whoever felt the urge to explain which would not have included the whole group. The statement cards led to discussions off topic, which was rewarding in a sense that I got to hear what they felt a need to share. The method had a positive effect of evoking excitement and engagement from the participants, which made them open up. The emotional service blueprint included expressions of feelings, in having to describe every touch point of the journey. It was evident that the success of this method relied on how open the participant was towards sharing emotions. The use of icons on the service blueprint kept the participants busy focusing on how they felt, and how to express their journey. Some time was spent explaining the blueprint, as this is a service design tool not common to everyone. Implementing visualization as a tool proved to give everyone a better foundation for understanding.

It is hard to prove that the use of 'designerly' methods will be beneficial compared to other approaches. However, the approach helped form a shield for the participants, as well as assisting them to express themselves. They could distance from their personal stories and respond to tasks targeted to let them share what they wanted, instead of pressuring them. The design method that was most difficult for them to participate in was the idea generating game "what if". Even after discussing the problem areas it was difficult for the participants to "imagine" how the asylum and integration process could improve. In other words, the design tools and methods used were beneficial in terms of highlighting problem areas, positives, and collecting information about the integration process. They were proven less resourceful in terms of co-designing. This can be reasoned given abilities are limited by language, and knowledge of the possibilities. The "what if" method sets ground to a 'designerly' way of thinking, which may be unknown to the marginalized participants. A more progressive way to co-design may be to present them with the possible ideas/solutions for exploration and feedback. Overall the design tools and methods helped "include" the participants in the process, and made them feel important in their purpose. Setting the focus on the design method, instead of the participants might have increased their willingness to share, and lowered the barrier for interaction.

7.4 How designers by using service design tools and methods can improve integration

By using service design methods on the existing services and situation in society, like service blueprints, visualization, and tools for discovering pain points and users' needs, the focus groups produced a large amount of information. Thus, service design and design methods can be a valid strategy for mapping out important information of this marginalized user group. Six major issues recognized by all participants to a certain extent surfaced; culture shock, role in society, waiting time in asylum, getting a job, socializing with Norwegians, and learning the bureaucratic system. These topics set ground for further service design investigation in terms of new solutions. The most apparent problem area was how segregated the asylum seekers are in society. Services aimed at building a bridge and understanding between refugees and ethnic Norwegians would increase the extent of integration. The problem with integration lies as much on the society's side as with the asylum seekers/refugees. To be able to improve integration, service designs valuable for Norwegians as much as refugees need to be explored further. Few Norwegians interact with refugees, unless they volunteer to help. This creates a distance where Norwegians think of refugees as "needy", while the refugees regard themselves "less than" a Norwegian person. The Red Cross and other organizations do a great job with activities and aid for refugees, but at the same time they create "segregated" communities for them to meet. The services offered need to be looked at with new and innovative eyes to find better ways to connect this marginalized group with the rest of society. Such services will be of value for the society as a whole, as refugees need to be integrated to be able to contribute. It was difficult for the refugees to imagine how things could improve, which sets ground for designers to get involved as "the problem solvers".

7.3 Improvements and ethical dilemmas

No more than two women highly integrated compared to their time spent in Norway formed the female focus group. This was both a positive in terms of highlighting what has worked for them towards integrating, and a negative in terms of not highlighting issues other women

might have experienced. Hence their stories may not be valid to represent female refugees as a whole. The female focus group evolved to be more emotional than expected, due to the possible eviction of one of the participants. Her presence provoked an ethical dilemma, as well as it understandably took some focus away from the methods in the research.

The "emotional service blueprint" could have been constructed with other icons and words, recognized to be more familiar to the refugees while conducting the focus groups. For example, the main asylum was labeled "Ordinary reception center" while they referred to it as "Asylum". The last stop was labeled "Local society", where they would have used "Kommune". The symbol for "free time" was a happy smiley, which could be misguiding as they may not perceived their free time as 'happy time'. However, as this was explained in the session it did not have too much influence on the outcome.

The statement cards could have been complemented with visualization to aid the text. Sketches were often drawn up for better understanding during discussions - which proved helpful. The text on the cards could have been revised to an even easier language, however it was difficult to predict their language skills before knowing the participants.

If I would have been able to conduct more focus groups, I could have tested a larger variety of design methods. This would have given me a better foundation for distinguishing which methods worked better than others, and why. It would also have been interesting to have had a control group where design methods were not implemented. Lastly, I would have liked to have had focus groups with current asylum seekers to compare the materials from the refugees.

8. CONCLUSION

Design methods and tools used in the focus group with the refugees were proven beneficial

in terms of gathering information and identifying needs, while less purposeful when co-designing. The refugees found it challenging to generate their own ideas for better solutions towards their integration and well being. This supports the idea that designers should get involved as problem solvers. Including designers means exploring new and original solutions, while evaluating what exists. Hence designers can lead the way to innovative service designs that may prove useful to the society as a whole.

The tested methods supported the participants to open up and share their stories through visualization and communication elements. Hence, design tools and methods can be a useful strategy for gaining relevant information about refugees as end-users. Throughout the presented study it was evident that a major issue in the integration process is segregation of the refugees in society, leading to several problem areas. Integration services need to be altered, or new services should be created, in order improve the existing conditions. Based on the concerns of these refugees, it will be beneficial if new services contribute to create a platform of motivation for both ethnic Norwegian citizens and refugees/asylum seekers to interact.

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