

Anthropology and Architecture: Motives and Ethics in Creating Knowledge

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Introduction

This chapter was born from an interdisciplinary research project,¹ which aimed to document and explore the effects of the physical surroundings on belonging and well-being among asylum seekers in Norway. Among other approaches, the project combined anthropological and architectural perspectives in exploring materiality and the housing qualities offered at asylum seeker reception centres. While the overall motive was to understand the relation between humans and the physical surroundings, we also came to discuss the motives, merits and ethics in the mutual process of learning. We will argue that the result was a more holistic, nuanced and in-depth insight by the two disciplines collaborating, and a shared awareness of an ethical direction of care for humanity and self as it is interwoven in its physical surroundings.

While our analytical approach contains little new, the research presents original empirical material feeding into a controversial and heated political debate concerning immigration policy, housing quality, integration and well-being. Furthermore, the anthropological as well as architectural calls for responsibility and commitment in terms of a need to 'study up', 'speak for' and uphold human rights for our research subjects gives opportunity for an enriched voice to asylum seekers' everyday lived life in Norway. The main contribution of this chapter is to document and reflect on the research process, as it negotiates anthropological and architectural approaches and perspectives, and discuss the contributions in the knowledge created, thereby emphasizing the important role of collaboration in both anthropological and architectural endeavours.

In the following, we first introduce the theoretical perspectives that address complexities in the creation of knowledge and our approaches to dwelling and

materiality. Second, we present a brief historical context for asylum seeker reception centres in Norway followed by a short overview of methods employed. Third, we present a case study of an asylum seeker reception centre called Open River Reception Centre. Then, we discuss the case material in light of place and practices of housing² (as it includes dwelling) followed by a section relating to ethics in the knowledge creation. By way of concluding we call for a policy that attends to a care of self and humanity.

Views on creating knowledge: Relations of persons, relations of materiality

Theoretically, we are concerned with the interdisciplinary creation of knowledge as we deal with the complex relations between housing, belonging and well-being in a particular context of asylum seekers, while also being crucial to all human lives. As part of this process, we highlight how an anthropologically inspired attention to the relations of knowledge creation also stimulates an ethical concern that may encourage respect for human equality and diversity (see also Grønseth and Josephides 2017). The creation of knowledge is always embedded in a complex web of relations between people distinctly positioned within wider social and material structures, cultural values and meanings, while we highlight distinct disciplinary positions. How such disciplinary relations and positions interact in the creation and employment of knowledge is always an (often implicit) ethical issue, while also affecting what is 'valuable knowledge' in a given context (see also Grønseth and Josephides 2017; Rabinow 2003; Strathern 2005). As international and national state-regulated conventions, laws and agreements increasingly tend to reach into, define and shape asylum seekers' life trajectories and day-to-day lives, issues of modes and content of knowledge and how it is created and employed are of crucial ethical concern and vital for asylum seekers' power to voice concerns of their own that affect important areas of their lives, such as material and social security, health, belonging and well-being.

While acknowledging a vast complexity related to the purposes of how knowledge is created and to whom it is or is not imparted, this chapter explores interdisciplinary views on materiality, social positions and persons. How we treat each other, here with a particular concern for the physical environment wherein asylum seekers' lives take place, lies at the very heart of our belonging and well-being in everyday life, and speaks directly to the anthropological quest for knowledge about human lives. Exploring asylum seeker reception centres as

architecture, while including an anthropological approach of belonging and well-being, we furthermore see the study as shedding light on the social and political ruptures and disputes, which make the often implicit ethical concerns explicit (see also Lambek 2010).

With a focus on anthropological perspectives in the overall study, we include a brief note on anthropological views on materiality, housing and architecture. Until quite recently, materiality and forms have not been a focused issue in anthropological inquiries. Rather than exploring the materiality of built forms and wider architectonic contexts, anthropologists have concentrated on immaterial abstracted social and cultural processes. Images and built forms have become increasingly difficult to separate from the anthropological analysis as visual representations and new technologies have become central in theory building (see also Buchli 2013). However, recent work on materiality and architecture have still tended to focus on the discursive, semiotic or mental aspects.

In line with Tim Ingold (2007) we rather see material qualities as having an inherently relational quality, not reducible to some empirical material quality such as building material of mental constructs, but existing within what Ingold describes as relational context of action, material and environment, reminiscent in certain ways of the philosopher of science Karen Barad's (2007) notion of 'intra-action' (see also Latour 1979; Gell 1998). More so, we draw on the growing attention to bodily and sensoric perceptions that opens up an anthropological interest in the physical environment and the aesthetics that embed and direct our everyday social lives. Together, the different approaches can be seen to make up a multiplicity of entries or registers attending to the 'house' (Ingold 2007), all as vital in negotiations of competing social claims and their value in conflicting assertions feeding social life.

Herein, we draw attention to how houses and their surroundings affect belonging and well-being as these are deeply interwoven with experiences of identity, personhood and self. Through this perspective, houses are seen not only as places or 'cases' of symbolism, but more as interplaying subjects (see also Humphry 1988). This refers to how materiality, such as buildings and outdoor spaces, can be seen to take on a certain agency in reinforcing and shaping social relations and senses of belonging and well-being.

Architects share anthropologists' interest in understanding people, their needs and aspirations, as well as the role architecture may play in order to reach goals such as social inclusion, dignity and mental health (Stender 2017). It is further acknowledged within architectural theory that buildings and places inevitably both create and symbolize socially constructed identities and

differences between people: 'The politics of identity in built form mediates who we are and where we belong' (Dovey [1998] 2009: 18). The architecture of reception centres therefore not only affects asylum seekers' own situation and self-understanding, it also influences other people's perception of them. At the same time, meanings related to the built environment are continuously reframed due to changing practices. An important starting point for the research presented in this chapter is thus that architecture in itself may bring about change (Awan et al. 2011).

The theoretical basis for understanding the dynamic and mutual relationship between humans and material objects within architecture has developed from actor network theory, and has led to a growing interest in spatial and architectural agency within the discipline (see e.g. Yavena and Guy 2008; Latour and Yavena 2009; Schneider and Till 2009; Awan et al. 2011). Agency in this context reflects an approach to architectural and physical spaces as not only autonomous products and objects, but also continuously changing entities entangled in and dependent on social, cultural, economic and political contexts. Within this understanding, architecture has the ability to make changes and even 'lead to other possible futures' (Doucet and Cupers 2009: 1).

In our research on reception centres, we are looking for other and better ways to house asylum seekers than what is currently offered them in order to affect their belonging and well-being and, as part of this, to change how we as a hosting society perceive and relate to newcomers. And here, the architect's approach tends to differ slightly from the anthropologist's. In order to transgress the present situation in reception centres, architects will challenge the housing qualities offered to asylum seekers and search for other solutions. In order to do this, normative judgements are made. This implies the need to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' housing quality, something that might be rather problematic among anthropologists being 'trained in a paradigm of cultural relativism' (Stender 2017: 35).

Within architectural practice, quality is understood as an essential dimension of the built environment, although continuously up for debate both within the discipline as well as in society at large. Housing quality is thus understood as characteristics related to housing which are given value at a certain time (Guttu 2003), and it is regarded as an important task for architects not only to add value to society (Stender 2017) but also to take part in the public debate of what housing quality is, or could be, for various situations and residential groups. Related to the research on housing qualities for asylum seekers, it becomes even clearer that there is a need to contextualize judgements of quality based on

knowledge and awareness of the specific situation of this specific group. This we will return to later.

As we can see from the above, the anthropological and architectural theoretical approaches drawn on here, although diverse, share an understanding of dwellings and materiality as holding a relational and agentive force that feeds into social life. However, the architectural concern for knowledge about the residents is given depth and emphasis by the anthropological hallmark and call for knowledge deriving from ethnographic and engaged explorations of ‘face-to-face’ encounters and the ‘natives’ points of view’, accompanied by ethics of solidarity and responsibility for our fellow human beings – variously in terms of debated positions of ‘speaking for’, ‘advocating’ and upholding human rights. Later on we will further explore how anthropology and architecture feed into each other. Before this, we introduce a brief context of asylum seeker reception centres in Norway.

Context: Asylum seeker reception centres in Norway

In Norway, asylum seekers are the responsibility of the government. While waiting for their case to be concluded, they live in special asylum seeker reception centres, which are spread around the country. Those asylum seekers who are either granted refugee status or residency on humanitarian grounds are relocated to municipalities where they are offered settlement, often in public rental housing. The time spent in reception centres may vary from a few months to more than a year, and sometimes several years (Strumse et al. 2016; Lauritzen and Berg 1999). The number of UN refugees is a quota, which is negotiated every three years. The UN refugees are commonly transmitted from the reception centre to the municipal authorities during the first month, or directly settled in municipalities.

Today’s Norwegian state and government reception system is a consequence of the increasing numbers of asylum seekers during the 1980s. Until 1987 the reception of refugees and asylum seekers was rather random and improvised. The system of asylum seeker reception of today has existed approximately since the early 1990s (Berg 2012). The debate concerning the housing conditions of asylum seekers was then, as today, directed and focused on not being too generous, although not too simple. In policy documents the asylum centres are described to offer a ‘simple, but reasonable’ (*nøkternt, men forsvarlig*) standard.³ The reception centres are commonly established within already existing

buildings (NOU 2011: 10; Strumse et al. 2016). Many centres have building-related problems such as damp, draughts, worn-down surfaces, poor indoor climates and poor accessibility for disabled residents (Strumse et al. 2016). Overcrowding is also a problem, since single residents most often must share a room with one or more others (Strumse et al. 2016).

The housing standard can be seen as a response to the policy demands of 'reasonable standard' and fluctuations in the number of asylum seekers. The state sets a minimum coverage of the reception centres' housing capacity to be utilized at all times, which implies frequent openings and closings of centres. The limited economic resources and variations in the number of asylum seekers in Norway make planning and managing reception centres challenging. The contracts to run centres are tendered for open competitions in the private market, while the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) keeps agreements with municipalities, voluntary organizations and private operators (Larsen 2014). The employment of short-term contracts and the risk of losing the contract on three months' notice may contribute to low housing standards and simple solutions, as well as instability in staff and a general perception of such work to be of lower status.

The original function of buildings utilized for reception centres varies, although the most common original function is found to be ordinary housing (this is due to a large number of the centres being organized as fully or partly decentralized), followed by former health institutions, hotels, educational institutions and military barracks (Strumse et al. 2016). Other categories are reported to be bedsits, dormitories, small lodging places, workmanship barracks, camping cabins and others. The fully or partly decentralized centres offer dwelling in detached houses or multifamily houses such as terraced housing and apartment buildings (Hauge et al. 2016). Generally, the reception centres are located in low-status areas keeping a low housing standard in terms of being worn down, and some not suitable as accommodation for people (Berg 2012; Strumse et al. 2016; Hauge et al. 2015, 2017). More so, they are often placed on the outskirts and in less inhabited areas, which implies that the residents have little opportunity for interaction with locals in public meeting places. Many of the centres make use of former hotels high in the mountains or health institutions in the countryside. If the reception centre is close to a town centre, these are often deserted of people after business hours.

The housing standard is based on short-term residence, while, as already mentioned, in fact many asylum seekers stay for several years. The time waiting for a final assessment of asylum application in Norway has steadily increased until 2014 (Larsen 2014). In December 2014,⁴ at the time of our study, 36 per

cent of asylum seekers stayed more than one-and-a-half years, and 25 per cent more than three years at a reception centre (UDI 2014a). The most numerous groups came from Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Syria and Afghanistan. At the time of our fieldwork, about one-third of residents had a resident permit and were waiting for settlement in a municipality, one-third were waiting for an answer to their application, and one-third had received a negative assessment and were waiting to be deported out of Norway (UDI 2014b).

Considering the study's concern with asylum seekers who seek refuge from war, prosecution and/or discrimination, we see a need to recognize these populations' and individuals' specific life conditions. Some central features of relevance for such refugee populations' situation often include: a) not choosing or understanding their destination; b) migration marked by trauma and persecution; c) vulnerable mental and physical health; d) separation from family members whose safety may be at risk; e) arrival without identity document or with false documents; f) arrival without evidence of qualifications; g) arrival under the stress of deportation or detention; h) temporary admittance under the fear of return (Kissoon 2010). In particular, the forced transitional and temporary condition and experience need special attention, as these are crucial for the perception and reception from the host society, authorities and community, the decisions for placing and shaping of reception centres, as well as arriving families and individuals who are at different ages and phases of their life cycle.

In the following, we present a brief overview of methods employed, while highlighting the ethnographic approach.

Methodological approaches and doing ethnography

The methods chosen for the project were anchored in an architectural approach that sought to document the material housing offered for asylum seekers, with concern for access to and quality of spaces for privacy, sleep and rest, socializing, food storage, cooking, enjoying a meal, cleaning and washing of clothing, children's play and school work, religious practices, sanitary facilities, light, air, greenery, outdoor recreation, and location in relation to local community, neighbourhoods, town centres and more. Such documentation was sought by developing a quantitative web survey sent to the total number of reception centres (105 ordinary centres) in 2013 (Strumse et al. 2016). To gain first-hand information, researchers in the project carried out various one-day visits at seven

different reception centres, interviewing employees and having informal conversations with asylum seekers. Shorter visits were conducted by student groups at four centres, where the architectural features were documented. In addition, ethnographic fieldwork was conducted at four centres, one of which was used as the empiric basis for this chapter.⁵ Furthermore, interviews were carried out with actors employed in institutions (public and private) who regulate and administrate the reception centres according to political demands and guidelines. In the last phases of the research, information on built examples of temporary housing was gathered in order to discuss alternative and more future-oriented architectural solutions to the housing needs of newly arrived asylum seekers identified through the survey and fieldwork.

Anne (the anthropologist) conducted ethnographic fieldwork at the Open River Asylum Seeker Reception Centre over a five-month period (August–December 2014), focusing on being there and engaging in the everyday life of asylum seekers and employees of the centre. At the time of fieldwork there were about eighty asylum seekers at the centre. While the Open River Reception Centre was a semi-centralized centre, most asylum seekers lived in the central building – a former hotel with reception and office area. Others lived in more or less worn-down but ordinary flats and houses in nearby vicinities. The most numerous groups of asylum seekers came from Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Syria, Iran and Iraq. The residents had lived there for various lengths of time (from two months to nine years), and some had previously lived in another reception centre that was now closed down. Some of the residents were waiting for the result of their application, others had a positive resolution and were waiting for settlement in a municipality, while others again had a negative resolution and were waiting for return to their country of origin.

Conducting fieldwork at Open River Asylum Seeker Reception Centre, Anne emphasized an approach of engaging with the ongoing activities and people present, with a special concern for the asylum seekers' experience of everyday life and the housing conditions. This implied visits and talks with the residents in their private rooms, cooking and sharing meals, going shopping in the nearby town, hanging around in the hallways, television room and outdoor benches, as well as entering the employees' office area to do interviews, share lunch breaks and have informal conversations. Speaking with the asylum seekers was a challenge in terms of language issues. Some asylum seekers spoke fluent English or sufficient Norwegian to make conversation, others spoke very little Norwegian or English and often included a third person, sometimes a friend on the phone, to help out as interpreter.

The employees were commonly busy with administrative tasks, planning activities for the residents such as information meetings, various courses about topics such as Norwegian ways of child upbringing and the legal prohibition of (parental) physical violence against children, meetings with individual residents to prompt them to make a voluntary return their country of origin, discussing residents' wishes and needs such as a change of room (often a wish for single room or change of roommates), access to fitness centres, health consultations, or visits to friends or relatives in other parts of Norway. These and other matters were discussed and dealt with on the basis that the employees, as explained to Anne, in principle knew nothing about and had no access to formal information concerning the individual residents' asylum application, their reasons for seeking asylum, family background or actual network outside the reception centre, health status or sickness story. As Anne approached the employees, it was often difficult for them to make appointments for interviews or discussions as their time was generally heavily booked, and they often needed to rearrange their schedule to meet the most urgent tasks and needs of the day. Most employees had scarce or no specific education or work experience related to their actual line of work. Several of the staff said that they were on the lookout for more 'respectable', 'steady' and 'less strenuous' work, while some thought they would



Figure 8.1 Former hotel converted into Open River Reception Centre. Photo: Stine Glennås.



Figure 8.2 Entrance. Photo: Karine Denizou.



Figure 8.3 Bedroom. Photo: Karine Denizou.



Figure 8.4 Kitchen. Photo: Ragne Ø. Thorshaug.

gradually professionalize by long-term engagement and experience, making themselves eligible for other work positions within the management of asylum seekers and refugees, or other (often municipal) jobs concerning integration and multiculturalism.

Together, the combined methods of web survey, one-day visits and ethnographic fieldwork produced data which enlightened distinct and overlapping themes and levels of concern. In the following section, we present case material followed by two sections of discussion: first, concerning views on housing, and second, views on knowledge creation.

Case: Open River Asylum Seeker Reception Centre

Leaving the train station, Anne entered the small town's main street and centre with bakery, hairdresser, shops and stores, cafes, banks, health centre and several municipal offices of different kinds. Ten metres down the main road, the shopping area came to an end and the road met a roundabout, giving options to turn to the left for schools and kindergarten, straight ahead and leading south to the next town, or turning right passing some warehouses, outdoors stocking of agricultural and labour machinery, while leading down to the riverside. Along this road was also the old brick-built hotel, which today serves as an asylum seeker reception centre.

Just outside the building, there were some wooden benches on the grass between the road and the parking area in front. Surrounding the reception centre was a rather large green lawn with a few trees here and there, before small bits of cultivated lands led the eye to new roads leading in between new lands and woods. In the parking and benching area there were a few old-looking bicycles parked; some old shoes and plastic bags lay along the building walls. The many windows indicated each one to be a 'hotel room' and appeared in regularly distanced neat rows both horizontally and vertically. A variety of textile curtains hung in different lengths, mixed with other kinds of materials closing up the windows, which together gave a messy appearance in the otherwise regular pattern.

In front of the main entrance there was a small outbuild roof with a bench beneath. This bench was used as a meeting and waiting point. Most times there would be a few people around having a cigarette, a soda drink, or just hanging out. It was mostly men who occupied the area. Already at this entry point, one was introduced to the most common attire for both men and women: cheap kinds of 'gym clothing', loose trousers, runners or slippers, and sweaters or T-shirts, depending on the season and weather. The staff told Anne that most outside visitors did not dare to enter the reception centre before someone from the staff came out to meet them and accompany them into the staff office area. Being a first-time visitor, the residents would commonly just watch you pass by, not knowing the purpose of your visit and supposing it was to meet with staff, not themselves. As Anne came to be well known, they greeted her and smiled and the opportunity could be used for small talk and making later appointments.

Passing through the double doors at the main entrance was a small hall from which a door to the left led into the staff area. Just passing the main entrance door there was a staircase leading up to long corridors between the former hotel rooms, now private rooms for the asylum seekers. Going down, right ahead there was a large kitchen with about ten cooking stoves and a long kitchen bench with several sinks. Turning right, there was a sanitary room with about five toilets and showers. Turning left, there were a few larger rooms used as billiard room and staff meeting room, and washroom facilities for staff only. In addition, passing the sanitary room, the downstairs contained an area with a few larger and smaller rooms for women residents only, inhabited by women from various African countries. Together they made a group of some of the most vulnerable women in terms of pregnancy, various illnesses and non-literacy, who, according to the staff, helped and supported each other.

Staying on the entrance floor and turning right led to a long corridor with private rooms for asylum seekers on each side. As in the corridors above and

below, this corridor was dimly lit and there were no windows. In front of each room were different pairs of shoes and a few other items. Behind the doors lived the asylum seekers in rooms for two, three and four people; a few rooms housed six people. Most of the inhabitants of the corridors were single men from both African and Asian countries, but also some women from Asian countries such as Iran and Afghanistan, and two married couples. The rooms contained one bed and a small wardrobe per person (the couples put their beds together making it into one), one or two refrigerators shared between the room residents, and a small bathroom with a toilet and shower for shared use. In most of the rooms, one or more of the residents had bought themselves a private television set and/or personal computer. The residents struggled to find places to stash and keep their few belongings, using every inch under beds, on top of wardrobes, underneath small coffee tables and/or bookshelves. Having little space, many complained about the unpleasantness of keeping clothing and shoes next to food and cutlery. Many would mark an individual private space in the room by, for instance, hanging a textile from the top bed down, making a 'wall' down to the bed below, or setting a chair or large pillow so as to draw a line between the private bed and the shared space in the room. Generally, the bed was the only area for one individual, although many said it did not feel sufficiently personal or private. As many pointed out, they did not approve when someone sat down on their bed. On the other hand, there was often not much other space to sit on, so it must be allowed for.

Being with and speaking with the asylum seekers, they generally express a concern that they are 'treated like animals, not as humans.' Ammaan, a woman in her late twenties from Somalia, said:

The camp is our transition to Norway. It is our doorstep. What we experience at the camp give us the image of Norway. If the person who works here are good with me, I get a positive image of Norway. If the person who works here is bad with me, I get a bad image of Norway. The same is about the building we live in, our rooms and environment. If the place is nice, we have a positive feeling for Norway. If the place is bad we have a negative feeling. We have only a small room shared with one, two, or three others. There is no place to keep our things, no place to dry our clothings. My shoes and garbage are kept next to my food-storage and kitchen utensils. It is not right. It makes me feel uncomfortable. It is not to complain, as we have many good things. But it is not what we had hoped for. I come for humanity, not to be spoken to and treated like animals. Humanity is in Norway, but not for us. Sometimes I feel like not to make the effort. I am tired. I tell myself I need to try. We live outside society. We are not so different;

we are humans first. It is not war outside. Here we have peace, bed, and clothing. But, we have lack of consideration of humanity. This makes us hate Norway. We go out and feel not welcome. It is not possible to feel good. I feel sick and dizzy. I shiver in my bed, and cannot sleep.

Another asylum seeker, Akram from Iraq, also in his late twenties, said:

Here is like a prison. But it is worse than a prison, because we do not know when we are finished. I am a mechanic. I want to work, but I am not allowed. My bedroom is very small and I share with one more. I do not like to make food in the kitchen. It is often dirty. We live like in a hole. See for yourself, you do not want to live here. It is not for human beings to live here. People get tired and sick. I have constant headaches and cannot sleep. The most important I have is my religion, my faith. It keeps me going.

Speaking with the staff, they generally agreed that the asylum seekers live 'on top of each other' and that the facilities are poor for long-time residency. One of the reasons for not finding better accommodation was, according to the centre leader, related to the local community's reluctance to include the asylum seekers in their neighbourhood. He explained:

It is difficult to find autonomous housing for our residents. The owners prefer other residents for their houses. The locals complain that the neighbourhood degrades and falls on the market, they get lesser price if they want to sell. We have one house with six housing-units. It is a lot of trouble there. They are too many together, living kind of on top of each other. The standards are low. The electric capacity is too low, since it is not measured for six units. It is also too little warm water for six units.

Another male employee, aged in his forties, who worked part-time as a custodian and sometimes helped out with transport to the local doctor and suchlike, spoke about local people's reaction to asylum seekers in their neighbourhood. He said:

Our centre had managed to get three autonomous houses on a row in one neighbourhood. When we took over the third house, we received a concerned phone from one of the neighbours saying:

- *Is one more of the houses turning into a house for such?*
- *Who such you mean?*
- *Such, you know*
- *But, has there been any problems?*
- *To be honest, not really, I was just wondering how many houses you are taking?*

Clearly, the phone call indicated that our renting of the houses was not to his liking. It never is.

The place and practice of housing: Belonging and well-being

From the above descriptions and interview citations, we can see how housing cannot be assessed simply on its own terms. It is always linked and related to the surroundings as well as to the people who engage with the buildings and outdoor areas with different aims and viewpoints. What was previously a hotel accommodating guests was transformed into an asylum seeker reception centre accommodating persons with a status of being 'in between' and 'Other' of 'us'. Thus, both the social and the environmental contexts in which housing is situated are important. The location and setting of the buildings affect the asylum seekers' experiences of belonging and well-being (Potter et al. 2005), while also expressing and shaping how the local community and wider society perceive asylum seekers. While it is reasonable to assume that the earlier hotel guests experienced their stay as agreeable for their purposes, the dwelling experience of an asylum seeker becomes something totally different. As Akram says, 'We live like in a hole. See for yourself. You do not want to live here. It is not for human beings to live here. People get tired and sick. I have constant headaches and cannot sleep.'

As already mentioned, the different perspectives and perceptions of the buildings can be seen to make up a multiplicity of entries or registers to the 'house' (Ingold 2007). By shifting between the different entries, the house, as architectural object, can be seen not as a lasting and fixed material entity, but as a process with moments of stoppage that both illustrate and enable social life. Such a view highlights how materiality and architecture hold a relational quality as it is formed by relations between practice, material and environment (see also Ingold 2007). Our research on asylum seeker reception centres supports the understanding of materiality as holding a relational quality and highlights how the human practice of dwelling includes senses of belonging, well-being, illness and emotions.

From the illustrative photographs, ethnographic descriptions and interviews, we see how the buildings, locations and aesthetics affect and shape not only what the residents can do, how they organize things, possessions and activities, but also inform and shape the residents' senses of illness, belonging and well-being. Recognizing the generally poor aesthetic, technical and functional standard of the asylum seeker reception centres, it appears that how we organize space, and

place people in distinct localities, expresses certain forms of power (Foucault 2000). Foucault (1974) argues how something that is institutionalized and constructed for one purpose can be turned and altered into another meaning and effect. Understanding power as exercised by organizing of space and material structures, reception centres may be seen as examples of creating distinctions and defining 'Others' from us.

Simultaneously, the same organization and structures are by their political creators said to uphold immigration justice, social security, and a minimum of local integration. We recognize how such processes of Othering are not only mental processes, but also spatial processes. By placing the asylum seekers in buildings and houses of low standard, on the outskirts of society, and originally meant for other purposes, they become places of 'in-between-ness'. The reception centres can be seen to offer a zone in between – neither fully inside nor outside – and as such as 'non-places' (Augè 1995) or 'empty spaces' (Agamben 1998). Living in such places, the asylum seekers can come to experience being 'treated as animals', as 'not human', as 'not welcome', and simply as 'such . . . that degrade the neighbourhood'. Experiencing these dehumanizing processes, the asylum seekers, such as Ammaan and Akram, generally feel 'tired', 'not feeling like making the effort', and suffer from headaches, sleeplessness, dizziness and much more.

From such a spatial and material dehumanizing process, we call for a housing practice within the asylum seeker reception system based on an acknowledgement of how the built environment and its qualities may play specific roles in transformation processes. Furthermore, we encourage architects and planners to be even better informed by studies that recognize knowledge as it is always linked to materiality as well as social relations, positions and persons (see Grønseth and Josephides 2017).

Creating ethical knowledge on housing qualities: Care for self and humanity

Traditionally, anthropology has sought to ensure social progress (in the West) by means of knowledge, which implies that the creation of knowledge and social reform were seen as harmonious tasks (see Stoczkowski 2008). This interwoven ambition was present in the 'colonial anthropology' of the 1920s, in the 'applied anthropology' of the 1940s and 1950, and later in the 'critical anthropology' from the 1970s onwards, in terms of reflectively taking on blame and responsibility for

Western traditions of imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, racism, nationalism and more (Stoczkowski 2008: 348). In a similar vein, some anthropologists call for moral commitment by empathizing and defending the rights of the oppressed (see for instance Scheper-Hughes 1995), whereas others term such a call as 'moral anxiety' (Faubion 2003). Common for all these approaches is a belief that the fundamentals for knowledge creation match the fundamentals of ethics, and that the epistemology for social studies is similar and accommodates the moral values that guide social reform for the benefit and well-being of populations. Rather than going into discussions of the moral agenda in social sciences, or knowledge as a means for 'doing good', we suggest that when 'doing ethnography' and creating knowledge in face-to-face relations it makes us recognize, beyond the verbal and factual, that the tacit, imaginative, emotional and empathic aspects are crucial to the creation of knowledge (see Grønseth and Josephides 2017; Grønseth and Davis 2010; Josephides 2008). In line with this, we propose that knowledge creation takes place in the process of the knowledge seeker becoming a knower (Josephides 2017; Daston and Galison 2010), thus stressing the link between not only the local and the non-local, but knowledge and person. Highlighting how knowledge is created in relations between persons relates to an ethical view of quality or care for self and humanity (Grønseth and Josephides 2017). This approach is in line with the Foucauldian and Aristotelian view in which an action is assessed by the virtuous disposition that underlies the agent's psychology (Fassin 2012: 7). Thus, we understand ethics as a process of inner states encouraged by virtue and care, while also encouraging action.

When knowledge on housing qualities is created in an ethnographic approach of 'being there' and 'sharing experiences', it adds not only a depth and complexity in our understanding, but we suggest it also can draw attention to an ethic of knowledge creation that goes beyond an already prepared checklist of 'to-do's' and 'not-to-do's'. It is an ethic that underlines the perceptions, experiences and relations between persons as they take place in various social, cultural, material and environmental contexts. Moreover, we suggest a need to explore how architecture, aesthetics and politics are not only rational interests, but include sensual and emotional dynamics in how individuals and groups struggle to have their voices heard and recognized as legitimate and equal partners in debate and everyday social life.

Combining anthropological and architectural perspectives in this research has not only strengthened the ethnographic insights of life in reception centres. Just as importantly, it has shown how negotiations between the two approaches during the explorations have led to a shared acknowledgement of the normative

dimensions of architecture. Creating knowledge within architecture is not only about gaining understanding of the effect of buildings or what shapes them. It is just as much about the knowledge embedded in the buildings themselves, how they speak to us, make us feel safe or 'at home', how they strengthen our dignity or sense of belonging, how they support our control over our daily routines, and so on. Therefore, among the outcomes of the research were not only scientific publications, but also a handbook with guidelines directed towards stakeholders involved in the planning and operation of reception centres (Støa et al. 2016). The guidelines are meant to improve conditions in Norwegian reception centres by describing housing qualities that should be aimed at for this specific residential group. The handbook does not define minimum standards or specific solutions but is intended to provide a basis in order to make better judgements when establishing and assessing reception centres or other kinds of accommodation for asylum seekers. It includes presentations and discussions of relevant built examples that both inspire to innovation and show possibilities. As there are few high-quality reception centres worth showing, most examples are other kinds of institution-like or temporary housing such as student housing, homes for elderly, mental patients, etc. The book highlights topics that are relevant for all kinds of housing, but that are particularly valid for asylum seekers: identity and participation, spaces for meaningful activities, and architectural solutions that provide privacy, safety and health.

We see ethnography as a way to help create a body of theory that recognises that knowing is 'understanding in practice', entangled with 'making' as an active engagement with the material world (Ingold 2013: 5). Participant observation, Ingold argues, is a way of knowing 'from the inside', 'because we are already *of* the world' (2013: 5; see also Faubion and Marcus 2009). When we extract 'data' from this existential mode of knowing – which includes the tacit, empathic and imaginative – and present it as knowledge reconstructed from the outside, we set up participant observation as a paradox, when it is simply part of dwelling in the world. Arguing otherwise removes us from the world in which we dwell and 'leaves us strangers to ourselves' (Ingold 2013: 5). Understanding fieldwork and ethnography as part of world-dwelling liberates us from 'descriptive fidelity' and opens up 'transformational engagements' with people beyond the settings of fieldwork. This openness acknowledges that the theorist 'makes through thinking' and thus that fieldwork is part of that process (Ingold 2013: 6).

Taking such a view, we suggest that by including ethnographic methods and anthropological perspectives in a research on housing qualities, our study creates

a mode of knowledge that reaches beyond the factual and visual and adds an approach that can open up an ethic of mutual respect and cosmopolitan solidarity (see Grønseth 2014), so crucial when dealing with sensitive and political issues of belonging and well-being in everyday life and the shaping of a new future in radical new environments.

Concluding remarks: Towards a policy of care for humanity

By way of conclusion, we highlight how asylum seekers as a group are not treated as equal to other vulnerable and marginal groups in Norway. The facilities they are offered are of a lower standard than those offered to other Norwegian groups of residents. Asylum seekers are not Norwegian citizens, and as such do not have the same rights in Norwegian society. However, they have a legitimate right to be in the country while their asylum application is under review and the Declaration of Human Rights sets all people as equal. Recognizing how politics, largely governed by economic and marked interests, directs political decisions towards increasing differences in people's and individuals' socio-economic position, together with belonging and well-being, we call to challenge these mechanisms.

In this perspective, we see a need for new ideas, perspectives, concepts and architectural solutions when developing models for reception centres in which the physical environment may positively affect individual and group belonging and well-being processes. We suggest that combining anthropological and architectural theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches may be helpful in developing knowledge, perspectives and concepts for future reception centres, based on values that rest in respect for humanity across cultural and social differences, and which recognize a need for compassion and solidarity founded on a shared humanity. Rather than understanding a betterment of housing standards and quality as a threat to Norwegian society and identity, we see a need to underline the social benefits of acknowledging equal humanity as well as providing secure housing that will ensure, at a minimum, a positive sense of belonging and well-being among asylum seekers in Norway. In this endeavour, we argue the value of ethnographically based knowledge from the sphere of everyday life as it is lived and felt, and thus adding crucial knowledge for policymakers who govern processes of migration and integration, and in turn shape our views on self and humanity.

Notes

- 1 The project 'What Buildings Do – The Effect of the Physical Environment on Quality of Life of Asylum Seekers' was funded by the Norwegian Research Council and the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) for the period 2012–17. It was led by the Faculty of Architecture and Fine Arts, NTNU. Other partners are SINTEF Building and Infrastructure and Inland Norway University College. It consisted of the following work packages: WP1: 'State of the art'; WP2: Case studies; and WP3: Architectural solutions for time-based dwellings.
- 2 The term 'housing' is here understood in line with the interdisciplinary field of housing studies, encompassing the built environment (the architectural dimensions), the social and economic structures (tenure, finances, policies, etc.) and residential or dwelling practices (how people dwell).
- 3 In Norwegian the term '*Nøkternt men forsvarlig*' is used. We have chosen to translate *forsvarlig* with 'reasonable' although this is not a fully adequate term. *Forsvarlig* means not only *reasonable*, understood as *proper*, *sound* and *safe*, but has also connotations of *dignity* and *decency*.
- 4 In 2015, one million refugees and asylum seekers came to Europe, thousands drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, and about 30,000 asylum seekers came to Norway (Østby 2016). At its peak, more than 8,000 asylum seekers came each month, most of them crossing the border from Russia entering Storskog, South Varanger, in the arctic north of Norway during the months of September to November. The situation created great concern for future development, and a series of strict political interventions was introduced so as to reduce the number of asylum seekers and secure integration of those who were granted residence. More than half of the asylum seekers in 2015 came from Afghanistan and Syria, while Eritreans were the most numerous during the years 2008–14 (Østby 2016). Previously, the largest number of asylum seekers was 17,480 in 2002 (number for the whole year) (Østby 2016).
- 5 The three other fieldworks are part of the overall PhD project 'Housing quality, home-making and dwelling in reception centres for asylum seekers'.

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